



Advances in Urban Agriculture Policy in East Africa: Learning through comparison

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Nairobi and Environs Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum display, national agricultural training centre, Nairobi, Kenya. Photo by Christopher Gore

The October 2015 Milan Food Policy Pact is an indicator of the global momentum behind the establishment of policies and practices to support and enhance urban food production and food security. There is reason to be optimistic about the Pact and its potential influence, but there is also reason to be cautious about assuming such commitments alone will produce policy change. Given that there have been international commitments to the right to food since the 1940s, we need to know more about the conditions that lead global and national commitments to become embedded or institutionalised at the national and city level. For the last four years, in collaboration with the Mazingira Institute, this has been the goal of a research project in East Africa.

Decades of research has shown how important urban and periurban agriculture (UPA) is for social welfare in East African cities (Maxwell 1995, 1999; Lee-Smith 2010; Prain, Karanja, Lee-Smith 2010). The countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, along with their largest cities, have featured prominently in this evidence. This research project was

motivated by the need to understand the *political dynamics* that lead UPA to be embraced both nationally and in the largest cities of Nairobi, Kampala, and Dar es Salaam. Two research questions motivated this project:

- What are the conditions that have led to varying degrees of institutionalisation of UPA in each setting?
- Are the conditions similar or different across countries and cities?

Institutionalisation

To be “institutionalised” means that rules are established, accepted and repeated over time. Rules can be formal, like laws and regulations, or informal, like practices that are continually followed. Lee-Smith and Prain (2010) hypothesised that sustained civil society engagement and advocacy, regardless of international funding sources, may be critical for the sustained institutionalisation and support of UPA locally and nationally. This paper confirms that sustained civil society engagement is one of the key factors leading UPA to be institutionalised – but not the only factor. International knowledge, networking and funding are very important for initiating and fostering UPA policy development. Still, these impacts are not influential or durable unless they are locally rooted. Domestic civil society organisations whose advocacy and programming are directly connected to formal government actors at the urban and national scale have higher impact. Multilevel interactions between government and non-government actors – in short, the character of urban and national governance – seem to be

an important and often overlooked indicator of whether UPA will be supported and sustained over time. This critical indicator should be added to others such as access to land and credit, and extension services.

Urban agricultural policy in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania

In Kenya, advocacy and coalition building between civil society, international actors, farmers and central government agricultural staff has resulted in some of the most extensive, sustained dialogue and capacity building for UPA in the region. Results from a comprehensive Mazingira Institute study of UPA in Nairobi in the mid-1980s became a baseline for future research in the city. These results helped UPA become recognised as a critical national issue connecting land rights, housing, livelihoods, health and environment. Yet it was not until the early 2000s that the advocacy efforts of civil society began to foster deeper institutionalisation of UPA. One of the most important drivers of this change in Kenya was the establishment of the Nairobi and Environs Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum (NEFSALF) in 2003 (see box), along with its sustained, collaborative approach.

Nairobi and Environs Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum (NEFSALF)

NEFSALF is a network of Nairobi farmers that meets as a public forum hosted by Mazingira Institute, a non-government organisation. The Kenya government has engaged actively with NEFSALF, using it as an opportunity for its official extension services to reach urban farmers by providing them with training courses to improve their practices. Over a thousand urban farmers have been trained. The NEFSALF farmers established a representative, gender-sensitive management structure to further their interests, including both their right to farm and getting access to land, and have taken part in regional and international exchanges. This form of networking encourages the development of similar structures and ways of working in other towns and cities. NEFSALF has collaborated with RUAF to host farmers from other African cities as well. Since 2013 the network and forum have linked closely with the new devolved government of Nairobi City County.

The Forum built support for UPA by working with government, citizens and urban farmers to create a farmers' network (see Lee-Smith 2010). In 2008 Mazingira started to convene farmer training courses in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture. Farmers were offered skills to help with production and value addition and they also learned about the policy context. Almost all trainees became members of the farmers' network and were invited to participate in regular Forum meetings.



