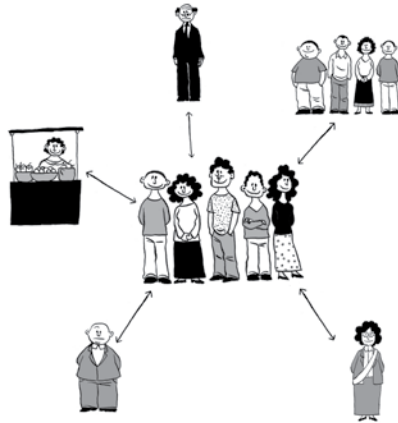


Chapter 5: Information exchange and partnerships

This chapter deals in detail with the issue of working with other groups and organizations – from joining other urban producer groups in a network or Inter-Group Association, to working with existing farmers networks and with other stakeholders as partners.



Key points



Why work with other groups and organizations

Stakeholders in UPA

Producer Organizations

- **Inter-Group Organizations**
- **Other producer organizations**

Working with Partners and stakeholders

Information exchange

GA actions

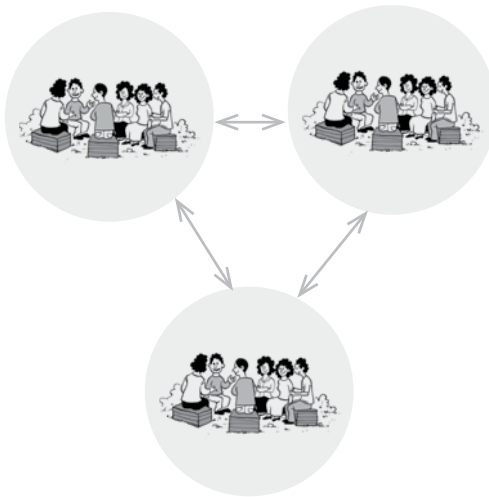
Summary

Why work with other groups and organizations?

An individual group can pool the resources of its members, combining their skills and knowledge. By sharing the work they are able to achieve together much more than they can individually (as discussed in Chapter 3). By working



together with others, whether other groups, networks or institutions, the group can gradually increase its sources of information to improve their knowledge and skills and to reduce costs and increase profits.



By working with other groups and organizations, urban producers can improve their access to resources beyond that possible for an individual producer group. Cooperatives, Inter-Group Associations and Producers Networks, can help provide cheaper inputs and a more effective lobbying voice to city authorities. Producer groups can also work for example with:

- landowners for agreement over use of land;
- city authorities to produce a better city environment through green spaces and use of city organic waste for compost;
- consumers and retail outlets to provide more of what they want;
- traders, transporters, and suppliers for mutual benefit and
- with NGOs, aid agencies, government service providers etc. for provision of advice, training and credit both for themselves and for others.

The more groups, individually and together, work with city authorities and with all stakeholders, the better the chances of resolving constraints and conflicts. As the group become more competent at making and building such relationships, they also become more self-sufficient and the role of the GA can eventually be reduced.

Stakeholders in urban agriculture

These include all those directly and indirectly affected by UPA such as:

- Producers themselves
- Processors – who may or may not be the producers
- Suppliers of inputs such as seed, fertilizer, compost, pesticides, tools and equipment – private, government and NGO.
- Landowners - private and public
- Water authorities
- Power, gas, electricity, telephone suppliers
- Transporters – who may or may not be the producers
- Market authorities
- The Department of Health and other public health organisations
- Service providers such as extension departments and NGOs
- Consumers of the produce from UPA
- Wholesalers and retailers – who may be the producers, or supermarkets, hotels, or other retailers who sell on the produce in other markets
- Schools (who often have small agricultural plots)
- Churches
- Financial institutions
- Promoters such as NGOs, Aid agencies, university departments, schools and religious organizations, government agencies
- City authorities – water, power, waste management, city planners, parks and gardens, agriculture and agricultural extension, forestry, health and nutrition, transport, market authorities, tax authorities etc.
- All those living nearby UPA plots or where animals are kept
- All those affected by the waste, noise and smells from UPA.

