Increased urban land values, more active land markets and intensified competition for use challenge the ways growers access land for urban and peri-urban horticulture.

**Key points**

The sustainability of urban and peri-urban horticulture is jeopardized by rapidly changing land rights, land uses and land values.

Land tenure arrangements for urban food production need to be integrated into an overall land policy for sustainable urban development.

Municipalities have adopted a variety of approaches to securing land for horticulture, including regularization of informal titles and tax incentives.

Multi-stakeholder platforms can help negotiate the integration of UPH into urban development plans.

Local authorities should promote a rational use of land with agricultural potential, identify mechanisms for settling disputes, and prevent inappropriate uses.

As cities grow, demand for land and changes in land uses are placing intense pressure on urban and peri-urban horticulture. Because areas used for UPH are often held under customary or informal tenure, many growers face the constant threat of being evicted or having their plots appropriated by others. Growers newly arrived from rural areas are particularly vulnerable.

A key requirement for sustainable UPH development is the long-term availability of suitable land. Studies show there is a surprising amount of open space and usable land which could be allocated or leased for horticulture. What is lacking, in many developing countries, are pro-active policies, planning and management aimed at safeguarding a range of land uses within a framework of long term, balanced and sustainable agro-urban development.

Land tenure arrangements for urban food production need to be considered by local authorities as part of an overall land policy that supports local sustainable development, including slum upgrading programmes. Through zoning and regulations, land policy should recognize and provide security for both UPH and horticultural production in rural areas that are directly connected to the city, thus contributing to stronger urban-rural linkages.

**A variety of approaches**
The challenge of securing land for horticulture is being addressed by municipalities around the world in a variety of ways.

**UPH for displaced populations**
As urban populations swell during emergencies and conflicts, cities often need to find additional land for food production. Temporary, flexible land tenure arrangements are needed to allow use of vacant land for agriculture and livelihood support, as well as for settlement of the displaced population. In Colombia, for example, FAO is supporting urban agriculture in a number of municipalities, which provide small plots for cultivation by communities and individuals. “Mini-spaces”, such as rooftops and containers, are also used for horticulture.

An FAO project for horticulture in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.
different ways. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a key strategy of an FAO-assisted project was regularizing vegetable growers’ informal tenure over their plots. That was achieved through the creation of municipal consultation committees, representing local authorities and growers’ associations, which processed requests for secure leases to some 1,200 ha of market gardens.

In some cities, local governments promote UPH on public land, in congested slums and squatter areas, and in environmentally degraded zones. Identifying areas suitable for UPH requires inventories and mapping, coupled with research on tenure status, ownership and the potential for cultivation. Some public areas (e.g., terraces along rivers or landslide-prone areas) can be used for “landscape-friendly” food production.

Home and school gardens are suitable places for horticulture in cities. They contribute directly to food and nutrition security and livelihoods, provide practical nutrition education and training in agriculture, and raise awareness of the importance to food production and marketing. In Gampaha, Sri Lanka, for example, local authorities are promoting school gardens to encourage students to participate in agriculture from a young age.

Urban horticulture activities can also be implemented on crowded and even landless private holdings. Rooftops have proven to be an ideal place for vegetable micro-gardens that do not compete for urban space.

To facilitate the use of land for UPH for a fixed period of time, local authorities can provide financial or fiscal incentives. Municipalities of Rosario, in Argentina, grant tax exemptions to land owners who allow poor urban farmers to use vacant private lots, while the city of Cape Town, South Africa, provides incentives in the form of access to irrigation water, tools and compost for poor urban farmers.

UPH can also be promoted on land not suitable for other uses, such as along roads and railways or under power lines. An added benefit is that such use helps keep those spaces open and clean. In Detroit, USA, for example, some areas left vacant by the closure of factories and the demolition of houses are used for urban agriculture. However, potential health risks, such as the presence of pollutants, need to be carefully assessed.

**Platforms for negotiation**

To negotiate key issues related to sustainable UPH – especially decisions on land use – multi-stakeholder platforms may be established. They should include central government, public health, education, municipal and land tenure authorities, representatives of producer associations, inputs suppliers, water distribution and use managers, NGOs, and micro-finance operators.

Stakeholders can lobby urban planners to integrate green spaces for UPH activities into their urban development plans, and to adopt procedures for dealing with often intricate customary tenure rights. This approach has been used by a project on urban agriculture and nutrition in Antananarivo, which is linking various stakeholders and partners in order to identify the parcels of land, to train local growers and follow-up implementation.

It is important to promote a rational and organized use of land with agricultural potential, identify mechanisms for settling disputes, and prevent inappropriate uses that might compromise productivity. Planning for UPH can be closely linked to strategies for disaster risk management, and also to strategies for adapting to climate change. All stakeholders, particularly NGOs and growers’ organizations, can play a negotiating role in that process.

**Kigali’s master plan**

In Rwanda, urban food production is a strategic component of Kigali’s Conceptual Master Plan, a long-term framework for the city’s development. The plan envisions a city set amid greenbelts and zones reserved for urban agriculture, and open spaces with community vegetable gardens.

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