



## Havana, Cuba: Urban Agriculture Policy<sup>1</sup>

**Name of the policy:** Havana Urban Agriculture Policy

**Start date:** 1997 (27 December is National Urban Agriculture Day); 1998 (Creation of the National Urban Agriculture Group)

**Completion date:** Ongoing

### CONTEXT

#### GOVERNMENTAL DECENTRALIZATION CONTEXT

##### City context

The Republic of Cuba is renowned for its high levels of human development based on extensive healthcare coverage, education and basic services, and is in 51st position (HR 0.863) (UNDP 2010).

The Province and City of Havana is the island's capital and political-administrative and economic centre. With just over 2 million inhabitants (100 percent urban), it accounts for 19 percent of the country's population within a relatively small area. Although Havana has no rural

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<sup>1</sup> The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** is a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. It contains over sixty case studies on innovative policies for interculturality, community development, access to basic services, gender equality, human rights, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty, among others. The initiative has been developed with the scientific support of Prof. Yves Cabannes from the University College of London (15 cases) and a team of researchers from the Centre for Social Studies (CES) at the University of Coimbra (50 cases), which has worked under the supervision of Prof. Boaventura de Sousa Santos. The Observatory aims to identify successful experiences that can inspire other cities when designing and implementing their inclusion policies.

The Inclusive Cities Observatory created by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights. **United Cities and Local Governments** (UCLG) is the international platform that represents and defends the interests of local governments before the international community and works to give cities increased political influence in world governance. The mission of the **Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights** is to contribute to constructing a common voice for the cities of UCLG in the areas of social inclusion, participatory democracy and human rights. It also aims to guide local governments in designing these policies and to that end, fosters political debates, the exchange of experiences and mutual learning among cities around the world.

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population, agriculture is an important activity which produced 3,537 thousand tons in 2009 (83 percent of vegetables), highlighting the importance of urban and semiurban food production.

Urban agriculture, which was formally launched in 1997, is a very important activity that employs thousands of people and makes a significant contribution to vegetable production. Urban agriculture emerged in response to the food crisis after the fall of the socialist bloc in the 1990s. It occupies a wide variety of urban spaces and involves various agroecological production systems, such as organoponic farming, intensive gardens and semi-protected crops that annually produce more than 100,000 tonnes of vegetables and fresh herbs (González et al, 2010).

The food crisis has become more acute in the past two years, and the impact has been particularly strong in Latin America, where the number of undernourished people has increased to levels similar to those of the 1990s, at around 52 million people (FAO 2009). Cuba is the country with the highest dietary energy availability per capita at 3,280 Kcal/per person/per day, a figure that has increased by 20 percent in the last 15 years (1990-2005). Urban agriculture has made a significant contribution to this result.

#### **Governmental decentralization context**

In 1998, Resolution No. 208/98 of the Ministry of Agriculture created the National Urban Agriculture Group, which has managerial, advisory and monitoring responsibilities for urban agriculture in the country. It includes representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, Higher Education, Education, the Revolutionary Armed Forces, the Interior, Science and Technology and the Environment and the National State Reserve Institute. This resolution is the first acknowledgement of urban agriculture's contribution to the production of food for Cuba's cities, towns and villages. In the same year, the Circular Letter of the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers No. 03/98 confirmed the importance of urban and semiurban food production to the Cuban government, and instructed the Ministry of Agriculture to organize the production of vegetables "*in order to achieve no less than 300 grams per capita per day, and to meet the demands of social consumption, tourism and exports.*" The Provincial Administration Councils were made responsible for organizing production on the ground, and were given the task of identifying areas available for production. In 1999, the land use plan for Havana produced by the Provincial Physical Planning Authority included urban agriculture as an ongoing activity, which was categorized by type of activity depending on the area where it takes place. The plan provides for a differentiated implementation of urban agriculture subprogrammes based on "*forestry in urban parks*" in the central area, as well as "*organoponic farms, nurseries, plots and courtyards for growing vegetables, herbs and spices, flowers and ornamental plants and rabbit and poultry farming*" in the intermediate zone, to suburban activity on the outskirts of the city. In 2001, Joint Resolution No. 1/01 promoted the inclusion of urban and semiurban food production in children's nurseries. A key measure in the implementation of the project came in 2002 with Resolution No. 40/02 issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security which authorized "*the suspension of the employment relationship of workers belonging to the occupational categories of labourer and technician from any sector or economic activity who work in Urban Agriculture in the province of Havana, for a period of up to two years,*" without this being detrimental to their career or profession. Furthermore, a series of resolutions and decrees passed between 1990 and 2010 addressed issues such as the social organization of farmers in Production Cooperatives, Basic Cooperative Production Units (BCPU) and Credit and Service

Cooperatives (CSC), the transfer of vacant land to urban farmers, legislation on pig breeding on the outskirts of the city, pigs for state farms and the promotion of urban forestry. The National Urban Agriculture Programme currently includes 28 sub-programmes covering various aspects of production, marketing and value addition, and the conservation of natural resources organized in livestock, cultivation and support sub-programmes.