Producer Organizations

I Inter-Group Associations (IGAs)

An Inter-Group Association (IGA) is an association of individual producer groups who have agreed to work together with a set of common rules and objectives.

Individual producer groups can combine the skills of their members, enabling them to do more than they can individually. However, they cannot do everything and even a large and relatively strong producer group will have limited power and influence on its own. Working together with other producer groups opens up a wide range of possibilities. For example, a producer group can learn new skills from another. They can also work together to be able to buy or sell in larger quantities and so gain better prices for inputs or to sell larger or more regular quantities to buyers such as supermarkets and hotels. They are also better able to access funding and advice from government, NGOs



The main ways in which an IGA can help Urban producers are through:

- *Bulk purchasing of inputs – seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, tools etc.*
- *Group finances (savings funds and loans)*
- *Access to services, training and advice*
- *Access to credit through the IGA's own funds or through other sources with the support of the IGA*
- *Joint marketing of produce*
- *Representation of groups to government and other organizations*
- *Exchange of ideas and information*

and Aid organisations. By working together, they can have more influence on policy towards UPA as they speak with a common voice.

Some particular types of group may work better together than others. For example, women's groups and youth groups are often particularly successful and may combine both social and economic objectives in working together.



Group Networks, Harare (Zimbabwe)

The Inter-Group Association has enabled groups to access training together. The Glen Norah ZRP Mushroom group received training together with other groups in Budiriro 5 in mushroom farming. Farmers are seen to benefit considerably from collective action and gain recognition and legitimacy. Strawberry farmers have managed to access inputs and exhibit their produce at a national agricultural show through inter group associations. In some cases alliances with other institutions have landed some groups lucrative deals of contract farming. But in most cases, associations have brought non-monetary benefits to groups.

(City case studies, Harare, Zimbabwe)

Cooperation between groups is usually informal at the beginning. Eventually, it can be formalised through an Inter-Group Association, which is often recognised and registered more easily. An association of groups requires greater management skill, than an individual group, especially if it has many activities. Some associations concentrate on obtaining economic benefits for member groups, such as access to credit, inputs and markets. Others have social aims, such as mutual support for child-care, health, or other community issues.



The farmers association UPROVAN, Union des Producteurs de la Vallée des Niayes, was formed in Dakar-Senegal, with the aim of improving production, processing and commercialisation. UPROVAN is a federation of four small farmers organizations. The cooperation between the groups has helped to increase know-how, build economies-of-scale and strengthen marketing and bargaining power. The association has provided training to its members in organic waste recycling and processing. It also managed to negotiate funds to build small composting units and stabilisation ponds for waste water treatment.

(Video - Small urban producers organisations. FAO-FCIT, ETC UA IPES and IDRC. 2006).

Forming an IGA

Forming an IGA too soon, i.e. not long after individual producer groups have been formed, often leads to a weak organisation that does not always represent the needs of member groups. The emphasis at first should be:



- on general cooperation between groups;
- on building awareness of the possible roles an IGA could play in solving group problems and;
- on the potential benefits - and costs - of inter-group cooperation.



Accra, Ghana

In the past, there were a number of strong producers organisations in the city. Today, though, whilst organisations in horticulture, grasscutter, sheep and goats and poultry continue to exist, the structure and functioning of those made up of low-income patrons is generally ineffective. This is because they are organized largely on an informal basis although they seek both social and economic gains. "The members and leaders appear to be serious only when a credit avenue seem to be opening although we encourage them to focus on other objectives – saving and knowledge sharing"

(City case studies, Accra, Ghana).

IGAs can offer economies of scale both for group activities and in access to services. They can also represent the broader interests of their members in discussions with local authorities. In this way, the urban producers become increasingly self-confident, earn greater recognition from the urban community and are able to make a greater contribution to city planning for food production and for an improved environment.

Most urban producers have little time to spend on committee meetings and any IGA formed needs to begin with realistic objectives and produce visible benefits to members in the short term. At a later stage, they may be registered as a formal organization in order to obtain legal recognition, services and facilities.

