Allotment Gardens for Philippine Cities

Community gardens are defined as gardens where people share the basic resources of land, water, and sunlight. This definition includes both allotment and common gardens. Since March 2002, a project is being implemented in Cagayan de Oro, Southern Philippines, to establish four pilot allotment gardens in different parts of the city with financial assistance from EuropeAid's AsiaUrbs Programme.

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Robert Holmer

Inside the vegetable nursery with some of the gardeners

Allotment gardens are characterised by a concentration in one place of several small land parcels of about 200 to 400 m² that are assigned to individuals or families, usually organised in an association. In allotment gardens the parcels are cultivated individually, while in common gardens the entire area is tended collectively by a group of people (Macnair, 2002). An allotment garden is made legally available by the city authorities to the association to be used exclusively for growing of vegetables, fruits and cut flowers, but not for residential purposes.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The idea of allotment gardening reached its first peak in 1864 when the first Allotment Gardeners' Association was founded in Germany. During the period of industrialisation in Europe, large numbers of workers and their families migrated from rural areas to the cities in search of employment in the factories. Very often, these families lived under extremely poor conditions – a socio-economic situation somewhat similar to the booming development of Philippine cities today. To improve their overall situation, so-called "gardens for the poor" (later termed "allotment gardens") were established; cities, factories and monasteries provided plots for the urban poor, allowing them to grow food for their families and to keep pigs, chicken, and other small domestic animals (Kasch, 2001).

The aspect of food security became even more important in the first half of the 20th century, during World War I and II, when the socio-economic situation was appalling, particularly in terms of people's nutritional status. Many cities were isolated from the hinterlands, and agricultural products from the rural surroundings did not reach the city markets anymore or were sold at very high prices on the black markets. Consequently, food production within the city, especially fruit and vegetable production in homegardens and allotment gardens, became essential for survival. In 1919, one year after the end of World War I, the first legislation for allotment gardening in Germany was

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passed. The so-called "Small Garden and Small-Rent Land Law", provided security in land tenure and fixed leasing fees. In 1983, this law was amended by the "Republic Act for Allotment Gardens" (Gröning & Wolschke-Bulmahn, 1995). The importance of allotment gardening in Germany has shifted over the years. While in times of crisis and widespread poverty (from 1850 to 1950), the main function of allotment gardening was to enhance food security and improve food supply, its present function is in providing recreational areas and locations for social gatherings. What was previously a part-time job is nowadays considered a beloved hobby for millions of practitioners. Frequently, allotment gardens are conceived as part of the public green belt area (Crouch, 2000, Drescher, 2001).

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the pilot projects is to serve as a model and learning centre to enable a future extension of allotment gardening in Cagayan de Oro and other Philippine cities.

The pilot areas are in four barangays (the smallest local government unit in the Philippines). The areas in Bugo, Gusa and Lapasan were selected based on the experiences gathered by the city government in a previous project on waste segregation. The allotment gardens here were linked with the biodegradable fraction of the segregated waste by using it as compost in the allotment garden, thus serving as an outlet for this kind of waste. The fourth pilot allotment garden in barangay Canitoan is located close to the city's controlled landfill site, and was selected to be used by the Cagayan de Oro garbage pickers, one of the most socially disadvantaged groups of the city.

The allotment gardens are essential for the success of solid *waste management

The College of Agriculture of Xavier University recommended linking the solid waste management component with the production of vegetables in allotment gardens using compost made from the biodegradable wastes of the surrounding community. Expertise on composting and production of vegetables in an urban setting had been gained through an earlier EU-funded research project (GUANZON & HOLMER, 2003). The German partners Schelklingen and APT of the University of Freiburg agreed to contribute their expertise on the administrative aspects of allotment gardening, particularly on legal aspects and community organisation. The project also has a community-based geographic information system component (GIS) as a tool for integrating allotment gardening into urban planning. This is coordinated by the Belgian partners Dinant City and the Geography Department of the FUNDP University, Namur City.

AREA SELECTION

Suitable areas were identified on the basis of a) accessibility to water and transportation, b) no rent or a reasonable rental cost and c) availability of a contiguous area of at least 3200 m^2 to accommodate eight family units of 400 m^2 each.

Most of the open spaces in Cagayan de Oro are privately owned. Hence it was necessary to advocate and promote the project goals and objectives not only to the respective barangay but also to private landowners. The areas in Bugo and Gusa were identified with assistance of the Allotment Garden Technical Working Group (AGTWG) of the project, the barangay council and the beneficiaries. In both cases the land is owned privately. In Bugo, the landowner did not ask for rental payments but offered her land to be used for community purposes, while in Gusa, the allotment garden area is composed of two adjacent lots, owned by different proprietors. In both cases, the owners agreed to the provisions set out by the project. Land rentals are paid according to the current rates for agricultural land in Cagayan de Oro and the surrounding provinces. The area in Lapasan was identified by use of GIS at the city hall. The AGTWG then made a site inspection and gave its approval. Thereafter, the barangay chairman approached the owner for a leasing agreement without rental payments. In the case of Canitoan, the land is owned by Xavier University who made the land available to the beneficiaries without rental payments. In all cases, memoranda of agreements were issued to all stakeholders, clearly stating the provisions of the project. The memorandum of agreement provides legal security for all parties: for the urban poor the access to land solely for agricultural purposes, and for the landowner the assurance that his property will not be squatted on. As regards the period of tenure, both parties agreed to start with a short-term pilot phase and to evaluate the benefits of the project before going for a long-term agreement. Hence, the memoranda of agreement stipulate a "win-win" situation as a prerequisite for successful implementation of the project activities.