Livestock subprogrammes	Cultivation subprogrammes	Support subprogrammes
1. Beekeeping	8. Fresh vegetables and herbs	20. Control, use and conservation of land
2. Poultry farming	9. Medicinal plants and dried herbs	21. Organic fertilizers
3. Rabbit farming	10. Ornamental plants and flowers	22. Seeds
4. Sheep and goat farming	11. Fruit	23. Irrigation and drainage
5. Pig farming	12. Non-specialized rice	24. Animal feed
6. Aquaculture	13. Forestry, coffee and cocoa	25. Marketing
7. Large livestock farming	14. Non-specialized banana	26. Small-scale agro-industry
	15. Tropical roots and tubers	27. Training
	16. Oilseed crops	28. Agroecological integration
	17. Beans	
	18. Corn and sorghum	
	19. Semi-protected crops	

**Institutional level of policy development:** Provincial

## SOCIAL CONTEXT

With 11,240,841 inhabitants (NSO 2010), the Republic of Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean.

Havana (Havana Province), founded by the Spanish in 1519, is the island's capital and political-administrative and economic centre. With a surface area of 272 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 2,141,993 inhabitants, 51.8 percent of whom are women (NSO 2010), it accounts for 19.1 percent of the total population (population density = 2970.8 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>). The city of Havana has 15 municipalities and 100 percent of the population is urban, which has an impact on agricultural activities.

According to official data, in 2009 the number of workers employed in Havana was 925,608 people in a working age population of 1,292,423 people, taking into account both the state and the non-state sectors (cooperatives, joint ventures and private sector) (ONE 2010).

Havana has a tropical climate, with an average temperature of 25°C, a relative humidity of 79% and an average annual rainfall of 1,400 mm, which makes it a city with good conditions for engaging in tropical urban agriculture.

In 2009, the total production of vegetables in Havana amounted to 285,166 tons, a significant

increase from the 20,000 tons produced in 1997 (Gonzalez et al, 2010). Nationwide, Cuban urban agriculture produced 1,230,300 tons of food between January and November 2010.

## **COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE**

### **Description of the policy**

The Havana Urban Agriculture Policy brings together the following components: i) production and environmental (with a strong emphasis on increased productivity based on a free scheme for synthetic chemical supplies), ii) social and labour (facilitating the mobility of skilled labour from other production sectors and the organization of the urban farmers in cooperatives), iii) land use and territorial planning (identifying the need to include urban agriculture as a permanent land use, minimizing the impact of vacant space in the city) and iv) food and nutrition safety (identifying the importance of high quality food in key areas such as children's and mothers' nutrition, and that of the population as a whole). The 28 sub-programmes that are run within the National Urban Agriculture Programme highlight the comprehensive vision of the Cuban policy.

### **Background / Origins**

After the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, Cuba promoted extensive agricultural plans based on the use of mechanized equipment and chemicals that produced food for four times the island's population. In the early 1990s, with the collapse of the socialist bloc countries whose markets accounted for 80 percent of foreign trade, Cuba began its "Special Period," which was characterized by a lack of supplies, goods and food. In Havana, the population spontaneously began to grow vegetables in particular, and were encouraged to do so by NGOs and some municipal authorities. According to Eugenio Fuster, the promoter of the institutionalization of urban agriculture in the city, "*it was marvellous to be able to present the idea of agriculture in the city to comrade Raul Castro, who was touring agricultural areas in the capital on December 27, 1997, which was subsequently instituted as National Urban Agriculture Day.*" This move prompted the authorities to consider the importance of having a specific urban agriculture programme, which was officially approved in 1998 with the creation of the National Urban Agriculture Group. Due to the characteristics of Cuba, the activity is promoted at various levels of government (the Ministry of Agriculture and the Provincial Government of Havana) and coordinated through associations and NGOs in the city.

