Farmers, not gardeners
The making of environmentally just spaces in Accra

Adriana Allen and Alexandre Apsan Frediani

Sites of urban agriculture are often contested urban open spaces. In the current dominant ideal of the 'competitive' and 'global' city, little recognition is given to the potential benefits of urban agriculture, beyond beautification, subsistence or therapeutic purposes. In this context, urban agriculture is often viewed as an activity performed by 'gardeners', either contributing to individual well-being or reducing the costs of maintenance of public spaces. A less 'tolerant' perspective perceives such 'gardeners' as squatters inhibiting cities' productivity. By contrast, urban agriculture enthusiasts advocate the recognition of the right to farm in the city as an essential condition for either food security or food sovereignty. This paper argues that urban agriculture can also be interpreted as a means to claim, nurture and propagate alternative views on spatial justice, place and citizenship-making, defying the maldistributional and misrecognition patterns that typically produce and reproduce unequal urban geographies. Drawing from a four-year research collaboration in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) undertaken by the authors at the Development Planning Unit (DPU) with the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), People's Dialogue and the Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor, the analysis examines the trajectories of female and male farmers working under different and fast-changing land tenure systems across the Accra–Ashaiman corridor. Adopting an environmental justice perspective, the analysis explores the extent to which urban agriculture might constitute a practice through which marginalised groups might actively claim spaces of daily sociability and political articulation within the city.

Introduction

Urbanisation in the global south is characterised by heated contestations over the use and appropriation of vacant land. Open spaces face multiple challenges due their increasing desirability as sites for property development, their perceived potential as a means to modernise city skylines and to increase tax revenues. From this perspective, city authorities often perceive urban agriculture (UA) as a practice that might guard land from future speculation, beautify its open spaces or by contrast stand in the way of modernisation and property development, inhibiting the pursuit of enhanced city productivity and competitiveness that might attract foreign direct investments.

The aforementioned views lead in turn to the perception that those cultivating urban land are simply 'gardeners'. Such label emphasises the temporary or occupational character of urban farmers, while associating UA to a marginal livelihood strategy in cities, making little or even a negative contribution to the overall urban economy. In more conflictive environments undergoing processes of urban regeneration, the label of 'gardeners' is often replaced by the less benevolent one of 'squatters', where the practice of agriculture is claimed to be at odds with modernising visions and therefore legitimately eradicated.

Meanwhile, a series of hypotheses advanced by current research and literature advocate the contribution of UA to alleviate poverty by generating livelihoods among marginalised groups (Van Veenhuizen and Danso 2007) and supporting food security (Zezza and Tasciotti 2010). UA advocators have also articulated its potential role in reducing ecological footprints, enhancing community cohesion and so on, in short, supporting a more resilient city in the face of more frequent shocks (Zeeuw, Van Veenhuizen, and Dubbeling 2011). However, such endeavours have been criticised for the lack of supporting data beyond anecdotal evidence (Mitchell and Leturque 2010; Lee-Smith 2010).

Beyond the above debate, there has been limited exploration of the practice of UA as a means to renegotiate the meaning and experience of space, place-making and citizenship in cities, where the politics of farming is embedded in the politics of shaping the visions and paths of what constitutes 'desirable' urban change. While backyard farming is often seen as a household complementary food security strategy, the cultivation of open space by groups of urban dwellers can be conceptualised as a practice that claims their right to the city, a perspective rarely explored in the UA literature. Aiming to stimulate and deepen current debates beyond normative and instrumental perspectives, this paper approaches urban agricultural as a practice embedded in the production of spaces of environmental (in)justice. Furthermore, does UA provide alternative forms in the production of urban space with the capacity to contest the distribution of environmental goods/bads, disrupt hierarchical and exclusionary processes of misrecognition and activate new modes of participation and narratives of belonging, being and becoming in cities?

In exploring the above question, the analysis focuses on the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA), comparing the processes of environmental injustice emerging through the study of various sites of UA, while examining the scope of ongoing practices to contest such injustices. GAMA has over 2.7 million inhabitants (with a present-day estimated population of 3 million) and its population is expected to double by 2017 (Obuobie et al. 2006).[1] The growth of metropolitan Accra has been led by the economic and political reforms of the last two decades, and more recently by the expectations of the oil-led growth from the newly discovered petroleum fields off the Ghanaian shore. In the face of poorly enforced planning and overlapping customary and statutory systems regulating land use and ownership, the spatial development of GAMA is uneven and highly unequal; with an estimated 60% of Accra's population alone living in informal settlements (Grant 2009).

Metropolitan Accra provides a particularly relevant context to examine the discourse and practice of UA, as since the late 1990s, a number of studies and initiatives have been taking place in this field. In the early 2000s, a Multi-stakeholder Policy Formulation and Action Planning (MPAP) process to promote sustainable agriculture was initiated in Accra by the Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF) and a number of local key stakeholders. Following a stage of initial engagement, dialogue and negotiation, a core team with representatives from nine stakeholder institutions was constituted in 2005 and a 'Multi-stakeholder

Agreement' was signed. The core MPAP team was soon after expanded to a 15-member Working Group, known as 'Accra Working Group on Urban Agriculture' (AWGUPA), formed with the purpose of further elaborating a detailed action plan to bring UA into the city's development agenda.

