



BEYOND TREES

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INTRODUCTION TO URBAN FORESTRY AND FARMING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Welcome to Beyond Trees. This special issue of the newsletter is dedicated to urban forestry and farming in the Middle East and North Africa. Organized and facilitated by the U.S. Forest Service International Programs in January 2020, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Green Cities Study Tour inspired this issue. It presents some of the efforts non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities and community leaders in Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan are taking to add green spaces to cities in the MENA region.

This issue takes a closer look at the challenges that the region's climate, the particularities that cityscape and the built environment, and resource scarcity pose for planting in cities. It also presents examples of community cohesion and resilience, of leadership and the engagement of women, youth and children, as well as the design of technical solutions tailored specifically to this region's needs. This Beyond Trees newsletter contains articles on urban forestry growing techniques, rooftop gardening initiatives, food production in cities, composting on city roofs, and the development of youth environmental awareness and stewardship through art, as well as activities aimed at raising awareness and engaging the community in greening their cities across the MENA region.

As a global pandemic has forced large parts of the world's population into lockdown measures of geographic confinement and social distancing this year, the availability of green spaces in cities has taken on an even more special and prominent meaning. Liza Paqueo, Urban Outreach and Partnership Specialist with the U.S. Forest Service International Programs, shares some thoughts on this issue.

This issue of Beyond Trees is dedicated to initiatives taken in different countries of the Middle East to increase urban greenspace and promote urban farming and gardening. **What role does urban farming and rooftop gardening play in our cities - specifically at a time when large parts of the world have to deal with lockdown restrictions to their daily lives?**

Liza: Urban farms—especially rooftop and backyard gardens—provide many benefits during a lockdown. The most obvious one is that it can be an immediate food source for families. That depends on the type and the amount of crops being grown. What is just as critical is the role these urban spaces play on one's mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Urban gardens and farms can help provide comfort and connection to nature. In addition, these urban green spaces may also serve as habitats and food sources for birds, butterflies, bees and other wildlife.

This Beyond Trees issue was inspired by the work of participants who took part in the Regional Study Tour on Urban Forestry and Green Landscapes in Urban Environments held in Cairo in early 2020. **What role can regional and international workshops and study tours play in advancing urban forestry, farming and gardening in different regions of the world?**



Liza: Workshops and study tours that convene colleagues and practitioners from other countries can help facilitate the exchange of information—current research and efforts, innovative techniques and methods, and challenges. They can help connect people to each other and allow for further dialogue beyond the scope and dates of the workshops.

How does rooftop gardening and urban farming feature among the range of activities the U.S. Forest Service’s International Programs offers?

Liza: One does not normally associate the U.S. Forest Service and/or urban forestry with rooftop gardening and urban farming. The U.S. Forest Service International Programs, however, works to improve lives in both rural and urban areas by engaging the communities. Urban farms and rooftop gardens can help improve lives in so many ways. These are green spaces—like parks, urban forests, etc. -- that should be explored as critical to that mission.



About Liza Paqueo :

Liza Paqueo is an Urban Outreach and Partnership Specialist with the U.S. Forest Service International Programs. She works in several cities overseas on community engagement and urban forest program activities. She also manages a network of urban organizations through Beyond Trees. She is one of the coordinators of the International Seminar on Urban Forestry and Community Engagement and has led the US delegation to the World Forum on Urban Forestry. She has also been a member of the North American Forest Commission, which is a collaborative group of natural resource practitioners across Canada, US and Mexico.

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