

Dealing with the peri-urban interface

Guidelines for policy makers



An Executive Summary

Currently there is little or no cooperation between rural and urban authorities, so those living in the peri-urban may find themselves under a political jurisdiction that fails to be responsive to their reality and changing circumstances. The solution is to create formal and informal channels for collaboration between urban and rural authorities.



Formal Mechanisms:

Empower the District Planning Committees with a budget to tackle issues in the peri-urban. This constitutionally mandated body exists to work across rural-urban boundaries but currently only compiles the plans of the line departments.

Informal Mechanisms:

There is a global trend toward “co-operative governance,” which is a system that creates flexible forums to solve problems, which dissolve after the problem is solved. This is a practical way to deal with the constantly changing conditions of the peri-urban.

Combining the Formal and the Informal:

The DPC should concern itself specifically with the PUI and create task forces to tackle specific issues. Since the DPC has jurisdiction over cities and their surrounding rural areas, they should be given the power to bring relevant stakeholders to address problems proactively. The task force would exist until the task is completed and then disband.

Why is the Peri-Urban Interface important for Indian policy makers?

- Current estimates are that in the next 25 years the world's population will increase by **1.7 billion**. Almost all of this growth will be in less developed countries, like India.
- An estimated 98% of this new population growth will be urban, about one-third of which will be due to migration from rural areas to the fringes of existing cities, namely the **peri-urban interface (PUI)**.
- Urban areas exert an environmental burden on peri-urban areas, such as pollution from traffic, municipal waste and sewage, and extraction of resources such as bricks, stones, fuel wood and timber.
- Peri-urban institutions such as industrial estates, poultry farms, IT parks, and airports, to name a few, will never be in the inner city. They will always be outside the city, but catering to urban needs. The peri-urban will always exist around cities, and, with its distinctive urban and rural features, it *must* exist.
- If peri-urban growth goes unplanned it will be enormously expensive to rectify in the future. Therefore urban authorities should take on the responsibility of initiating the recommendations contained in this policy brief.

Life between the urban and rural

Imagine you are living in a rural village. Every morning you pick up your vessels and walk along a muddy, makeshift dirt road to the borewell down the way. You prepare breakfast and then go to work in the fields until dark. But one day you wake up and you are no longer living in a rural village. From this morning forward, you are living in a city. But you still have to go to the borewell to fill your vessels with water, the road is still muddy and in disrepair, in fact, everything looks exactly as it did the day before when you were living in a rural village. So what has changed? Today you are no longer eligible for rural development schemes provided by the government, because today you live in a city. Because today you live in a city you have to pay higher city taxes. With all these sudden, dramatic changes, you may decide to go to the home of your local Gram Panchayat representative to address your concerns, but you would find out that you no longer have a Gram Panchayat at all, because today you live in the city.

Today's institutions are divided on rural-urban lines. However, issues faced by peri-urban communities do not respect these administrative boundaries. Those living between urban and rural areas are affected by a process of dynamic change – for the land and for the people – that is far more complex than the simple drawing of administrative boundaries.



Why is the peri-urban interface important?

The world as we know it will be completely transformed in our lifetime. According to projections, by 2050 the earth's population will increase by 200 to 300 crores. The overwhelming proportion of this dramatic growth will be in developing countries, two thirds of which will be in and around existing urban centres. Therefore changes that would be considered massive on a global scale will occur in the localized spaces where the urban meets the rural as cities and their impacts burst into outlying areas. This means that unprecedented stresses will be placed on the lands and the people caught at the site of these rapid and dynamic changes. However, it also means that governments and local communities have the opportunity to effectively manage these changes by focusing their efforts on the Peri-Urban Interface.

What is the peri-urban interface?

The peri-urban interface (PUI) is often defined as a 'transitional zone' where rural and urban features coexist. These areas are increasingly inhabited both by low-income households and wealthier middle-income dwellers in search of larger residential spaces because land prices are more affordable than in more central and established areas, and urban-style building and planning regulations are often non-existent or not enforced. In some cities, these intra-urban migrants coexist with a diversity of enterprises serving the urban population, ranging from exclusive golf clubs to cemeteries, quarries and solid-waste landfills, as well as, for a time, long-established farmers. Peri-urban areas also provide useful environmental services, such as underground aquifers, rivers and ponds. In short, the PUI is the context where many of the changes in urban-rural flows materialize, leading to **problems** and **opportunities** not only for peri-urban communities but also for the sustainable development of adjacent rural and urban systems.