The discussion in this paper draws from a four-year research collaboration conducted between the Development Planning Unit (DPU) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) between 2009 and 2012. The research was embedded in the practice module of the DPU Master's Degree in Environment and Sustainable Development (ESD) and examined the practice of urban and peri-urban agriculture in GAMA, assessing its contribution to environmentally just urbanisation.[2] The focus was on six farming areas with irrigated vegetable production, four of which are located in the Accra Metropolitan Area (AMA) and two in the Ashaiman Municipality next to Tema Municipal District. Table 1 provides a brief description of the sites of UA investigated and Figure 1 outlines their location within GAMA.

Drawing from this work, the analysis of UA practices is structured around three domains of environmental justice. The first domain relates to the *distribution* of environmental good and bads, with particular attention to the redistributive capacity of UA and the political economy of access to and control over land. The second domain concerns the politics of *recognition* as it unfolds through the various material and discursive practices converging in UA. The third domain explores the procedural elements that regulate different modes of *participation* in farmers' access to and control over resources, some associated with their inclusion in market systems, others as a means to enhance their representation and wider rights in the city.

Reshaping maldistribution?

A key hypothesis advanced by UA advocators is that this practice might play a key role in reducing urban poverty and food insecurity by enabling the urban poor to access alternative livelihoods, reducing their vulnerability to temporary food shortages and adverse food price shocks, therefore protecting more nutritionally rich and varied diets. In short, UA is presumed to be an effective

Table 1 Description of sites of urban agriculture investigated by the DPU/IWMI research

Sites	Description
Inner city	Plant Pool, Roman Ridge and Dzorwulu sites cover an area of 15 hectares farmed by 36, 43 and 38 farmers, respectively. Farming takes place under/near high-tension power lines, next to train lines and a stream. Farmers use piped water and wastewater for irrigation and cultivate exotic vegetables such as green peppers, cucumbers, Chinese cabbage, lettuce, radish and spring onions.
Peri-urban	In La, located in the east of Accra, approximately 200 farmers cultivate an area of 121–142 hectares. Farmers grow okra, pepper, cassava, maize, corn and watermelon and rely on the use of mechanised water pumps, rainfall, wastewater and stream water for irrigation. The land is largely owned by the East Dadekotopon Development Trust, the Burma Military camp and individual traditional families.
Emerging municipality	In the municipality of Ashaiman, approximately 20 km east of Accra, the research focused on the sites of the Ghana Irrigation Development Authority (GIDA) and Roman Down, comprising of 64 and 40 farmers and 155 and 22 hectares, respectively. GIDA owns the land of both sites, however, those in Roman Down are not formally included in the irrigation scheme. Farmers cultivate mostly maize, okra and tomatoes in Roman Down and also rice, onions and peppers in the GIDA site.

Source: Compiled from Allen, Frediani, and Wood-Hill (2013).

Figure 1 Location of the studied sites
Map drawn by B. De Carli

practice to reshape the maldistribution patterns that appear to be structurally articulated not just by the urbanisation of poverty but also of inequality that characterises most urban regions within the global south.

Commonly cited in support of the aforementioned hypothesis is a study produced by UNDP in 1996, which argues that worldwide urban farming (defined as both the production of crop and livestock goods in urban settlements) employs about 200 million people, both directly and through related enterprises, while significantly contributing to the supply of food to 800 million urban dwellers (UNDP 1996). Although these figures are presented in the original report as estimates derived from the observations and extrapolation of data obtained from the Urban Agricultural Network, over time they have been popularised as 'hard evidence' of the quantitative impact of urban farming (Zezza and Tasciotti 2010). In

reality, most available studies are of a qualitative nature with a handful of quantitative studies applied to individual cities or case studies (Egziaber et al. 1994; Ellis and Sumberg 1998; Van Veenhuizen 2006).

A study by Zezza and Tasciotti (2010) sets to address the aforementioned shortcoming by examining the distributive effects of urban farming across 15 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Comparing their findings with those derived from in-depth quantitative and qualitative case study analyses, a number of interesting observations emerge.

First, many of the differences in the effects claimed by previous studies might be explained by the way in which 'urban' and 'rural' farming are conceptualised in different surveys and datasets available (FAO 1996; Allen and Dávila 2002; Maxwell 2003). This has two significant consequences, the first being that quantitative

comparative studies are likely to classify 'peri-urban' farming arbitrarily as part of rural or urban production, thus abstracting distributive effects from the political economy and geography of an emerging rural–urban continuum. The second is that most datasets derived from household surveys focus on 'urban households' involvement in agriculture, rather than strictly urban agricultural activities' (Zezza and Tasciotti 2010, 267). In the case of GAMA, previous studies from IWMI have established the presence of about 1000 urban farmers engaging in irrigated, market-oriented vegetable production (Obuobie et al. 2006) who both reside and farm within the boundaries of Greater Accra, although the proximity between residential and farming sites varies for different groups in terms of their gender, ethnicity, age and class.

