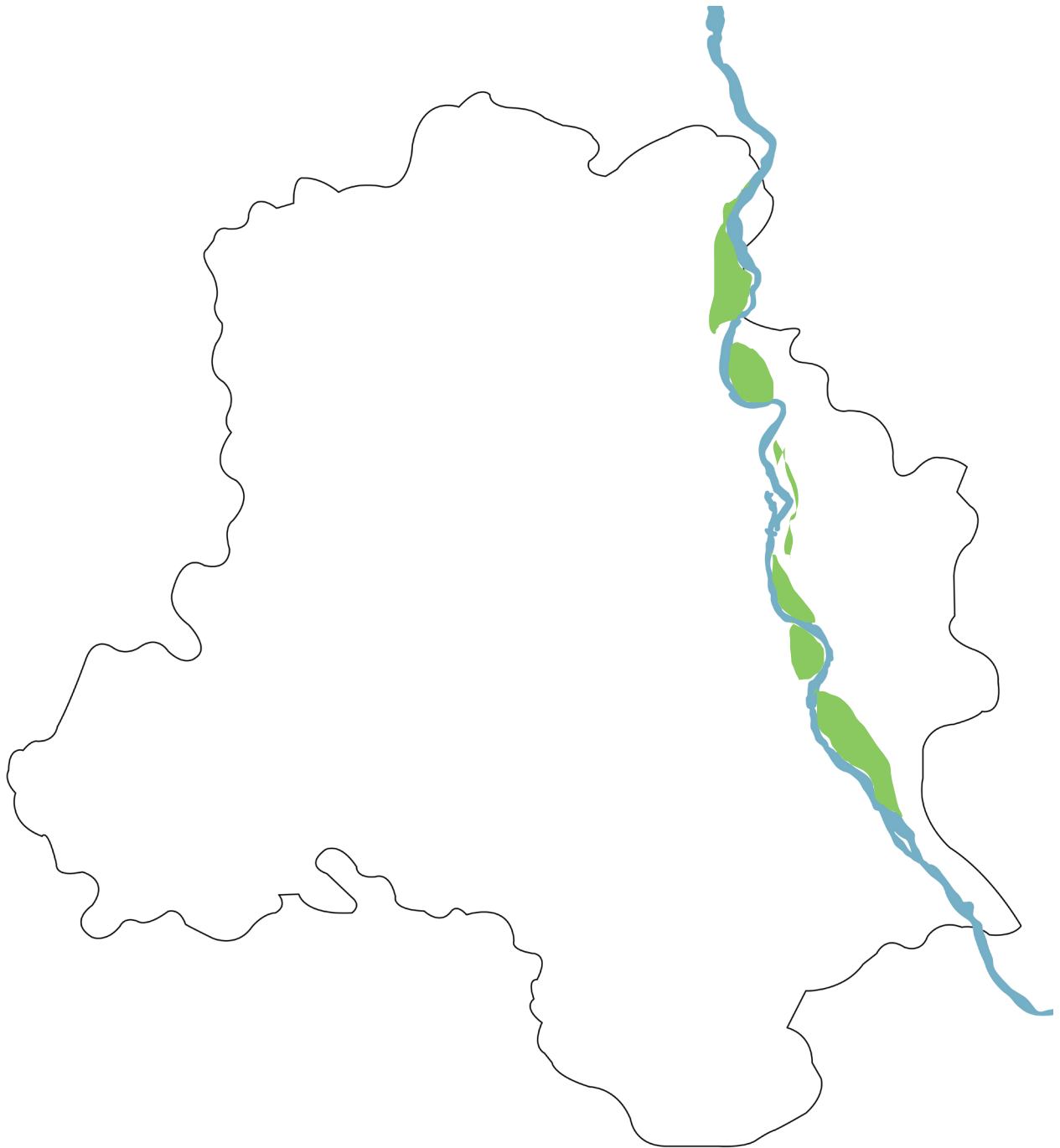




FARMERS OF ZONE 0



Where We Are

Delhi has a rich history of large scale agricultural activity on the floodplains of the River Yamuna. However, given shifting tenures, ownerships, and planning visions, farming has had a chequered history in this area. The Master Plan of 2001 envisioned channelization of the Yamuna all through its length in the NCT and subsequent development of extensive green spaces and special recreational areas on the pattern of Disneyland. The Yamuna Riverfront Development (YRFD) Plan proposed large scale cleansing and beautification of the Yamuna. DDA intends to create recreational parks, wetlands, cycling tracks, and a forested buffer area in an area spanning 500 acres between the Old Railway Bridge and ITO Bridge.

Though farmers have acted as guardians of the Yamuna by preventing rampant concretisation of the floodplains, over the past two decades, the extent of farmland in this region has fallen from 4850 Ha to 3330 Ha. Farming communities began facing forced evictions in early 2011. In 2015, the NGT pronounced strict prohibition on cultivation of edible crops in this region in lieu of environmental pollution in the Yamuna. As many as 30 demolition drives have been undertaken by the DDA in over a decade against the farmers of Zone O. Such forced evictions are accompanied by bulldozing of standing crops, undermining not just right to shelter but also livelihood.

