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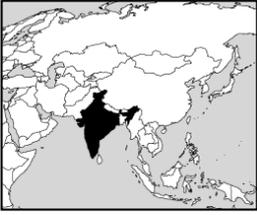
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Participatory action planning in the peri-urban interface: the twin city experience, Hubli–Dharwad, India

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SUMMARY: This paper describes the process of participatory planning in five peri-urban villages in the Hubli–Dharwad twin city region. The objectives of the participatory planning project included enhancing the livelihoods of the poor and managing the natural resource base. The paper describes the characteristics of the villages involved and their specific peri-urban aspects; the tools used and the participatory planning process; the main issues which emerged from the process and their relevance to different groups (women, landowners, landless and lower castes). It also summarizes the main lessons learnt: what worked, the major problems and how these were addressed.

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

IN LOW-INCOME countries where population pressure and resource scarcity are acutely felt, cities are rapidly growing in population and territory. The constantly expanding periphery around a city constitutes the peri-urban interface (PUI). The PUI offers far more choices than other spaces as the population here has a foot in both the rural and urban worlds. It is characterized by flows of produce, finance, labour and services and by processes of rapid economic, sociological, institutional and environmental change. The livelihoods of some of its inhabitants depend on natural resources such as land for food, water and fuel, and space for living, which is often over-exploited. Environmentally, the PUI is an area where three systems are in constant interaction: namely the natural resource system (forests and waterways), the agricultural system and the urban system.

In the Participatory Action Planning Project (PAPP), over a one-year period, communities developed action plans based on the twin objectives of enhancing the livelihoods of the poor and managing the natural resource base. This paper presents an analysis of factors that enhance or hinder the process of participatory planning in five peri-urban villages in the Hubli–Dharwad twin city region of India.

a. Partner institutions

• *University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS)*: PAPP was grounded in the UAS, administratively, technically and in terms of communication and coordination with all stakeholders. UAS played a key role in the involvement of district level government institutions in the planning process.

- *BAIF Development Research Foundation*: As one of the NGO partners, BAIF mobilized people's active participation in the action planning process, and helped produce action plans in Gabbur and Channapur villages. BAIF organized eight self-help groups (SHGs) and is currently lending its expertise on watershed development and agro-forestry in the implementation of the action plans.
- *India Development Service* (*IDS*): As the other NGO partner, IDS also mobilized people's participation in the action planning process in a cluster of villages. IDS has a long history in one of these villages, Mugad, where they had earlier organized 16 *sanghas* (community-based organizations) and, through the planning process, created several more. IDS is currently lending its expertise in income generation, joint forest management and social mobilization, particularly with respect to women, during the implementation phase.
- *Best Practices Foundation (BPF)*: BPF conducted process documentation and helped engender the process by highlighting women's perspectives. In the implementation phase, it is currently playing a role in the dissemination of research findings to government at the state and national levels.
- *British partners*: Funded by the UK Department for International Development, the University of Wales, Bangor is the lead institution with the University of Birmingham and University College London. The British institutions coordinated the project internationally, acted as the primary research partners and provided capacity building on research tools and in the involvement of government.
- *Community-based organizations (CBOs) or "sanghas"*: Reflecting the participatory nature of the process, the CBOs were instrumental in defining the issues, creating the action plans and grounding these plans concretely in an enabling community-based institutional framework for both planning and implementation.
- *Key institutions*: These included bodies engaged in planning, providing services, formulating local policy and implementing regulations. The Hubli–Dharwad Municipal Corporation (HDMC), the Hubli–Dharwad Urban Development Authority (HDUDA), the Dharwad Zilla *panchayat* (local government body), the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, the District Industrial Centre, the District Irrigation Department, and *taluk* and *gram panchayats* (government bodies at different sub-district levels) are all involved in various capacities. Finally, state and national government institutions were also informed about the process through direct meetings and through project newsletters and literature.