Backyard chicken coop, Kampala, Uganda. Photo by Christopher Gore

At the urban scale, in the early 2000s, the City of Nairobi was not supportive of UPA. However, following the passage of the new constitution in Kenya in 2010, which devolved agriculture as a responsibility to the new county governments, support for UPA in Nairobi changed. In August 2015 the Nairobi City County passed a bill to recognise UPA as a legitimate land use, and today Mazingira is working with the County to train and sensitise non-agricultural staff on the benefits of UPA. Although there is no national UPA policy in Kenya yet, one does exist in draft form. Nonetheless, the momentum and support for UPA is high with formal recognition of UPA in other national laws and policies. So while some of the conditions leading to support for UPA in Kenya are unique owing to agricultural devolution to counties, the conditions for support were established well before this as a result of purposeful, collaborative dialogue between farmers, civil society and national government agricultural staff. These characteristics stand out in contrast to Uganda and Tanzania.

Until 2015 Kampala, Uganda, was one of the few cities in sub-Saharan Africa that had implemented by-laws to permit urban agriculture within the city boundaries. These by-laws came about in 2006 after an inclusive, consultative policy development process (Lee-Smith 2010). Even though the by-laws were restrictive rather than supportive, their passage was celebrated and well documented. A national UPA policy was expected to follow soon after. This has not yet materialised however, and the political context in the city has also changed.

In 2010 an Act of Parliament established the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA). The Act gave the national government direct oversight over the city (see Gore & Muwanga 2014). This event resulted in a dramatic change in city staff and overall managerial approach in the city. The role of the elected mayor and councillors was (and is) also regularly debated. With respect to UPA, what also changed was the relationship between the city and farmers, domestic civil society and national bureaucrats. The new city staff did not have connections with the domestic actors and processes that led to the establishment of the original by-laws, nor with the international actors that had supported the by-law process. The KCCA remains supportive of UPA and has not altered the by-laws, though they will be reviewed. But in contrast to Nairobi, UPA initiatives in Kampala have been largely executed independently of the civil society and farmer networks so engaged a decade ago. City agricultural staff are in high demand and are motivated to support UPA, but they are re-establishing and building an urban food governance system anew.

In Tanzania, urban agriculture has been a nationally recognised land use since the mid-1990s, with reference to it in several national policies. Yet no national UPA policy exists and there has been reluctance to include UPA in national land-use planning policy or legislation (Halloran and Magid, 2013). Like Kampala, Dar es Salaam – as well as other towns – has been a focal point for research on UPA in Tanzania. But owing to the absence of a national UPA policy, the large geographic size of Dar es Salaam, and the complexity of the city's administrative structure (until recently there were three independent municipalities, and now there are five), farmers and civil society groups are not sure whom they should turn to for support for UPA. In short, support for UPA exists in legislation nationally, but with farmers increasingly pushed from vacant lands, that recognition is not felt at the urban scale. Urban farmer networks like TaFoGaNet (Tanzania Food Garden Network) along with domestic researchers have been working for years to enhance and protect urban farming through legislation. National agricultural extension officers based in municipalities have also been sympathetic and supportive of farmer needs. Some municipalities, Kinondoni for example, have moved ahead with ambitious UPA programmes and support. But the complexity of Tanzanian and Dar es Salaam administrative structures – particularly for agriculture – combined with a lack of resources for prolonged and sustained advocacy has meant that institutionalisation of UPA has been very incremental and weakly felt on the ground.

Advancing and sustaining UPA in East Africa

The results from this research suggest that a critical condition leading to the institutionalisation of urban agriculture is sustained, long-term collaboration between domestic civil society organisations, domestic researchers, farmers and farmer organisations, agricultural extension officers, and agricultural policy leaders in national government. To date this limited evidence has not been well documented. The depth of support for UPA in Kenya is more extensive than in the other countries. This is a result of

long-term processes where domestic civil society and farmers became deeply engaged in dialogue and collaboration with government staff. This process was slow, prolonged and deliberative. It was not rushed. International organisations have played important roles in each country, and remain critical to promoting and fostering knowledge sharing, networking and collaboration; they helped support domestic processes, programmes and policies at the state and city levels in all three countries and provided external evidence and expertise. Still, this support is more likely to have a sustained impact when connected to a collaborative process with strong domestic roots. Furthermore, policy processes are often one-time events, often driven by requirements for tokenistic public participation. These are not the same as forums where dialogue, deliberation and knowledge sharing occur gradually and over time. The cases in East Africa suggest that for UPA to be institutionalised, opportunities for dialogue, learning and debate between domestic civil society, farmers and public servants is critical and can help weather local and national political change.

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