The Policy Framework and Practice of Urban Agriculture in Bulawayo

Bulawayo is Zimbabwe’s second largest city. Once Zimbabwe’s industrial hub, the city has lost most of its major industries, through outright closure or relocation to the capital city, Harare. The city is thus home to a relatively poor urban population, compared to the population of Harare. A policy framework on urban agriculture is under development since 1996, and is supported by RUAF.

Bulawayo is located in the southwest of the country and is home to an estimated two million people. The city is the hub of the Matabeleland region, which comprises all of western Zimbabwe from the South African border in the south to Victoria Falls in the north. The region receives relatively little rainfall. The bulk of the water consumed in the city is extracted from an aquifer called the Nyamandhlovu.

The city of Bulawayo has been developing a policy framework for urban agriculture since 1996, when the city council recognised the emerging phenomenon of urban farming and took a decision to improve it for the benefit of its residents. The council sought to improve urban agriculture in terms of increasing the area under urban agriculture activities and also the intensity of production per given area in a manner that would not harm the environment. In 1998 the council set-up an inter-departmental committee that was mandated to develop draft policy on urban agriculture. The committee developed a draft policy, which the council adopted in July 2000. In Zimbabwe policy at central or local government level usually influences legislation in the form of Acts of Parliament or bye-laws for local authorities. The importance of the adoption of a policy on urban agriculture by the city of Bulawayo can therefore not be over-emphasised.

THE POLICY DOCUMENT ON URBAN AGRICULTURE

The policy document for Bulawayo crafted by an inter-departmental committee and adopted by the city council in 2000. It is entitled Urban Agriculture in Bulawayo – Issues and an Inception of Policy Guidelines. The document highlights, in the first section, the key issues for urban agriculture in the city in terms of the characteristics, types of activities, and problems encountered. The second part deals with the objectives of urban agriculture in the city and the last part deals with urban agriculture proposals and policy guidelines.

The policy document defines urban agriculture as “a system of land use for agricultural purposes within the urban environment for crop and animal husbandry.” It therefore recognises urban agriculture in its broad sense and does not limit it to crop cultivation. The policy also recognises that urban agriculture is widespread in the city and is a major land use activity with immense socio-economic benefits to the residents. It recognises urban agriculture as an industry that should be supported and organised. In Bulawayo, as well as in Zimbabwe in general, urban agriculture is seen as illegal or unwanted, so the intention of the policy is to legalise the activity in certain designated areas within the city.

The objectives mentioned in the policy document are to identify suitable land and allocate it to deserving people (i.e. the elderly, women and youths), promote the utilisation of urban wastewater, support the activity (with proper extension services, finances and project appraisals) and above all to make sure that the activity is properly coordinated. In order to control the practice, the city council must first formally accept it, register all pieces of land used for the purpose, categorise the agricultural activities and where they can be
practiced, and re-affirm positive existing bye-laws that prohibit cultivation on certain areas like road verges, stream banks, etc., or prohibit the keeping of animals on residential plots or stands with limited space.

**URBAN AGRICULTURE PROJECTS**

There are nine garden allotments in the city that are managed by the social services office in the Department of Housing and Community Services. Some of these allotments were in existence before the policy was accepted in 2000. The beneficiaries are mostly the elderly and the destitute. In addition the city managed the Gum Plantation Allotment, a massive community garden project on an estimated four and a half square kilometres. Like in the other garden allotments, preference in allocation of plots is given to the elderly and the destitute. Were most of the vegetable from the Gum Plantation Allotment for own consumption in 2000, it has been estimated that nowadays sixty percent of the vegetables are sold in the city and the rest in Francistown in neighbouring Botswana. The city still manages this Gum Plantation and wastewater from the council’s sewage treatment works was and is pumped to the nine garden allotments for irrigation. Two extension officers assisted the residents with advice. However, the council has not been able to support the farmers recently due to manpower and financial constraints.

![Image](image-url)

**PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

The major problem initially encountered in implementing the policy was the lack of a driver and an institutional home for the policy. The policy is largely a result of the work of an interdepartmental committee sponsored by the Town Planning Division, but in fact one person, who also had other duties within the city council, did most of the work. This has changed now, since the council has agreed that the Town Planning Division will deal with urban agriculture and staff will be dedicated to the activity.

Another problem in the implementation of the 2000 policy was that it conflicted with some existing bye-laws in Bulawayo. The main conflict arose with the Bulawayo (Protection of Lands and Natural Resources) Bye-Laws of 1975, which regulate how residents in the urban or periurban area may practice urban agriculture by detailing the types of land that can be used for agriculture and restricting stream bank cultivation. Whilst the 2000 policy identified land very close to streams as being suitable and desirable for urban agriculture activities, the earlier bye-laws stipulate that cultivation is not allowed within 30 metres of a stream. The residents’ association is in favour of stream bank cultivation and even some of the demarcation of land for urban agriculture has taken place in areas that do not meet the provisions of the regulations. Recent scientific research has shown that not all stream bank cultivation causes soil erosion; certain crops can actually help arrest soil degradation, such as bananas. Therefore the regulations, which proved difficult to enforce anyway, need to be specific to certain types of crops or cultivation methods.

