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Title: Promoting sustainable livelihoods and healthy nutrition; The role of community-driven gardening initiatives in urban food systems. A case study of George, South Africa

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While South Africa is generally considered as food secure on a national level, the reality in cities presents a different picture. Recent studies state that approximately two thirds of urban dwellers cannot afford a basic healthy food basket (South African Cities Network 2015). Facing the burden of malnutrition in particular obesity, an innovative urban gardening initiative started in 2013 in a poorer neighborhood of George, South Africa. The movement 'Kos en Fynbos' (understood by the organisers as food and biodiversity) intends to improve nutrition, solidarity and ecological sustainability. Meanwhile, this initiative has spread all over the town, and food gardens became also a vital part of the municipality's strategy for local economic development.

Guided by the concepts of 'Food Sovereignty' and the 'Right to the City', this research questions how the benefits of grassroots initiatives in gardening can best be sustained and improved. In this context, the institutional environment for community-driven initiatives in the urban food system is analysed. Thereby, the study discusses the idea of urban food councils. To get an in-depth insight into the stakeholders' agendas, qualitative interviews were conducted in the first quarter of 2016. First results show that the needs and knowledge of the gardeners are barely considered in the existing food system. Furthermore, a conflict between the intentions of the bottom-up movement and the rather top-down governmental approaches became apparent. While the gardening initiative shows high awareness of community problems, and therefore strives for active citizenship, existing forms of public participation seem to be inadequate.