A second observation concerns the actual weight and magnitude of UA as a livelihood and potential poverty reduction strategy. Here Zezza and Tasciotti (2010, 271) found that 'agriculture is indeed a not negligible reality of the urban economy, involving anywhere between about 10–70% of urban households'. Thus, across all studied regions, the poor appear to be disproportionally engaged in UA in comparison to other social groups. In Ghana, over 70% of the households ranked among the poorest expenditure quintile practice some form of UA. Furthermore, in cities across Ghana, revenue obtained from urban farming appears to contribute to 'over 30% of the income of the poorest quintile' (Zezza and Tasciotti 2010, 268).

A third set on considerations emerge from exploring the impact of urban farming on food security. When confronted with increasing food prices or decreasing disposable income, a common coping strategy among urban poor households is to adjust their food consumption patterns, keeping calorie consumption constant but at the expense of the richness of micronutrient intake, with particularly detrimental effects on children and women of reproductive age (Maxwell, Levin, and Csete 1998). By contrast, it is hypothesised that poor households engaged in UA might benefit from having comparatively more stable access to greater amounts of food and a more diversified nutrient-rich diet. The international comparison developed by Zezza and Tasciotti reveals that in two-thirds of the 15 countries analysed, urban households engaged in farming experience greater dietary diversity and nutritional quality than those who are not, although the authors insist on the need for more comprehensive and disaggregated studies to establish the magnitude and coverage of this correlation.

In recent years, a number of indirect and indivisible benefits have been attributed to the practice of UA, such as the role that it might play in safeguarding environmental capital and services within the urban region (Vázquez et al. 2002; Lee-Smith 2010). In other words, UA is being increasingly regarded as a practice that can preserve green open spaces which in turn help to regulate temperature, enhance the recharging capacity of underground aquifers and reduce water run-off. Moreover, nutrient cycles can potentially be closed through the use of organic solid and liquid waste as an input into farming practices and can reduce the amount of urban waste that needs to be disposed. Furthermore, by producing food close to where it is consumed the food footprint can be reduced substantially (Allen, Frediani, and Wood-Hill 2013). However, further research is required to establish the actual potential of these multiple benefits and to reframe the prevailing perception of UA in planning and policy circles as an outdated and backward practice, a waste of valuable land and a public health nuisance to be at best tolerated in the short term and/or at worst eliminated from the future development of the city.

From the distribution of 'goods' to the distribution of 'rights'

Ideal notions of justice emphasise a construction of equality that in reality legitimises

distributive planning and decision-making in scenarios where people are not equal, but rather differentiated along the lines of class, gender, ethnicity and age. By contrast, a theory of justice opposed to the universalist 'should be' approach calls for a relational perspective in which justice is understood as a socially constituted set of beliefs, discourses and institutions, conveying social relations and contested configurations of power that regulate and order material social practices.

Therefore, distribution should be analysed not only in relation to the actual redistributive effects of any particular practice but also in terms of the structural distributive conditions that enable or disable its effects. Levy (2013) conceptualises the latter as conditions of 'deep distribution'. In discussing how social justice is framed in terms of urban transport planning, she contents that:

> '[a]n approach based on an acknowledgement of "deep distribution" builds the foundation for an understanding of transport based on the articulation of power relations in public and private space at the level of the household, community and society, which generates the structural inequality and dominant relations under which decisions about transport are negotiated and made'. (Levy 2013, 5)

Following the above, it could be argued that debates on the actual potential of UA tend to focus on the 'shallow distribution' or distributive effects of UA, for instance, on poverty reduction and food security. While these are undoubtedly important considerations, far less attention has been given to the underpinning conditions that regulate the possibility of advancing the right to the city through farming practices. Thus, in assessing the potential of UA to advance environmental justice in the production of urban space, we should look not just at its redistributive effects—as examined in the previous section—but also and perhaps more fundamentally at the political economy regulating the deep distribution of access to land, an essential requisite enabling or inhibiting the very possibility of UA to

exist and persist. Furthermore, in the light of increasing privatisation of space in the contemporary city, understanding the extent to which UA can be exerted through the collective appropriation (use and occupation) of urban space rather than through its commodification and exchange, might serve as a means to test its political capacity to protect the right of the poor to the city outside the realm of property ownership.

In the context of Accra and more generally of African cities, UA is deeply underwritten by struggles over land (and water) which are not just regulated by urban planning norms and land markets but also through a complex web of 'everyday practices and negotiations over identity, labour, control of the harvest, crop selection, household obligations, money and food embedded in social and political relations' (Flynn-Dapaah, n.d., 1). In other words, the notion that 'rights in land are rights through people' is highly relevant to the way in which urban farmers actually access land in urban areas (Quarcoopome 1992; Larbi 1995; Gough and Yankson 2000; Flynn-Dapaah 2002; Owusu 2008).

