



UCLG Committee
on Social Inclusion,
Participatory Democracy
and Human Rights

**Inclusive Cities
Observatory**

Urban Agriculture and Social Inclusion in Rosario, Argentina¹

This narrative is one out of 15 that were originally developed in 2007 as part of a project on innovative policies for social inclusion jointly developed by the Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London with the Committee on Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy (CSIPD) of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). This narrative was complemented and edited in 2010 by the Centre for Social Studies, Coimbra University (CES), to a standard format for the Observatory on Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy.

Name of the policy: Programa de Agricultura Urbana (PAU)

Start date: 2002

Completion date: Ongoing

¹ 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 community development, access to basic services, gender equality, 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 case studies) and a team of researchers from the Centre for Social Studies (CES) at the University of Coimbra, which has worked under the supervision of Prof. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (50 study cases). This Observatory aims to identify and investigate successful experiences that might inspire other cities to design and implement their own social inclusion policies.

The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** has been created by the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the global platform that represents and defends the interests of local governments before the international community and works to give cities more political influence on global governance. The **Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights** aims to contribute to building 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 peer learning among cities around the world.

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CONTEXT

GOVERNMENTAL CONTEXT

Government decentralization context

Argentina is the second largest country in South America, constituted as a federation of 23 provinces and an autonomous city, Buenos Aires. The 23 Provinces are divided into 376 departments (*departamentos*), which are further subdivided into municipalities or districts. With the exception of the capital city, the nation's provinces have chosen in recent years to enter into treaties with other provinces, forming four federated regions aimed at fostering economic integration and development: Center Region, Patagonic Region, New Cuyo Region, and Argentine Greater North Region. The city of Rosario – the third largest metropolitan area in Argentina, with a population of 1,069,293 in 2001 – is in the province of Sante Fe, which is part of the Center Region.

Institutional level of policy development: Municipal

COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE

Description of the policy

Rosario's program of urban farming is a highly recognized example of successful integration between social inclusion, poverty reduction, promotion of solidarity economy, and sustainability policies. The program implements the re-use of vacant urban land for agro-ecological farming on the part of marginalized sectors of local society, granting food security and alternative sources of income to the poor, while also providing public services such as the revitalization of degraded urban plots and the increase of green areas.

Background / Origins

The PAU programme is rooted in a longer history of experimentation with agro-ecology in Rosario, starting with a pioneering phase (between 1987 and 1990) during which a proto-model of community gardening was autonomously generated with the name of "Huerta comunitaria del Saladillo." An early institutionalization occurred between 1990 and 1997 (phase 2) with the aid of the local NGO CEPAR, Centro de Estudios de Producciones Agroecológicas (Centre for the Study of Agroecological Production), thanks to which different public and private organizations coalesced into a program called "Programa de Huertas." Phase 3 is the one in which an agro-ecology orientation consolidates, in connection with similar experiences in other areas of the Santa Fe province.

During this phase, the gardening program proper evolved into a program of social action, the Community Organic Gardens (Huertos Orgánicos Comunitarios).

In December 2001, Argentina suffered a severe economic, political, and social crisis, during which a number of strategies were developed to combat the poverty and unemployment affecting significant groups of women, men, youth, and children. Beginning in 2002, Phase 4 was the one in which the community organic gardens consolidated and institutionalized, becoming a strategic policy of the municipality of Rosario, thanks to the Program of Urban Agriculture launched by the Social Promotion Division (Secretaría de Promoción Social). During this phase, the policy linked with a national





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program, Pro Huerta, which supported family gardens. The plan was to supply 20 groups with gardening tools, materials, and seeds; develop a methodology; and then slowly extend the program throughout the city (Terrile et al. 2007; Guénette 2006).

Policy objectives

The main goal of PAU was to create productive community-based enterprises which would ensure the food security of poor citizens and generate genuine income. In addition, the policy was intended to promote participatory strategies and solidarity-based forms of production, processing, commercialization, and consumption of healthy food. A secondary objective was to recover public spaces for social ends by using them for social and productive purposes.