As with individual producer groups, it is important that the groups have a common objective in working together. Some groups have only a very informal link and have simply agreed to work together to access credit. Such groups are rarely effective and quickly disband once the credit agreement has been reached (**see box**).

IGA structure

An IGA represents its constituent groups and must be accountable to all group members. It should have a facilitating, coordinating and educational role and become a source of technical assistance, economies of scale and guidance. It can eventually perform many of the functions of group advisors including representation at stakeholder meetings.



With a small informal meeting of producer groups, it can be practical for all members or a few representatives from each group to meet together. As an IGA grows, however, this becomes less practical and the IGA meetings need to be restricted to the leaders of each producer group and for even larger IGAs, a management committee of a few leaders will become necessary for the regular day to day management. By this stage, an IGA will need a formal constitution, membership payments and a management team. The benefits in turn are the increased services and influence that the IGA is able to offer to its members.

The need for inter-group associations will develop gradually if/when potential member groups are convinced that the benefits of setting up an IGA outweigh the shared costs.

More details on formation and development of Inter-group associations are given in the Group Promoters Resource Book, the Group Enterprise Book and developed further in the Inter-group Resource Book – all available for download from FAO (http://www.fao.org/sd/2001/pe0701_en.htm).

2 Other producer organisations

Cooperatives, Allotment Garden Associations, Agricultural Labour Unions, Agricultural Associations or Agriculture Networks (see box – NEFSALF in Kenya) often exist in or near to urban areas. The majority are usually concerned mainly with the rural areas but can equally serve the urban agriculturalist in the same way. They can provide a viable alternative to an IGA in providing inputs and representing the interests of urban producers groups.

Such organisations generally have a recognised legal personality and are often subject to specific legislation and government intervention. It may be possible, and worthwhile, for urban producers groups to work directly with such existing organisations.



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

58 percent of the groups are affiliated to NEFSALF, which again confirms the importance of this forum to farmers in Nairobi. The groups' perceptions on benefits of these partnerships include development of better and sustainable practices (55.6%). Through knowledge sharing and capacity building in groups, farmer can learn practices that continue to improve their livelihoods. The second is investment into value adding (50%) followed by access to larger or more lucrative markets (39%). Other benefits that groups mentioned less include access to better inputs (33.3%), more stable incomes (27.8%), access to more land and water (22.2%) and access to safer land tenure (11.1%). Non-group benefits of partnerships include improvement in the quality of life (58.8%), access to better training (58.8%), stable incomes (27.8%), improvement in acquisition of goods (17.6%) and opportunities for investments (5.9%).

(City case studies, Nairobi, Kenya)

Increasing influence – lobbying authorities

An IGA, Coop, Farmers Association or labour union, in representing a large group of producers, is in an ideal position to influence city authorities. They may need assistance and advice in how to approach the authorities in the first place, but most responsible government planners are willing to listen to organised groups of citizens.



For UPA to contribute significantly more than at present to city food supplies and a safer cleaner environment, a policy environment which includes planning for urban agriculture is needed – and this needs to be developed jointly by all concerned stakeholders. (See also *Chapter 7 on increasing legitimacy*).



Yiriwaton Cooperative, Mali

Yiriwaton is a well-organized and effective registered cooperative, which promotes urban agriculture, supporting farmers and regulating agricultural activities in Bamako. It offers a credit facility to its 160 members to purchase seeds and tools, and runs a saving scheme for the members. Members farm mainly privately owned land, on the basis of informal rental agreements made with the landowner.

Yiriwaton is politically active, defending farmers' rights and lobbying government offices to obtain and secure access to public land. It takes cases of land eviction without compensation to court in order to recover the farmers' production and investment costs.

(UA Magazine no. 17)

Working with Partners and Stakeholders

Producer organisations can work directly together with many of the stakeholders and partners listed above. For example:

- They may be able to negotiate a deal with others in the market chain (from production to sale) such as **transporters, processors, packers, and market authorities** to reduce costs or provide a better service for their members. Individual producer organizations are more effective than individual producers at negotiating such a deal, but IGAs and other larger networks are usually even more effective.



