

Chapter 4: Improving access



This chapter deals in detail with the improving access to resources for urban producer groups. Beginning with an overview of the situation, the main areas of opportunity for improvement are reviewed followed by suggested actions that can be taken by the GA.

Key points



Situation overview

- **Land**
- **Water**
- **Inputs – seeds, pesticides, fertilisers, tools and equipment**
- **Credit/funding**
- **Services**
- **Market and market access**

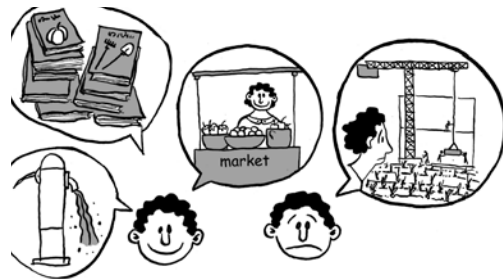
Summary

Situation overview

Agricultural production, its productivity and profitability, is directly dependent on being able to access the necessary resources. These include technical inputs (seeds, tools, fertilisers and pesticides etc), land and water, as well as suitable credit facilities, training and information. Access to such productive resources is critical whatever the aim of the production is (whether to feed the family, provide a minimal income, or a larger scale economic enterprise), and wherever the production is based (i.e. urban, peri-urban or rural area). Their relative importance however varies according to the specific circumstances.

In the case of UPA, proximity to the town will make access to certain resources simpler, while making access to others more difficult. For example, closeness to a large number of potential consumers, as well as to aid organizations,

sources of information and availability of inputs can be to the advantage of urban agriculture. Pollution, reducing the quality of produce and consumer bias, on the other hand, limit the potential advantages.



Limited access to credit facilities for low-income urban producers, low availability of clean water, and most particularly, high pressure on land, represent major constraints for urban farmers, especially women.

Lack of legitimacy, a policy environment and institutional set up not usually supportive (if not actively hostile) to production, make access to land or credit even more difficult.



What can be done?

There are many ways in which the situation can be improved, making the most of the positive factors and limiting the effects of the weaknesses of the urban location. Access to all resources – land, water, credit, inputs and services – **can** be improved by joint action from the group members and the GA can help both directly and as an intermediary with other stakeholders.



Group Advisor actions

The first step is for the GA and the group to conduct the SWOT analysis of their situation as shown in chapter 3 and analyse the results with particular regard to access to resources. This will help give a clear understanding of the nature of the constraints and who or what can influence them. Similarly, they should be aware of the advantages of their urban location and how they can make the most of this.

From here, the GA can help the group to analyse what actions can be taken and by whom to improve access. Can the group take the actions alone or do they need to work in partnership with other groups or another larger organisation (**see chapter 5**)? In some cases, there will be little an individual producer group can do on their own initially and the GA will need to act as an intermediary on their behalf with city authorities and other stakeholders.

I. Land

The situation

Land is probably the most critical issue constraining the development of UPA. Already limited access to land for UPA is made even more difficult by conflicting interests, lack of land tenure, and the, often poor, quality of agricultural land within the urban area.



Land in urban areas is usually under constant pressure for construction, resulting in ever less land availability and making it economically unjustifiable to allocate land to agricultural uses. Cities expand and agriculture will always be pushed further out to peri-urban areas (which themselves then come under pressure). Despite this, most towns still have land at least temporarily available either whilst waiting for construction to begin, or in areas not as yet allocated (or unsuitable – such as flood zones, land under power lines etc.) for building. One option for city authorities is to reserve land in peri-urban areas specifically for agricultural production whilst the land is still affordable for limited city budgets. Doing this can help them maintain flexibility and enable them to systematically integrate open spaces into the city as it grows.

As a result of the very limited space available and the reliance of many on UPA for food security, UPA is practiced wherever there is any vacant land. This may be alongside roadsides, railway embankments, riversides, on waste land, temporary land to be built on and on any green spaces. It is also practiced in backyards and on rooftops and balconies. Animals can and are kept wherever there is space for them.