Chronological development and implementation of the practice

The policy began by taking into account the existence of vacant urban land that was suitable for agricultural activities, unused infrastructure, organic wastes and, above all, a large idle labour force that added to the widespread poverty in Rosario. The vacant urban land selected (some of which belonged to the state, other plots were privately owned) was located near poor settlements or public housing developments, and was the right size for this kind of activity. A municipal ordinance of 2002 (Ordinance No. 4713/02) ceded public plots of urban land to the residents of precarious settlements or unstable shantytowns to carry out agricultural activities. The same ordinance also invited private property owners to cede the use of their vacant land for two years, in exchange for exemption from taxes on unused land during that period.

In each of the six districts into which the municipality is organized, a technical coordinator and two local support staff with knowledge of agriculture or gardening were appointed to assist the *huerteros* (the persons tending the *huertas*). Beginning with the cession of the land, the residents involved have created more than 700 community *huertas*. These include areas for growing fruits and vegetables, flowers, medicinal plants, bushes, and trees. The production is intended for household consumption by the *huerteros* and also for sale through farmers' markets.

There are six of these farmers' markets located in different areas of Rosario, which take place one day per week. At these farmers' markets, the vendors not only sell fresh fruits and vegetables, but also products derived from them such as marmalades, sweets, and preserves. In addition, a group of women have developed a series of natural cosmetic products, like lotion made of aloe vera, calendula, and nettles, based on what they produce in their *huertas*. The products are processed by social production companies, the social agribusinesses. The products sold in the farmers' markets are very highly regarded by the community, because of their quality, conservation, presentation, and good flavour.

In addition to providing land, the policy also granted training and technical support by linking with the INTA (National Agricultural Technology Institute) through its Pro-Huerta Program, which offered workshops on commercialization in order to help the *huerteros* and *huerteras* to develop their sales skills and to organize the farmers' markets. INTA also provides the seeds for the *huertas*. The Municipality of Rosario pays the salaries of the coordinators and facilitates the organization of the farmers' markets to commercialize what is produced by the *huertas*.



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This policy is tied to other social inclusion policies being implemented in Rosario. For example, a Participatory Budget has been carried out since 2002, through which citizens can decide on and prioritize how a percentage of the municipal budget is to be used. There are district assemblies and activities are prioritized according to the decisions made by the community. The creation of a space for social agribusiness was voted to be the third highest priority activity in the Western district of Rosario in 2005. Urban agriculture is also associated with the housing policy of Rosario. In recent years, with technical assistance and training provided by the IDRC (International Development Research Centre) and McGill University, both Canadian institutions, an effort is being made to develop more *huertas* in the areas surrounding new public housing projects so that the residents of those projects can work on them and obtain a source of income as well as contribute to the creation of green spaces and an improved urban environment. Part of this effort is to work on recovering degraded soil through the creation of Huerta-Parks: La Tablada (inaugurated in May 2007), the Molino-Blanco-Las Flores park on the Saladillo Creek (the next to be opened), and the Bosque de los Constituyentes along the Ludueña creek.

Agents involved

PAU is a joint effort by the local government – bringing in money, logistic support, and infrastructures; NGOs such as CEPAR and Ñanderoga (an NGO that works with “street kids” between 13 and 19 years old, who also help to take care of the *huertas*); and governmental programs such as the Prohuerta INTA, bringing in technical resources and financial means. Technical support has also been provided by the Schools of Engineering and Architecture at the University of Rosario. Financial support has been granted by international organizations such as UN Habitat and the Spanish NGO ASPA. Finally, a crucial role is played by a local network of consumers, the “Movimiento de Agricultura Sustentada por la Comunidad,” which includes schools and other public structures.

Beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries are families in situations of structural poverty and nutritional vulnerability. Indirectly, the policy benefits the whole population of Rosario, benefiting from the regeneration of urban spaces, an additional provision of healthy locally produced food through the program’s farmers’ markets, and new opportunities of sustainable social interchange.