b. Characteristics of the villages selected

In the village selection process, the main concern was how peri-urban changes affected natural resources and, in turn, livelihoods. Based on this consideration, the reasons underlying the choice of each village are described below.
- Kelgeri was selected because agricultural workers were now commuting to the city for jobs and, consequently, agricultural land use had shifted to cultivation requiring less intensive cropping, such as mango plantations. Brick kilns catering to the urban construction industry had led to rapid land use changes and resultant soil degradation.
- Kotur is located in the industrial belt, which affects employment in the agricultural sector, leading to a neglect of natural resources and migration into the village.

Table 1:	Peri-urban features considered in the village selection process					
		Mugad	Channapur	Gabbur	Kotur	Kelgeri
Proximity to city (km)		12	11	0	12	0
Degree of influence by city*		++	+++	++	+++	++++
Rural values and character (time, trust and attitude)		++++	++	+++	++	+
Immigrant population		0	0	0	+++	++++
Proximity to highway and by-pass		0	0	++++	+++	++++
Industrial development		0	0	0	+++	0
Commercialization		0	0	0	0	++++
Number of shops		30	2	3	20	35
Licensed arrack** shops		1	0	0	2	1
Unlicensed arrack shops		3	12	0	0	0
Alcoholism		+	++++	0	+++	++++
Gambling and other vices		+	++	+	++++	++++
Old traditions and practices		++++	++++	++++	++++	+
Changes in agricultural practices		Shift to horticulture	0	Vegetable cultivation through sewage irrigation	0	Horti-culture; brick-making

* Calculated on a scale of 1:4, the villages were characterized by the entire research team during the first meetings, to define the project objectives and select villages to meet those objectives.
** Arrack is the colloquial term used for local liquor in India.

- Gabbur is the only village through which urban sewage flows. Sewage, used for vegetable cultivation, represents both a lifeline and a health hazard. Its main produce, vegetables and dairy products, are highly market driven, making this village's economy extremely commercial.
- Channapur's population is known for livestock rearing geared towards city markets, also for commuting for employment and for the sale of curds.
- Mugad is well known for its predominance of artisans, who depend heavily on natural resources and who produce pots and baskets for the urban markets.

Peri-urban factors that drove the research and selection process are described below, and shown in Table 1.

- *Proximity to the city*: The initial assumption, that the closer the village to the city the more peri-urban its character, was found to be invalid. Kelgeri and Gabbur are both located within the city boundary but, whilst Kelgeri had more urban characteristics, Gabbur retained its rural character.
- *Rural values*: Rural values are defined here as attitudes towards outsiders, in terms of time available and trust. Rural populations are interested in outsiders and new ideas. In peri-urban villages (like the urban areas), people have less time and trust and these are seen as typically urban attitudes and behaviour. In Kelgeri, unlike Mugad, people were reluctant to give time or listen to NGOs or attend meetings. Kelgeri, because of its more urban character, was eventually dropped from the project. In terms of planning, it was easier to organize people with rural values.

- *Immigrant populations*: In Kelgeri and Kotur, there is massive immigration. Migrants are hard to organize for different reasons as they are unavailable and do not feel connected to the village's natural resources. In Kotur, the immigrants are factory workers with steady employment and incomes, whereas in Kelgeri they do not have stable incomes or employment and are very poor, but are difficult to organize because they are occupied with daily wage earning and are therefore unavailable.

- *Industrial development and proximity to the highway and to the bypass*: Kotur's proximity to various industries and the highway exposes the village to outside influences, affecting employment, natural resources and people's attitudes.

- *Commercialization*: Changing land use in the form of residential building for urbanites, brick-making and a high degree of commercialization (represented by the number of shops) affect natural resource management and strategies.

