

Urban agriculture faces very stiff competition from other urban land uses.



IWMI-Ghana

Availability, Access and Usability of Land for Urban Agriculture

Land is an important resource for urban agriculture. Urban farming requires some land space, irrespective of whether the farming system is soil-based or not. Therefore land is and will remain a resource of particular concern to urban farmers. But land, or rather the adequate use of the land, is of increasing concern also to planners and municipal policymakers who have to consider the various demands on the land and its functions in and around the city.

Urban agriculture has always been part of urban settlements. In the past and even today many urban inhabitants turn to it as part of their livelihood strategy. Although the quantity of food produced by city farming does not match up to that outside the city, its impact is quite considerable. Yet, national and municipal policy do not acknowledge this important role, but consider urban agriculture as something of the past, and one that does not have a place in modern urban design. This poses several key challenges for urban farming: urban land is either not *available* or not *accessible*; and when available, it is most often not *suitable*.

Availability refers to the existence of land that can be utilised for urban agriculture, in the short-, medium- or long-term.

Accessibility refers to the opportunity for actual use of available land by needy households or groups, taking into account administrative procedures and conflict resolution mechanisms. In the past few years, programmes for urban agriculture have emerged, but existing laws have largely ignored the existence of urban agriculture or prevented its official integration into city planning. The *usability* of the land for urban agriculture is a function of topography, soil texture and fertility, moisture and other environmental qualities.

Access to suitable and adequate land within a conducive legislative framework will ensure sustainable urban agriculture. The questions we ask and try to get answered in this issue of the *UA-Magazine* are whether suitable land is available and how it is accessed for urban agriculture, especially by the urban resource-poor. In order to further articulate and elaborate on these and other related issues, we have drawn on the rich experiences presented in the recent e-conference reported on page 4.

AVAILABILITY

A city is a dynamic entity that develops continuously; new spatial structures are

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created while others go to decay. Consequently, most cities often have a lot of (temporary) vacant open space that could be used for urban agriculture. Urban agriculture takes place *on-plot* and *off-plot*, and in *periurban* areas.

Agriculture on-plot is limited by the amount of non-built-up space, and additional space created by rooftops and verandas. The challenge here is to determine suitable plot sizes for various income groups in urban design. Off-plot urban agriculture takes place on road, rail and power-line reservations; land reserved for development; and institutional land reserves. Access to such land is determined by many factors, including informal networks and information. Periurban land is the most freely available category. Here, rules of access are often determined by the land ownership patterns and are subject to a mix of traditional and modern rules.

Yet, in most cities and towns, there is no land zoned specifically for urban farming. Only in a few countries, for example Botswana, urban agriculture has only recently been considered as part of environmental municipal planning. It is crucial to incorporate agriculture in other programmes aimed at poverty reduction, local economic growth, employment, urban youth initiatives, or managing HIV and AIDS at the community level through community gardens.

However, there is high demand for land within urban areas for residential, institutional, commercial and industrial development uses. The cases on Kano, Nigeria; Tanzania; Setif, Algeria and Bamako, Mali show that urban agriculture faces very stiff competition from other 'legal' urban land uses. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that urban farming is being undertaken in marginal areas with fragile ecosystems such as wetlands, hill-slopes, or that it is being pushed to the boundaries of the city, where it is tolerated until other development ventures take over (as is illustrated in the Bamako case).

Unfortunately, urban agriculture cannot compete strongly enough against other uses for the land, and often loses out. This calls for policies that do not provide land for urban agriculture on the basis of demand and supply on the open market, but on the important role it plays in sustaining livelihoods, particularly of the urban resource-poor. As mentioned before, the land most often available for



urban agriculture is open spaces (under council or government) or land earmarked for future development. The duration of its availability is therefore not secure. In many cities, like Accra, Setif and Divo lease for agricultural use of the land is only given for one year. This means that the urban farmer cannot plan for a longer period. It also limits the extent to which services and other resources like finances can be provided.

Initiatives to improve the availability of land for urban agriculture need support and facilitation of the municipality. This is usually hampered by the lack of awareness and adequate information. A good starting point is to make an inventory of available vacant open land in the city (using participatory methods and GIS) and an analysis of its suitability for agricultural use, as is illustrated in the Latin American cases (and several articles published in no.4 of the *UA-Magazine*).

ACCESS

So, there is land available in the city for agricultural use, but this is often not recognised as such, or that access to this land is a problem. The cases in this issue describe many different formal and informal ways to gain access to land. The not-so poor hold land under various forms of title: private ownership, municipal or state land, and institutional land belonging to churches, police, army, etc. Traditional forms of ownership as under customary law also exist (see the cases on Accra, Kano and Divo). Formal and informal access to land by the urban resource-poor includes share cropping, squatting, renting, leasing, inheriting or outright purchase.

