URBAN AGRICULTURE AND THE REDUCTION OF POVERTY


Young girl at a water pump.
Photo: Peter Bennett


Household greywater treatment system, Karak, Jordan.
Photo: Mark Redwood


Harvesting greens, Latin America.
Photo: IDRC

The International Development Research Centre's Urban Poverty and Environment Program works with communities, research organizations, and governments in the developing world to improve urban environments and reduce poverty. Since 1996, IDRC has worked to develop a better understanding of the costs and benefits of urban agriculture.

Urban agriculture can help to break the poverty cycle

Many poor urban families in Africa and Latin America spend up to 80% of their income on food.

Urban agriculture (UA):

- reduces food expenditures and helps families use scarce resources for other important priorities
- increases nutritional diversity
- creates employment and
- reduces the need for transportation of goods from rural areas.

In many cities, such as Rosario, Dakar and Bamako, UA has been a catalyst for the organization and activities of community groups seeking better access to land, advocating for better municipal services, and accessing markets for their products.

Empowerment through knowledge

Capacity building – IDRC has invested around $5 million on strengthening research capacity to generate knowledge that will help cities implement policies to alleviate poverty.

These investments have been channeled through:

- Projects with Southern-based research organizations
- Communications and learning through workshops, awards programs, regional training courses and our website
- Encouraging methodologies that build trust between local communities and local governments: participatory action research
- Project evaluation to better understand the outcomes of our work

Urban agriculture: a livelihood with benefits and risks

Waste management and health
Liquid and solid waste is often used without treatment. The wider use of untreated wastewater in and around cities has led to joint work between IDRC, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization to develop appropriate, country specific guidelines for safe use of wastewater with health targets adapted to local conditions

Gender
Women and children are the most vulnerable populations when food is in short supply. Female-headed households and women in general are very active in UA, not only as farmers, but also as marketers and in food processing.

IDRC has contributed to a tool-kit on gender appropriate research methods and analysis and research on women's access to land in West Africa.


Urban farmer watering lettuce crops; apartment buildings in background, Accra, Korle-Bu district.
Photo: George Kwasi Damso

Multidisciplinary approach
Forging durable partnerships between communities and local governments takes time and energy. For example, through the Focus City Research Initiative of UPE, in Tunisia, La Soukra city authorities in partnership with local researchers are analyzing the potential to urban agriculture to contribute to livelihood improvements.

The future: Research, innovation and the cities

Future work will look at :

- Understanding the links between urban agriculture and changing food markets
- The use of urban agricultural waste for income generation – for instance, biogas production
- Accessing credit to improve access to land
- How to minimize the health impacts associated with UA
- Recognizing and understanding the "peri-urban"
- Urban agriculture's role in reducing vulnerability to climate change
- Developing more effective UA policies

Urban Poverty and Environment • International Development Research Centre • www.idrc.ca/upe • upe@idrc.ca

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