The rural urban institutional divide

Administratively, peri-urban areas might lie outside the jurisdiction of urban institutions, where rural authorities are unable to provide households and firms with adequate services due to their inability to develop an adequate resource base at a pace that matches the rapid change in these areas. Conversely, peri-urban villages might fall within the jurisdiction of the city, which often lack a focus on natural resources management.

An example of the types of problems that do not adhere to the current administrative landscape is the treatment of sewage. Urban waste in the form of sewage flows used for vegetable cultivation by farmers causes human health problems for both the farmers and the urban consumers. For farmers using sewage, skin disease is a common problem and for the urban consumer, the presence of e-coli in vegetables can be fatal. Where the responsibility for these health problems lies is unclear with neither rural nor urban agencies accepting responsibility.

The table below shows some of the problems and opportunities that peri-urban dwellers are likely to face as they only have access to either rural or urban authorities.



The extent to which the peri-urban poor are negatively or positively affected by the changes shaping the PUI depends on their livelihood sources, which are usually more heavily reliant on natural resources than those of wealthier, more urban-based groups. But the emergence of problems and opportunities for the peri-urban poor also depends on the conditions regulating their access to and control over natural resources and the extent to which they can effectively voice their concerns to and work both with urban and rural authorities.



Rural representation

A village that falls under rural jurisdiction has access to the Panchayat system of representation. People have ready access to their Gram Panchayat representative, who is most likely a peer living close by. Gram Panchayat representatives can in turn raise these concerns in the Taluk Panchayat and the Zilla Panchayat. Through this system, individuals have a more direct voice in how funds are used locally. Furthermore, governments provide a range of rural development schemes. Funding is tailored to the needs and livelihoods of village life. However, these schemes are often designed to reach the rural poor and might fail to provide the kind of support required by the peri-urban poor, who often rely on more diversified livelihoods. In addition rural political representation can also be dominated by a strong patron-client relationship. This might affect the capacity of those traditionally marginalized to reach government institutions.

Urban representation

In contrast, when a village becomes part of a city, representation is more remote and less accessible. Those living in the outlying areas of cities have limited mobility to physically access the political institutions of the city. They certainly do not have the savvy and personal connections necessary to get the municipal corporation to address their concerns. Those living within the city limits must now pay higher taxes and are no longer eligible for rural development schemes. Furthermore, the agenda of a city often fails to include actions that can help peri-urban dwellers to enhance natural resource management. On the positive side, peri-urban villagers might have greater exposure and understanding of the political processes being shaped by agents outside the bounded location of the village. They also realize the need to pursue change through channels other than those exclusively managed and influenced by local structures.

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Natural resource management in the peri-urban interface

Situation

Urban opportunities combined with changes in agricultural production and marketing tend to push people away from agriculture and from other land based activities. Consequent neglect of natural resources, and rapid urbanization in the form of land use changes and generation of urban waste leads to the deterioration of the natural resource base. For example, activities catering to urban needs such as the growth of construction, brick kilns, quarries,

growth of illegal settlements and industrial estates all have deteriorating effects on land. Illegal felling of trees and conversion of forests by growth of monoculture species like eucalyptus for industrial use decreases bio-diversity, depletes the forests and affects the livelihoods and sustenance of the very poor who depend on the forests most. Water tanks have steadily disappeared due to encroachment, dumping of urban waste, and silting.

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To contain encroachment due to urban sprawl and degradation of valuable natural resources, several policy instruments can be applied, such as zoning, taxation strategies and land regulations. Other interventions include green rating of industry and planned growth of housing and infrastructure. At the local level, innovations such as the wadi (orchards that combine agriculture, horticulture and forestry) can increase biodiversity and bring people back to the land, by making it more productive (Box 2). This innovation was found to be particularly suited for the peri-urban since it is less labour intensive and allows people the option to continue work in the cities while still working

the on land. This in turn reduces the problem of migration.

