Enhancing International Cooperation and Development through Urban Agriculture (UA)

AERES UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES ALMERE

RUAF

EFUA European Forum on Urban Agriculture

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Introduction

Urban agriculture (UA) is the practice of growing food in and around the city, that is in some way connected to the city and its residents. The EFUA typology of urban agriculture identifies six main types, all of which share three essential characteristics: they are located in urban or peri-urban spaces; they provide food - often in combination with other services; and they are integrated socially, economically, and/or ecologically into the urban system.

In addition to **food and nutrition security** UA offers benefits and opportunities across all dimensions of sustainable development. **Socio-culturally**, it enhances social cohesion, fosters a sense of belonging, and promotes education and awareness about food and the environment. **Environmentally**, UA helps reduce the urban heat island effect, enhances urban green spaces, and preserves biodiversity. For **health and well-being,** UA contributes to better physical and mental health. **Economically**, it strengthens local economies and creates job opportunities, making UA a multifaceted approach to urban sustainability.

UA can contribute to meeting objectives across a range of policy areas and disciplines and, as such, is a powerful strategy for a range of organizations across the public, private, and civil society sectors.

Despite numerous existing best practices of different types of UA in cities across the **Global South (GS)** and the **Global North** (GN), their multiple benefits are not yet universally acknowledged. There are a number of **critical barriers** to this acknowledgment and to the further development of UA around the globe. These barriers can be addressed through enhanced coordination and collaboration between practitioners and policy-makers within urban communities, between cities (in the same and different countries) and on a global scale. This policy brief identifies **six mechanisms for boosting collaboration** between stakeholders in the GN and the GS that will raise the profile of and support for UA around the globe.

1. Creating a global network or observatory of UA practices and policies
2. Enhancing GS-GN university & academic network engagement
3. Fostering global UA public awareness and engagement
4. Implementing practical projects across the GN and GS Network
5. Innovation and R&D sharing
6. Private sector support

This policy brief targets diverse stakeholders who practice or support UA, and whose sustainable development objectives will be served by greater international, inter-city, and inter-sectoral cooperation. This includes **national** and **local governments**, **the European Commission, civil society organizations**, **development banks and agencies, city network coordinators, NGOs, UN agencies, research networks, universities**, and **businesses** of all types and sizes throughout the food system.

Barriers to unlocking the multiple benefits of UA & desired outcomes of GN-GS cooperation

By drawing on the outputs of the EFUA project (especially deliverables D4.1-D4.4 and D5.1-D5.7, see references) and other literature and debates, eight critical barriers to the further development of UA have been identified. These barriers are explained in Table 1 below, along with desired outcomes in relation to each obstacle. The following sections propose six mechanisms for GN-GS collaboration that can help reach these outcomes.

Table 1: Critical barriers to the development of UA and unlocking its multiple benefits

	Barriers	Details	Desired outcomes
	**1. Policy-related and regulatory barriers**	Variations in agricultural policy, land use planning and food safety regulations between different countries in the GS and GN impede harmonization of UA efforts. Within countries, misalignment between local and national policies and the lack of a coherent policy framework for UA causes confusion and can hamper implementation. This is compounded by lack of clarity over responsibility for UA at the city level, coupled with lack of coordination between departments (such as agriculture, social welfare, public health, and economic development), which can lead to fragmented efforts.	→ **More policy exchange** within and between countries and cities → **Improve awareness** of how multilevel integration and inter-disciplinary integration enable beneficial UA
	**2. Lack of high-quality data**	In all geographical areas, there is a critical lack of high-quality data on urban food systems in general, including data relating to UA. This hinders the effective planning and execution of UA strategies. It is difficult to identify the most suitable locations for UA, assess the impact of existing projects (across all benefit areas), and develop tailored interventions to address specific urban issues (FAO, RUAF & CGIAR, 2024).	→ **More and better quality data and indicators** on urban agriculture practices and their benefits → **Improve availability of data** for everyone who needs it

