

Growing better Cities

URBAN AGRICULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2

From the ground up

Urban agriculture reforms take root

In January 2004, Kampala City Council approved a set of ordinances that legalizes urban agriculture. New rules governing livestock rearing and crop cultivation recognize the key role farming plays in the Ugandan capital.

Edith Kyeswa leans over the rail of her backyard pen and scratches one of her two cows behind the ear. “I got this cow from a cow bank that was started by my local Member of Parliament,” says Kyeswa. “The cows were a present to the women of Kampala from the President.”

It is ironic that such a valuable gift from so notable a person should support an activity, which at the time the 20 pregnant heifers were donated in 1998, was banned. In Kampala, as in many other cities across Africa and around the world, raising livestock and growing crops within the city limits was illegal. But here as elsewhere, city officials turned a blind eye. They understood the critical role urban agriculture plays in supplying food and generating income for city residents, especially the poor. Benign neglect, however, had its own pitfalls. Urban producers, most of whom are women, were vulnerable to the whims of officers charged with enforcing outdated regulations. They still cultivated fields over which they had little control, and they lacked access to new technologies. Change, however, was on the horizon. In January 2004, the Kampala City Council passed a series of ordinances to legalize farming activities within the Ugandan capital.

A voice for urban farmers

“The new ordinances are a great milestone as far as urban agriculture is concerned,” says Professor George Nasinyama, the Department Head of Veterinary Public Health and Preventative Medicine at Uganda’s Makerere University.



KUF5ALCC: Moses Makoha

Thanks to new regulations, farmers like Sarah and Christopher Senyumba-Zake can now raise livestock in Kampala.

He also leads a local nonprofit organization called the Kampala Urban Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Coordinating Committee, or KUF5ALCC. Formed in 2004 from groups actively involved in promoting urban agriculture, KUF5ALCC has become a voice for urban farmers across the capital district.

“Our greatest strength,” Nasinyama states, “is the variety of people we have brought together.”

KUF5ALCC draws its membership from local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the Kampala City Council, the Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industry and Fisheries, Makerere University, the National Agriculture Research

Organisation, and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

Members like Margaret Azuba, Kampala District's Urban Agriculture Officer and deputy leader of KUFALCC's research team, have played a pivotal role in educating and lobbying municipal authorities about the need to reform the city's existing farming regulations.

Most critics of urban agriculture, Azuba maintains, are concerned with its health impacts. Beyond the typical farming practices associated with animals and crops, she points to unregulated processing facilities and retail outlets, like the butcheries and dairies which dot Kampala streets. Few people, she insists, talk about the positive effects of farming in her city.

A 1993 study supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), for example, revealed that children in poor farming households had lower levels of stunting — a classic indicator of malnutrition — when compared to children in poor nonfarming households.

Azuba has used this kind of evidence to convert more than one skeptic. She tells of a medical doctor in her department who was concerned about the risk from malaria-carrying mosquitoes breeding in farmers' fields. To win him over, Azuba and the doctor first visited several farmers and then she convinced him to facilitate an urban agriculture workshop in Nairobi, Kenya.

"He was surprised by what he saw taking place in his own city," she says. "But after we came back from Nairobi and after hearing and seeing the research that had been done here and elsewhere, he said to me 'I think we have to change our attitudes toward these activities.' "

KUFALCC's approach, a combination of development activities, research, and advocacy, has made the organization a potent force for change within the Ugandan capital.

"When dealing with officialdom you need to show them clearly that urban agriculture and livestock rearing is beneficial," says Abdelrahan Lubowa, a research officer with KUFALCC. "Roaming cattle are a major concern. So, if you can show Council that this problem can be controlled without prohibiting all farming activities, then it makes sense to them."