- *Degree of alcoholism, gambling and other urban influences*: Alcoholism and other influences caused by proximity to the city affect Kelgeri, Kotur and Channapur, seen in the growth of liquor shops within the villages themselves. In villages with high rates of alcoholism, any intervention would not necessarily improve living standards for women and children but could, instead, result in more resources being spent on gambling and alcohol consumption. This finding changed the action planning process fundamentally, where community mobilization became an overriding goal to empower women to address these social issues.

II. ELEMENTS OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION PLANNING PROCESS

a. Tools used

- RAPPORT-BUILDING WITH the community was one of the main tools used in the planning process, where awareness raising on peri-urban issues was the entry point into villages, using street plays and literature.

- Meetings were held right through the planning process, both within the community and as formal meetings and workshops with all stakeholders, including government.

- Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) exercises were conducted in all villages to assess resources and skills, to prioritize issues and to plan.

- Iterative planning emerged as a tool when it was found that separate planning sessions were needed to bring out the perspectives of women, the landless and the poor.

- Working groups were planned where community, government and NGOs were to create the action plans together. This tool was later dropped because government tended to dominate the discussions and the communities would lose ownership of their plans and the process itself. The second conceptual flaw in the working group concept was the impracticality of working across villages on individual issues because of the interrelatedness of issues and the need for coordination among government officials from different line agencies across each issue.

b. The process

Village communities created action plans built on dissemination initiatives including a series of workshops and field visits.

- *Street plays and materials*: As an entry point, street plays were conducted on peri-urban issues, discussing environmental and livelihood concerns. Posters and pamphlets supported the messages projected by the plays. Overall, for a non-literate and semi-literate audience, the street plays were found to be more successful in raising awareness than were the written material.
- *Rapport-building and meetings*: Continuity was built into the process by the NGOs through workers living in the villages, meeting communities around the clock and working with the poor and women at times suitable for them.
- *Planning workshop*: An initial workshop held in April 2001 oriented the main institutional partners on the participatory planning process, the objectives and the villages to be included.
- *Field visits* by all institutions were an integral part of the entire planning process.
- *PRA exercises* were conducted to get an overview of the villages, the conditions, resources, problems and opportunities for change. Group discussions were conducted with various sections of the community, including men and women and lower castes/occupation groups to obtain an in-depth analysis of the problems faced by each and to identify community representatives to participate in all future events. PRA also helped the communities to prioritize issues and find possible solutions, instrumental for the creation of final action plans.
- *Diagnostic workshop*: At a workshop conducted on 6–7 June 2001, community representatives presented information on their villages and on the problems they faced relating to natural resources and livelihoods. Community, government and NGO representatives interacted to create solutions to problems and tentatively to create working groups for drawing up action plans. This did not work because government dominated the process in all groups except the Mugad group, where existing *sanghas*' representatives had the capacity to interact on an equal basis with government. Consequently, these working groups were abandoned. Only the Mugad action plan went forward.
- *Workshop with key institutions*: The chief executive officer, head of the local district government, led a workshop on 17 August 2001 with several government agency representatives, to whom the action plans were presented by the NGOs. Here, linkages between existing government programmes and the action plans were discussed.
- *Field visits to the selected villages*: In a participatory process, village representatives designed and presented their own action plans and logical frameworks (the format of the action plans). Rigid imposition of logical frameworks has rightly been criticized in development projects,[1] but the approach used here aimed to clarify primary stakeholders' thinking about constraints, potential solutions and aspirations.

c. Issues prioritized

One outcome of the planning process was the emergence and prioritization of issues by the community. Iterations of planning took place, initially with the entire population but, later on, specifically with women, lower castes and

1. Guijt, I (2000), "Methodological issues in participatory monitoring and evaluation" in Estrella, M (editor), *Learning from Change*, Intermediate Technology Publications, London, pages 201–216; also Symes, J and S Jasser (2000), "Growing from the grassroots: building participatory planning monitoring and evaluation methods in PARC" in Estrella, M (op. cit.), pages 138–149.

