



# CULTIVATING COMMUNITIES

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Project Overview 2014-2015  
Huerto Orgánico Lak'a Uta

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# INTRODUCTION

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With a growing global population that is increasingly urban, the question of how to feed the world has made its way into boardrooms, the media, classrooms and universities. Around the world, organizations, universities, laboratories and entrepreneurs are investing in growing more food, often applying new technologies and techniques, in an attempt to solve one of the looming challenges of the 21st century: food security.

Cities have also begun to ask what role they can play in the food system. Urban planners and elected officials are adopting policies and initiatives that seek to guarantee access and availability of food for their constituencies. From New York to Tokyo, urban farming projects are becoming more visible and noteworthy. Citizens are also beginning to wonder and ask where their food comes from and how it arrived at the table. However, despite advances, there is still much to be done and it will be fundamental for developing countries – home to a large percentage of the world’s population – to actively participate in the conversation. Together, urban innovators can help identify the role of cities and the most feasible strategies to guarantee people’s right to food.

The community food garden Huerto Orgánico Lak’a Uta is the first of its kind in the city of La Paz. Located in the Cotahuma district, at more than 3600 meters above sea level, the garden is a place where people grow organic, fresh and nutritious food.

This project is centered on transforming under-utilized space into green and productive areas. In this community food garden, people of all ages work together, learn from and

share with each other, and of course, enjoy the outdoors. People have come to share values, develop friendships and dream together as a community. They also make a conscientious effort to ensure their diets are healthier, sustainable and adequate. They hope to share this lifestyle with peers, society at large and future generations.

The Huerto Orgánico Lak’a Uta helps people develop new capacities while also developing greater awareness on the importance of healthy eating habits. As such, members of the garden’s community have become empowered to play a more active role in guaranteeing their right to food. They are also becoming agents of change. Together, they are working towards a future in which green cities can guarantee food security.

When the garden was only a dream, we imagined one of the biggest challenges would be convincing citizens it is possible to grow food at more than 3600 meters above sea level. Today, thanks to the collective efforts that make this project possible, urban agriculture is a reality in La Paz. We hope to spread the enthusiasm to other cities of Bolivia.



**Maria Teresa Nogales**  
Executive Director



# 1. PRODUCTION

The garden's community members grow fresh and organic produce to complement their daily household diet with nutritious and healthy food. Through their small-scale production, participants are improving their household's access to healthy food.

Currently, 40 families grow food in the Huerto Orgánico Lak'a Uta. Families plant and harvest all year, and save between 3 and 30 Bolivianos a week on groceries. The garden produces more than 25 varieties of vegetables and herbs in addition to decorative flowers and organic fertilizers.

## WELL-BEING

The garden positively influences essential aspects of personal well-being. It promotes healthier eating habits, direct human contact with nature, dynamic physical and mental activity. It has also shown to improve family and social relationships.

“The vegetables we harvest are a reflection of our labor. Our harvest is worth more than money. Growing our own food, we are no longer so dependent on the market prices of food.”

Juan, parcel No. 4

## 2. EDUCATION

The garden is an educational platform where people come to learn it is possible to grow food in the city and, in the case of La Paz, at more than 3600 meters above sea level. People learn different growing techniques as well as how to make organic fertilizers, grow food in small spaces and organically conduct pest control.

The garden organizes educational visits with school-aged students, from public and private schools, as well as farmer to farmer exchanges, open house events and guided tours for community-based organizations. To date, more than 2000 people have come to visit and learn in the garden.



## DIVERSITY

The garden is a community, inter-generational and multicultural effort. More than 200 people have helped with tasks such as building, planting, harvesting, decorating and general maintenance. Visitors have arrived from different cities and regions of Bolivia and from more than 10 countries from around the world.

“We value solidarity, healthy eating, the friendships we cultivate, all that we learn and the respect we have for others.”

The Garden Community, Focus Group

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HUERTO ORGÁNICO LAK´A UTA

## MAY 2014

Inauguration day, more than 20 people participated in the ritual offering to Mother Earth and helped clean the once abandoned park.

## SEPTEMBER 2014

Seeds are sown in the first 20 parcels.

## NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2014

First harvests including lettuce, chard, radishes and turnips.

## DECEMBER 2014

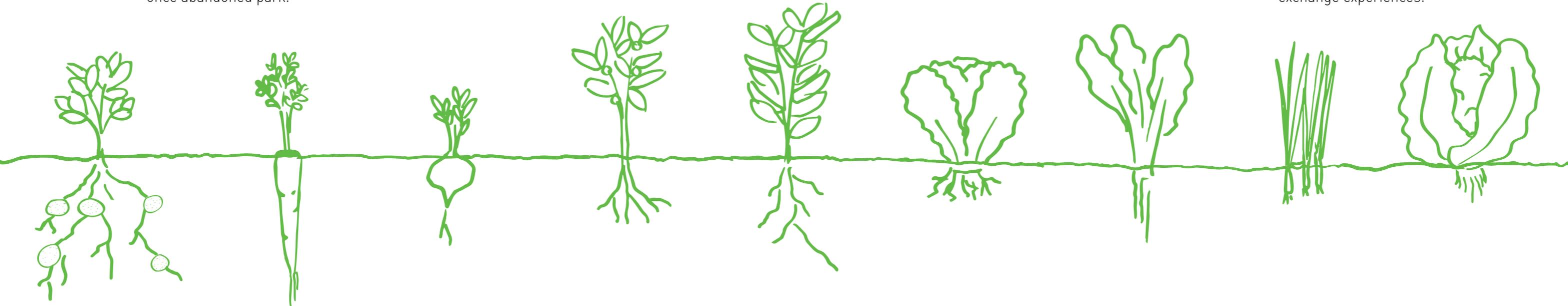
First community Christmas in the garden.