To build their evidence base, KUFALCC and its research partners have examined livelihood issues, production systems, and market opportunities, including the use of schools as seed and seedling multiplication centres. They have studied the health impact of city farming, assessing the dangers of rearing livestock and the risk from animal-borne or zoonotic diseases. They have also looked at food security and nutrition as well as the risk to the food chain and people's health from contaminants, like heavy metals. Most recently they have launched a study to examine the health risk from vegetables irrigated with sewage, looking in particular at pathogens like the deadly *E.coli* (O157) bacteria.

KUFALCC has garnered support from a variety of organizations besides IDRC, notably, the Urban Harvest program of the CGIAR and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development.

Building political support

Even with a robust body of research, Nasinyama acknowledges that evidence alone is often not enough to bring about change.

"If you want to influence policy you must have some politicians on your side," he claims. He points to Councilor Winnie Makumbi, the City Minister for Community Development, Social Welfare and Antiquities of Kampala, as one of urban farming's political champions. She spearheaded efforts on the Council for a public review of agricultural reforms first proposed by municipal authorities in 1998.

"Putting in place laws that you cannot implement simply didn't make sense," adds Nasinyama. With Makumbi's support, KUFALCC "convinced the City Council that a bottom-up approach was needed to draft ordinances that would work."

Stakeholder consultations fed workshops in each of the city's five districts. Participants, including farmers and representatives from farmers' groups and NGOs, politicians, technicians, and the media were able to review existing rules and propose reforms, which were then debated in a city-wide forum. Despite differences among the groups they all agreed that urban agriculture should be controlled to protect residents' health and the city's environment.

Portrait of an urban farmer

To call Edith Kyeswa "just a farmer" is to describe water as "just wet." The retired schoolteacher is a successful entrepreneur, a tireless community organizer, and a leader in the local women's movement.

Kyeswa was one of Kampala's first urban vegetable growers to organize small-scale farmers to grow horticultural crops and set up outlets for the sale of their produce. She has also been instrumental in establishing market chains between producers and consumers.

When asked about the greatest challenges she faces, Edith doesn't mention how she raised three daughters single handedly or provided them all with a quality education. She doesn't mention the demands on her time as a local leader, as a business owner, or as an adult educator. Instead Kyeswa gives the type of pragmatic answer you would expect from a farmer. "Soil, I need better soil. But having cows and manure helps."



Edith Kyeswa

KUFSAALCC members credit the consultative process with overcoming the impasses that arose among different groups. Municipal authorities and business groups, for example, were concerned about health issues and the nuisance factor caused by roaming animals. Nongovernmental and community-based organizations worried about food security and livelihood issues.

Promoting safe practices

Acceptance of the ordinances has, according to Nasinyama, “opened up many things. Extension workers and veterinary technicians the city employed to collect revenue when farming activities were illegal can now promote safer practices and proven technologies.”

Some of those practices and technologies can be seen in Edith Kyeswa’s backyard. Her two cows are kept in a sturdy pen built on a concrete slab to allow for easy and thorough cleaning of waste. Manure is composted in nearby pits. Kyeswa recycles the nutrient-rich, high quality fertilizer in her gardens or she sterilizes it for use as a mushroom-growing medium.

Mushroom growing is especially attractive to women, says Stephen Muhumuza, District Coordinator with the Kampala District Farmers Association. “It is very compatible with the other activities women do such as looking after the home and family. Mushrooms are a delicacy popular with the affluent class and, in the current market, they also earn about a 200% profit.”

Pilot-testing new rules

As a first step in implementing the new ordinances, KUFSAALCC and the Kampala City Council prepared user-friendly versions written in local languages. The municipality will also issue temporary permits to city farmers. City officials have allowed for a grace period to give farmers, along with milk, fish, and meat processors and retailers, a chance to upgrade their operations to meet new health standards.

“KUFSAALCC has also been asked to pilot test the ordinances to assess the challenges of implementing the new rules,” says Nasinyama. Data about farming operations within pilot areas is being documented using surveys and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). Eventually information about “who is doing what and where” will be captured in a city-wide database of Kampala’s farmers and traders.

