

Hi again. Nice to have you here on As It Is. I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.

Today we are talking about cities and countrysides. Or, to say it another way, urban and rural areas. The World Bank recently reported that people who live in urban areas are more likely to be a little richer and a little healthier than people in rural areas. We will talk about why that is later.

Right now, Karen Leggett tells us about something people in African cities sometimes do not have – fresh fruits and vegetables. But urban gardening is changing that.

City gardens are beginning to provide income and healthy food for people in several African countries. The United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization reported last year that more than half of all Africans living in cities are in very poor neighborhoods. The report is called “Growing Greener Cities in Africa.”

Senegal’s capital, Dakar, is home to 4 million people. The city has several micro-garden projects, including one at a hospital.

“This is an idea of Professor Papa Salif Sow simply to contribute to improving the quality of food offered to inpatients and I confess that since this noble initiative, we noticed a great improvement, for example like weight gain.”

Now the Senegalese government and local groups are training people to grow crops on top of buildings and other empty spaces. They grow in containers made from old wooden pallets and car tires. The plants require little water. More 5,000 families have been shown how to use this technology.

A garden project in the South African city of Johannesburg targets people who have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. A balanced diet is important for people who have HIV, but finding healthy food at a good price can be difficult.

Annah Mogoathe digs potatoes out of the ground. She says the food she grows and eats from the garden makes her stronger and healthier.

Lettie Ngubeni directs the Osizweni Community Center near Johannesburg. She says it often takes time to persuade people to see the value of growing vegetables.

“It’s not our culture. And it was difficult at first when we started to change the mind-set of the people. You know in this place, the culture is that you buy, instead of doing, what is it, doing gardens.”

The Osizweni Community Center trains people how to plant and grow crops. They are taught water use management and can ask questions. The program has already helped about 250 people.

Another group has launched a rooftop garden project to help people moving into Johannesburg. Tshediso Phalane is vice president of the Thlago cooperative.

“Because the idea is get a job. And the only way to get a job is to work on a factory. But now we are trying to change the mind-set: look, you have skills from the homelands. Why can’t you utilize that skill on the rooftop and see what is it we are coming up with.”

What they are coming up with includes rows of spinach, beets, celery, strawberries, lemons and figs. Some of the farmers grow food for their own families. They sell the extra fruits and vegetables at lower prices than the local markets. Bonyume, a young woman, says working at the rooftop garden has changed the lives of her sons.

“I’m gonna heat my oil, put onions, lot of onions, green pepper. Then I put spinach, salt, I stir, put my Knox cube, then I make my pap on the side, because I don’t have money for meat these days since the middle of the month, but still I don’t go hungry. There’s plate on the table.”

Doreen Khumalo says her garden produces enough to feed 50 people. Now she wants to be partners with a housing company.

“They have 69 buildings. If you plant all the 69 buildings, the city will be green. Everybody will eat healthy.”

Back in Senegal, a rooftop gardener says he is showing his children that you do not have to be wealthy to eat healthy.

I’m Karen Leggett.

Wealth and health are also on the minds of researchers at the World Bank. They looked at countries that are trying to reach the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals—or MDGs. The MDGs aim to reduce poverty and increase education, health, and equality between women and men. The World Bank researchers reported that areas where many people live in cities lead the effort to reach their MDGs.

For example, countries in East Asia with large population centers, such as China, have made major progress reducing poverty. And, infant mortality rates are lower in urban areas in Central Asia and Latin America.

Jos Verbeek was the lead World Bank economist on the report. He says there are many reasons why urban areas are quicker to make social progress.

“Urban centers are centers of economic activity, growth and job creation, no? Consequently, poverty is significantly lower in urban centers than in rural areas.”

Mr. Verbeek says cities also benefit from having more people living close together. The population density makes it easier to offer services like health, education, electricity, and water. For example, he says it is not too expensive to bring pipes for water to new edges of the city. But, it is very expensive to run pipes tens or hundreds of kilometers to rural areas.

Of course cities can also experience problems. Mr. Verbeek warns that cities that grow without rules can develop slums. He says governments should use urban planning, including policies that show who is buying and selling land.

In World Bank meetings this spring, African policymakers debated how best to pay for services for people in cities and the countryside.

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