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Allotment gardens in Germany in 1950

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The pilot allotment gardeners of the AsiaUrbs project can be categorised into two main groups:

- Those who have already taken up urban agriculture as part of their survival strategy. However, due lack of space, these activities are confined to production of vegetables in containers (such as used cans or plastic bottles) or in tiny patches along the roadside.
- Those who are in need of alternative sources of subsistence and income but have not taken up farming due to lack of access to land (such as the garbage pickers at the landfill site).

Beneficiaries were recruited, based on their income; their willingness to do the

a) The Information & Education Campaign Group (IEC) with assistance of the Allotment Garden Technical Working Group (AGTWG) and a barangay organiser promote the goals and objectives of allotment gardening to all households of the pilot area
b) Interested households submit their application through the project assistant to the AGTWG
c) The AGTWG pre-screens applicants and forwards a list of final candidates to the barangay council for approval. The AGTWG ensures that all major groupings of the community are represented.
d) The barangay council approves/disapproves membership
e) An acceptance ceremony is conducted with a pledge of commitment by the beneficiaries.

actual garden work, to participate and share experiences; their residency near the project site and being residents of the pilot barangay. A Memorandum of agreement was signed with the barangay to support the project activities.
Initially, the identification of allotment garden beneficiaries based on the above-mentioned criteria was left to the communities. This resulted, however, in certain constraints and inequalities that led to the following optimised standard procedure for membership application as agreed upon by the project steering committee:

ALLOTMENT GARDEN SET-UP

The size of each family unit is 20 m x 20 m (400 m^2) consisting of eight beds planted to vegetables of different botanical families (cucurbits, solanaceous crops, legumes, leafy vegetables, etc.). The design of a pilot barangay allotment garden consists of eight individual family units having a net total area of 3,200 m^2 and a gross total area of 4,000 m^2. The area is fenced, and has an entrance, a tool shed, a nursery, and water supply (for which the additional 800 m^2 is used. One important aspect of the allotment garden is the compost heap for the biodegradable household wastes. The compost heap thus links the allotment garden with the integrated solid waste management component of the pilot area. More than 50 % of the household waste in Cagayan de Oro is biodegradable, and its conversion into compost and safe application in the allotment garden significantly reduces the residual waste to be dumped at the controlled city landfill.

As regards the cost of establishing one pilot allotment garden, the project spent approximately 337,640.00 PhP (6,400.00 US $). This includes human resources, capital outlay, consumables, training and overhead costs.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The pilot allotment gardens enabled the urban poor of Cagayan de Oro to have legal access to vacant land in the city for agricultural purposes.
The private landowners who participated in the project are so convinced that they have offered other areas in Cagayan de Oro to be used for allotment gardening. The total area so offered is five hectares of open land. The landowners were particularly convinced that their land will no longer be idle but productive, and that their property is protected from illegal squatting, which is perceived as a constant threat for open spaces.
The allotment garden is essential for the success of the solid waste management programme in the area. The residual waste of the 300 pilot households to be brought to the landfill area could be reduced to 33 %. 55 % of the household waste is biodegradable and went to the compost heap in the allotment garden, while a further 10 % is recyclable and marketed by a garbage pickers' organisation.
The project gets full support of the local government units. A city ordinance on the use of vacant lots in the city is in preparation and will further promote allotment gardening (i.e. tax incentives for landowners that make land available for urban agriculture; requirement to allocate space for allotment gardening in residential areas such as sub-divisions).
Yet, not everything has been smooth. Different perceptions of the community and the of the project itself had to be settled (what technologies to use, how will the project money be spent, misconceptions regarding roles and responsibilities). A good preparation with, and mutual understanding of the project objectives by, all stakeholders is thus a necessity for success.
Also, certain fears and objections within the community had to be overcome. Residents were particularly worried that the compost heap in the allotment garden may be odorous. However, the compost heaps established so far are properly maintained and thus not offensive to the neighbouring community.
The entire project is funded through a grant that is channelled through the barangay. The only direct contribution expected from the beneficiaries is labour to maintain the allotment garden. They are however obliged to contribute towards setting up a fund for the association, which could be used for replacing damaged tools and other equipment, and for obtaining resources (like what?) for new members. And thereby the project is made sustainable.

The importance of allotment gardening in Germany has shifted over the years

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the experiences of setting up the first four allotment gardens in Cagayan de Oro, the following is recommended:

- Further advocate and promote project objectives among private landowners, local government officials and the general public in order to extend allotment gardening to other areas of the city
- Include norms and values in training programmes to strengthen the allotment gardeners association
- Consult the city council on strategies to ensure long-term tenure of the allotment gardens (i.e. proposal to purchase land from private landowners)
- Conduct more research, particularly on integrated pest management strategies to reduce dependence on chemical pesticides

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Allotment gardens Germany in 1920

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