The analysis of different farming sites within GAMA reveals the variety of planning and land issues conditioning the potential for UA towards a more inclusive process in the appropriation of urban space. Farming sites located on institutional land, such as Dzorwulu, Roman Ridge and Plant Pool, benefit from a certain degree of land tenure security, albeit on a rather temporary and informal basis. Planning regulations in these areas typically prohibit the construction and development of permanent structures; thus, UA is tolerated as a means to protect institutional land from encroachment (see Figure 2).

In peri-urban areas, the situation differs significantly. Competing demands for housing and urban expansion mean that rural farmland is under considerable pressure for development, making these areas particularly volatile, both spatially and politically. Traditional farming sites such as those in La, for example, have seen large tracks of customary land enter into the real-estate market

Figure 2 Farming under high-tension lines in Dzourwulu
(Photo: P. Hofmann)

in the form of permanent structures, churches, colleges and gated communities. Some of the above developments often occur without formal planning approval and warnings of eviction and site demolition pepper the area; however, enforcement of such threats is beyond the capacity of the La sub-metro (Figure 3).

Similar evolving pressures and processes of urbanisation are even being felt in Ashaiman, some 20 km east of Accra. Here, land encroachment is directly and indirectly threatening the success of a national irrigation scheme established in the 1960s, while unwarranted developments on a nearby floodplain, which also serves as a location for seasonal farming, are the source of additional conflict, placing not only the irrigation scheme but also the municipality at risk. Despite its formal status, institutional land here is not immune from the pressures exerted by housing needs and real-estate development.

Across all sites, tenure security ranges from agreements with institutions with different degrees of formality to usufruct entitlements negotiated on the basis of ethnicity. Use rights to land (and water) are therefore bundled under different axes of social differentiation, although some with more stability than others. In areas where UA is primarily practiced on customary land, ethnicity plays a key role in differentiating the rights on insiders and outsiders (Kasanga et al. 1996). However, this does not imply that users' rights here are more stable than in areas where agriculture is practiced on institutional land, as customary land is increasingly susceptible to market pressures.

For instance, in the area of La about 47% of the land under cultivation was lost to residential purposes just between 2010 and 2011. On average, farmers in the area have lost 3–4 acres over the last five years, with those who can afford to do so dispersing to available

land in the north of the site. This has had significant gender differential impacts. While historically La used to exhibit the largest number of female farmers within Accra, once evicted, women experience more restrictions to relocate their practice to sites further away due to the combined effects of distance and increased amount of time and financial resources required to access water and for land clearing and preparation. Furthermore, increased uncertainty of land use also means that fewer members of younger generations partake in farming.

Farming sites on institutional land present a different scenario but also significant restrictions to incorporate new farmers. While access to land here is not strictly regulated through ethnic ties, the density of existing farmers vis-à-vis the number of beds that can be accommodated in each area to guarantee a minimum income determines the chance that newcomers might have to enter a site. Whether practiced on institutional or customary land, urban farming does not rely on property entitlements but on formal and informal usufruct agreements regulated by a highly diverse set of customary and institutional norms that define who is likely to be able to enter farming, for how long and where within the city.

Through considering the myriad of threats facing sites of UA in GAMA, it can be argued that the systems of land management and planning are not conducive to a city with urban farming at its core. This may be the case; despite receiving increasing endorsement in the last decade, farming is still predominantly seen by city planners and municipal assemblies as an outdated use of land gradually being phased out and displaced to rural hinterlands. Nevertheless, certain arrangements exist whereby planners and local farmers can make productive use of land in areas where restrictions have been imposed, through adopting UA practices that prevent land from encroachment and development (Allen, Frediani, and Wood-Hill 2013).

Beyond the redistribution–recognition antithesis

From the 1990s, debates on justice started to focus not just on how egalitarian distributive concerns are being reshaped in the surge of free-market ideology but also by a second type of claim concerned with the politics of recognition. Contesting the emergence of a recognition–redistribution antithesis, Fraser (1996) sustains that both dimensions of justice are indivisible, meaning that economic inequality cannot be divorced from cultural misrecognition.

In metropolitan Accra, urban farmers' misrecognition manifests through the individualisation of farmers vis-à-vis the dismissal of their collective political identity. Through various encounters with official institutions dealing directly with farmers in the city, the latter were often described as 'individualistic' and 'opportunistic'.

> 'Farmers in Accra come from all corners of life, some are Muslim, others are Christian, some are natives, others come from the northern region or are migrants from neighbouring countries. They are not inclined to associate themselves through farmers' cooperatives. They engage in UA with a short term and opportunistic view. It is far more difficult to reach them through our extension work than in rural areas.' (Fieldwork interview with a senior representative from Ministry of Food and Agriculture [MOFA], Accra, May 2010)

In accounts like the above, farmers are typically portrayed as lacking a collective identity and agency. Interactions with MOFA's extension workers are therefore commonly conducted on an individual basis, by recording each farmer's yields and adoption of official recommendations. Furthermore, UA sites within or in the proximity of informal settlements are excluded from MOFA's extension services on the grounds that farming here is just a transient activity.