With **marketing and sales** – groups may be able to combine their skills for joint marketing or it may be better (or the only practical possibility) to work in partnership with existing marketing organisations.

In some countries, cartels control market access and producer groups have little choice but to work with them. Even in this case though, working together with other producer groups gives them more power in negotiation with cartels – or in some cases, more influence over city authorities to allow them entry to markets without the middle men. Networks and organisations, which have been in existence for some time, may well have already made such arrangements.

- Similarly, it may well be possible to work directly with **input suppliers** for a better arrangement for members such as lower prices for bulk delivery or direct delivery to the producers.



Storage of supplies can be a problem for some small urban producer groups and so, the input suppliers may also be able to keep stock aside (reserve it) for the producer group for later collection.

- **Service providers** such as **water, electricity, power, gas, telephone** – are all easier to work with as a group than as individual producers and the group (or IGA or network) can offer guarantees to the suppliers that are not practical or possible for an individual producer.

Similarly, extension, training and advisory services can more easily be arranged through groups working directly with the service provider. By working directly with them, producers groups can also agree to work with other producer groups to share the advice or training or to bring together members of other groups for a joint session to the benefit of all.

- **Private landowners** may be willing to make a direct deal with an established group in exchange for rent or produce (or both).

In some cities, idle land now attracts higher taxes than does land used for agricultural production and this can also be a potential starting point for partnership between the private sector owners of a plot to be used at some future date, and urban farmers.



The guarantees and legal force of such agreements are usually stronger than for an individual and hence more attractive to the landowners. Again, such arrangements are easier through IGAs, coops and networks.

- **NGOS, Aid agencies, churches and schools** are often interested in working directly with established UPA groups to develop the programmes and share the results with others. The more the benefits can be shared with other producer groups, the more interested such organisations will be in working together with the group or association.

- **Government agencies, institutions and authorities**, are always more willing and able to work directly with larger organisations than with individuals. By discussing what each needs, an agreement can be reached which will help all parties.



A simple example is with urban organic waste. Producer groups can work together with the city authorities to agree on collection and composting of urban waste to keep an area clean and tidy in exchange for training and space for a composting site. The resulting compost can then be sold as a business activity for the producer group. Similar arrangements can be made for use of grey water and unused municipal land.



Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) agrees that farmers need to be empowered to take the right decisions regarding their agricultural activities. One way of doing this is for the MoFA to "collaborate with the Department of Cooperatives to strengthen the capacity and facilitate the formation of farmer based organizations (FBOs). A fund has been established to support the development of FBOs"

(City case studies, Accra, Ghana)

Banks and other financial institutions can work together with larger, more established groups and networks to provide credit and savings schemes to producers groups. Special arrangements and group guarantees can often be made once the groups are established for long enough and particularly if they have a good record of managing their own finances.



- Direct arrangements can be made with **retail outlets, hotels, and restaurants** to supply produce direct to them. By working together, with such partners, the groups may be able to agree a regular supply which will meet the needs and requirements of the buyer in terms of quantity, quality and delivery times. The more groups work together, the better

they are able to keep to such agreements by using produce from others in their network when they do not have enough themselves.

- Finally, **consumers' groups and citizens' organisations** often object to urban agriculture because of the smell, noise and lack of hygiene often associated with it. By discussing needs directly with them, the producers groups may be able to come to an agreement that satisfies all parties, reducing some of the activities which are most objected to and providing more services and produce that is wanted. (See also **conflict resolution in Annex I**)



Information Exchange

Groups need information and advice internally, but they also need to communicate with other groups, organisations, partners and stakeholders.

Leaflets providing information on what services are available from government, NGO and other service agencies are still one of the most effective methods of passing on basic information to groups. The GA can play a very useful role in contacting such organisations for information they have directly available for distribution as well as to know what services and advice they can provide.



Simple leaflets and fliers are also one of the cheapest and best ways to advertise the group produce and where it can be obtained as a first approach to potential buyers.