The mentioned cases show that despite formal ownership rights becoming dominant over customary mechanisms, informal means of access to land persist. Land ownership, tenure, land transfer, and access and user rights to land are complex and dynamic. There is a mix of

both the traditional and the modern systems (see the Ghana case). Claiming formal access appears to be very difficult because of unclear or long procedures, or the reluctance of municipalities to issue long-term leases. The Ghana case points out the complex nature of land transfers, resulting in people opting for other arrangements

that are less secure. The role of informal ties, kinship and other social relations are important for such systems of access to work. Among the informal strategies used by farmers to get land for urban cultivation are investment in social relations (marriage), lobbying in groups with caretakers to lease the land, occupying vacant land, etc.

Newcomers (migrants) to the cities often lack the social relations to gain and secure access to land and water.

Dominant groups often have a favoured position in regards to land access and prevent migrants from access. In Divo, Ivory Coast, most migrants have been reduced to renting under very insecure tenure arrangements that favour exploitation by the landowners, who use the migrants to clear land for them during the first season and then take over.

Land grabbing and corruption, increasing land rent and increasing contamination of irrigation water and soils are other problems encountered. Such problems often lead to conflicts. The case from Zambia highlights some of the critical problems that may arise in the utilisation of a piece of land between the bona-fide owners and other users. Techniques of conflict resolution are therefore important. These techniques involve bringing the different parties to the



negotiating table and discussing their problems.

There are also differences between men and women in the access to the land. Although it is women who mostly manage the land, it is mainly men who hold the land titles. Women are therefore dependent on the men for arrangements and access to other inputs for agriculture, and if not through their husband or brother, they may find other ways to lease the land. The case of Kampala shows how, as a result, women farm the less suitable areas, sometimes highly contaminated, which could jeopardize the health of family members and customers who consume these products.

USABILITY

Many factors determine the suitability, or usability of land for urban agriculture, such as the size of the plots or soil quality, availability of water, security of tenure, etc. The history of the plots and the proposed urban farming systems may also influence the suitability. The case from Rosario gives an overview of variables selected to define the suitability of the land: environmental quality; potential agronomic use; actual use (and previous use, if the area is currently used as a dump or other hazardous activity); current regulations for land use; planned urban and city projects; water supply; ownership; and population groups interested in agriculture.

The availability and usability of water has been highlighted in the cases of Accra and Hyderabad. Urban farmers very often turn to contaminated water for the irrigation of their crops. In turn, the nutrients contained in the wastewater may replace expensive fertilisers (see also UA Magazine no. 8).

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The *legal status* of the land may vary: a significant percentage of the real estate of the city is subject to litigation, while other parcels are public land, or have been sold, leased or assigned to institutions or persons. Duly *regulated* ordinances that foster, promote and formalise the assignment of land for alternative productive enterprises – such as urban agriculture – hardly exist in most cities. Urban agricultural land use is usually seen as an illegal activity that is economically unviable and

environmentally disastrous. Until such time that legal frameworks are amended to recognise agriculture in the city, it will be very difficult to legitimise it and attract resources to develop it. The Tanzania case adds to this argument by saying that national policies and laws need to be linked to the municipal by-laws and ordinances.

Recognition and legitimisation of urban agriculture do not remove the reality of competition for resources with other land-uses and activities, but it does level the playing field and provide a framework for officially responding to the resource requirements in an equitable manner. In some countries legislation has emphasised ownership rather than land use (in Kampala for example) to the detriment of agriculture. Most of the by-laws on urban agriculture have tended to control the activity rather than facilitate its development. By-laws and regulations need to be facilitatory rather than being controlling in a negative manner.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO LAND FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE

The general picture may look like a vicious cycle: land is unavailable or access is denied, and if not so, the land is often not usable. This limits the flexibility of the farmer in planning and further impairs his or her ability to mobilise resources, and because it cannot realise its full potential, urban agriculture most often does not compete favourably against other urban land uses. Positive action is needed to break this cycle.

Once the main stakeholders are convinced of the positive impact of urban agriculture, having been informed sufficiently and accurately, a participatory multi-stakeholder process of diagnosis, joint research, planning decision-making and implementation is necessary.

This issue describes various arrangements for improving access to land and other resources. These range from temporary arrangements, for instance in eThekweni in South Africa where community gardens are allowed, to the carefully considered optimisation of the use of open space, in Rosario and Cienfuegos. Another strategy is the creation of (allotment) gardens on privately-owned land leased by

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associations of the urban poor. Sometimes not all of the land is fully used, but seen as multi-functional and important to all its users (see the London case). The creation of allotment gardens, like in the Philippines underlines the need to have active involvement of the municipality, but also to have good insight into the local social relations.

Most of the cases presented in this issue provide suggestions that could be useful in drawing up successful programmes in urban agriculture. They emphasise the importance of innovative approaches and techniques that facilitate integration of urban agriculture into the city landscape as a permanent feature, thereby ensuring adequate access to land and other resources for the urban poor. Land banks, multi-stakeholder participatory urban planning and long-term leasing arrangements are examples of innovative approaches that are already being tried out with success.