

While achievement of all the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is important for progressing towards sustainability, the growing population living in urban areas, especially in the Global South, are faced with the pressing issue of poverty and urban sustainability.

While these two issues may seem like they have nothing in common, [research](#) by the DSI-NRF SARCHI Chair in Interdisciplinary Science in Land and Natural Resource Use for Sustainable Livelihoods at Rhodes University, found that there is a connection between the two areas which can result in a win-win outcome for achieving sustainable development. Furthermore, investments in urban green infrastructure (UGI) is likely



Can Investments in Urban Green Infrastructure ALLEVIATE POVERTY?

Research looks at the direct and indirect ways in which urban greening can contribute to poverty alleviation

to have clear benefits in reducing or mitigating urban poverty, especially for the most poor.

Given that a majority of research on UGI that support sustainable cities has focused on a small subset of benefits such as recreation; physical and mental health; and regulating services, this study sought to explore the direct and indirect ways in which UGI, specifically urban greening, can contribute to poverty alleviation.

Direct links between UGI and poverty alleviation

By drawing on the limited evidence from various regions of the world, the study found that:

- Consumption or provisioning of goods such as water, wild foods, medicinal plants, and firewood can contribute to household welfare and thereby poverty alleviation;

- Most formal green spaces on public and private lands in towns and cities require human capital to manage and maintain them, thus creating the potential for job opportunities and employment for city dwellers; and
- The use of UGI for purposes of urban agriculture (for food), shelter, and trading for income generation contributes to livelihoods.

Indirect links between UGI and poverty alleviation

The connection between the two areas can result in secondary outcomes such as cash savings for households from the use of free provisioning services; improved physical and mental health; improved social networks; and improved educational outcomes.

According to the review, indirect effects of

neighbourhood greenness during childhood, even in poorer neighbourhoods, can translate into higher incomes later in life and hence reduce intergenerational poverty. This is because of the indirect effects of exposure to and experience of UGI as a child of improving potential academic achievement, creativity, and emotional intelligence, all of which are important in gaining employment and performance later in life.

Recommendations

Although it is evident that investments in UGI are likely to have clear benefits in reducing or mitigating urban poverty, the study cautions that the unequal distribution of UGI usually found within and between cities means that the poverty alleviation and benefits will be unevenly distributed, often against those who are most in need of them, i.e. the urban poor.

Study motivates for increased budgets for urban greening as part of poverty alleviation efforts

Given that both UGI and poverty are under threat from multiple and overlapping dynamics, such as climate change, COVID-19, and erosion of UGI in many Global South cities as they expand and develop, the study motivates for increased budgets for urban greening as part of poverty alleviation efforts and for this relationship to be acknowledged and acted upon immediately. Furthermore, there's a need for the transformation of mindsets and frameworks of planners and decision-makers towards the mainstreaming of UGI and nature-based solutions in all planning and management domains, and not just the parks department. 