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### ***Urban community gardens and urban justice in the Cape Flats of Cape Town***

Cities worldwide are undergoing neoliberal transformation processes, culminating in deep income inequalities, erosion of public space, and the depletion of social fabric across distressed communities. The process of neoliberalism has coincided with a renaissance of urban community gardens across the globe. This has been apparent, especially during financial crises, due to the failure of the capitalist system. Such crises have resulted in various unemployed and distressed citizens engaging in urban gardening activities for several reasons. Traditionally, the literature has observed that motivations behind urban community gardening were to address the people's immediate needs such as food security and nutrition. While this is true, the post-productivist discourse indicates that there are more deep-seated motivations behind such activities. Under this perspective, the literature views urban community gardening projects as a form of activism against the neoliberal system and its ills. Here urban gardening projects are interpreted as bottom-up initiatives to counter the ills of neoliberalism such as food injustice, spatial injustice, socio-ecological injustices, especially in distressed neighbourhoods. Despite the globalisation and widespread adoption of neoliberal ideologies, the bulk of such literature has focused on global North regions in North America and Western Europe. On the other hand, the research on urban community gardens in global South countries such as South Africa has grown over the past two decades, focusing on various topics such as food security and nutrition, income generation, and the benefits of gardening to the community. While these lines of inquiry have been insightful, minimal research examines urban community gardening projects as spaces of activism against socio-economic and ecological injustices in distressed neighbourhoods. South African cities such as Cape Town have suffered from a double precarious nature of inequality. First, they were affected by the legacy of apartheid spatial planning affecting socio-economic development, and the adoption of neoliberal policies influenced urban governance strategies resulting in massive inequality. Given this background, it is surprising that limited studies examine urban agriculture activities such as community gardening as a form of activism in the context of neoliberal urbanism and deep-seated inequalities within the contemporary city. Therefore, this research adds to this gap in the literature by examining urban community gardens as an activist tool to address urban injustices in the low-income areas of Cape Town. Using Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space, the research investigated how specific urban community gardens counter urban injustices prevailing within their distressed communities. To this end, the researcher employed a mixed-methods research approach consisting of a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews with urban community gardeners from 34 community gardening projects in the Cape Flats. Results were triangulated with other data sources involving aerial images, observations, audio-visuals, and a systematic literature review and document analysis. Moreover, key informant semi-structured interviews were pursued to augment the questionnaire and semi-structured interview findings. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 27, where cross-tabulations and frequencies were employed to identify possible patterns and associations emerging from the collected data. Qualitative data were coded, categorized according to themes, and analysed in a textual manner. Ethical considerations, including consent

and anonymity, were upheld throughout the study. Based on data gathered and analysed, the findings demonstrate that urban community gardening projects in the Cape Flats exhibit varying forms of activism in response to problems faced within their communities. Although, from the surface, the motivations behind participating in community gardening reflect immediate problems such as unemployment and food insecurity, they also indicate deep-seated longings to address socio-economic, spatial, and environmental injustices that linger in the post-apartheid city. This research demonstrates that community gardens are sites of activism, implicitly or explicitly to varying degrees. More clearly, despite the limitations of garden space, gardeners are utilising these sites to nurture and develop progressive ideas which they spread to the immediate community. Therefore, the research argues that the rubric of activism needs to be extended beyond visible acts of heroism and mass protests to include small but yet impactful everyday routines such as gardening. However, the research findings suggest that the broader socio-economic and political environment influences the community gardens cultivating neoliberal subjects. In this way, urban community gardens are depoliticised by the state and non-state actors. For instance, most community gardens are located on interstitial spaces, which are not necessarily contested; hence, they do little to address spatial injustices. Moreover, the historically entrenched colonial system and present neoliberal policies continue to suppress any attempts towards transforming distressed neighbourhoods. In other words, urban community gardening projects in the Cape Flats function simultaneously as tools of domination and resistance. The research concludes that although the broader context is militating against urban community gardens' activist nature, they still possess elements that could promote the necessary environment for transformative change within these communities. Urban community gardening projects exploit 'cracks' in the capitalist system, and it is on these cracks that they can gather momentum to drive for change within their communities. Finally, the research draws practical recommendations for urban community gardens that need to be aware of the duplicity of their activities within the neoliberal environment. Working with this in mind could produce more impactful activities to address problems within these distressed communities.