

## AGROECOLOGY CASE STUDY STORIES

**ZIMBABWE**

# An Urban Farming Success Story

**I**n 2017, experienced community organiser and horticulturalist, Mike Davies registered a trust, Urban Farming Zimbabwe. UFAZ in short. This trust in turn established the highly successful Pomona Community Farm in 2019.

Pomona farm is located in a place not many agro ecological farms, or farms of any kind really, are found. Within Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city.

UFAZ acquired some land in the northern part of the city to develop its urban farm and was able to provide 200 cultivators with plots at the site. The cultivator community are the producers of the organically grown crops that the trust then markets.

The affordable access to small gardens for community members has ensured year round production of fruits and vegetables for the urban farmers. But it has also imported agro ecological practices to the city. For instance, the techniques used to invigorate the soil at Pomona for better yields are organic. The demonstration farm also trains cultivators and members of the community who tour the farm on how to practice low input agriculture without compromising on crop health.

UFAZ uses a two pronged approach for the production of organic food at Pomona. The cultivators get a plot on the farm at a negligible fee, where they in turn grow their own food, for family consumption and or sale, supported by UFAZ agro ecological technical knowhow. The individuals fund the farming on their own plots and proceeds are not shared with UFAZ. The farm also has a commercial projects section from whose proceeds, UFAZ is able to cover the farms running costs.

According to Davies, urban agriculture is regarded quite negatively in Zimbabwe. Available land around the city is highly prized for property development and little if any is left for farming. Even when land is available for cultivation, urban farmers have no security of tenure. The practice of the farming is therefore not refined and often with little regard for maintaining or improving soil fertility.

All that seems to have changed overnight. The demand for plots on the communal farms has been overwhelming. The support from commercial enterprises in stocking and selling off produce was prompt. Community groups also bought into the idea, with some participating in the cultivating and often buying fresh produce from the farm.

So far, UFAZ costs are met by sales of produce and the



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odd donation. Efforts to source extra funding are yet to bear any fruit. This means some of the greater plans to scale the farm into a network of communal urban farms around Harare and other urban centres in the country have to wait. The trust also requires more resources to publicise work and fund research.

While the community farms success has proven that Harare is ready for an urban grower's movement, there are still challenges facing the model. Land access in the target area remains an issue. In fact, UFAZ has lost the lease on the site Pomona stands on after a dispute with the landlord. This has led to a temporary halt in activities while in the process of acquiring another 5 hectares nearby to set up a new farm.

Urban agriculture remains criminalised in the city and those defying this rarely invest in sustainable techniques. Resources and infrastructure issues also affect production from time to time. A good example is unreliable water supply in the area the farm is set up.

In spite of this, Pomona farm in its two years of existence has shown urban farming to be an alternative to conventional, industrial farm production that supplies the urban food cycle in Zimbabwe.

The conscious production approach is good for diets in the urban communities and its part of a broader vision for environmentally friendly, food abundant cities.

