Foreword

The livelihood of a large number of people in cities in developing countries, especially the poor and women, depends completely or partly on urban agriculture.

These agricultural activities take place in various parts of cities, both in the built-up area (in back yards, along streams and railway reservations, on vacant public or private land) as well as in the rapidly changing sub- and peri-urban areas.

Attention to urban agriculture is steadily increasing. Research undertaken in the last two decades indicates that urban agriculture has multiple roles and functions and plays an important role in:

- enhancing urban food security, nutrition and health;
- creating urban job opportunities and generation of income especially for urban poverty groups and provision of a social safety net for these groups;
- contributing to increased recycling of nutrients (turning urban organic wastes into a resource);
- facilitating social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and community development;
- urban greening and maintenance of green open spaces.

However, the potential adverse effects of urban agriculture on health (eg. the risks associated with irrigation of food crops with urban wastewater) and the environment (eg. pollution of underground water by agro-chemicals) also need to be recognised. Balancing of the positive and negative impacts that agriculture may have in a specific city, depends to a large extent on the measures taken by the local authorities to enhance the benefits of urban agriculture while reducing the associated risks.

Conventionally, city governments looked upon agriculture as incompatible with urban development and as a relict from rural-urban migration that dwindles as cities and urban economies grow. Urban agriculture was not given any policy attention, other than restricting it as much as possible or permitting it only as a temporal use of the sites concerned until urban functions took over its use.

Activities of the partners in RUAF (International network of Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security), in cooperation with UN-Habitat/UNDP’s Urban Management Programme in Latin America, IDRC’s Cities Feeding People programme, FAO’s PAIA Food for the Cities, CGIAR-Urban Harvest and other organisations, have demonstrated to local authorities in many countries that urban agriculture is more pervasive than ever before. These cities have recognised that agriculture and related activities form an integral part of the urban socio-economic and ecological system, link to several critical urban issues, and need proper policy attention and support. Such recognition has led to policy changes in many cities and the design of adequate programmes on urban agriculture involving various stakeholders from governmental and private sectors.

Since 1999, the RUAF partners have been playing a crucial role in improving access to information on urban agriculture of local authorities, NGOs, farmer organisations and other stakeholders, and in enhancing the capacity of such organisations to engage in local participatory processes of diagnosis and strategic action planning on urban agriculture.

This publication presents a vivid picture of the progress made since the ground breaking UNDP publication “Urban Agriculture” (published in 1996) and the DSE publication “Growing Cities, Growing Food; Urban Agriculture at the Policy Agenda” (Bakker et al., 2000).
The publication is a well-balanced combination of the experiences gained by local RUAF partners in cities in developing countries with the expertise of leading researchers in their respective thematic fields. The book’s focus on policy and action orientation makes it a valuable resource for local policymakers, urban planners, organisations of urban farmers, NGOs and other stakeholders in urban agriculture. The book will enhance their understanding of the role urban agriculture can play in promoting inclusive, green and productive cities and provide ways to facilitate safe and sustainable urban agriculture.

For United Nation agencies and other international donor organisations, this publication provides some important directions to consider regarding the role of urban agriculture in the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty by 2015. Experiences documented in this publication provide evidence of how local authorities deal with urban agriculture in the context of food security for the urban poor. Urbanisation of poverty in the developing countries is becoming a serious concern, and international agencies need to support programmes and activities that promote development of safe and sustainable urban agriculture systems and integration of these in the urban planning system.

*Dinesh Mehta*
Coordinator
Urban Management Programme
UN-Habitat
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