Table 2:	Village issues: relevance to select populations and consequent interventions				
		Mugad	Channapur	Gabbur	Kotur	Kelgeri
Issues						
Water for irrigation		Land-owning men	Land-owning men	Land-owning men	Land-owning men	Land-owning men
Drinking water access					Women	Women
Tank restoration		Landowners; potters; fishermen; livestock owners; women	Landowners		Landowners; livestock owners; women	Landowners; women
Access to forests		Landless; artisans; women	Landless; women		Landless; women	
Dairy and access to fodder			Livestock owners	Livestock owners	Livestock owners	
Sewage irrigation				Farmers and labourers		
Health				Farmers and workers		
Sanitation drainage		All	All	All	All	All
Sanitation toilets		Women	Women	Women	Women	Women
Livelihoods		Landless; women; SC and ST	Landless; women; SC and ST	Landless; women; SC and ST	Landless; women; SC and ST	Landless; women; SC and ST
Alcoholism and social problems			Women	Women	Women	Women
Interventions						
Landowners		Watershed; agro-forestry	Watershed; agro-forestry	Agro-forestry	Watershed; agro-forestry	None
Landless and artisans		Access to forests; income generation; skill development; community organization	Dairy/goat income generation; skill deve-lopment; community organization	Dairy income generation; skill deve-lopment; community organization	Dairy/goat income generation; skill deve-lopment; community organization	None
Women		Community organization; alternative livelihoods	Community organization; alternative livelihoods	Community organization; alternative livelihoods	Community organization; alternative livelihoods	None

SC = scheduled castes; ST = scheduled tribes

the landless. Different issues are relevant to different populations (Table 2).

Initiatives that increase access to water, such as watershed develop-ment, benefited the entire village, but the landed benefited the most; agro-forestry typically benefits only landowners. Issues relevant to the landless, artisans, women and lower castes included access to forests and the need to explore alternative livelihoods since they do not have assets such as land or livestock.

- *Water*: Water was important for everyone, but women were concerned with drinking water and men with water for irrigation. Watershed development initiatives such as tank rehabilitation would increase access to water and benefit men, women, livestock owners and the entire population in different ways.
- *Access to forests*: In Mugad, Channapur and Kotur, increased access to forests would benefit artisans' livelihoods by providing access to raw materials. It would provide non-timber forest produce for the landless and for women. Increased fodder availability would benefit livestock owners. Increased biomass would provide manure for landowners. Increased access to firewood, whilst relevant for all, was especially relevant to artisans and women. Therefore, one intervention planned for villages with forest lands was organizing people into village forest committees in the government Joint Forest Planning and Management Programme (JFPM). Agro-forestry was planned where no forest lands existed.
- *Dairy*: In Gabbur, Channapur and Kotur, it was planned to improve dairy productivity for livestock owners by improving animal health, introducing improved cattle-breeding techniques and increasing fodder availability. UAS was planning to conduct research on fodder species that can grow in the summer and BAIF was planning interventions for improving animal health and cattle breeding.
- *Livelihood and other issues raised by women, lower castes and the landless*: Separate interviews with women, lower castes and the landless elicited that the initial plans would not benefit them as they owned neither land nor livestock. Several new issues, such as alternative livelihoods, alcoholism and the lack of toilets, emerged in these discussions, which then led to the team revisiting and changing the action plans.
- *Alternative livelihoods*: The more vulnerable populations, such as the landless, women, lower castes and minority populations, wanted alternative livelihoods. Therefore, a new emphasis emerged in all the plans to ensure that, for these populations, a special effort would be made to explore alternative livelihoods.
- *Alcoholism*: All action plans were reshaped to include community organization and building and strengthening *sanghas*, to deal with alcoholism and other social issues.
- *Inadequate toilets*: Women raised the issue of proper drainage and the lack of toilets.
- *Inclusion of the poor, the landless and women*: Among the poor, some families participated and some did not. In the Indian context, such under-representation of the most disadvantaged sectors is not unusual.[2] It was decided that NGO staff would identify the poor, as they were living in the community and could interact with them at their convenience.