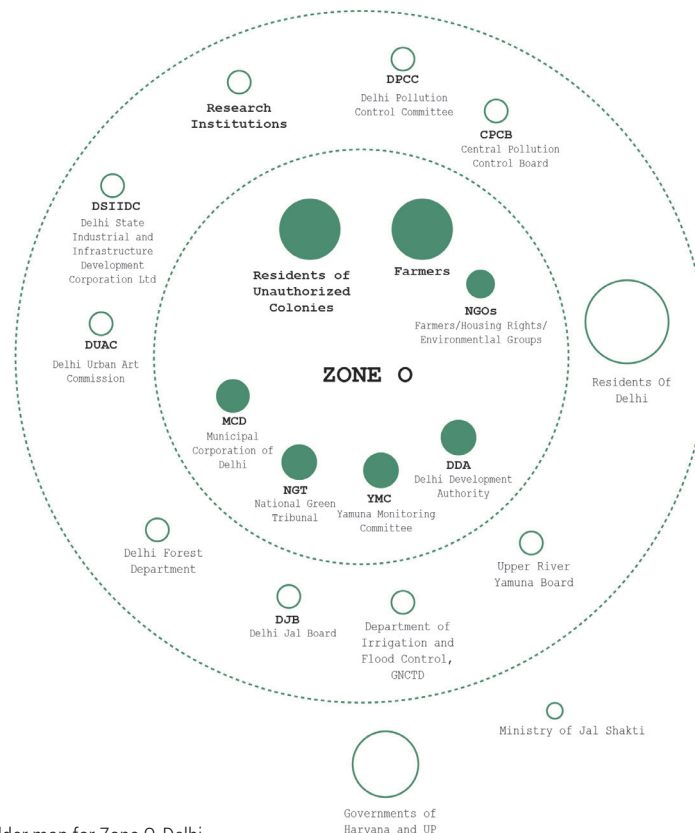


Image: Stakeholder map for Zone O, Delhi

How We Got Here

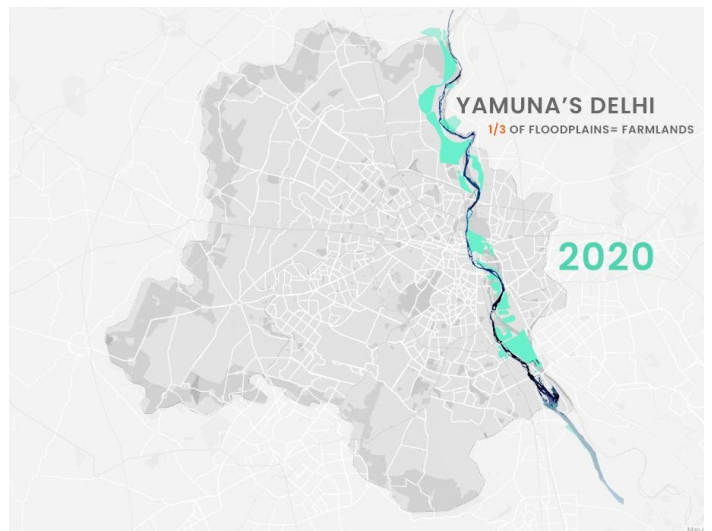
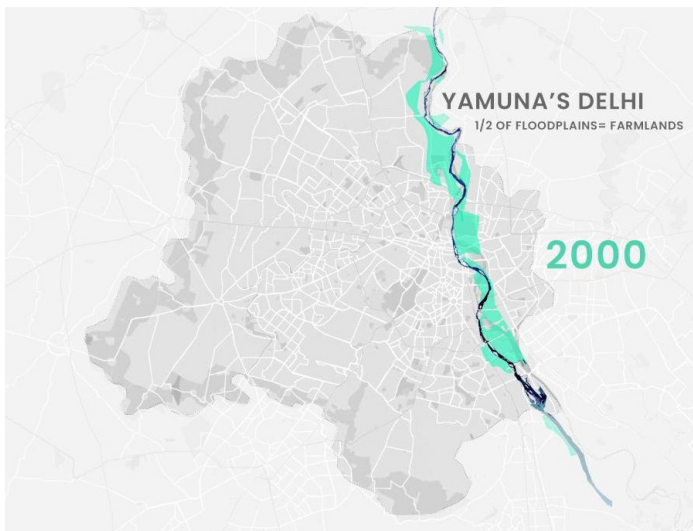
a Changing urban aspirations and aesthetics

The state began to see the Yamuna's floodplains as a revenue-generating civic asset which will contribute to repackaging Delhi's reputation within a global network of world-class cities. Despite prevalent pre-existing agrarian practices, planning agencies have consistently chosen to primarily prescribe recreation, public utilities and biodiversity zones as land uses for this region. Farming seems to have no space in the state's imaginations of Delhi and its future.

b Rising concerns on environmental pollution

Due to unchecked discharge of industrial and domestic sewage in the Yamuna, the river's water has become unfit for any kind of consumption. Like all other residents of Delhi, farmers are also the victims of the state's inability to curb this pollution despite massive expenditure of public money. Attempts to portray farmers as polluters are misplaced and misinformed, diagnosing effect as cause. Even though public sector agencies like CPCB have found vegetable produce from this region to have permissible limits of metals, farmers have been stigmatised as polluters for no fault of theirs.

Maps: Extent of farmlands on Yamuna floodplains in Delhi in 2000 (left) and 2020 (right). Source: Social Design Collaborative



What can MPD '41 do for Farming in Zone O

Any planning vision for the Yamuna and its floodplains in Delhi must consider and reconcile the concerns and interests of all stakeholders, public as well as private. In 2014, an Expert Committee appointed on directions of the NGT also found farming to be suitable land use for the Yamuna's floodplains in Delhi and suggested regulation of agricultural activity in Zone O. International best practices, independent research, and policy precedents, all of these also indicate that farming is a suitable and sustainable land use for riverine floodplains.

To balance principles of intergenerational environmental equity with socio-economic justice for vulnerable sections of the population, it is necessary to re imagine the Yamuna's floodplains as an urban asset and inclusively integrate farming with riverfront development:

01



Riverfront development be integrated with farming

With their skills and knowledge, farmers can also be easily trained to become effective guardians of parks and biodiversity spheres which should coexist alongside farmlands.

02



Agriculture be notified as a dedicated land use

The first step in regularising farming as a community-driven, sustainable urban livelihood will be to recognize long-standing ground realities and notify agriculture as a dedicated land use for Zone O.

03



Farmers be reskilled in organic and sustainable practices

To mitigate inadvertent ill effects of riverine pollution, farmers must be reskilled to follow organic and sustainable practices.