	**3. Inadequate global financial support**	Practitioners, community groups, and municipal officials working on UA generally lack sufficient funding. This limits the scale and sustainability of projects, as well as the ability of urban farms to attract capital and of community groups to invest in infrastructure such as greenhouses, irrigation systems, and soil quality improvement.	➔ **More private sector funding** for urban agriculture initiatives. ➔ **Greater recognition of UA as a nature-based solution (NbS)** by UN, European and development agencies, and its explicit inclusion in their funding streams for sustainable cities and food security projects for the GS.
	**4. Limited UA educational opportunities**	Agricultural universities and engineering schools that focus on agriculture have a general shortage of training programmes and master's degrees specializing in urban agriculture, particularly in generalist universities. This gap hinders the development of practitioners who are both trained in techniques suited to the urban setting and who can effectively advocate for policy support for UA.	➔ **More UA training programmes** (e.g. similar to Youth Food Action) ➔ **More exchanges and collaboration between universities** enabling students to cross-learn between different contexts, including helping each other develop high-quality, up-to-date curricula on UA.
	**5. Knowledge and technology gaps**	There are significant gaps in knowledge and access to technology between practitioners in cities of the GN and the GS. While those in the GN may benefit from access to advanced technologies and research capabilities, those in the GS may have more local knowledge and context-specific traditional practices. As a result, practitioners in both regions may lack the full complement of knowledge and expertise.	➔ **More effective, mutual transfer** of both traditional and technological knowledge and skills between the GN and GS. ➔ **Improve the technology availability** for UA practitioners
	**6. Infrastructure limitations**	Urban infrastructure in many cities in the GS (and, to some extent, the GN) is not suited for supporting UA activities. Issues such as inadequate water supply, poor soil quality, and limited space pose significant challenges to setting up and running viable UA activities.	➔ **Increase available resources and funds** to put in place suitable infrastructure – e.g. private sector funding upgrades, PPPs.

	**7. Lack of awareness and public engagement in UA**	A general lack of awareness and understanding of the benefits and practices of UA can limit public support and engagement. Without public recognition, it can be challenging to garner the necessary political and financial support to establish and maintain UA initiatives.	➔ **Enhanced public awareness and engagement** through education, media, and community outreach, leading to citizens who are supportive of, and advocate for supporting UA.
	**8. Lack of recognition of the potential of UA for vulnerable communities**	The potential of UA to improve the economic and health prospects of vulnerable and marginalized groups, and to help them integrate into society, is often overlooked. This means UA tends not to be included in social and economic development programmes, to which it could make a significant contribution.	➔ **Include UA in programmes supporting vulnerable communities and marginalized groups** (including migrants, refugees, women, etc) to enable economic opportunities and social integration.

Mechanism 1: Creating a global observatory on UA practices and policies

Barriers addressed:    

A global observatory or network on UA would provide a platform for the systematic exchange of knowledge between cities nationally and internationally (e.g. Gardeniser), for mapping UA case studies from the GS & GN (e.g. Food Action Cities, EFUA Project Map, French Observatoire de l'agriculture urbaine et des jardins collectifs, or Panorama), as well as policies (e.g. GUPAP). It would enable joint studies to be carried out in key areas such as youth engagement, vulnerable communities, and eco-system services and facilitate the collection of comprehensive and high-quality data on UA practices. With the identification and dissemination of indicators aligned with the multiple benefits, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners will be better equiped to make informed decisions. Moreover, the observatory or network would enable the effective transfer of both traditional and technological knowledge, enhancing the capabilities of UA practitioners worldwide.

- **Existing city networks** (e.g. Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), ICLEI CityFood, UCLG, C40, Resilient Cities Network, FAO Green Cities Initiative, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), CityAdapt Nature4Cities) could lead the creation of a web-based observatory on UA, **with the participation of city officials, NGOs/CSOs, and members of the global academic network on UA** (see mechanism 2).

- **International development banks** (e.g. the New Development Bank, European Investment Bank [EIB], World Bank [WB], Inter-American Development Bank [BID], African Development Bank [ADB]), **private companies** that channel funds for UA or/and vulnerable communities

(e.g. Innovation Norway, Microsoft), and **national development agencies** (e.g. GIZ, ADK, French Development Agency [AFD]) may provide funds for the establishment and ongoing maintenance of the observatory.

- **The global academic network on UA** (see mechanism 2) could both contribute data to the observatory and leverage it for joint studies – as could **agriculture research institutes in the GN and GS** (e.g. Institute of Urban Agriculture, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences [UA], Aeres UAS, National Center for Urban Agriculture, CIRAD), **UN agencies** (e.g. UNHCR, UNRWA) and i**nstitutes that research vulnerable communities** (e.g. Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network [GAIN], Refugee Research Network [RNN], International Migration Research Network [IMISCOE]**).** Study topics could include youth in urban agriculture, access to innovation and traditional knowledge for practitioners, and the benefits of UA for vulnerable and marginalized groups (e.g. women, refugees, and migrants). The study findings should be open-access and circulated widely to national and local governments, NGOs, and CSOs that lead urban food systems projects.