*Escalating land prices in **Hyderabad** ensure that land is increasingly purchased by property developers. Small landowners in the green fodder production area in Uppal are selling their land or leasing it to migrants from rainfed rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. Linked to the escalating land prices and loss of agricultural land is the 'Musi Beautification Program' where acquisition of land is set at a rate of Rs 800 per sq yard (85,098 US\$ per acre).*

This is in contrast to a land price of several times this outside the scheme area and has led to conflict between landowners and the authorities.

The land designated under the 'Musi Beautification Program' is currently under paragrass cultivation and provides an input to the green fodder market. Loss of 1600 acres could result in a loss of up to 150,000 tonnes/year-of paragrass.

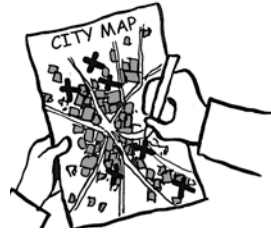
(City case studies, Hyderabad, India)

Lack of land tenure affects UPA productivity because it limits the possibility for investment in and development of the land. Without tenure, urban producers inevitably use the land for short-term survival rather than with a long-term production strategy.



What can be done?

a) **Mapping vacant plots** – most towns still have a large number of free plots of land. In most cases, construction on them will start at some point in the future, but they could potentially be available for agricultural production at least in the short term.



In a number of towns across the world, city authorities have made an inventory of vacant open land within the city boundaries, assessing its suitability for agriculture and using it as a starting point for improving access to land for urban farmers.



Dyen Te Don Association

*Dyen Te Don is a well-organised, fairly effective and politically active association of farmers located in suburban **Bamako, Mali**. In addition to providing its members with credit for seeds, Dyen Te Don takes an active approach towards improving access to land for its members. To facilitate access to land, it actively searches for vacant land, providing members with connections to the landowners.*

(UA Magazine no. 9)

For the mapping exercise to have any serious potential, city authorities need to be committed to act on its results. With their commitment and participation in the process, NGOs or aid agencies, sometimes also in cooperation with universities or Ministries, can be willing to take a leading role in funding and conducting the actual mapping exercise.

b) Temporary leasing of vacant municipal plots

Despite the pressure on land and the urban development plans, many plots can be earmarked for a certain building use but remain unused, even for years, before construction starts.



Similarly, there are often areas that, though not allocated to agricultural use, are not suited for construction (e.g. flood zones, land under power



If preparation of formal individual land lease contracts is too time and labour consuming, land may be leased out to farmers associations.

Often the contract with the farmers includes conditions and restrictions as to the land, crop and waste management practices to be used. Some municipalities provide training on these practices to farmers of municipal land. Some not only provide the land but also assist in improving the quality of the land by ploughing, delivery of compost, fencing.

(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)

lines or alongside railway lines). In both cases, city authorities, or other stakeholders/owners may agree to their temporary leasing to urban farmers.



Various cities such as **Havana (Cuba)**, **Lima (Perú)**, **Bulawayo (Zimbabwe)**, **Rosario (Argentina)** and **Governador Valadares (Brazil)**, have formulated a city ordinance that regulates the (temporary) use of vacant municipal land by organised groups of urban farmers. “Considering the alarming rate of unemployment in the city of Rosario and the need to promote productive activities, the Municipality is committed to assigning land under contracts with farmer groups for farming purposes. Lots should have minimal services for carrying out the proposed tasks”

– P Javkiin, Councillor Rosario Municipality

(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)

c) Promoting use of vacant private land

City authorities can encourage landlords with vacant land to let it out temporarily to urban farmers. To promote the establishment of such agreements, tangible tax incentives can be provided to the landowners for the period of the lease. The result can be that land which would otherwise be used as a dumping ground and can be a dangerous 'no-go' area can be put into productive use until it is time for construction to begin.

By making an agreement with a registered producer group or association, the private landowner can have legal guarantees and conditions on the use and duration of use of the land – something that can be difficult or impossible with an individual producer.

d) Demarcation of zones for urban agriculture

Many cities in developing countries have opted for the demarcation of selected urban areas for urban agriculture as a form of permanent land use. The benefit of such an approach is the provision of a green buffer area between residential and industrial areas. It can also be a useful long-term strategy to preserve some urban areas for future development.