Institutions can prevent unwanted repercussions of urban expansion on natural resources through a combination of mechanisms aimed at building up collaboration between urban and rural authorities and between local authorities (whether urban or rural) and local communities. Collaboration across these lines can be through either formal or informal mechanisms designed to deal with specific natural resource management issues.

Box 2: The BAIF model of tree based farming

The synergy between different crops, animals and trees makes farming systems sustainable. Trees are an important link in the energy cycle of the system because they yield fodder, fuel, fruit, timber and biomass for manure. Tree based farming, or “wadi”, developed by more than fifty thousand small and marginal farmers associated with BAIF Development Research Foundation, integrates agriculture, horticulture and forestry. Farmers develop a single acre of land. They have a live hedge around the farm, bunds across the slopes that help conserve soil and water, farm ponds to harvest runoff water, horticulture (40 plants per acre) and forestry (500 plants of 15 species per acre) plants. Entire communities work together on common lands and each other’s lands to achieve this. Within three to four years the farmers are more confident of taking care of their livestock due to the availability of fodder, they have biomass and dung for better manure which in turn leads to better crops and decreased import of inputs.

Source: BAIF Development Research Foundation



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Situation

Rapid land use changes witnessed in the PUI results in scarcity of land and consequently a dearth of agricultural by-products such as fuel and fodder, which are not as easily available to the peri-urban poor compared to the rural poor. These processes result in a certain unpredictability of livelihoods particularly amongst the poor, who often have little resilience and least room to manoeuvre in the face of rapid change. Peri-urban poverty is multi dimensional in nature and the poor are subject to more shocks and stresses caused by rapid urbanization, such as changes in agricultural

production and marketing or in the quality and availability of common natural resources. The poor often lack incomes and access to resources, have high numbers of dependents, consist of female-headed households and their coping strategies include migrating to urban centres to take advantage of urban opportunities that require semi-skilled or unskilled labour. In the peri-urban context, what often distinguishes the poor from the very poor is their ability to utilize urban opportunities. Livelihood strategies here are strongly driven by markets and more diversified than in rural areas.

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Any interventions should be focused on countering the barriers faced by the peri-urban poor to make use of both urban and rural opportunities. These include the urban markets, the products and services that the urban work force need and urban jobs which provide regular and higher incomes. It is important for the government to recognise both the rural and urban characteristics of the PUI and create tailored programmes to provide the support required for peri-urban sustainable livelihoods. NGOs can facilitate

community mobilization of the poor, and build their capacities to better compete with their urban counterparts. Capacity building should focus on technical skills, credit management capacities, natural resource management, alternative income generation and marketing skills. Current poverty alleviation programmes have no market component. Therefore innovations such as MOVE (Market Oriented Value Enhancement) can build the skills of the landless and women to understand and access markets (Box 3).



Box 3: Market oriented value enhancement

MOVE: Market Oriented Value Enhancement was designed for landless and assetless women in the peri-urban. Natural resource based interventions leave out the landless as they have no access to land. MOVE helps illiterate landless women understand and access the market through adding value to products and services. To help women assess the demand for products, a new technique called participatory market appraisal (PMA) was created where illiterate women designed, administered and analysed results using a visual door-to-door product survey. Women choose a product or service for a livelihood based on understanding the demand of several products. The most important lesson from the MOVE experience was that ignoring the market is not an option for small producers and in fact, understanding the market can open up a whole range of opportunities for the poor. Current programmes need to be completely recast beginning with the trainers themselves being oriented to the markets and with policy makers, government, banks and NGOs understanding the importance of factoring in a market component into income generation programmes.

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Institutional mechanisms in the peri-urban interface

Situation

To better manage natural resources, to enhance livelihoods and to deal with other urban induced problems such as higher levels of alcoholism, gambling and so on, government agencies need to now think outside the box breaking the compartmentalization of rural and urban modes of administration. In the formulation of policies for management of the peri-urban interface, a dichotomous approach to administration and planning (on urban and rural lines) is inappropriate. Forums, which encourage collaboration among urban and rural authorities, are the need of the day as pressures of urbanization increase.