Box 1: The Cívis platform to promote public volunteering in urban agriculture

The Brazilian Ministry of Social Development, in collaboration with the Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology (IBICT), launched an online 'Cívis' platform in June 2022 to promote public volunteering in urban agriculture. This platform includes mapping of spaces currently used or with potential for urban agriculture, distance education, a platform for volunteering, and a digital library. The Cívis platform is designed to engage citizens in sustainable agricultural practices and enhance community resilience. It provides open access to resources and facilitates the organization and participation in urban agriculture activities. Read more about the Cívis platform in the article of Fuscaldi et al. (2024) in EFUA and RUAF's joint publication of Urban Agriculture Magazine no. 41, titled 'Linking Future Policies and Next Practices'.

Mechanism 2: Creating a global academic network

Barriers addressed:   

The creation of an academic network on urban agriculture (UA), made up of universities from across the GN and the GS, would enhance educational opportunities by enabling specialized training programmes and Master's degrees. This initiative will produce skilled practitioners capable of advocating and implementing UA solutions. It could serve as a vehicle for two-way exchange to bridge knowledge gaps (both traditional and emerging technologies) between the GS and the GN, and would enhance public awareness and engagement through education. See also EFUA deliverables 5.3 and 5.4.

- **Leading urban agriculture academic institutions from the GN** (e.g. Toronto Metropolitan University, The Republic Polytechnic in Singapore, Wageningen University, Aeres UAS, Fachhochschule Südwestfalen, RWTH Aachen University, Polytechnic University of Turin) **and the GS** (e.g. Universiti Putra Malaysia, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences [CAAS]) are recommended to establish an academic network on UA to facilitate student exchanges, and

create joint and complementary Master's degrees covering all aspects of UA practice and policy. Additionally, the network would encourage and support other **agricultural universities and engineering schools that already integrate UA in a minor way** into their programmes (e.g. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, AgroParisTech, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Universidad de Costa Rica, Institut d'Agro Rennes - Angers) and those that do not, to develop programmes dedicated to UA.

- The created Master's programme(s) should include an innovation component by incorporating courses directly connected with **university innovation centres** (e.g., the Innovation Center of Arizona or the Centre for Urban Innovation of Toronto).

- **Public youth funds** (e.g. Global Youth Empowerment Fund, EU Youth Empowerment Fund, Erasmus+), **international development banks** (e.g. NDB, EIB, WB, BID, ADB), and **development agencies** (e.g. AFD, GIZ, USAID) could fund the creation of joint Master's programmes across the GN (e.g. Sesame Erasmus+ project, see Box 2) and should extend them to countries in the GS. **National governments** and **development agencies** should subsidize schools and universities to develop urban agricultural programmes.

Box 2: The SESAME Project (Erasmus+)

The SESAME (Social Enterprise by Synergic Advantage of Multicultural Education) project, funded by Erasmus+, is designed to foster social entrepreneurship among youth by integrating multicultural education in the GN (e.g. France, Spain, and Italy). By offering comprehensive training programmes, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities, SESAME equips young people with the skills and confidence to create sustainable social enterprises. Through SESAME, Erasmus+ aims to empower a new generation of social entrepreneurs who can drive positive change and contribute to cohesive, resilient communities.

Mechanism 3: Fostering global UA public awareness and engagement

Barriers addressed:  

Building global public awareness and engagement through events, media engagement, and cultural integration would foster widespread community support for UA. Highlighting the significant contributions of vulnerable communities, such as women, migrants, and refugees, will promote social inclusion and recognition. Additionally, greater public awareness will amplify advocacy for policies that support UA policies (and against those that would impede UA), and integration of UA into broader urban development plans.

- **NGOs that lead urban food systems projects, universities/research institutes** (including members of EU project consortia), and **UN agencies** (e.g. FAO, UN-Habitat) can contribute to awareness-raising by improving communication of their UA activities and qualitative outputs on social media (e.g. Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, TikTok), aimed at a broader public audience. They could consider collaborating with UA influencers from the GS and the GN –

e.g. Edén Agricultura Urbana (607.6K followers on TikTok) and Harriet Nakabaale, champion of the Camp Green agricultural training program in Uganda (See UA Magazine no. 35, p. 18).