## MARCH 2015

First school fieldtrips to the garden.

## APRIL 2015

First farmer-to-farmer exchanges. Members of the Lak´a Uta community garden visit other urban farms to exchange experiences.



## MAY 2015

Family Day and the garden's first year anniversary. More than 300 people came to visit and learn about the garden.

## JUNE 2015

Expansion of the garden, 20 additional parcels incorporated.

## SEPTEMBER 2015

Spring Celebration in the garden. More than 300 people came to visit and learn about the garden.

## NOVEMBER 2015

First impact evaluation of the garden.

## DECEMBER 2015

Second community Christmas in the garden.

## MAY 2016

Family Day and the garden's second year anniversary.



## 3. COMMUNITY

The garden is made up of a community of people who are working towards improving their eating habits, caring more for the environment, reconnecting with nature and creating environments where people share experiences. The members of the garden community have learned that working together produces great results.

In addition to the individual and family work that takes place in each parcel, the garden hosts activities in which people can engage, share and get to know each other. Activities include community picnics (apthapis) and community work days (aynis).

## EQUITY

In the garden all people are treated equally while also respecting and valuing their individuality: men and women, children, adolescents, senior citizens and foreigners. All people come to the garden to learn, share and enjoy the community that has taken root, and all that it offers.

“The garden gives me joy and more interaction with people. Working together, time flies.”

Maria, parcel No. 28

## 4. FOOD SECURITY

In learning to grow food, people become empowered and can play a more active role in guaranteeing their right to food. The garden allows people to rediscover the importance of a healthy diet and ensures people have the ability to grow food as a means to improve their quality of life and that of their family.

The members of the garden community have learned new ways to cook and incorporate their harvests into their diets. Likewise, their eating habits have improved and they are becoming less vulnerable to the unpredictability of the food market.



## REPLICABILITY

The garden is designed with versatile characteristics so as to encourage and facilitate its replicability. It was built by the members of its community and volunteers with a focus on low-cost and simple infrastructure, the reutilization of recyclable material and basic techniques of agroecology. The garden shows its visitors that anyone can grow food.

“In the garden we share everything, including recipes. At home my daughters and I eat more vegetables and more diverse foods. We go out to eat less often.”

Miriam, parcel No. 9

# BENEFITS OF THE GARDEN

In 2015, an impact evaluation was conducted to identify and measure the impacts of the Huerto Orgánico Lak´a Uta with an emphasis on understanding changes in garden community member´s food security. To this end, a quantitative and qualitative participatory study was conducted in the garden. Thirty three in-depth interviews and four focus groups were carried out. Overall, the results demonstrated that the garden has a positive impact on its members.

The study measured changes in the personal and household use of food, the nutritional intake and eating habits of participants, as well as the access and availability of nutritional food.

**Do you think your eating habits have changed since joining and participating in the garden?**



Participants expressed having learned new ways of cooking and incorporating their harvests into their diets. They consider their diets have nutritionally improved and that the garden is helping make them less vulnerable to the unpredictability of the food market.

**Who eats your harvest?**



The study also sought to detail the *sense of community* in the garden, gauging social relations between garden members and people´s attitude toward group activities. It also sought to measure people´s satisfaction of needs as a result of sharing and engaging with others who share common traits.

In the garden, people value community work days during which they exchange and share

seeds, seedlings and harvests. They also share advice, experiences and recipes. The community has formed as a result of collective work, shared experiences, community picnics (apthapis) and community work days (aynis).

**In the garden, do you exchange seeds, harvests, recipes and seedlings?**



**Do you consider it important for members to work collectively?**



The study revealed that garden members have nurtured a positive attitude toward the project. In many cases, people have convinced others to join the garden and these were quickly

incorporated into the community. Likewise, many garden members have begun to adopt urban agriculture as a practice in other living spaces.

Some members expressed that, initially, they thought participating in the garden would be difficult or unfruitful. Now, they do not wish to leave their parcels and are very pleased with what they have learned and the skills they have developed. In the future, they wish to share what they have learned and their community values with many other people.

Overall, the members of the garden community are proud of themselves and of what they produce.

**Do you feel like a part of the garden community?**





# TOGETHER WE CAN SOW THE CITIES OF TOMORROW

## Cultivating Communities: Project Overview 2014-2015 – Huerto Orgánico Lak´a Uta



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