Radio is widely listened to in urban areas and can be an effective medium to inform all stakeholders, of the issues related to urban agriculture. By raising the issue, it promotes debate and provides an opportunity for the GA to begin to promote a dialogue between the stakeholders.



In some cases there may be an opportunity to represent producer groups in a radio or television discussion.

Some groups may also have access to the internet. However, the limitation, with this and most media is that many members are illiterate or computer illiterate. As such, whilst the medium has an enormous potential for sharing of information, the most practical use at present is for the GA to make use of it in discussion with donor, NGO and government organisations. With larger groups, associations and networks, it may well be possible and practical to set up their own website to help counteract negative publicity about UPA, to publicise the success stories and how UPA can help the city in providing food, reducing pollution and improving the attractiveness of waste areas. Such a website can also be used for direct advertising and sale of produce.

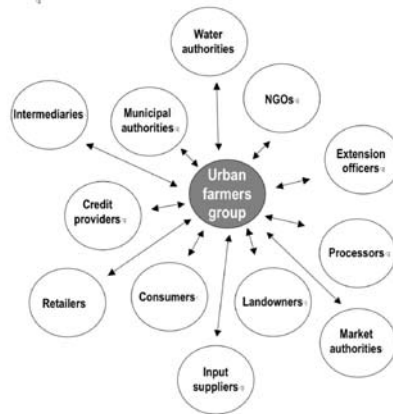


Group Advisor Actions

I Who affects the UPA producer group?

The first stage in discussion with a producers group should be to discuss who affects the group and who is affected by them. A simple way to do this is the following exercise:

First ask members to list all the groups or persons who influence the success of their group (the stakeholders). Write them on a board or piece of paper. Are there stakeholders missing from the list in this chapter? Should some of them be added or are they not relevant to the group? Are there other important stakeholders not mentioned here?



group. The distance of each stakeholder from the group will represent the importance of that stakeholder to their success.

Thirdly, discuss what would be the advantages of cooperation with them – could there be some mutual advantage?

2 What producer organizations already exist?

Before considering forming any sort of producer group organisation, it is better to find out what organisations already exist. The GA should meet with them informally to find out if their objectives and services could be of interest to the producers groups and if they are interested and willing to work with them.

If so, a meeting with a representative from the association or cooperative and the producers group would be worthwhile to discuss cooperation.

3 Who to work with

From the results of exercises 1 and 2, discuss with the group, who they should work with first. Is it most worthwhile to join an existing network? Should they approach other stakeholders for direct partnership? Which if so? Should they work on more than one at once? What are the priorities?

Eventually, producer groups and those helping them should aim to work with the whole marketing chain from inputs supply, to production, processing, packaging, marketing and consumer requirements and preferences.



NGOs in **Cambodia** have established networking and partnership groups for better coordination. So far, they have membership organizations (e.g. CCC, NGO Forum on Cambodia), and sectoral groups (e.g. agriculture, child rights, commune administration and decentralization, disability and rehabilitation, education, fisheries, forestry, gender, health, HIV/AIDS, human rights, land reform, micro finance, credit working group, and environment working group). Within this network, the NGO community is able to exchange information through their monthly meetings and help ensure activities within an area do not overlap.

(City case studies, Phnom Penh, Cambodia).

Chapter 5: Information exchange

The points where they can achieve the greatest gains in income or improved conditions should be the priority areas for action initially. This process will also need to be reviewed and revisited as the group progresses.

It is not always easy or even possible for producer groups to contact others for information exchange or to negotiate partnership deals directly with others. The GA may need the help of an NGO or others assisting the producer groups who may be better placed for this - as with the example from Cambodia (**see box**).





Summary

Groups can improve their situation in many ways by working with other producer groups and organisations and in partnership with many different stakeholders. They can reduce their costs, increase their profits and help to provide more benefits to their members.

- **First they need to recognise how many different groups influence their production**
- **Then what organisations already exist who can help them**
- **Thirdly, who they can could be able to work with in partnership**
- **Fourthly, what actions should be taken now**

The process will need reviewing at various stages in the group's growth