- As noted in the EFUA manifesto, the **European Commission**, **city networks, national and local governments** (both GS and GN), **NGOs/CSOs, and UN agencies** could organize open days on UA, both at local and national levels and globally across the GS and GN (e.g. similar to the 48 hours of Urban Agriculture, see box 3). They may also host innovative collaborative games and challenges (e.g. Climathon, AgroAdapt, RE-ADJUSTool) that enable participation from across the GN and the GS. The same actors may also include UA topics in **global summits** (e.g. Global Conference on Women in Agriculture [GCWA], World Food Forum [WFF], C40 Global Mayor Summit), and continue to organize dedicated conferences on UA (e.g. UA heritage Herren Hausen Conference, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact [MUFPP] events, AESOP Sustainable Food Planning conference).

- **Development agencies**, **public-private partnerships** (PPP) and **corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives** of private companies could dedicate funds to activities that build global community awareness and engagement in UA.

Box 3: The 48 Hours of Urban Agriculture

The 48 Hours of Urban Agriculture is a two-day event held annually in 35 cities in France and European countries to celebrate the diverse and innovative practices of urban agriculture. The initiative brings together communities, urban farmers, and enthusiasts to explore and promote sustainable agricultural practices in urban environments. Participants can take part in a series of activities, including workshops, farm tours and roundtable discussions, all aimed at increasing understanding and appreciation of how urban agriculture can contribute to food security, environmental sustainability and community well-being. The event serves as a platform for sharing knowledge, exchanging ideas and showcasing the potential of urban spaces to produce fresh, local produce, fostering a deeper connection between city dwellers and their food sources.

Mechanism 4: Implementing practical projects across the GN and GS

Barriers addressed: 

Implementing practical projects across the GN and GS that engage city stakeholders from both regions, led by NGOs and urban planners' networks (e.g. the International Society of City and Regional Planners [ISOCARP]), and supported by public and private funds, can establish a framework for mutual learning, cooperation, and the adaptation of proven approaches tailored to local needs. Targeted projects could be implemented in new cities in the GS, e.g. the megalopolis Abidjan–Lagos in Africa (Choplin, 2019) or Neom in Saudi Arabia, or to empower refugee and vulnerable communities in the GN (e.g. Syracuse Community Geography's refugee urban agriculture initiative). These projects can serve as platforms for the exchange of data, traditional knowledge, and technologies on clothing collaboration with the global observatory or network

on UA (see mechanism 1), incorporating specialized training, education, and capacity building for practitioners.

- **Local governments and planning departments** should integrate practical UA projects into plans for new cities in the GS as well as initiatives for welcoming and integrating refugees and vulnerable groups into communities the GN.

- **NGOs and international urban planners' networks** should develop proposals and actively seek funding opportunities for practical projects to empower vulnerable communities in UA through access to land, water, education, and tools, that include GN-GS cooperation and shared learning.

- **International funders that focus on specific vulnerable groups** (e.g. Sub-Saharan African Women Farmers Fund, Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, Facility for Refugees, Migrants, Forced Displacement and Rural Stability [FARMS]), **development agencies,** and **private companies that channel funds for refugees** (e.g. Innovation Norway) could dedicate funds to cross-regional projects that include urban agriculture, including the integration of UA spaces in refugee camps and resettlement communities, and reconstruction plans after climatic or political disasters.

- **The European Commission, and other international funders (including charitable foundations, development banks, national governments, and development agencies)** should issue more open funding calls for urban food system and urban agriculture programme proposals that include a strong component on GN/GS exchange and cooperation, alongside infrastructure and capacity building in local contexts (e.g. the GenerACTOR project, see Box 4).

Box 4: The GenerACTOR project

The GenerACTOR project, supported by the European programme EuropeAid, runs from 2022 to 2025 with partners from Rome, the Lazio Region, and Barranquilla. The initiative focuses on knowledge exchange and skill development through online webinars with experts and training courses for gardeners and trainers, including specialized programs like Gardeniser Pro, Gardeniser Tec, and Gardeniser Edu. A key component of the project is the bottom-up construction of four urban community gardens by migrant communities from other Latin American countries, fostering community engagement and sustainable urban agriculture practices in Barranquilla.

Mechanism 5: Sharing of R&D innovations and traditional knowledge

Barriers addressed:  

Sharing of R&D innovation, including the adaptation of traditional practices, between developers and practitioners in the GN and GS, can bridge significant knowledge and technology gaps. It can also lead to the development of innovative solutions to overcome infrastructure challenges, such

as improved irrigation systems and space-efficient farming methods. Additionally, incorporating these innovations into educational programmes can enhance training opportunities, equipping practitioners with the skills needed to implement and advocate for advanced UA practices (see mechanism 2).

- **National development agencies** (e.g. IDB, AFD, GIZ), and **innovation and/ or UA networks in the GN and GS** (e.g. URBACT, CityAdapt) could formulate bilateral/multilateral agreements for facilitating technology transfer and collaboration on research and development (R&D) projects (e.g. INNOPOLIS 2020 project, see Box 4).

