Developing Institutional Synergies for Effective Urban Agriculture Development in Sri Lanka

Agricultural development towards food, nutrition and livelihood security is high on the political agenda in Sri Lanka. A number of national programmes (e.g. Api Wawamu Rata Nagamu 2007-2010 and Divi Neguma) have focussed on achieving greater self-sufficiency at household level in order to reach a higher GDP in the agricultural sector with higher economic returns. Recently, national priorities have included the development of food-secure resilient cities, and in this regard, the Western Province has been a forerunner, having commenced its urban agriculture campaign already in 2000.

These urban plans have been further strengthened by complementary programmes aimed at curbing the effects of rapid urbanisation (see box 1), high food prices, and extreme climate events. One of the cities in Western Province, Gampaha, was the first start of a process of design and revision of urban and periurban agriculture policies, bringing together stakeholders and partners for synergistic actions and to consolidate the multi-stakeholder action planning process. The RUAF Foundation, together with its regional partner the International Water Management Institute, facilitates these linkages and further development of national programmes on urban and periurban agriculture, through their global programmes CFF and FStT.

Urbanisation in the Western Province

The Western Province of Sri Lanka is the most developed province on the island, contributing 48 percent of the national GDP. It hosts a population of 5.4 million (28 percent), and an additional floating population of 1.5 million. With a population density of 1458 per km², it is one of the most congested regions in the country, and its agricultural land is gradually being lost to development. Increased migration to cities is putting pressure on many sectors, thereby also increasing Western Province’s dependency on food from other regions. Rapid urbanisation has also led to an alarming increase in pollution levels. This province accounts for 60 percent of the number of vehicles in the country, 70 percent of industries, 88 percent of thermal power plants, 62 percent of fuel usage, 85 percent of heavy fuel usage and 60 percent of solid waste generation (Manapperuma and Basnayake, 2007). Urban poverty is believed to be rising as well. The province encompasses the administrative districts of Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara, which together form a commercial hub linked with a major airport and the harbour. It also includes 48 administrative bodies, 6 municipal councils, 13 urban councils and 29 Pradeshiya Sabhas, all of which assist in the administration of their respective levels.

Developing a sustainable urban agriculture programme

Selected cities in the Western Province were the first to promote urban agriculture (as early as 2000), when the Western Province’s Department of Agriculture launched its home gardens and Family Business Gardens (FBG) programme (Ranasinghe, 2009) to meet the nutritional needs of the population, generate income for underserved communities and contribute to the greening of the city. Utilising horizontal and vertical spaces, the FBG programme introduced the income generation potential of urban agriculture, especially for underserved communities. In one of these cities, Gampaha, with over 300,000 permanent inhabitants and an additional 100,000 who travel daily to the city (DCS, 2001), municipal garbage collection (55 tons per day) was successfully reduced by recycling fresh organic waste for floriculture and home gardens (Amerasinghe, 2010).

The FBG and RUAF programmes
have promoted the introduction of awareness and educational programmes in schools on how home gardening and food security can contribute to a clean, green and food-secure city. Positive results have been achieved by establishing school gardens, which serve as models to encourage students to participate in agricultural activities from a young age. A government-led initiative has provided over 1000 families living within the city of Gampaha with inputs for home gardening, while an additional 25-30 families are estimated to practice more commercial (small-scale) forms of agriculture (personal communication Department of Agriculture, 2009). Gampaha's poverty indicators are among the lowest in the country (8.7 percent; DCS, 2008), but urban poverty is rising (Sunday Times, 2008; DCS, 2008). Since 2005, RUAF has assisted in establishing a process of institutionalisation of urban agriculture, which involves strategic steps to consolidate the ideas across the participating sectors and bring about policy change/revision, first under the CFF programme (see box 2) and later under the FStT programme (see box 3). These activities have been coupled with the development of marketing capacities among urban farmers, a group often neglected in agricultural development.

The CSA outlined different interventions and activities for each of these objectives, delegated responsibilities and identified local as well as external funding sources. The agenda was formally accepted by the MSF steering committee in April 2009.