*In order to enhance access to urban farmers to privately owned vacant land the Municipality of **Rosario (Argentina)** created a Municipal Agricultural Land Bank (a cadastral-based land registry) and brings those in need of agricultural land in contact with the owners of vacant land. It also hires vacant land from private landowners to lease it out to community groups interested in using this land productively.*

Another effective instrument used in Rosario to encourage private or institutional landowners to make vacant land available to poor urban groups interested in farming is the increase of municipal taxes on idle urban land and a reduction of taxes for landowners who make idle land available for temporary farming.

(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)

e) Multifunctional land use

UPA can be combined with other compatible land uses, such as recreational services, educational farms and agro-tourism activities. Successful examples already exist around the world, both in developing and industrialised countries.



“Colombo, Kampala, Rosario, Dar es Salaam are experimenting with the inclusion of space for home and/or community gardening in new public housing projects and slum-upgrading schemes. Some cities also promote the recycling of grey household waste water for use in home gardens and educate farmers regarding prevention of health risks.”

(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)



*Aquaculture in urban or peri-urban lakes or ponds may be combined with other (water and fish related) recreational activities such as angling, boating, a fish restaurant etc, which has proved a successful model in **Bangkok, Thailand**. Agriculture and aquaculture may be linked to waste water treatment and reuse e.g. in constructed wetlands as is practised in Calcutta on a massive scale and could become an integral part of peri-urban green open spaces. By doing so the management costs of such areas can be reduced and protection against unofficial uses and informal re-zoning enhanced.*

(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)

f) Integration in social housing projects

In some cases city authorities deliberately include plots to be used by residents as kitchen gardens in some new residential areas.



Group Advisor Actions

Discussions with the authorities

Most of the options for improving access to land need the agreement of and active collaboration of the city authorities and/

or private landowners. As such, there is usually not much an individual producer can do to influence the situation. The GA, particularly in collaboration with his/her parent organisation can however, help to promote the above options in meetings with the city authorities, aid agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders. The first activity should probably be to look for agreement on conducting a survey of available land and find funding to conduct it. Once this has been done, a dialogue needs to be held with the authorities to discuss integration of UPA in city planning as part of improving the policy environment.



Discussion with private landowners

Approaches may also be made to private landowners for temporary lease of land by established groups. This can be successful if the group has a record of being trustworthy in keeping to its agreements and if the landowners do not expect to develop the land for a reasonable period.

Producer group members

Producer groups can help with both of the above procedures by helping to identify vacant land and its suitability for UPA. The group leader may also be able to join the GA directly in meetings with other stakeholder organisations. Where a UPA group is strong – particularly after training on advocacy and lobbying (see chapter 7), they may be either able to work directly with the authorities and other stakeholders on this issue.

Women and access to land

In the case of women, the formation of registered groups would improve their access to land in that, as registered groups, they may be allocated land that they own “freehold” or on a tenancy basis. Such tenurial rights would provide women producers with the land collateral that they might not normally have especially in patriarchal societies where property rights are exclusively for men.

2. Water

The situation

Most agricultural activities rely on regular access to affordable quality water as well as access to organic materials and other sources of nutrients. Water suitable for agriculture is however not always accessible to resource poor farmers in urban and peri-urban areas. Clean fresh water is too expensive in many areas to be considered as an economically viable resource for agricultural purposes.



Waste water, (grey and sewage water) on the other hand, is often the only available and reliable water supply. Direct use of such water when untreated, however, carries significant health and soil and ground



“Municipalities can play an important role in enhancing access of urban farmers to water.

The city of **Bulawayo (Zimbabwe)** provides treated water to poor urban farmers in community gardens, while the city of **Tacna (Peru)** agreed to provide urban farmers its treated waste water in return for their assistance in maintaining public green areas.

The city of **Gaza (Palestinian Authority)** promotes the collection and reuse of grey household water in home and community gardens.

Mexico City (Mexico) promotes systems for rainwater collection and storage, construction of wells and the establishment of localised water-efficient irrigation systems (e.g. drip irrigation) in urban agriculture to stimulate production and to reduce the demand for potable water.”

(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)

water pollution risks. Waste water also has a significant organic content however. If properly treated and used, it can be safe and to some extent provide a valuable source of nutrients for crops. Farmers yields and income is often significantly higher from using waste water compared to those using fresh water because of this effect. Long term use of waste water is, however, associated with soil damage and pollution which reduce yields and increase susceptibility to pests.