The policy further encourages the keeping of small livestock, including pigs, rabbits and to some extent goats, within the areas designated for urban agriculture. However, the Town Planning Schemes of 1975, in Part II Condition 4 (b) state that no cattle, sheep, goats, swine or horses shall be kept without consent of the authority responsible for town planning. Most people believe this condition is no longer applicable and new initiatives to review the policy guidelines will tackle the issue.

Finally, the 2000 policy encourages the establishment of fisheries and the use of treated wastewater for the aquaculture systems. This could create a conflict because the wastewater is currently being used for the production of crops at Gum Plantation and other garden allotments dotted within Bulawayo. The diversion and use of the water for fisheries would reduce the amount available for irrigated crop production.

**THE SITUATION IN 2006**

The 2000 urban agriculture policy for Bulawayo reflected the intention of Bulawayo city council to recognise urban agriculture within the city. The policy in fact was a proposal for an agriculture plan for the city. The proposals are divided into immediate-term (1-5 years), medium-term (5-10 years) and long-term (over 10 years) plans for developing urban agriculture. However, the draft proposal failed to deal with critical issues of incentives for urban farmers and how land and other resources like water and financial matters should be tackled. Unfortunately, since the adoption of this policy in 2000, no new initiatives have been developed.

The major problem initially encountered was the lack of a driver and an institutional home

Following the introduction of the RUAF-CFF project in the city in 2005, the city council started implementing new city-wide activities (see also the article by Dubbeling and de Zeeuw in this magazine). The debate on urban agriculture was revived and the city has revisited the policy with the intention of streamlining it and coming up with a policy on urban agriculture that addresses some of the issues emanating from the current debates in the city. Some of the activities that have been embarked on include:

- Establishment of an Urban Agriculture Multi-stakeholder Forum for the city to guide the further development and implementation of the urban agriculture agenda for the city.
- Engaging a team of experts to identify pilot projects on urban agriculture. This did not get off the ground earlier due to lack of funds.
- Identification of periurban land on the edge of the city. The land is to be demarcated into 200-square-metre plots for use by households.
- Resuscitation of boreholes in the city and the use of land around them for urban agriculture.

**POLICY CHANGES**

Through the experience of implementing the policy and the introduction of the RUAF-CFF project in 2005, the city council and other actors learned that
several changes have to be made to the policy guidelines and that a new policy needs to be developed. They also realise that the new policy needs to be based on an inventory of the 2000 policy guidelines and current legislation. An audit of legislation was undertaken in 2003 by MDP and the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) to identify relevant and current policies and legislation which impacts urban agriculture (Makonese and Mushamba, 2004). The research established that, despite the seemingly prohibitive environment, current legislation does indeed offer many opportunities for the practice of urban agriculture. This is contrary to popular belief that the law prohibits urban agriculture in Zimbabwe. In fact, the law recognises the risks that go along with agricultural production in the city, and is intended to regulate urban agriculture.

The first and main issue that will have to be addressed as a direct result of the 2000 policy is the need to establish an institutional home for urban agriculture, preferably within the city council. At the moment it is not clear which department or section within the council will be responsible. The Town Planning Section within the Engineering Department has been temporarily assigned responsibility. What is needed is confirmation of this arrangement as a permanent one. The policy needs to be clear on which department will coordinate urban agriculture activities. All indications are that the Town Planning Section within the Engineering Department will play this crucial role.

The second issue is that the new policy to be developed should articulate and give clear guidelines on the issue of irrigation and water harvesting for urban agriculture (i.e. both gardening and aquaculture). The policy guidelines of 2000 do not mention water harvesting and the use of wastewater for irrigation. The current description of urban agriculture in the policy guidelines does not distinguish between on-plot farming and off-plot farming activities. It is imperative to encourage the development of “on-plot” urban agriculture as land for this is already secured. There is a general feeling amongst most stakeholders that the current guidelines emphasise “off-plot” urban agriculture activities without adequately addressing issues of “on-plot” farming.

Issues related to integration of urban agriculture into overall urban development are not covered by the current policy guidelines. It is imperative that this be addressed in the revision of the policy and in the development of a new policy on urban agriculture. The action plans being developed under the current CFF programme for the city are articulating this issue.

The last important issue to consider in reviewing the 2000 policy, involves the need for broad-based participation by all stakeholders in the reviewing of policy. As was mentioned, the policy was largely crafted by a small committee of the city council. One of the results is that the policy has remained largely unknown among the majority of stakeholders. Participation of a wide array of stakeholders and their inputs in the development of a new urban agriculture policy will also assist in the organisation of the projects on urban agriculture at community level. It will also make it easier to find sources for funding and to regulate the activity. The CFF project has facilitated this process through the formation of the urban agriculture stakeholder forum in the city. The forum, which was established in September 2005, met five times in 2006. A summary of their deliberations is available on www.mdpafrica.org.zw. The Urban Agriculture CFF programme is currently participating in the policy review and formulation process. Details of the MPAP process are discussed elsewhere in the article by Dubbeling.

CONCLUSION

Urban centres in Zimbabwe can become home to some of the highly productive farming operations in Zimbabwe, enabling the country to achieve a much faster economic recovery than anticipated. The draft policy guidelines for Bulawayo adopted in 2000, were inadequate in addressing critical issues relating to urban agriculture, like creating an institutional home, proper integration of urban agriculture into urban development, and the absence of critical discussions on how to make resources available for urban agriculture. Constraints in funding have also contributed to this lack of proper attention. These issues are now being addressed under the CFF Action Plan for Bulawayo.

References