In contrast, observing farmers' associative practices reveals a different picture. Meetings

Figure 3 Demolition threats peppering the La site
(Photo: A. Allen)

are held informally but regularly and always preceded by several prayers that acknowledge the religion of those attending. Farmers do not just come together to claim for more secure land tenure, access to water or to receive coupons for subsidised inputs. They do so to develop and sustain the collective management systems that make farming in the city viable and sustainable. For instance, farmers in the inner-city site of Dzorwulu have developed ingenious collective means to irrigate the site through the development of collectively managed canals and sedimentation ponds, where water diverted from open drains is purified reducing its contamination and health-related risks before being used for irrigation. Tracking opportunities to obtain water in densely cultivated spaces often means that some farmers give up their individual beds to make room for further collective canals. These farmers in turn are internally compensated by the group, which finds space within the site to relocate the beds lost for collective purposes. While in the first instance, these could be seen as practices that simply articulate farmers around redistributive concerns, the hybrid knowledge generated through these practices is defined by the farmers as the outcome of their intersubjective interaction, in which hybridisation of different cultural situated practices is in its own right a multicultural means of farming in the city.

Furthermore, farmers are often expected to organise themselves into cooperatives to enable their interaction with institutional bodies; their reluctance to do so often read as a further sign of their individualistic and opportunistic association. By contrast, a concern commonly expressed among interviewed farmers was that formal associations such as cooperatives expose them to take too many risks collectively (particularly around shared financial resources) which in turn fosters internal conflicts and erodes the value of seeking recognition as a group.

'Our trade is too uncertain to know how much we will earn next week, let alone to

apply for a loan collectively! We have been working in this site for years, why do we need to work differently to be recognised?'
(Fieldwork interview with a male farmer from Dzorwulu, Accra, May 2009)

On the ground, the collective identity of farmers is seen by institutions either as a lacking attribute requiring some form of organisational fix or as a feature only recognisable when in the presence of more homogeneous ethnic attributes. The latter is exemplified in the case of La, in an area also known as the 'Okra city', where agriculture has been practiced for decades by the indigenous Ga people. Here, the politics of identity misrecognition is more obviously at play. Tourist maps still use the term 'Labadi' (the 'bad people of La') to designate the area, a term originally used in the colonial era to differentiate indigenous populations from the expat community. Meanwhile, the local toponymy of the area (see Figure 4) recalls the multiple meanings of the land for the Ga community and its value as a place for farming, social, spiritual and religious practices.

The La Citizens Network, a local civil society organisation, is lobbying for the creation of a green belt in the region of Kodjor, mainly for agricultural purposes but also in a fight to establish recognition of the values embodied in the land and to preserve Ga heritage and culture (Caradonna et al. 2012). This reflects an ethnic and local political trend in Accra, as well as in Africa more generally, whereby the debate about rights to the city is increasingly revolving 'around tribal differences and the conditions under which it revolves around language group differences' (Posner 2005, i). While this highlights an organised attempt to restrict urban development in the area in order to preserve Ga heritage, it is less clear whether a green belt alone will protect the region or the traditional farming practices that grant it meaning.

The La Citizen Network does not actively include local farmers in their initiative, but

TOPONOMASTIC DISCOVERIES

LEGEND

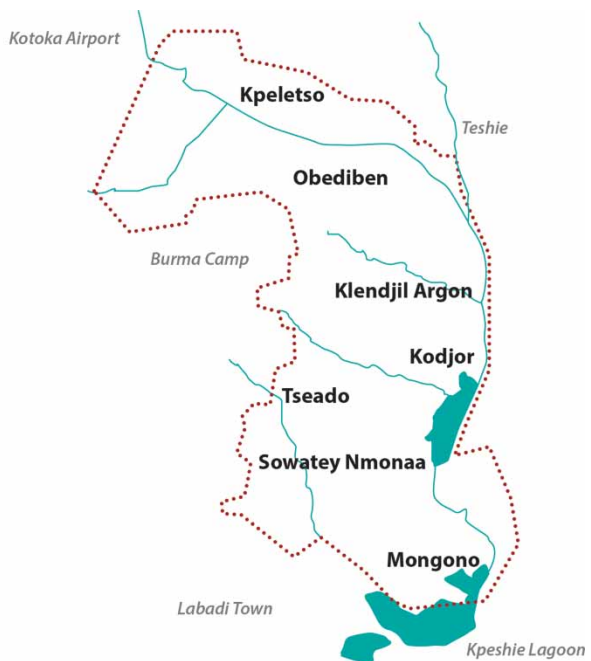|	
Kpele Tso	*Ritual Tree*
Obe Di Ben	*What would you eat*
Klaan Gon	*Tigers' Hill*
Koko Jor	*Valley of Koko*
Tche Ado	*Father Ado*
Mu Gonno	*Oily Hilltop*