What can be done?

The following can usually be used to improve access to water for agricultural purposes:

- Education and training activities for urban producers on how to use grey and sewage water, irrigation methods (e.g. sub-surface drip irrigation) and on improved hygiene practices and risk minimisation practices from production to consumption of produce.
- Promotion of a combination of farm-level and post-harvest measures to be adopted by farmers. A range of measures, should be used, not just one to reduce risks (e.g. use footwear and gloves when working with waste water and crops, stop waste water application prior to harvest, wash produce in clean water before sale, restrict crops allowed to be grown if waste water is applied directly to foliage).
- Assessment of the level of treatment needed for different sources of water. Such assessment requires specialised technical knowledge and should be carried out by water authorities and technical staff from health/extension services.
- Provision of different levels of treated water for specific crops and monitored use by UPA producer groups.
- Testing, monitoring and acontrol of waste water use. As above, this should be carried out by water and agricultural authorities in cooperation with health and extension services and the producer groups.
- Municipal governments and other local agencies should consider the use of waste water in overall management of limited water resources.



Waste water treatment

When choosing crops to be planted, it is important to consider the type of water that will be available for irrigation, in order to minimize possible health hazards. An example is the Complejo Bioecológico in San Juan (**Lima, Peru**), which, with the assistance of the Centro Panamericano de Ingeniería Sanitaria y Ambiental (CEPIS/OPS-OMS) is using 23 ha. for stabilization lagoons. Depending on the level of treatment, the water is used for different applications, such as forest and recreational parks, fodder, fresh vegetable farming and aquaculture.

(Guidelines for municipal policy making. UA No 6)



Group Advisor actions

Training activities on safe use of grey water supplies can be conducted by the GA in cooperation with extension services and water authorities.

The GA (together with the group leader) can also play a pivotal role in bringing the issues to the attention of the relevant authorities, initiating the dialogue among relevant parties and promoting the necessary action. Stronger groups may be able to work directly with stakeholders in a dialogue over this issue.

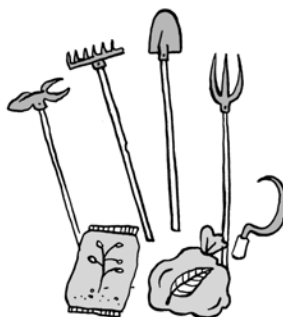
3. Inputs

The situation

Seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, tools and equipment, supplies and materials for UPA are generally more easily available in towns or in the nearby peri-urban areas than they are in rural areas. The concentration of trading activities, the better transport, and the fact that towns often serve as distribution hubs resulting in a far higher variety and amount of supplies and a more reliable and regular distribution system.

However, since demand for agricultural inputs is higher in rural areas, access to suitable agricultural inputs can still not be easily accessible if they are intended for delivery to rural areas. Towns often lack adequate distribution networks for urban agricultural producers, which can add to the difficulties. In other cases, access to inputs is more a problem of lack of funds than actual lack of physical access.

Where UPA lacks legitimacy, it also lacks adequate support from extension services. Limited extension advice, together with an erratic distribution network can result in misuse of chemicals, limiting the benefits of urban production and increasing the health risks.





What can be done?

Groups can be effective in making it more practical for suppliers to provide adequate inputs. By placing orders in bulk, the group can provide a distribution channel for traders securing better, more timely and cheaper provision of inputs.

The urban location and the higher risks of pollution, often make a strong case for limiting use of chemicals. The use of integrated pest management practices as well as the use of organic fertilizers can provide a safer, healthier and cheaper alternative for UPA farmers. This can also help in improving the attitude toward urban agricultural produce if it can be marketed as safe organic produce.

The use of compost, rather than chemical fertilisers could be promoted as a safer and better alternative in cities for agricultural production. This can also provide a business opportunity itself, with compost production and distribution becoming a profitable activity for groups or individual UPA producers. Where this is considered a suitable option, the chances of success increase when city waste authorities and extension departments play an active role.



