

Public Sector Engagement With Peri-Urban Issues is Difficult But Important

With few exceptions, efforts to involve local government institutions did not succeed. This is a sign that governments lack interest in peri-urban problems and opportunities.

In undertaking the research, efforts were made to capture the interest of government officials, opinion formers and policy makers and to provide a two-way channel for communication. However, public sector personnel proved difficult to engage with, apparently because they were unaware of many of the issues relating to the peri-urban interface (PUI), and they were consequently reluctant to give them any priority.

Conversely, from a community perspective, full participation in the action planning process was successful in raising levels of confidence amongst participants in their own abilities. Increased confidence was, in turn, helpful in turn in enabling people to approach external agencies, including NGOs, financial service providers, training agencies and political institutions. Those involved were better able to articulate their requirements, and consequently, requests for improved service levels achieved better results.

Public Sector Reluctance to Engage. Specific peri-urban challenges require the sensitive and appropriate use of planning and policymaking frameworks that are both rural and urban. However, in all three PUIs, the political and institutional frameworks that might protect natural resources, relieve poverty, or promote economic growth were concerned with either the city or the countryside and never both.

Onibokun (cited in Brook and Davila, 2000: 34) proposed that in Anglophone West Africa:

“... urban poverty is exacerbated by managerial incompetence, inefficiency, ineffectiveness and unresponsiveness. Lack of transparency, accountability and popular participation has combined to weaken the capacity of the state. Few states are able to face the challenges of urban growth effectively.”

A general lack of understanding about the PUI was exemplified in India where it was reported that the training and political institutions in Hubli-Dharwad were:

“... treating it [the PUI] as an urban area. They were of the opinion that the peri-urban effect is a natural process and it is beyond their ability to do anything in this area.” Reassuringly, though, *“their involvement in the planning process [initiated by the research] has raised their interest in this issue”* (R7959/FTR: 16)

Participatory action planning carried out as part of the research process indicated the range and complexity of stakeholders and their variable and partisan understanding of the issues in question. Encouragingly, adoption of a robust action-planning methodology was sufficient to significantly improve the level of understanding of those who took part, including any public sector staff that were involved.

Careful selection of appropriate activities is essential, with a demonstrable need to engage all the key stakeholders, including government. This was borne out in both Hubli-Dharwad and Kumasi, where concrete successes did eventually help to achieve a wider government engagement. Once involved, individuals within government agencies did develop a better understanding of the deprivations and challenges faced by poor members of the community.

In Hubli-Dharwad, the research indicates that government interactions are most useful either at a very local level or at the highest (state) level.

Significance of Public Sector Role in Natural Resource Management. There was evidence that people in the more urban villages of Hubli-Dharwad take a more monetised approach to natural resource protection, though it had previously been a community responsibility. This extends to provision of services such as water, with many feeling that they are the responsibility of government. However, in less urbanised parts of the PUI, where government support is typically even more inefficient, people remained more open to the idea of providing these services themselves through community action.

Similarly, the research identified a change in the way natural resources are managed near to Kumasi, with the emphasis shifting from informal, community-based systems to formal management through a variety of government departments.

Given the importance of natural resource-derived incomes, especially amongst the very poor, the issue of resource management has a critical livelihood dimension. The increasing role of the public sector in this area is therefore critically

*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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important, but urban administrators tend to be oblivious to the livelihoods implications and afford it a low priority.

A concrete illustration of the situation is found in the management of urban waste. The research shows that municipal authorities frequently do not recognise urban waste as a resource of any value to PUI producers and their livelihoods. Instead, the priority is simply to find a means of disposing of them.

Traditional understanding of urban waste as a valuable resource is powerfully demonstrated by the widespread use of sewage for fish and vegetable farming in both Hubli-Dharwad and the East Kolkata Wetlands. However, efforts to interest policymakers in these uses failed to result in the inclusion of support for them in urban waste management policies. The potential benefits to

livelihoods for peri-urban dwellers along with enhanced food security therefore continue to be ignored.

Policy Implications

Research has identified barriers to better peri-urban livelihoods and that it is possible to overcome them. The same research has learned that both rural and urban policies do not reflect sufficient awareness of these findings to be effective and coordinated responses to the changes wrought by a peri-urban interface. It is very unlikely that development agencies realise what happens at a peri-urban interface and what can be done about it. This knowledge is not yet in the body of development literature. The research from which this message is drawn is unique.

References

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- R7959, 2002, "Natural Resource Management Action Plan Development for Hubli-Dharwad Peri-Urban Interface", *Final Technical Report*, University of Wales, Bangor



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