RUAF: Rooted in cities
Over 20 years in urban agriculture and urban food systems

Put agriculture on the urban agenda
RUAF is founded in response to demand from international donors to respond to increased urbanisation of poverty and food insecurity.

Support local action and policy
With its Cities Farming for the Future programme, RUAF, now an independent Foundation, supports local action in over 20 cities with 100+ local partners, and influences local policies.

Align strategy with local government interest
RUAF’s network is converted into a true network and renamed as RUAF - Global Partnership on Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Food Systems.

Leverage international change
RUAF supports the City of Milan in drafting the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), signed by 235 cities by the summer 2022.

City to City Exchange
ICLEI and RUAF launch the CITYFOOD Network to accelerate local and regional government action on sustainable and resilient city-region food systems.

Create knowledge resources
RUAF launches Urban Agriculture Magazine to exchange policy views, practical experiences, and research results on urban agriculture and urban food systems.

Develop value chains
With the From Seed to Table programme, RUAF and partners strengthen urban farmer organisations through training in farming systems innovation, micro-enterprise and value chain development in 17 cities and 7 regions.

Build an evidence base
RUAF grows its portfolio on climate change, city region food systems, indicators and tools, and circularity, to support strategy and action planning for more resilient food systems.

New Urban Agenda
RUAF supports successful efforts for the inclusion of urban food security and urban agriculture in the New Urban Agenda, the guiding document on sustainable urbanisation for the next 20 years.

The RUAF Secretariat is hosted by Hivos. RUAF supports a systemic approach to feeding cities by promoting the need to integrate food and business models, and go hand-in-hand with shifts in thematic focus.

1999-2004: Building a global network of regional resource centres
The RUAF - Resource Centers on Urban Agriculture and Forestry initiative effectively launched in 1999, as a major and lasting outcome of the international Support Group on Urban Agriculture convened by IDRC in Ottawa in 1996. Led by ETC Foundation (the Netherlands), its two initial core funders were IDRC and the Dutch Government. Given the 1996 Habitat III Conference’s heightened attention to urban sustainability, RUAF’s funders saw UA as a new field where they could complement each other, through both supporting multidisciplinary research for actionable results (IDRC), and practical cross-sector interventions (Dutch Government). The founding membership was selected mostly from among IDRC’s UA research grant recipients.

Over the first five years, the RUAF network would broaden its focus, from building a network for documentation and sensitisation, to strengthening capacities, and supporting policy and action planning.

2004-2012: The RUAF Foundation
In 2004, the RUAF network became an independent non-governmental organisation, for policy innovation on urban agriculture and food security, with its own governing body - the RUAF Foundation – staffed by employees of member organisations subcontracted to the Foundation. The network itself was re-named RUAF Resources Centers on Urban Agriculture and Food Security.

Over this period, RUAF expanded its geographical reach and scale of its activities, particularly through its City Farming for the Future (CFF, covering 20 cities and over 100 local partners) and From Seed to Table (FS2T, 17 cities in 7 world regions) programmes. The CFF included tailor-made stakeholder training and innovative policymaking and action planning in diverse contexts. Policy formulation protocols that integrated UA into spatial planning and financing mechanisms mobilised the expertise of the RUAF collective in response to local governments’ expressed needs and following issuance of its Guidelines for Municipal Policymaking. FS2T supported urban producer organisations with farming innovations, micro-enterprise and value chain development. The results were captured in RUAF’s two books Cities Farming for the Future and Cities, Poverty and Food.

After the 2008-9 financial crisis, official development assistance’s engagement with civil society changed, making it more challenging to compete for major grants against large institutions with secure core funding. RUAF saw this as a good time to revisit its niche since organisations engaged in rural agriculture or urban development were now embracing a “food in cities” agenda.

2012-2019: The Global Partnership
The work of the RUAF Foundation in 2012-13 laid the groundwork for a substantial transformation over the rest of the decade, in particular members assessed their own commitment to the network in light of their changing management and priorities. Up to 2012, the Foundation had a one-tier board of nine members who appointed a director. Reflection on its effectiveness led to a smaller Board of three independent experts. In 2013, the new organisational structure was approved by the RUAF members, as well as a more deliberate approach to recruiting new members and growing the Network.

Nothing like it had been seen before: a global collective of science, government and civil society organisations, mobilising to support urban agriculture (UA) at a time when this was still an oxymoron for many.

This daring venture came about following two United Nations sponsored global field assessments of the gathering phenomenon while, at the same time, Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) had been developing a portfolio of applied research on UA in various world regions since the mid-1980s.

Yet, RUAF was no short-sighted accident; its evolution coincided with growing international attention to the extent and values of UA and RUAF would effectively help to position UA at major global development summits, such as United Nations’ Habitat Conferences and World Urban Forums, and its World Food and Food Systems summits.