Group Advisor actions

The GA can help the producer group to work directly with suppliers to arrange bulk delivery and negotiate better terms

S/he may also be able to act as an intermediary in discussions with city waste authorities and extension departments to help them get agreement on use of city organic waste, and for training on compost production and use.



"The municipality of **Cape Town, South Africa** supplies community gardener groups with a basic infrastructure (a fence, a tool shed, a tank and hoses for irrigation), composted organic wastes and up to a certain amount of free water daily. In addition it provides community groups that wish to start gardening activities with a <start up kit for survivalist gardeners> consisting of a pickaxe, spade, rake, watering can, seeds and compost. The start-up kit is further supplemented by skills training and extension services.

Some cities such as Havana in Cuba, assist by supporting the establishment of decentralised low-cost facilities for compost production and installation of composting toilets. Substantial progress has been made there in recycling urban organic waste. Havana also facilitates the supply of quality seeds, natural fertilizers and bio-pesticides in small quantities to urban farmers through a network of local stores.

The municipality of Marilao, located on the fringe of Manila, the Philippines, is establishing a composting facility, while the NGO community is addressing the necessary change in behaviour of the urban households in the municipality"
(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)

4. Credit/funding

The situation

Access to credit is often difficult for small farmers anywhere, despite the established recognition of the role of agricultural production and of the needs of producers.



The situation for urban farmers is significantly more difficult, with rarely any credit facilities being available at all. Urban commercial banks and financial institutions don't cater for farmers, and the situation is made considerably worse by the lack of legitimacy of the urban agricultural sector.

As in rural areas, women often represent the majority of farmers in urban areas. Even when some possibility of accessing credit exists, it is rarely tailored to their needs and requirements.

Most urban farmers, particularly women, are resource poor due to

lack of collateral with which to secure a conventional loan. Their credit worthiness is further limited by the fact that their farming activities have a level of insecurity considered too high by any lender. They don't own the land, they farm on plots only temporarily available, their produce is more prone to theft than in a rural setting, and even when considered legitimate, their activity often lacks official recognition and an institutional base.



What can be done?

When UPA plays a significant role in food security and in income generation, city authorities (and NGOs and aid agencies) can encourage financial institutions to establish schemes and loan conditions tailored to urban producers (e.g. by creating a guarantee fund) and their specific constraints.

The organisation of urban farmers into groups can make accessing credit much simpler, with options for group financing, rotating funds, group managed loans and schemes similar to the well established Grameen Bank model. In those groups that are run democratically there is evidence of a positive impact on women. In such groups there is a rotating chairmanship and women have an equal voice. The group is registered and has its own savings and bank account. Women own (freehold) the plots on which they carry out their activities. In this way they have collateral, and with a good track record, they can always obtain credit.



Regarding access to credit, all banks in India must follow RBI (Reserve Bank of India) Rules which stipulate that 30-45% of all funds retained by the bank must be issued as loans to the agricultural sector and/or through microfinance programs for cooperatives, urban joint liability groups or SHGs. This is closely supported by the AP Mutually Aided Coop Society Act (1995) and the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2002 (Annex 9 and 10).

(City case studies, Hyderabad, India)

When city authorities have included UA in their development plans, NGOs and aid agencies can also be approached for funding of such group schemes.



Group Advisor actions

The GA should always first stress the importance of savings and assist group members in establishing and developing their own saving and loan schemes rather than looking for outside credit initially. This should be done as a preference as well as a precondition to exploring and developing credit and grant options. Once the principle of saving first and paying back loans into a group fund has been established, the GA can help the group look for outside funding for the group from NGOs, banks and other sources as above.

See the FAO group savings book for more details on this area – available from: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4094E/y4094e00.htm#Contents>



Access to credit - Funding of market gardening campaign

A large trader operating in the market of Thiaroye, the vegetable market of **Dakar, Senegal** advances money to a market gardener in the area of Conduite de Gaz on the condition that the latter gives him priority for purchase of his production. The advance is based on trust, but also the quality and quantity of the expected production. If the funds advanced by the trader happen to be higher than the value of the harvest, the market gardener reimburses the balance; otherwise the trader pays the deficit (see also Moustier et al., 2001).

