

NOTE ON URBANISATION AND THE GROWTH OF PERI-URBAN SETTLEMENTS

Urbanization is one of the most important demographic trends of the twenty-first century, and growth is particularly rapid in lower-income countries. The majority of urban growth is associated with the rapid expansion of smaller urban centres and peri-urban developments. Much of this growth is unplanned and informal, with community members and informal sector developers taking advantage of the fact that the regulatory capacity of government authorities is weak particularly in those areas which are outside of municipal boundaries.

Peri-urban areas are characterised by a mixture of land uses. These land uses reflect different urban and rural economic activities. Many industries locate themselves on the edge of the city where land is relatively cheap and not subject to stringent development controls. The wastes these industries produce are often discharge without treatment to a local water body. The process of urbanisation means peri-urban areas are often in a state of rapid state of transformation.

Development in peri-urban areas creates demand for new infrastructure and services. Outside core urban areas, there are substantial financial and institutional constraints to delivering these services. Many areas fall under rural administrative regimes that have little or no people or tax raising ability to provide even the most basic infrastructure facilities and services for peri-urban communities (Edelman and Mengers, 1997). In general, the majority of municipal authorities and centralised government agencies lack the capacity to manage the complexity of environmental problems in peri-urban areas especially in situations where the economic interests of development are prioritised by city-based vested interests (Nunan and Satterwaite, 1999).

Where infrastructure and services are constructed these are often in a piecemeal fashion, either through the efforts of residents themselves or as a result of pressure from civil society on elected representatives and government officials. Electricity and water supply are usually given highest priority by residents and politicians. Sanitation, drainage and solid waste collection services becoming priorities as problems associated with these services escalate. In general however, the majority of settlements in peri-urban areas, particularly those inhabited by poorer communities, do not have access to adequate water supply and sanitation facilities. Even where household sanitation and localised drainage facilities exist, there is often a lack of a comprehensive system for collection and disposal of wastewater.

According to WHO/UNICEF (2000), 22% of the urban population in Asia lack access to adequate sanitation. However, the proportion of rural population is much higher (69%) and a significant proportion of these people live in peri-urban areas.

References

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