As RUAF expanded and matured over its first decade, member organisations and project associates were increasingly called upon by major development agencies and networks to inform new programmes, including by the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization, Local Governments for Sustainability, the CGIAR Partnership, regional and national federations of municipalities and local governments, and regional development banks.

Throughout its evolution, RUAF would prove itself to be nimble, always remaining visible and relevant. At critical junctures, changes in its structure, governance and business model would go hand-in-hand with shifts in thematic focus.

The RUAF Collective since 1999 - A Remarkable Journey
Luc Mougeot
Frans Verberne

Urban Agriculture magazine • number 38 • July 2022
www.ruaf.org

Forums, and its World Food and Food Systems summits.

Over this period, RUAF expanded its geographical reach and scale of its activities, particularly through its City Farming for the Future (CFF, covering 20 cities and over 100 local partners) and From Seed to Table (FS2T, 17 cities in 7 world regions) programmes. The CFF included tailor-made stakeholder training and innovative policymaking and action planning in diverse contexts. Policy formulation protocols that integrated UA into spatial planning and financing mechanisms mobilised the expertise of the RUAF collective in response to local governments’ expressed needs and following issuance of its Guidelines for Municipal Policymaking. FS2T supported urban producer organisations with farming innovations, micro-enterprise and value chain development. The results were captured in RUAF’s two books Cities Farming for the Future and Cities, Poverty and Food.

After the 2008-9 financial crisis, official development assistance’s engagement with civil society changed, making it more challenging to compete for major grants against large institutions with secure core funding. RUAF saw this as a good time to revisit its niche since organisations engaged in rural agriculture or urban development were now embracing a “food in cities” agenda.

2012-2019: The Global Partnership
The work of the RUAF Foundation in 2012-13 laid the groundwork for a substantial transformation over the rest of the decade, in particular members assessed their own commitment to the network in light of their changing management and priorities. Up to 2012, the Foundation had a one-tier board of nine members who appointed a director. Reflection on its effectiveness led to a smaller Board of three independent experts. In 2013, the new organisational structure was approved by the RUAF members, as well as a more deliberate approach to recruiting new members and growing the Network.

Nothing like it had been seen before: a global collective of science, government and civil society organisations, mobilising to support urban agriculture (UA) at a time when this was still an oxymoron for many.

This daring venture came about following two United Nations sponsored global field assessments of the gathering phenomenon while, at the same time, Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) had been developing a portfolio of applied research on UA in various world regions since the mid-1980s.

Yet, RUAF was no short-sighted accident; its evolution coincided with growing international attention to the extent and values of UA and RUAF would effectively help to position UA at major global development summits, such as United Nations’ Habitat Conferences and World Urban Forums, and its World Food and Food Systems summits.

As RUAF expanded and matured over its first decade, member organisations and project associates were increasingly called upon by major development agencies and networks to inform new programmes, including by the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization, Local Governments for Sustainability, the CGIAR Partnership, regional and national federations of municipalities and local governments, and regional development banks.

Throughout its evolution, RUAF would prove itself to be nimble, always remaining visible and relevant. At critical junctures, changes in its structure, governance and business model would go hand-in-hand with shifts in thematic focus.

The RUAF Collective since 1999 - A Remarkable Journey
Luc Mougeot
Frans Verberne

Urban Agriculture magazine • number 38 • July 2022
www.ruaf.org

Forums, and its World Food and Food Systems summits.

Over this period, RUAF expanded its geographical reach and scale of its activities, particularly through its City Farming for the Future (CFF, covering 20 cities and over 100 local partners) and From Seed to Table (FS2T, 17 cities in 7 world regions) programmes. The CFF included tailor-made stakeholder training and innovative policymaking and action planning in diverse contexts. Policy formulation protocols that integrated UA into spatial planning and financing mechanisms mobilised the expertise of the RUAF collective in response to local governments’ expressed needs and following issuance of its Guidelines for Municipal Policymaking. FS2T supported urban producer organisations with farming innovations, micro-enterprise and value chain development. The results were captured in RUAF’s two books Cities Farming for the Future and Cities, Poverty and Food.

After the 2008-9 financial crisis, official development assistance’s engagement with civil society changed, making it more challenging to compete for major grants against large institutions with secure core funding. RUAF saw this as a good time to revisit its niche since organisations engaged in rural agriculture or urban development were now embracing a “food in cities” agenda.

2012-2019: The Global Partnership
The work of the RUAF Foundation in 2012-13 laid the groundwork for a substantial transformation over the rest of the decade, in particular members assessed their own commitment to the network in light of their changing management and priorities. Up to 2012, the Foundation had a one-tier board of nine members who appointed a director. Reflection on its effectiveness led to a smaller Board of three independent experts. In 2013, the new organisational structure was approved by the RUAF members, as well as a more deliberate approach to recruiting new members and growing the Network.