

A Peri-Urban Interface Has Special Features, But There are Lessons for Wider Rural-Urban Policy

A peri-urban interface (PUI) produces special circumstances for production, livelihoods and poverty. One key consequence is that it appears to push people from a rural economy into an urban economy. Particularly important are its strong impacts on poor people that will need to be considered in pro-poor policy as well as policy aimed at economic growth more generally. Researching PUI features – despite the specialness of some of them – may have produced findings for policy directed at rural-urban migration in general.

The tendency to categorise into 'urban' and 'rural' simplifies reality too much. Because it is the meeting of urban and rural activities, acknowledgement of a PUI's effects can counter this trend. A PUI can be described in terms of the flows that cross it (for example, of labour and natural resources) or in terms of the people and places which most directly bear the impact of it. For example, new urban housing and industries are frequently located beyond a city's edge, attracting migration from both the city and rural areas, while radically altering the use of natural resources.

Rural-Urban Migration Without A Shift in Location. This meeting of urban and rural activities brings irreversible changes in access to natural resources. These changes effectively push people from a rural economy into an urban one, but without moving their place of residence. Many are made poorer in the process, and as cities and towns grow, increasing numbers are affected. At the same time, though, opportunities are created for better livelihoods, particularly as a result of greater proximity to the concentrated population, wealth, infrastructure and production of a city or town. The city consequently becomes increasingly important for people's livelihood activities.

Other Special Features. The places – as well as the people – affected by a PUI continually change. The city pushes outwards, always converting its edges into more neighbourhoods and industrial areas, so that new areas further out then feel the impact of the PUI. Newcomers from both the city and from other rural areas enter the peripheral

communities, changing their social composition and customs.

As a result of losing access to natural resources in the PUI, residents tend to move away from natural resource based production, an action that becomes more pronounced closer to the city. The rate of change across the locations studied was found not to be uniform, and this heterogeneity was reflected in people's livelihood strategies. However, increasing involvement in a monetised economy was consistently in evidence. In response to these changes, people develop multi-stranded, risk-reducing livelihood portfolios. Surprisingly, these continue for some time to include natural resource based activities, adapted to the new conditions.

The institutions of government, and even NGOs, give little attention to these changes and their consequences. Those organisations with urban responsibilities see them as rural, and vice versa, yet concerted action by both is needed.

Circumstances Particularly Affect Poor People But Effective Intervention is Possible.

Urbanisation disproportionately affects poor people. By definition, they do not have the livelihood assets required to capitalise on many of the opportunities created in the increasingly monetised peri-urban economy. At the same time, greater competition for natural resources results in reduced access to them for nearly everyone who is peri-urban. Poor people are consequently pushed into activities that can rapidly generate cash income, but for which rates of return on labour and other resources are poor, preventing them from accumulating sufficient savings to with which to make good use of new opportunities.

The research showed that people can nevertheless change their livelihood activities in ways that might benefit them and that they can be helped to do so. With better access to information about alternatives and about markets and with better access to credit, they will try new productive activities and substantially raise the scale of some current ones. With more confidence and solidarity, they will seek from institutions of government and civil society more help with their challenges. Interventions by the research that strengthened participatory planning, access to credit, the facilitation of community action, and the activities of NGOs

*This is a message from new research into lives affected by the meeting of rural and urban, of country and town: the meeting called the **peri-urban interface**. It is a product of ten years of study, focusing on livelihoods, systems of production and poverty in Kumasi (Ghana), Hubli-Dharwad and Kolkata (both India). It was funded by the Natural Resources Systems Programme of the Department for International Development of the UK Government (DFID), for the benefit of developing countries. The view expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.*

The source of this brief is "A Synthesis of Peri-Urban Research of Kumasi, Hubli-Dharwad and Kolkata PUIs" at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/pui/research/previous/synthesis/index.html>, which is also Annex B of the Final Technical Report of NRSP Project R8491

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served to promote trials of livelihood changes by peri-urban dwellers.

PUI Provides Lessons for Rural - Urban Migration in General. The research reached new depths of understanding about rural livelihoods change in response to urban pressures and of the transition into urban economies. Much of this knowledge may inform about more than the peri-urban interface situation itself. Attention to the findings and further research based on them should enrich attempts to support people – especially those who are poor – when they choose or are forced to migrate from country to town. In particular, there are insights regarding the necessity of moving from non cash-based and natural resource-based livelihoods to productive activities that give cash incomes. Coupled with this is the knowledge of how

and why interventions can be successful in smoothing this transition for poor people.

Policy Implications

The peri-urban interface is an important – yet overlooked – arena in which to fight poverty while promoting economic development. Better knowledge of the PUI could bring about policies and actions that help the rural people enter the urban economy with less poverty than would otherwise occur. They could be better equipped to contribute to the roles of cities and towns as engines of development. But such policies and actions will need to have both urban and rural dimensions.



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