The solutions to peri-urban issues lie in the development of formal and informal channels of collaboration between rural and urban authorities.



Box 4 : The District Planning Committees

In the early 1990s the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (CAs) accorded a new status to rural and urban local governments, carrying the decentralization process up to the neighbourhood levels and widening the democratic base of Indian politics and decision-making. The Constitutional Amendments provided a new mechanism for rural-urban collaboration called the District Planning Committee (DPC). This mechanism was assigned the role of integrated planning. It also was conceived as a forum that would widen participation in planning beyond just the Urban Development Authorities (UDAs) to now include elected representatives, both rural and urban as well as the line departments. However the DPC only has advisory status and no budget and is perceived by many to be more a political body with no teeth, than a planning body.

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Institutional mechanisms in the peri-urban interface

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Formal mechanisms for integrated planning like the District Planning Committee (DPC) already exist, at least on paper (See Box 4). The DPC in Hubli Dharwad is typical of DPCs throughout the country. Far from serving as the body for integration of planning across rural-urban lines, it at best ‘staples’ the plans provided by rural and urban agencies. By empowering the DPC with a real budget to tackle issues of the PUI, true change can occur.

Informal mechanisms can also pave the way for integrated planning and management that effectively addresses the changes experienced by peri-urban dwellers. In the PUI project conducted in Hubli-Dharwad, one such mechanism was a district steering committee to build on community based participatory plans allowing direct interface between officials and communities of rural and urban jurisdictions. A second mechanism explored was a rural urban task force to address peri-urban issues on scale. Both mechanisms being informal had limited results and life spans but nonetheless their very initiation shows that government can operate in innovative, flexible ways to solve problems. These mechanisms represent new trends in global thinking and are instances of collaborative governance, which create flexible government bodies to solve problems and dissolve after the problem is solved. This contrasts with anachronistic fossilized government bodies which are unwieldy, often permanent and do not have the powers to deal with the constantly changing, non-static conditions of the peri-urban

Combining the formal and informal:

To address peri-urban problems effectively, a dynamic administrative strategy is needed which could potentially combine the strengths of both formal and informal mechanisms. The DPC should concern itself specifically with the PUI and create task forces to tackle its problems. Since the DPC has jurisdiction over cities and their surrounding rural areas, they should be given the power to bring relevant stakeholders to address problems proactively. For example, with the issue of sewage irrigation, several representatives of urban communities that contribute to sewage flows would be included in the task force, as well as the farmers of villages that use this sewage for cultivation. In addition representatives from the irrigation department, and the sanitation department, together with politicians, bureaucrats, and scientists appointed by the DPC would constitute a task force that would study the problem in depth and then submit recommendations to the DPC based on its findings. The DPC would include the recommendations as part of its next budget and then allocate the necessary funds and delegate the responsibility to the entity responsible for implementing the plans. The task force would exist until the task is completed and then dissolve. Empowering the DPC to create task forces gives it the flexibility not only to address a wide range of policy issues, but also to create responsible bodies when necessary and dissolve them when obsolete. Given the constantly changing nature of the PUI, this adaptability is a key component to any future policy measures.



Elements of an effective peri-urban policy

Any peri-urban policy cannot have a dichotomous, either rural or urban, approach but need to be integrated. Awareness of the great diversity that exists within the PUI among policy makers is needed. One consequence of diversity is that a 'one size fits all' approach to management is unlikely to be effective in achieving objectives. The non-static nature of the PUI needs to be factored into administration as the frontiers move on. Today's peri-urban areas will be tomorrow's suburbs; today's rural area will be tomorrow's peri-urban interface. Thus, for a given locality, the peri-urban interface is a temporary state. Therefore, any mechanism needs to have the capacity to change over time; otherwise it risks becoming fossilized as another anachronistic tier of administration. No one pretends that addressing the issues raised above is a simple matter. But ignoring the existence of the peri-urban zone is not an option.

This policy brief is based on nearly a decade of research on the peri-urban conducted by a multi-disciplinary team. The contact details of the team are given below. This policy brief has been published by Best Practices Foundation.



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