### **Policy objectives**

The provincial urban agriculture policy aims to produce high quality food without using synthetic chemical inputs to improve the population's diet, which has been heavily affected by the economic crisis resulting from the collapse of the socialist countries. To do so, it uses vacant land (urban spaces) and the resources available in the city (soil, organic matter, water). Over the years, transformation and various marketing channels have been included in the city's urban agriculture.

### **Chronological development and implementation of the practice**

Havana has had an Urban Agriculture Policy since 1998, when the National Urban Agriculture Group was created. It emerged as a response to the food and production crisis in the Special Period of the 1990s, and became consolidated to the extent that it became an ongoing activity

involving a wide variety of spaces and more than 26,000 urban farmers (IPES/ACTAF 2010). The activity's early inclusion (in 1999) in permitted land uses led to its development as an ongoing activity. Access to technical and professional human capital to run the various subprogrammes (in 2002) and the introduction of a wage system to encourage producers helped to consolidate the activity, by enhancing the availability of skilled human resources. The permanent transfer of vacant spaces guaranteed the availability of land suitable for farming, and the National Programme (with its 28 sub-programmes) led to the development of production, processing and marketing and the management of basic resources (water, land, supplies).

### Agents involved

The Ministry of Agriculture and the Provincial Government was responsible for designing the Havana Urban Agriculture Policy. However, over the years, various types of support have been received from organizations in Cuba and internationally. According to Eugenio Fuster, delegate of the Ministry of Agriculture in Havana (between 1994 and 2004), *"The support from the capital's government and the Communist Party was essential. They embraced the idea, and then other agencies and international collaboration projects joined in."* The collaboration projects that have worked with the urban agriculture policy at the years include Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, Veterinarios Sin Fronteras, Oxfam International, EZE Germany, Movimiento Laico de América Latina, HIVOS in the Netherlands, Bread for the World, Terranova, ECHO, the Habitat-UNDP Urban Management Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean, IPES Promoción del Desarrollo Sostenible, and numerous European councils and mayors' offices. The Cuban associations that have acted as counterparts include the Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forestry Specialists (ACTAF), the Cuban Association for Animal Production (ACPA), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), the Cuban Council of Churches and the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Man.

### Beneficiaries

Since its inception, the policy has sought to benefit the entire population by the consumption of high quality food, with an emphasis on children and pregnant mothers. The urban farmers were initially state workers and the general population interested in producing food in urban areas. Since then, with the introduction of labour and wage incentives for urban farmers, the activity has spread to other sectors of the population, such as professionals and technicians. Today, there are 22,700 urban farmers in the city.

### Participation processes implemented

In the Cuban model, the various sectors of society participate through their representative organizations (professional, technical, etc.) and mass organizations (women, youth, peasants, etc.) which are in all cases coordinated with the public policies promoted by the various levels of government. In this context, one of the cornerstones of the Havana Urban Agriculture Policy has always been its broad-based social and political participation. The creation of the National Urban Agriculture Group in 1998 shows the interdisciplinary and multi-actor nature of this policy. The Group includes four ministries, the Revolutionary Armed Forces and 15 scientific institutions and agencies linked to the agricultural sector.

Some associations, such as the Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forestry Specialists (ACTAF), the Cuban Animal Production Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP) are key players in the implementation of the Urban Agriculture Policy in the city, undertaking initiatives and channelling funds from international cooperation. Based on

the principle of "*decentralization while not losing control and centralizing while not killing initiative*," production was promoted within neighbourhoods, by neighbourhoods and for neighbourhoods, by encouraging the thousands of people interested in taking part in the activity to participate. In addition, the various ways in which the gardens are organized (Basic Production Units, Credit and Service Cooperatives, etc.) have participatory management models with a collective leadership and collectivized results among the urban farmers.

### **Institutionalization processes**

The institutional structure of the Havana Urban Agriculture Policy falls within a legal framework of over 18 Ministerial Resolutions, Decrees, Circulars and Laws that address various issues of urban agriculture (see *Governmental Decentralization context*).

### **Financing**

The policy is publicly funded, although international cooperation maintains an active presence by funding specific urban agriculture projects and initiatives in the city. No precise amounts for the financing of the policy are available.

### **Key results and achievements**

In 2009, the Havana Urban Agriculture Policy had the following outcomes/impacts (Gonzalez et al, 2010):

*Volume of production:* 285,166 tons of vegetables produced in 2009.