In some of these contracts, the landowner advances the funds for purchasing inputs and agricultural equipment, and even provides part of the tenant farmer's meals. In this case, after the sale of harvested products, the owner first recovers his funds before the profits are shared. This mode of pre-funding entails a risk of domination and dependency.

Another form of pre-funding is based on solidarity among actors. This system is more equal and applied more often by small urban producers, such as through

a Network of Savings and Credit Banks created with the support of Enda-Graf Sahel which facilitates "access to credit from the mobilisation of popular savings through solidarity". It enables the poor to finance activities of urban agricultural production. The credits are allotted on a short-term basis and help the beneficiaries cover their working capital (purchase of agricultural inputs, wages, etc.). The investment funding (acquisition of equipment) is exceptional: 20% of the credits are deposited as guarantee savings.

(UA Magazine No 17)

5. Services

The situation

Access to services is one clear advantage that urban producers have over most rural farmers. By definition towns have a higher concentration of public and private service providers (banks, schools, health centres etc) as well as better access to power, communication and information.



Proximity to government offices, as well as NGOs and aid agencies, health, water, research, extension etc., makes accessing information easier. The main problem with accessing such services is the lack of legitimacy of urban agriculture which can mean that while services are physically close, they may have no or limited access in practice.



What can be done?

The GA should help the group to build on this strength, where access to services is possible, to counteract some of the other disadvantages which urban producers face. Which services would be most useful to the group to overcome constraints or to develop their productive activities, will depend on the specific case and will be identified during the group situation analysis (**Chapter 3**). Where urban producers are not permitted direct access to services due to lack of legitimacy, it may be possible for the GA to intervene on their behalf.

Access to information, training and advisory services is always simpler to arrange and likely to be more tailored to their specific requirements, when channelled through a group rather than to an individual urban producer.



Group Advisor actions

The GA can help the group by contacting extension and other services either together with the group leaders or on their behalf. Training and advice can often also be arranged for groups through NGOs or aid agencies where government services are not available.



Nairobi, Kenya

More than half of the groups indicated that the extension service was good (54.2%). 29.2% thought it was average and only 16.7% said that extension was poor. Compared to the rural areas this is a major plus for the farmers and contradicts the general perception that due to the lack of recognition for UPA farmers are not able to access extension services.

The extension services staff in city of Nairobi and its environs disseminate information to urban farmers and livestock keepers and provide training on farming methods and opportunities that can enhance food security and safety in the city. Useful information on composting of organic waste, waste water reuse and health issues associated with food production are being provided through the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP).

(City case studies, Nairobi, Kenya)

6. Markets and market access

The situation

Many urban farmers tend to produce largely for self-consumption, sharing the surplus with family and neighbours and often not having enough for any significant sales.



In some cases however, even subsistence urban farmers rely on sales of their produce as the main source of family income.

The urban location generally also means proximity to main markets, with a large number of potential customers needing agricultural produce. Despite the potential demand however, cartels can prevent entry of urban farmers to the market place. Consumer bias against urban produce due to its image of unsanitary production practices can also limit the possibility for sale of produce grown by urban farmers.



“Due to the low status of urban agriculture and the usual exclusive focus on food imported from rural areas and the exterior, the creation of an infrastructure for direct local marketing of fresh urban-produced food and local small processing of locally produced food has received little attention in most cities.

There are ready markets for UPA products within the proximity of the groups’ bases.

The land tenure issue has a role to play in what is produced, since the groups cannot put long-term investments into property that does not belong to them.

(City case studies, Nairobi, Kenya)



What can be done?

Direct marketing

If there are problems in selling in the main city markets, the group can explore other channels such as direct sale to consumers at their homes, or businesses such as shops, restaurants and supermarkets. This is, as with most issues, easier in a group when they are able to guarantee a level of supply impossible for the individual producer. For example, in Hyderabad, India, a fodder producers group provide their produce directly to the urban dairies as a regular business activity.



“We had no market land for selling our produce and hence formed this association which helped us get access to a piece of land from the Government where we can sell our grass.

But we still do not have access to the path leading to the market. We requested the Government to provide this access”.

Interview Jamanjyothi Srinivas, Green Grass Growers Producers Organisation.

(Video - Small urban producers organisations. FAO-FCIT, ETC UA, IPES and IDRC. 2006).