“Developing a system to accurately deal with the variability of urban agriculture enterprises and activities is a challenge,” says Lubowa. “We didn’t think of people keeping snakes when the ordinances were developed, but there are! Urban farming is also a very dynamic process,” he adds. “Activities taking place today may not be here tomorrow. But the lessons we learn should create an



Kampala farmers supply 70% of the poultry products consumed in the city.

The economics of poultry farming

Shillah Kabugo has a farm with a view. It sits on a gentle slope along the peri-urban fringe of Kampala overlooking Lake Victoria. The scene outside her front window may be bucolic, but her poultry operation is all business.

“I gave up a career in dentistry to become a chicken farmer,” she says.

Operations like Kabugo’s supply 70% of the poultry products consumed in the city. A city girl, Kabugo is self-taught — and she is obviously a quick learner. Her breeding stock is imported from Zambia because the birds are more robust and market-ready sooner than the common local variety. Her hen houses are kept very clean. Employees wear rubber boots and walk through a disinfectant before entering and when leaving the houses. The feed she gives her chickens is made on her premises to her specifications. Birds are fed precise quantities to control their weight gain.

“They put on weight quickly,” Kabugo says, “but only for the first six months.” After that, the rate at which food is converted to animal protein drops considerably. This means that twice a year she replenishes her stock of 1 000 birds completely.

According to Stephen Muhumuza, District Coordinator with the Kampala District Farmers Association, operations like Shillah Kabugo’s make good sense in urban settings. They require relatively little space and they are close to markets, thereby reducing or eliminating many of the costs associated with transportation. Given the slim profit margins in Uganda’s poultry industry, these savings allow urban farmers to make a better profit than their rural counterparts.

Chicken rearing, like mushroom farming, is popular with women because it can be carried out at home along with their other household duties.

appropriate mechanism for introducing ordinances efficiently.”

Municipal authorities will also have to invest in infrastructure to administer the new laws, notes Nasinyama. “Residents will be required to licence all companion animals, like dogs, but to date there are very few places for them to do that. Pounds for strays or for livestock found grazing along roadsides will also have to be constructed and existing ones improved.”

But the biggest challenge facing municipal authorities may well be winning the confidence of their constituents, Lubowa believes. “When it comes to permits and fees, people are very skeptical. Because of years of government breakdown, there is a culture of not paying for anything because the government does not give anything in return. So, building confidence will take time.”

Sharing a scarce resource

“We say that the hills are multiplying,” jokes Nasinyama, referring to Kampala’s steady spread across the rolling hills of Lake Victoria’s northern shore. A city of approximately 1.5 million inhabitants, Kampala currently houses 14% of all Ugandans and is expanding rapidly.

“Land is the biggest constraint on farming in Kampala,” maintains Stephen Muhumuza. “It is so competitive that farming has become a transitional activity, because people can earn far, far more by building a structure on their property. So farming must compete for land with a lot of industrial and building development.”

The management of land in Kampala is a tangled mix of customary, colonial, and modern land tenure practices. For farmers, the current procedures for accessing land in Kampala are described as “bureaucratic, time-consuming, and complex.”

The new ordinances further restrict the areas open to urban farmers in order to protect wetlands, greenbelts, road reserves, and drainage channels. Farmers need the permission of Council to cultivate old industrial sites or any other land believed to be contaminated. While these restrictions make obvious sense, they point to the need for a clear policy and guidelines on land use that includes urban agriculture, especially if farming is to benefit the urban poor.

Women, like Edith Kyeswa, face an additional hurdle — customary practice dictates the transfer of land title from father to son or to the deceased husband’s brothers or male kin. At best, women may co-own property with their husbands. Women’s groups across Uganda are pushing for reforms to these long-held practices.

Developing legal and institutional arrangements to resolve these issues would go a long way to building community confidence in the new regulations and ensuring their compliance. For the city’s farmers, it would also be proof positive that old attitudes have given way to the new realities.

This case study was written by Kevin Conway of IDRC’s Communications Division.

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