Figure 4 Place-naming and identity-making in La
(Source: Adapted from Caradonna et al. 2012, 26, redrawn by B. De Carli)

rather their rights and experiences are used to legitimise the calling for a green belt and municipal status for La. Despite the Network's aims to redefine both the value of the land and also the role of the Ga people in the statutory system, local farmers have instead channelled their concerns almost exclusively through the customary system, limiting their claims to the traditional authority embodied in the Ga stool. This in turn has further subordinated their position within the system. During a meeting between the La Chief and Council of Elders and the leaders of the La Farmers' Association, when asked about the future prospects for farmers in La, the La Chief said:

> 'I don't see any farmers in La, just gardeners, old people who keep themselves busy by working the land in the absence of other hobbies. Have you seen any tractors or advanced farming practices in the area? There is no room for agriculture within cities in modern economies.' (Fieldwork interview, Accra, May 2011)

The case of La refers us to a process by which institutional recognition is reduced to an essentialist understanding of ethnicity, where misrecognition is intersubjectively produced and reproduced both by the customary and statutory systems, not only implying the devaluation of the farmers' identity but also their social subordination, preventing them from participating as equals in social life.

The above discussion highlights that recognition cannot be examined without interrogating who the 'recognisers' and the 'recognisees' are. Furthermore, claims and practices seeking redistribution and recognition are deeply embedded in each other, with their separation resulting on either a reductionist or essentialist exercise.

Parity of participation and urban agriculture

The above discussion implies that there is a direct link between maldistribution, lack of recognition and therefore a decline in a person's membership and participation in the wider community including the political and institutional order. Fraser (1996) explores the 'interpenetrations' between distributional and recognition spheres of justice through the concept of 'parity of participation'. Rather than a third component of justice, the 'parity of participation' is a norm which a bivalent conception of justice should be oriented towards.

In Fraser's formulation, the parity of participation is conditioned by objective and intersubjective processes. Objective preconditions are related to the material inequalities and economic dependencies that hinder the parity of participation. Intersubjective preconditions are associated with the social status of those involved in participatory practices and how they affect their ability to engage in meaningful processes of deliberation. In the context of UA in Accra, such debates on the preconditions of the parity of participation enable the identification of participation that sustains relations of economic dependency as well as participatory practices claiming for new spaces of representation in the municipal processes of deliberation.

The pursuit of 'participation' and support towards urban farmers' representation were central in the various initiatives that took place in Accra through the RUAF programmes 'Cities Farming for the Future' (CFF) (2004–2008) and 'From Seed to Table Programme' (FStT) (2009–11). These initiatives were strategically planned in a manner that started by forming a multi-stakeholder platform on UA, generating policy recommendations and capacity for institutional lobbying, and then moving into the elaboration and execution of specific projects to support farmers' groups. While the institutional activities focused on generating by-laws that would decriminalise the practice of UA (i.e. by allowing the use of grey water), the strengthening of farmers' groups took place through the formation of formally recognised farmers' associations/

cooperatives and the support of farming production and marketing activities.

The FStT programme focused particularly on the enhancement of farmers' bargaining power in markets as a means to make farming a more productive practice. This programme supported three farmers' groups (in the areas known as Dzorwulu, Plant Pool and Roman Ridge) by enhancing their innovation and entrepreneurial capacities and improving access to finance and markets.

However, the discourse of participation embedded in the CFF and FStT programmes exhibits an instrumental perspective on the role of participation in improving the sustainability and profitability of UA, in that 'participation' is associated with the capacity of farmers in enhancing the productivity of UA. This approach led to contradictory outcomes by, on the one hand, raising the visibility of UA as a potential good business, while on the other hand, ignoring the underlying causes of economic dependency and subordination through the food chain as articulated. This contradiction was particularly present in the processes of formalisation of farmers' groups (alluded to in the previous session) and capacity building of farmers.

In terms of capacity building, the FStT programme aimed at moving farmers up the production value chain by enhancing their skills as sellers. The commercial activities supported by the programme, which in theory were supposed to be conducted by a marketing committee formed by farmers, ended being coordinated by a private entrepreneur. According to the programme officers, this was due to the lack of capacity of farmers to work together and their unwillingness to act as sellers as well as producers. However, in-depth interviews conducted with different farmers' groups targeted by the programme reveal a more complex picture. Implemented from a business-oriented perspective, the programme overlooked existing social practices of interaction among farmers and underestimated the importance of consolidating such relations before devolving new responsibilities that required different and new levels of coordination and cooperation.

Similarly, the capacity building strategies of the FStT programme prioritised short-term productivity gains over addressing the conditioning factors shaping the sustainability of the practice of UA. Such strategies resulted in the increased dependency of farmers on artificial inputs, such as fertiliser, pesticides/herbicides and hybrid seeds to increase yields. While acknowledging the increased cost of production through the use of such inputs, farmers argued that such expenditures were unavoidable to maintain production at the scale required to support the marketing strategy of the programme. Chan et al. (2011) argue that processes like this tend to 'trap farmers in a "cycle of dependency" in which they need to purchase inputs from multinational corporations or large national retailers such as Aglow or Agrimat, which were former government companies privatised under the Structural Adjustment Programmes during the 1980s' (18).

