



Guidelines on how to manage urban forests

A Q&A with Susan Braatz, Forestry Officer, FAO
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What do we mean by urban forestry?

Urban forestry is the management of forests, groups of trees and individual trees in and around urban areas for their contribution to the physiological, sociological, and economic well-being of urban and peri-urban society.

Why are urban and peri-urban forests important?

Urban and peri-urban forests take many forms and are managed for a range of purposes. These may include natural and planted forests to provision cities with food, timber, fuelwood and other forms of wood-based energy; forests and wooded areas for recreation; forested watersheds to ensure clean water supplies and prevent landslides, forests in drylands to protect against winds and sand storms; green spaces and street trees to cool and beautify cities; and trees in urban/peri-urban gardens for provision of fruit, shade amenity. In some cities, tree planting days and city gardening projects are as much about building community cohesion as they are about the trees and gardens themselves. Extensive research and experience demonstrates that forested cities are more resilient to climate change. Towns that have invested in a green infrastructure have subsequently enjoyed many benefits.

Is all is well in the urban forest?

Urban expansion is at the expense of trees and forests in many countries. The rate of urbanization in developing countries is particularly an issue for forests in and around their cities. There, the extremely rapid pace of urban population growth is outpacing efforts in urban planning and is rendering existing urban plans obsolete. Forest land is transformed into urban infrastructure – apartment buildings, offices, roads; and remaining forests and trees are often used for urban supply of wood and non-wood products. Spontaneous settlements of the rural poor moving into cities seeking better lives often result in clearing or degrading forests and trees where they are needed most, such as on erodible hillsides. The importance of urban forests, and “green infrastructure” in general, to healthy and safe cities is often underestimated, with mayors, planners, urban designers and decision takers too often not aware of the potential role of this resource in increasing the liveability and sustainability of their cities.

What does a progressive approach to urban forestry policy look like?

A progressive approach to urban forestry looks like this: forests and trees are integral parts of urban plans just as are other urban and peri-urban concerns such as food supply and transport; and legal, policy and institutional frameworks exist to support the design, management, conservation and development of urban and peri-urban forests. An inclusive process, involving all the stakeholders concerned, is crucial to make this approach successful. Training and education also play an important part.

What is FAO doing about it?

Through a multisectoral and multi stakeholder approach FAO supports the development of actions, projects and strategic planning tools promoting urban and peri-urban forests. Currently, FAO’s Forestry Department

is working to the development of global and regional *Voluntary Guidelines for Policy and Decision Making Promoting Urban and Peri-urban Forestry*. The guidelines are designed to provide policy makers and decision takers with a set of best practices that will be useful in developing strategies, action plans and initiatives to optimize the contribution of trees and forests to a sustainable urban and peri-urban development.

Are only foresters working on the guidelines?

The urban forestry guidelines will have input from experts from other disciplines, for example, agronomists, food systems experts and urban planners. FAO has offices in about 100 countries and expertise across food and agriculture. They will contribute with their ideas. Urban forestry experts from outside FAO will also participate and review the guidelines.

What happens when the guidelines are ready?

We plan to publicize and distribute them widely. We will seek opportunities to facilitate their use. FAO stands ready to assist countries and cities in the use of the guidelines. After all, the whole point is that they are used.

FAO is currently developing three sets of guidelines on urban and peri-urban forestry: one global and two regional. The regional ones have been developed for the Asia-Pacific region and for the African French speaking countries and the Near East. The development of guidelines for the Mediterranean region is being explored through the working group on urban and peri-urban forestry set up under the auspices of the *Silva Mediterranea* network supported by FAO.