

# The **El Panecillo Pilot Project** in Quito, Ecuador

**The Municipality of Quito is challenged by demands to eradicate urban poverty, to improve the urban environment and to promote a participatory style of governance. Urban agriculture is a potential source of food, income and employment, and is part of a multifunctional use of land, and therefore has an important and strategic role to play in this development.**

**B**y way of a participatory city consultation on urban agriculture, the municipality embarked upon a process of institutionalising urban agriculture. This consultation was followed by the formulation of an action plan, later implemented into a specific action programme which presently forms a pilot project. It is envisaged that this will be implemented throughout the entire Metropolitan District of Quito.

Two systems of urban agriculture (UA) are found in Quito: *intra-urban* agriculture and *peri-urban* agriculture. Intra-urban agriculture is basically a (part-time) family activity, almost entirely aimed at the production of vegetables. The farming technologies are adapted to the distinctive urban conditions (irrigation with drinking water, hydroponics, and intensive production techniques). In the peri-urban system, the entire household is involved in production, with a trend towards exchanging produce, sometimes for cash.

It became apparent during the city consultation that there are no specific regulations concerning urban agriculture in the legal framework of the municipality, in spite of there being laws and regulations concerning issues influencing UA, like land use and water availability. The general action plan includes the following recommendations:

- ❖ Urban agriculture is an urban activity and should be recognised, incorporated and regulated under specific municipal policies.
- ❖ Credit and incentive programmes for urban agriculture should be developed.
- ❖ Technical support systems and programmes for the production, processing and marketing of produce should be developed.
- ❖ An urban environmental management system needs to be established.

The decision was made to start implementing the action plan through a pilot programme in the neighbourhood of El Panecillo. El Panecillo is located in the historical centre of Quito, and was selected due to its specific characteristics. It has a large area of protected land unsuitable for construction and already includes a family garden project. This project was initiated in 1994 under a rehabilitation plan with aims to stimulate use of municipal land for UA, avoid illegal occupation of land and improve livelihood conditions for the people.

The community of El Panecillo selected four concrete areas for intervention:

- ❖ setting up of composting and vermiculture plants (providing direct employment to 15 youths);
- ❖ installation of a community nursery for native ornamental and food production species;
- ❖ supporting the existing family gardens for production of vegetables, medicinal

plants and small fruits (involving 30 families, and mainly women); and

- ❖ construction of two agro-industries for vegetables and medicinal plants (providing direct employment to 23 families).

Through these initiatives, access to capital and knowledge is provided, but central to success and sustainability is the provision of secured access to land. Actors involved in the pilot programme formulated the following land-use regulations:

- ❖ use of symbolic rents for municipal lands used for agriculture;
- ❖ preferential property taxes for private land areas under agriculture (10% discount); and
- ❖ long-term (5-10 years) user-right agreements for municipal lands used for agricultural activities coordinated by producer associations and the agro-industries.

A series of reports have been published with additional information and criteria for the proposed land-use regulations. For instance, the implementation of symbolic rents and preferential property taxes should be principally aimed at the urban poor (presently representing 50% in El Panecillo). The agricultural production should also be oriented towards organic farming and should incorporate erosion-control techniques to avoid landslides (a general phenomenon in Quito).

To date (May 2001), the programme has facilitated the official recognition of urban agriculture and its integration into the new general Land Use Plan for Quito (2000-2010). The proposals relating to the (regulation of) secure access to lands, transformation and commercialisation are at this point at the Municipal Council and will be legalised shortly. The municipality is also working on the institutionalisation of a municipal urban agriculture programme, that will be hosted under the Department for Social and Economic Development, and will receive a percentage of the municipal budget.

The pilot project started in September 2000. It is financially and technically supported by IPES, the Urban Management Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (UMP-LAC/UNCH-HABITAT/UNDP) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and is implemented by different governmental and non-governmental actors.



**Maize on steep slopes in Quito**

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