During a participatory workshop with farmers, Beckwith et al. (2009) identified a series of potential mechanisms to conduct intercropping based on farmers' knowledge and existing practices. Instead, the sites were used by the programme as testing grounds reproducing the hierarchy and supremacy of technical knowledge coming from MOFA officers over the hybrid knowledge systems collectively produced in the sites. Figure 5 is from Dzorwulu, where farmers were encouraged to compare the 'Good Practices' (GP) disseminated by RUAF over 'Farmers' Practices' (FP) existent on the site. Such polarisation reproduces subordination in the mode of knowledge production, reinforcing technical supremacy over tacit knowledge emerging from practice.

In contrast to the approach to participation in the planned interventions described above, urban farmers have articulated the need and desire to engage on wider planning processes with the objective to influence the preconditions of the parity of participation. The experience of the urban farmers of Roman

Figure 5   Farmers' practice vs. good practice
(Source: Bindo et al. 2011)

Down in Ashaiman illustrates how they have embedded a series of demands to the right to the city through the discourse of UA (Doron et al. 2010). Throughout the four years of research, we witnessed growing encroachment on this farming site. This process was intensified once Ashaiman acquired municipal status, and land prices continued to increase without much regulation from state authorities. Despite having farmed the area for over 40 years, Roman Down farmers were labelled by local developers as squatters and threatened if they continued to farm on the site. Meanwhile an unsustainable and insufficient municipal waste management system meant that waste disposal continued upstream from the Roman Down site.

Within this context, the Roman Down Farmers' Cooperative established a series of strategic alliances to enhance their security in the area and to find new spaces of political influence. As the site was located on land owned by the Ghana Irrigation Development Authority (GIDA), Roman Down farmers exerted pressure on GIDA to officially endorse and allow them to cultivate that portion of land. Such endorsement was crucial in the negotiations with the traditional authorities that argued that farmers were not officially recognised by GIDA.

While increasing the legitimacy of farmers, the endorsement was not sufficient to stop the construction of houses on the site and threats to farmers. Roman Down Farmers' Cooperative, in association with other civil society organisations, then started to engage in the District Citizens Monitoring Committee, a national strategy under the Ministry of Local Government aimed at identifying key priorities from municipal civil society groups and shared on a district and national scale. The Committee activities in Ashaiman raised the visibility of encroachments on governmental

land and Roman Down farmers argued that the encroachment on farmed land was reducing the permeability of the soil and therefore making the surrounding areas more prone to flooding. This claim, together with the lobbying from other groups, had an impact on municipal and national authorities who then conducted a study on the issue and implemented a series of control measures. Apart from enhancing the security of farmers, the mobilisation of Roman Down Farmers' Cooperative opened up institutional spaces to exert pressure on municipal authorities on issues that go beyond the practice of UA to address wider urban planning and urbanisation trends.

The comparison between the above experiences highlights tensions in the parity of participation. On the one hand, it demonstrates that, as argued by Fraser (1996), if the objective and intersubjective preconditions are not in place, the practice of participation is bound to reproduce relations of economic dependency, voicelessness and inequality of social status. The case of the FStT programme illustrates this particular problematic, as the imposition of technical and market-based notions of participation reproduced cycles of dependency and compromised the economic empowerment outcomes set up by the programme. On the other hand, the case of Roman Down demonstrates the potential of UA to articulate new claims for the right to the city. In this context, UA opened up spaces of insurgency that created opportunities for tackling existing conditions of maldistribution and misrecognition.

From redistribution and affirmation to transformation?

The analysis departed from taking UA as a rich entry point to engage with the notion of environmental justice in the city not just as a matter of unfair distribution across different social groups, but in the intersection between nature and social relations. Furthermore, we argued that though a number of hypotheses have recently expanded the presumed benefits of UA to make urban-regional systems more resilient to change, there has been little examination of the relationship between resilience and environmental (and spatial) justice.

As highlighted in the introduction, the majority of the literature on UA focuses mostly on its 'shallow distributive' potentials, rather than engaging on a discussion of its capacity to transform the processes of deep misdistribution, misrecognition and lack of parity in participation that underpin the practice of UA not just in metropolitan Accra but elsewhere in the global south. In assessing such capacity, the meaning of 'transformation' needs to be further unpacked. Fraser (1997) argues that there are two possible paths to address injustices which transcend the redistribution–recognition divide. The first is 'affirmation', which incorporates any action that corrects 'inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them' (Fraser 1997, 23). The second, 'transformation', refers to 'remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restricting the underlying generative framework' (23). In other words, transformation takes place when change is effected upon 'institutionalised patterns of cultural value'. From this perspective, we argued that UA needs to be embedded in a wider discussion about the conditions within which rights and citizenship are articulated and claimed in the production of urban space.

