

BUILDING AN EDIBLE LANDSCAPE

Urban-farming progress in Kampala, Uganda leads to an innovative program to integrate agriculture into municipal planning.



For decades, residents of Kampala have relied on urban agriculture for food, employment, and income. Farming activities have spread throughout the Ugandan capital, taking over all manner of available space—from abandoned fields to grounds along roads and waterways. Unfortunately, many residents viewed these agricultural activities as a nuisance. Roaming livestock raised frequent road-safety concerns, while other farming practices were considered harmful to public health and the environment.

“Our bylaws were outdated,” admits Winnie Makumba, Kampala City Minister of Social Improvement, Community Development and Antiquities. “They failed to recognize that many residents derived their livelihoods from urban farming. We realized it was up to us as political leaders to initiate the policy changes that would support urban farming practices.”

CHANGE IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION

In 2001, Kampala city government set out to revise existing legislation related to urban farming. Two years later, the Kampala City Council District Extension Office, in collaboration with the Kampala Urban Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Coordination Committee (KUFSALCC), spearheaded a consultative process to re-examine draft bills for five city ordinances.

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Resistance to change, however, ran deep in Kampala, partly because urban agriculture challenges prevailing attitudes. Influenced by colonial bylaws, these attitudes hold that urban farming is inappropriate in cities.

INFORMING CHANGE

However, abundant urban agriculture research and advocacy—supported by international organizations such as IDRC, the UK Department for International Development and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research—helped illuminate food security as a key issue, and successfully eclipse outdated fears in Kampala. Perhaps most compelling was the city’s inclusive consultative process, which helped ensure grass-roots support for change.

“The best way to make laws is to involve the people who are going to be affected by them,” says George Nasinyama, KUFSALCC Team Leader. With this in mind, KUFSALCC and the Kampala District Extension Office conducted a series of workshops to engage a range of stakeholders—especially urban farmers. Recommendations generated at these workshops were readily adopted by Kampala city council with only minor amendments.

“Input from community members was strong because they knew what they wanted,” says Kampala City District Extension Coordinator Semwanga Margaret Azuba. “The ideas they brought

on board only needed to be polished in legal language.” As a result, five ordinances were created to regulate all forms of urban agriculture. Two ordinances are currently being piloted to enable an impact assessment.

A BROADENING SCOPE

Meanwhile, with attitudes to urban agriculture shifting, Kampala has joined the Edible Landscape Project (ELP). A partnership with IDRC, the Netherlands’ ETC-Urban Agriculture unit, and McGill University School of Architecture, ELP aims to re-engineer cities from traditional centres of food consumption to primary hubs for food production.

“ELP helps us showcase the integration of urban agriculture into urban planning and housing design,” says Margaret Azuba.

On land donated by the city, municipal officials, architects, and urban planners will work closely with community members to improve housing, income, and food security for some of Kampala’s most vulnerable citizens. ::

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THE GARDEN CITY OF AFRICA

The capital of Uganda, Kampala is also its largest urban district. The city is home to more than 1.2 million people—40 percent of whom live in absolute poverty. In addition to being the country’s political centre, the city is also the hub of Ugandan administrative, commercial, and industrial activity. Covering 195 square kilometres, Kampala has been referred to as the garden city of Africa due to its lush growth—a product of a mild climate and generous rainfall.



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APPLIED ARCHITECTURE

The Edible Landscape Project was launched by the Minimum Cost Housing Group at McGill University School of Architecture. The group is an educational and research unit focused on human settlement problems in poor nations. Through ELP, the McGill group coordinates research in three cities: Colombo, Sri Lanka; Kampala, Uganda; and Rosario, Argentina (page 06). Results of these initiatives will be presented at the 2006 World Urban Forum in Vancouver.