*Production infrastructure:* 13 arable farms consisting of 475 holdings; 23 Basic Cooperative Production Units (UBPCs) and 6 livestock UBPCs with 318 ranches; 15 urban farms; 160 hectares of semi-protected crops; 179 high yield organoponic farms; 418 intensive nurseries; 28 seedling production houses; 324 protected crop houses; 162 workplace self-consumptions; 92 credit and service cooperatives with 7,579 members; 5661 natural landowners who are not members of cooperatives; 7,848 smallholders of plots under 800 m<sup>2</sup>; 34,970 courtyards in houses; 5 forestry units comprising 126 integrated forest farms; 4 livestock farms on 67 ranches; 52 farming offices/shops; 3 organic matter production centres; 7 centres for the production of entomophagous and entomopathogenic fungi and 40 veterinary clinics.

*Legal framework:*

- 18 Ministerial Resolutions, Decrees, Circulars and Laws covering the various aspects of urban agriculture.
- 28 subprogrammes within the National Urban Agriculture Programme.

*Participating population:* 22,700 direct urban farming jobs created.

*Institutionalization and international cooperation:* At least 11 international development cooperation agencies and institutions supporting urban agriculture initiatives and projects in the city.

### **Main obstacles**

The main obstacles identified were as follows:

- The initial lack of belief at government level as regards the potential of urban agriculture for food production, especially in urban areas (such as the central municipalities in the city). Initially, the municipalities that were quickest to join were those on the outskirts, but the construction of a flagship garden in the city centre and the strong support received from some key government institutions (especially the Revolutionary Armed Forces and the provincial government) contributed to changing this perception.
- The availability of skilled human resources (experts and professionals) with salary levels motivating them to engage in this work. The solution to this obstacle came with the enactment of a Ministerial Resolution enabling public sector employees to work in this field, with the incorporation of economic incentives from the sale of urban agriculture products.
- The need for some key supplies such as compost and a provincial marketing structure. The creation of compost production centres (as yet insufficient to meet demand) and the Metropolitan Horticultural Company has facilitated the marketing of urban agriculture products in Havana.

### **Replicability or adaptation of policy elsewhere**

While the Cuban model is based on specific social, cultural, political and economic conditions and circumstances (which are not easily replicable in other contexts), it is possible to think in terms of some useful recommendations for other governments interested in replicating urban agriculture activities.

- While the trigger for urban agriculture - which then became a policy - was the food crisis experienced during Cuba's Special Period in the 1990s, the Havana Urban Agriculture Policy shows that it is possible to move from a model of crisis one in which urban food production is an ongoing activity in the city. To do so, it is essential that urban planners identify and allocate space for the activity and that the various projects (including livestock farming) have an appropriate legal framework.
- In this respect, a legal framework that structures the various productive and environmental components, land use, human resources and income generation is essential. A comprehensive legal foundation helps to ensure an integrated activity.
- For the activity to be implemented as a public policy project beyond the project phase (change of scale), it is necessary to have specific programmes (the 28 Urban Agriculture subprogrammes) that address key aspects related to the production, processing, marketing and use of resources. While urban agriculture is based on the work of farmers, ongoing state support is crucial to maintaining the activity, providing economies of scale (inputs, training, organization, etc.) which enable a massive demand to be met.



## **SUMMARY**

The Havana Urban Agriculture Policy was officially launched in 1998 with the creation of the National Urban Agriculture Group. It has an antecedent in the spontaneous production of food by the population with the onset of the food crisis experienced during the "Special period" after the fall of the socialist countries in the early 1990s. It was created to produce food to feed the city's population, and has shown how it is possible to implement a permanent policy that fosters urban food production beyond times of crisis. The policy currently directly benefits 22,700 urban farmers and the general population, which was provided with 285,166 tons of vegetables produced in 2009. The enactment of 18 Ministerial Resolutions, Decrees, Circulars and laws provide the legal framework for the activity. It is financed with public funds and the work of urban farmers. Over the years it has received funding from at least 11 international development cooperation agencies and institutions, which shows the interest generated by the policy on a global scale. The results include a wide variety of programmes and activities, ranging from livestock farming and vegetable, herb, fruit and ornamental flower production to forestry, classified in the 28 Urban Agriculture sub-programmes within the National Urban Agriculture Programme promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture, organized within various legal institutions (UBPC, CCS, state farms, etc.) highlighting the activity's capacity for organizational innovation. Although the achievements are many and very varied, the activity must overcome various obstacles such as the production of high quality inputs to cope with the change of scale (fertilizers, plant pathogens, etc.).

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### **Acknowledgements / Credits**

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