The examination of the different conditions and processes under which UA is currently being practiced in metropolitan Accra reveals that institutional initiatives intended to support UA as a livelihood strategy, often leave unchallenged the conditions that produce and reproduce inequalities and injustices in the city in the first place. To a large extent, this appears to be the case because in focusing on how to improve a redistributive effect, current

programmes fail to tackle deeper processes of maldistribution associated with access to and control over land usufruct. As a consequence, it is safe to speculate that the actual areas under cultivation within GAMA will continue decreasing steadily as vacant land is taken over by the multiple real-estate development pressures at play. In this context, agricultural land is likely to be displaced to peripheral municipalities where land is cheaper, following an endless market-led centrifugal force. Indeed, we found that this hypothesis is perceived by most institutions currently endorsing a role for UA in GAMA as the only option to preserve UA's assumed benefits.

In practice, on the one hand, this translates into advanced discussions with companies like Zoom Lion—one of the main solid waste management contractors operating in Accra—to purchase large tracks of land in peripheral municipalities with the intention of 'closing the nutrient loop' by reusing compostable solid waste and treated liquid waste into commercial organic farming, mostly aimed at the export market. Such a scenario can be seen as a process that is facilitating land grabbing in the periphery of Accra but that will do little to protect either subsistence livelihoods or a continuous supply of affordable food for the urban poor. On the other hand, and from the perspective of current groups engaged in UA, the displacement of farming to further away areas where land is cheaper appears to have significant adverse consequences. Most farmers, and particularly women, will be gradually forced to withdraw from UA as a result of a combination of multiple push factors (e.g. increased distance between dwelling and cultivating areas, increased transport cost, inability to enter even labour sites of large-scale commercial agriculture, etc.).

In short, any attempt at preserving or enhancing the presumed redistributive benefits of UA will be short-lived, unless injustices in the political economy of land are tackled. While it would probably be unrealistic to assume that the government will have the capacity or willingness to interfere with the local land market, particularly on customary land, a large percentage of current vacant land within GAMA corresponds to institutional land, where various government agencies are entrusted to secure that such lands are used for the common good of the city and its citizens. Within existing planning provisions vacant land can be redesignated as passive land, which in effect means that it is possible to build a land bank to be dedicated to safeguard the practice of UA and its associated benefits. Further transformative practices in respect of access to and control over land would demand the detailed consideration of the entitlements afforded within the customary system to ensure that usufruct rights are respected instead of being privately appropriated by individual families.

From a recognition perspective, an examination of current practices and interventions reveals an even more complicated picture. Farmers are misrecognised and malrecognised in a number of ways, ranging from the stigmatisation of their practices (labelled as backward, unhealthy, unsafe and so on) to their socially constructed perception (gardeners, encroachers, squatters). Whether partially supported, temporarily tolerated or overtly resisted, it is difficult to identify substantial signs of positive transformation at play. On the one hand, just as we redefined current redistributed efforts and claims as signs of substantiating a process of 'shallow distribution', it is also possible to see signs of 'shallow recognition' articulated at best in those interventions designed in support of UA in Accra.

Last but not least, we identified throughout the analysis a number of cracks or entry points opened through the practice of UA as possible means to explore the production of new political spaces and meanings of the relationship between citizens and their place-making practices. We are referring here to parity in participation expanded through the collective mobilisation of farmers in the context of Roman Down in

Ashaiman. The transformative capacity of this process is not the result of externally invited spaces of participation but rather the outcome of insurgent intersubjective conditions. Its generative capacity lies on its spatial locus, in other words this was not a struggle for alternative livelihoods but a struggle in, through and for space in the city to cultivate.

Rather than approaching UA as an alternative livelihood and food security strategy, we approximated it as a spatial practice—a 'here' and 'now' practice as opposed to a 'wherever' and 'whenever' practice. This choice in our view opens up the possibility of exploring the potential of UA to disrupt existing relations of dependency and explore emerging—and in some cases insurgent—spaces of redistribution, recognition and participation in the city. In the context of Accra, perspectives recognising those cultivating the land as urban farmers, rather than gardeners, open up the opportunity to recognise their spatial and discursive practices in being and becoming rightful members of the city, which in turn has the potential to disturb dominant and exclusionary narratives of how urban space is and should be produced.

Notes

1 GAMA comprises of AMA (also referred as the Accra Metropolis District) and the surrounding districts of Ga East, Ga West and Tema.
2 The reports produced by the students can be accessed at: http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/programmes/postgraduate/msc-environment-sustainable-development/in-practice/o-f.This action learning project also produced a video examining the trajectories of female and male farmers working under different and fast-changing land tenure systems across the Accra–Ashaiman corridor (Von Bertrab et al. 2012).

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Adriana Allen is a senior lecturer at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL. Email: a.allen@ucl.ac.uk

Alexandre Apsan Frediani is a lecturer at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL. Email: a.frediani@ucl.ac.uk