RUAF, Cities Farming for the Future (CFF), 2005–2008 main activities

- Formation of a Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF): Gampaha Nagarika Haritha Balakaya – Urban Green Force
- Situation analysis – identifying issues for a clean and green city
- Staff training – assessing the urban context (PRA, GIS, policy review etc.)
- Strategic planning – institutional collaboration and CSA road map
- Demonstration projects – Gampaha city (pilot), Colombo city (dissemination), home gardens for city dwellers including underserved communities
- Special projects – budgets for urban agriculture activities (waste recycling, compost making, up-scaling of home gardens)

The City Strategic Agenda – A five-year plan

Under the RUAF CFF Programme, the Urban Green Force (the core team in the MSF) developed the City Strategic Agenda (CSA) on Urban Agriculture (Amerasinghe, 2010). It identified four major objectives:

- Promote and support a culture of sustainable urban agriculture in Gampaha municipality.
- Revitalise the (abandoned) paddy farming systems; develop strategies to improve productivity through innovative farming practices that harmonise with nature; and improve access to paddy lands for those who are keen on farming.
- Reduce environmental pollution and health concerns through proper management of the city’s drainage infrastructure.
- Strengthen marketing of urban agriculture products – both within and outside the city.

The RUAF-FStT programme was launched - by IWMI India and Practical Action 2 - with two aims: 1. Institutionalisation of an MSF on urban agriculture, leading to development and implementation of a CSA. 2. Strengthening of farmers’ organisations and their marketing capacities. Comprehensive discussions led by the MSF and experiences gained by adopting the CSA have highlighted vital policy issues related to promoting urban and periurban agriculture in the cities. Forming a producers’ organisation to strengthen marketing capacities for urban and periurban agriculture was a novel concept. The formation of Seemasahitha, Krishi Nishpadana Samagama – Green Agro Products of Gampaha was highly successful owing to the strategic planning implementation processes in the key areas of organisational strengthening, credit and financing systems, and marketing strategies.

Policy statements formalised at provincial level

RUAF and its partners have facilitated the operationalisation of urban and periurban agriculture activities at national and provincial level. Urban and periurban agriculture is mentioned in three national (agricultural) policy documents, with special reference to the establishment of city home gardens and provision of the necessary capacity building support to women in cities (Ranasinghe, 2009; Amerasinghe, 2010). In this context, several promotional
activities, including awareness and training programmes, have been developed by the Department of Agriculture under various funding schemes. Unfortunately, the approach to date has been mostly project based with limited focus; and as a result many issues related to urban and periurban agriculture have not been dealt with in a comprehensive way.

Newly proposed policy statements, however, point to the need for action in a wide variety of areas that encompass the requirements of urban and periurban development in the country. Specific features, such as limited space, use of common land, availability of different low-space technologies, recycling of household waste and water, and disease and pest problems have been discussed at length by a special committee of the provincial council. Stakeholders have also debated special needs at a provincial level and policy statements focussed on urban agriculture have now been approved by a cabinet of provincial ministers, which allows the adoption of these policies within the province (pending gubernatorial approval). Adoption of these policies will require interactions between various institutions and stakeholders, as illustrated in figure 1. The Western Provincial Council has identified a process for incorporating these policies into the National Policy on Agriculture; and debate on this issue is expected to take place in the near future.

The following urban agriculture policy statements have been approved at the provincial level.

1. Improve urban/periurban agriculture using modern and traditional technologies to enhance nutritional security, household income and livelihoods of urban people.
2. Strengthen urban/periurban agriculture activities through government/non-government/private partnerships.
4. Utilise unused spaces to improve urban/periurban agriculture – urban houses, government premises, schools, army camps.
5. Develop credit and finance facilities and insurance schemes for urban agriculture activities.
6. Promote the sale of produce through agri-tourism.
7. Include urban agriculture in the curricula of primary, secondary and tertiary education programmes.
8. Develop local and international entrepreneur programmes to improve urban/periurban agriculture.
9. Form multi-sector institutional support systems.

**Conclusion**

Adoption of urban and periurban agriculture policies at different levels of government is key to establishing sustainable programmes within countries. Such policies enable easy access to funds within provincial or national systems, as they identify key areas of economic development. Good policies can only be developed if viable processes are institutionalised and lessons learned from on-the-ground experiences. The Gampaha programme highlights key steps that need to be taken, and how synergies can be built to complement the expertise of diverse sectors that need to come together for successful adoption of policies within a city environment. This case also demonstrates that the city municipality, as a service provider to urban residents, can play a pivotal role in providing complementary support for urban agriculture practices, especially in waste recycling. Convincing multiple sectors, identifying a champion and funds, and close supervision stand out as being very crucial. Finally, the involvement of key decision makers from the very start streamlines the process.

**Notes**

2) http://practicalaction.org/sri-lanka

**References**


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