04



Farmers of Zone O be given access to welfare schemes

Farmers in the urban segment of Zone O must also be given access to welfare schemes of the GoI and GNCTD, such as SBM Gramin, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, Mukhyamantri Kisan Mitra Yojana, etc.

05



Innovative solutions for housing problems

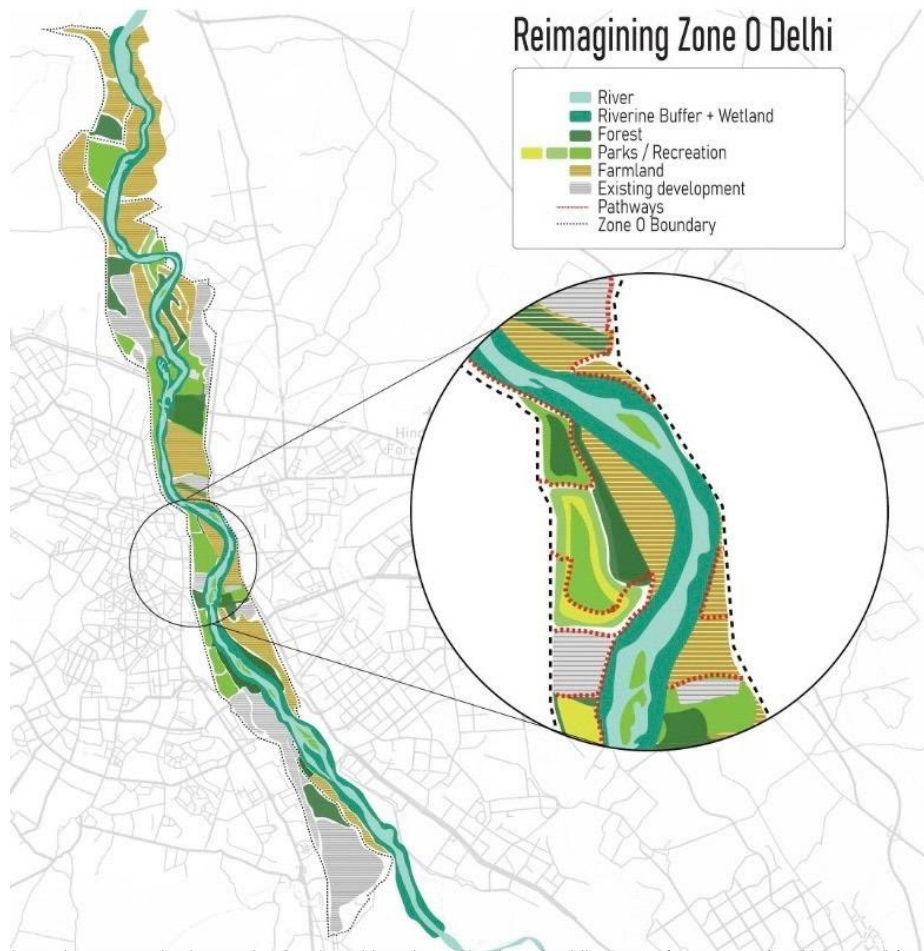
Flood-resilient housing must be designed for farming communities settled in the Yamuna's floodplains in keeping with international best practices.

06



Eviction and resettlement must be last resorts

Any eviction for any public purpose must be carried out as per DUSIB Policy and Protocol as clarified by the Delhi High Court in Ajay Maken v. Union of India (2019). In such cases, rehabilitation and compensation must be extended to the farmers of Zone O as they have been made available to the public at large elsewhere in Delhi.



Conceptual illustration of an alternative Zone O plan integrating farming with parks, wetlands and public spaces (Representational image only). Source: Social Design Collaborative with Kushal Lachhwani



Artistic visualisation illustrating farmlands integrated with public spaces.
Source: Social Design Collaborative with Kushal Lachhwani in consultation with farmer groups

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