Key results and achievements

This policy has had very positive results, according to the people involved: it has fostered cooperation and integration among citizens, and has provided a source of income for close to 2000 citizens, who work to produce food that is free of agrochemicals. In addition, the policy has helped to make productive use of abandoned spaces, giving the city more green areas and contributing to environmental sustainability. The neighbourhood landscape has also improved, which makes residents happier and more content with their home.

The policy has been a tool for the inclusion of social groups who had felt marginalized (i.e., unemployed head of households, women and youths of poor neighbourhoods). It has also contributed to raising the self-esteem of many of the people involved and strengthened social and community ties. Many women have become the main breadwinner of their households, thanks to what they produce in the community *huertas*.



Due to its success, the urban agriculture policy in Rosario has received a significant amount of international recognition, such as the Best Practice Award (the Dubai Award) from UN-Habitat in 2004. The money received for this prize was invested in purchasing a tractor for the collective use of the *huerteros*.

Overall assessment

The main initial obstacles to be faced were the scarce knowledge of farming on the part of beneficiaries, mostly unemployed persons previously working in sectors such as metallurgy and construction; the demand of secure tenancy of the land on the part of farmers; and the lack of structured farmers' markets. In order to deal with these difficulties, a training plan was developed which had the active participation of the *huerteros*, who contributed their traditional know-how to the technical knowledge taught. In terms of land tenure, through the joint work of various municipal entities, the appropriate legal instruments for ceding the land were written. In addition, in cooperation with the Faculty of Architecture of the National University of Rosario, a geo-referenced database of vacant lots that could be used for urban agriculture was created. Mechanisms were also developed to facilitate the sale of agricultural products, and the production process was planned in a better way, using crop rotation and terracing which made it possible to grow crops regularly throughout the year. In addition, fertilizers and soil revitalization products were prepared to help to optimize productivity.

Replicability or adaptation of policy elsewhere

The main requirements for replicating this policy in other cities are:

- Placing urban agriculture within the context of a strategic urban plan, using agro-ecology as a local development strategy;
- Incorporating urban agriculture into the physical planning of the city, identifying available spaces and designing public spaces suitable for the activity;
- Giving a leading role to the beneficiary families, through their participation in the stages of production, processing, and commercialization;
- Developing an integrated way of working between the municipality, universities, research centres, and community organizations on issues related to urban land management, food production, and the processes of social inclusion of the elderly, women, and people with different capacities;
- Regulating, through appropriate legislation, the granting of vacant lots to use them productively and the implementation of farmers' markets to provide the groups of producers with an instrument that lets them have more secure tenancy of their land, and engage in planning production and sales for the medium term.

SUMMARY

The Programa de Agricultura Urbana (PAU) implements the re-use of vacant urban land for agro-ecological farming on the part of marginalized sectors of local society, granting food security and alternative sources of income to the poor, while also providing public services such as the revitalization of degraded urban plots and the increase of green areas. It began in 2002 and is ongoing. The PAU aims to create productive community-based enterprises to ensure the food security of poor citizens and generate genuine income; to promote participatory strategies and solidarity-based forms of production, processing, commercialization, and consumption of healthy food; and to recover





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abandoned urban areas by using them for social and productive purposes. The beneficiaries of the program are: families in situations of structural poverty and nutritional vulnerability; the city population, benefiting from the regeneration of urban spaces and the additional provision of healthy, locally produced food through the program's farmers' markets; and new opportunities of sustainable social interchange.

Municipal funding for the project is decided through Rosario's Participatory Budget policy. The project's implementation is carried out through district assemblies, and activities are prioritized according to the decisions made by the community.

The main results of the program are: providing food security and additional income for roughly 2000 citizens; regenerating urban waste spaces for productive and sustainable use; fostering self-esteem and social integration of marginalized groups; and achieving the Best Practice Award from UN-Habitat in 2004. The main obstacles have been: scarce knowledge of farming on the part of beneficiaries, mostly unemployed persons previously working in sectors such as metallurgy and construction; the demand for secure tenancy of the land on the part of the farmers; and the lack of structured farmers' markets.

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International Development Research Centre: http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-95756-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

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Acknowledgements / Credits

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