

# Invisible Farming

A Study of Urban Agriculture in Delhi-NCR

परिदृश्य से अदृश्य होती खेती

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# Urban farming: Why this study?

- Urbanization is bad and synonymous with ecological devastation- is it really the case?
- **Can** cities be (planned as) environmentally sustainable and economically affordable spaces
- Delhi is the most urbanized region in India (Census 2011) but what happened to its villages and farmers?
- More people are growing food and non-food plants on their terraces, balconies, backyards. Why this revival of growing own food?
- Is urban farming an exclusively elite hobby?

# Defining UA

Agriculture in and  
around the cities

- Growing food (most importantly, vegetables and fruits), and non-food (herbs, flowers etc.); but may also be processing and distributing
- Producing for the city region using the resources available in the city region
- At varying scales: ranging from household-level kitchen/terrace gardens to neighbourhood-level community farms to for-profit/entrepreneurial farm houses
- (skilled) livelihood strategy, food security
- Governance around the resource appropriation is often fuzzy, enabling the authorities to harass the farmers

# Geographies of UA in Delhi

# Yamuna Floodplains



People's Resource Centre (prcindia.in)

- Palla village (North) to Jaitpur village (South)- 48 km stretch;
- One of the most polluted rivers in the world
- Farming on both sides of Yamuna
- Land entitlement and environmental issues (NGT order and Yamuna Rejuvenation)
- Tenant farmers from UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan
- Small hutments, no permanent structures, frequent demolitions
- Primary produces- seasonal vegetables, fruits, flowers

# Farmers and the Land



- “Farmers who owned the land in Delhi are no more interested in farming. Migrant families from other states come and cultivate the land.”  
-a landowner in Kirari
- Many villages are facing severe hostility due to loss of ground water, degrading land, commercial electricity charges
- Those still interested in farming are adopting new technologies and methods
- But new methods are also risky. A farmer in Tiggipur village told the team how costly it was to set up a mushroom farm.

# Farmhouses



- Fields, farmhouses and walls of protection
- Diverse crops- traditional and new varieties; ongoing experimentation with land
- Edible Routes model of renting land to organic farming enthusiasts, and terrace gardeners

# Rooftop Farming



- Many people grow plants on any land they have a hold on
- This is not done for profit but for setting a good environment at home, maintaining relationship with nature, and spending quality time for a more compassionate living
- Types of bonsai plants (bamboo, banyan, palm, fig) cactuses, fruits (guava, papaya, lemon, sugar-apple), vegetables

# Farm laborers



- Farm laborers can not depend solely on farming for their livelihood; but it uses their skills in more meaningful manner
- Hundreds of laborers are employed in mushroom and paddy farms in Tiggipur, Sugarpur, Palla; but only for a couple of months
- A group of laborers often move together from one farm to another

# Women



- Women are central to urban farming in all its forms
- Many women work in *saag* and other vegetable fields
- For many women, their husbands don't earn enough and working on farms is a meaningful job with not-too-bad wages
- Globally too, majority of the workforce in UA comprises of women

# Animal husbandry



- After mechanization of farming, cattle became outdated; dairy and farming are now two separate occupations
- There is no holistic plan for dairies, except pushing them out of 'urban' boundaries
- Even small-scale rearers face difficulty; a respondent in Gautampuri- "pigs are looked down with disgust in society. Neighbours also don't appreciate and I don't have any place to keep and am thinking of doing away with them"

# Fisherfolks



- As the water bodies become extinct in Delhi, the upper (northern) stretch of Yamuna remains the only source catching fish in Delhi
- A community of fisherfolks (migrants from West Bengal) live in Bengali Colony (Burari)
- Despite having licence, they are facing difficulties to register their group as a fisher people's union/society
- People use *bansi*, mosquito net, hooks and catch fish as a weekend hobby

# Waste to Food



- Garbage mountains in Delhi: Bhalaswa, Okhla and Gazipur
- What is agricultural waste?
- Solid waste in vegetable markets, liquid waste, *Parali*
- Composting the so-called 'waste' can restore a nutrients in land and help moving away from chemical fertilizers
- A major reason for fertile lands in Chian and Japan is their usage of humanure in fields
- High organic component in the daily waste per capita

# Market



People's Resource Centre (prcindia.in)

- UA is lucrative for many migrant tenant farmers because of proximity to consumers (not necessarily through the organized market)
- In the organized market, farmers remain vulnerable to demand and supply uncertainties and control of a few over price determination
- A hierarchical structure of food supply- from Azadpur Mandi to weekly *haat* in neighbourhoods
- Larger proportion of the food consumed in Delhi is supplied from its neighbouring states

# Struggles ahead

- Delhi has been declared a non-agriculture area
- No subsidies, no policy benefits, no relief from damages or flood,
- Harassment by the Delhi Development Authority officials,
- Adverse NGT order
- Urbanization should benefit the urban farmers, but it is yet to
- Sale of a part of land is not permitted, results into transfer of land to the state
- Farmers in urban villages apprehensive of land pooling policy; an instrument for transfer of land to corporate, real estate?

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