- **National governments' trade and industry departments** (e.g. Department for Business and Trade in the UK) could incentivize tech companies to pilot innovations in the GS (see also mechanism 6).

- **Public- or privately-funded urban innovation centres in the GN** (e.g. the Innovation Center of Barcelona, the Urban Innovative Actions initiative) and **development banks** could establish satellites or partnerships in the GS to facilitate the exchange of traditional urban agriculture techniques and access to UA technology. These innovation centres should partner with the academic network on UA (especially universities with strong innovation capabilities) to ensure access to information on problems faced in different contexts that might be addressed through technology (see also mechanism 2).

- **Private tech companies** and **international geospatial services** (e.g. FAO Geospatial Unit, IIASA) should identify the suitability of urban agricultural traditional techniques by data monitoring on their data portals (e.g. GAEZ) or by conducting suitability studies.

- **UN agencies** (e.g. FAO, UNESCO) should protect and promote traditional agricultural knowledge through recognition and representation of urban agriculture in heritage initiatives (e.g. Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems [GIAHS], World Agriculture Watch).

- **NGOs, CSOs, government agriculture departments, agricultural cooperatives** should engage local farmers who master traditional techniques (e.g. those practicing Khetara in Morocco or Jessour in Tunisia) in training and capacity building on effective transmission of their knowledge.

Box 5: The INNOPOLIS 2020 project

The INNOPOLIS 2020 project, supported by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) from 2021 to 2024, focuses on urban innovation exchange. Partner cities across Europe and Latin America (e.g. Rome, Lima, A Coruña, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Loures, and São Paulo) foster collaboration through a programme consisting of various coaching pathways that enhance the exchange of knowledge and best practices. The initiative connects over 200 cities from the IDB Cities Network with European cities accredited for their expertise in urban innovation, promoting cross-continental learning and development.

Mechanism 6: Private sector support for UA

Barriers addressed: 

Private sector support for UA can provide essential funding and investment, ensuring a steady stream of capital for projects, and enabling the construction of greenhouses, irrigation systems, and soil improvement initiatives. Additionally, these companies can facilitate the transfer of advanced agricultural technologies and practices from the GN to the GS, bridging significant knowledge and technology gaps (see also mechanism 5). By offering technical assistance and training, the private sector can help overcome infrastructural limitations, creating more viable UA environments in GS cities.

- **Multinational companies** (especially those with locations in the GN & GS) could formulate PPPs with national governments of countries where they do business, to finance, strengthen infrastructure, and implement urban agriculture projects.

- **Private companies, together with multilateral development Banks (MDB),** could create a digital platform that brings together leading domestic and international financial institutions and corporations at the CEO and finance practitioner levels, along with government partners and MDBs, to accelerate UA finance solutions (e.g. Climate Finance Leadership Initiative (CFLI), see box 6)

- **Private companies** should continue to support initiatives designed to accelerate joint urban agriculture action on a two-tier global model – i.e. closely supporting cohorts of cities in building city-business partnerships from conception to long-term self-sustainment, while convening a wider network of cities and global businesses to share expertise, advocacy, and learnings (e.g. City-Business Climate Alliance, a 20-city worldwide network to achieve ambitious climate actions).

- **Companies from both the GN and the GS** should incorporate urban agriculture into their CSR activities by providing funding, technology, and expertise, and (where possible) space for UA for educational purposes within their business premises (see also mechanism 2). CSR reporting is mandatory for large companies in the EU.

- **The private sector** should provide microgrants that facilitate access to markets by UA practitioners from vulnerable communities (e.g. the Grameen Bank's microfinance services) or fund Market Access Networks (e.g. Farmers Market Coalition in the USA should be adapted to urban contexts and include GS countries).

Box 6: The Climate Finance Leadership Initiative (CFLI)

The Country Climate Finance Leadership Initiative (CFLI) is a multistakeholder platform active in India and Colombia that is designed to accelerate local climate finance solutions by uniting domestic and international financial institutions, corporations, government partners, and MDBs. Operating under the umbrella of Bloomberg Philanthropies and endorsed by the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), CFLI engages at both the CEO and finance practitioner levels to develop and implement tailored climate finance strategies. This private-sector-led initiative aims to scale up investments in sustainable infrastructure and renewable energy, supporting the global transition to a low-carbon economy (see also the publications of the High-level expert group on scaling up sustainable finance in low and middle-income countries)

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