The association presently markets about 250 tons of fodder a day. Selling on this common market is more convenient and profitable to the fodder grass farmers.

With larger groups and associations, it may also be possible to bring pressure to bear on city authorities to allow sale in the city markets if cartels are blocking access. Alternatively, specific farmers markets may be created as in the example from Brasilia (see box).



Group Marketing

Groups coming together can also access markets better and more competitively. When the Chitungwiza strawberry farmers were marketing as individuals they were getting less return. When they pooled together and marketed en-bloc, they began to access bigger buyers who paid better.

(City case studies, Harare, Zimbabwe).



Some municipalities facilitate the marketing of surpluses by poor urban farmers by providing them access to existing city markets, assisting the in the creation of farmers' markets (infrastructure development, licenses, control of product quality), authorising food box schemes and/or supporting the establishment of "green-labels" for ecologically grown and safe urban food. An example is **Brasilia** FD, which is furthering the integration of small food production with local food processing and marketing.

(de Zeeuw et al., Courses of Action for Municipal Policies on Urban Agriculture, ETC-Urban Agriculture, 2006)

Diversification and development of niche markets

Where more regular agricultural produce has a limited market due to the image of UPA, niche market products can provide a profitable alternative. Successful examples include medicinal plants, mushroom, organic vegetables, honey production, fodder and fruit.



Establishing a certification scheme for urban produce

Urban produce tends to have low status and its sale often meets resistance from customers (If they know its source) mostly due to health and hygiene reasons. City authorities and the Ministry of Agriculture can provide training and advice to improve the safety standards of urban produce (assuming



it is not actually an illegal activity in the first place). This can be



Food labels

Over the last few years the Thai government has launched a policy of "food safety" awareness, generating a consumer demand for cleaner and better-quality products. Vegetables free from pesticides that are subject to food safety standards can be marketed with a certification of quality standard. It is expected that, having started the process, food safety concerns will further rise and quality certifications will become more and more common among both consumers and buyers.

If the certification can maintain a high level of standards and meaningfulness, market dynamics will then ensure that "food safety" labelled foods can demand higher prices, first developing a niche market of more health conscious customers, then expanding to a larger audience. For such changes to establish themselves in the market, continuous government support is however needed, together with the planning and implementation of a multidisciplinary approach to urban agricultural production.

(UA Magazine no. 14)

paired with a certification scheme, allowing the certified producer to market its produce under a special label. A condition for granting the certification could include attendance to a training course on health and safety standards, from production to market and a positive assessment of the production site and handling facilities by a Ministry official.



Group Advisor actions

The GA, possibly also networking with NGOs and extension services, can help the UPA producers group with direct contact with consumers to establish a direct link for their produce.

S/he can also help with arranging training and advice on safer production, processing and sales to improve the image of UPA produce.

Working together with city authorities and extension services s/he may also be able to help establish a certification scheme.

Larger, stronger UPA groups may also be able to work directly with city authorities on preparation of guidelines which they will be able to carry out. This would be the ideal situation as without involvement of the UPA groups themselves, guidelines can be proposed which involve unacceptable costs or work and as such will not be implemented.

Finally, the GA may be able to help the group with training and support on establishing a new niche product – for example by arranging visits to another group who are already producing that product.



The municipality of Governador Valadares, (Brazil)

has prioritised the marketing of urban agricultural products in different ways:

by providing incentives for the formation of cooperatives for the production and commercialisation of products,

by creating sales and distribution centres as well as farmers' markets in the city and

by buying agricultural products from the urban farmers' groups to supply to schools, community kitchens, hospitals and other service organisations.

(Urban Agriculture Magazine No 16)

Summary

The issue of access to land, water, inputs, credit, services and markets are widely reported as major constraints by urban agriculture producers, especially women. There are, however, many actions that can be taken to deal with or lessen these constraints.

By working together with the producer groups and other stakeholders, better land and water access can be arranged. Inputs can be jointly purchased and agreements can be made for regular supply.

Funding can be arranged within groups through group savings and credit schemes and services can be more easily accessed through groups.

All these issues become easier, however, when UPA acts within a supportive policy and institutional environment (see next chapters)