2. Madeley, J (1991), "Missing the poorest in India" in Madeley, J et al. *When Aid is No Help,* Intermediate Technology Publications, London, pages 45–54.

III. LESSONS LEARNT

a. What worked

- *THE PRIOR EXISTENCE of sanghas*: In all villages, except Mugad, unorganized communities were expected to plan. It was clear that Mugad was more capable of both planning and representing the interests of the poorest and of women who were organized into *sanghas* here. Therefore, the formation of *sanghas* among the poorest and most marginal-

ized communities came to be seen as a necessary first step in building their capacities to plan and to participate in general.

- *Planning iterations*: Historically, the poorest and women are the hardest groups to help. Therefore, separate planning iterations with them were seen as necessary to bring in their perspectives.
- *Going to the poor*: A staff person living in a village is especially needed to reach the poor and women so that they can work with them at times convenient to these groups.
- *Range of institutions*: A large international multi-institutional collaborative initiative such as this allowed different institutional strengths to be brought into the process.
- *Development expertise*: Having two NGOs with very different types of experiences allowed a range of different strategies to emerge, even on similar issues.
- *Documentation*: At every stage of planning, the documentation of the process provided the basis for analysis, reflection and change. The analysis of the processes that took place during the project was an important component of the study. Very little exists in either the formal literature or in the informal or "grey" literature on understanding participatory planning. More is written about participatory technology development methodologies (PTD) – but this was not a PTD project – and there is little analysis of the processes. Two noteworthy examples, however, are Sontheimer and Umans.[3]
- *Inputs from the universities*: Conceptual frameworks, logical frameworks and institutional frameworks developed by academic institutions helped place in a broader perspective the work being done on the ground.
- *PRA in planning*: NGOs in the past used PRA as an entry-point activity and for rapport-building. Information from the PRA was used to compare the situation of the community before and after interventions and also for planning by the NGOs. Here, NGOs learnt how to help communities utilize the information from PRA to define their own issues, present these issues and, finally, to draw up action plans. Thus, PRA here was used as a community planning tool.

b. The major problems and how they were addressed

- *Inclusion of the poor, women and the landless*: Whilst these groups were present at the meetings, initially they did not necessarily participate and, when they did, it was simply to agree with the more dominant groups. Thus, the initial plans on watershed management, agro-forestry and dairy did not address the primary concerns of the landless, women and the poor. They did not have any assets such as land or livestock. One landless woman, interviewed on the plans, asked: "*Where do I tie the goats, on my legs?*" indicating that, without such assets, none of the plans worked. This led to separate meetings with women and the poor, with the specific goal of getting them to define what would work for them; planning thus became an iterative process.
- *Gender perspective*: Women brought up the issue of alcoholism right at the beginning but, as the project goals were poverty alleviation and natural resource management, this was not addressed. However, in later meetings with women, they said that if alcoholism was not dealt with, all additional resources generated by the plans would be spent on alcohol. Thus, alcoholism is in fact a livelihood issue where, addition-

3. Sontheimer, S (1997), "Gender and participation in agricultural development planning: lessons from Nepal", Women in Development Service, FAO, background paper for the project Improving Information on Women's Contribution to Agricultural Production for Gender-sensitive Planning; also Umans, L (1998), "Participatory process analysis", *Forest, Trees and People* Newsletter 35.

ally, women need to gain access to and control over their incomes. Thus, community mobilization, particularly of women, was included as another major goal cutting across all the plans.

- *Addressing the concerns of the poor*: As separate meetings elicited that the poor need completely different plans, the goal of poverty alleviation must now emphasize initiatives to benefit the landless and women. However, even further into the process, and after various explorations with various institutions, it was, and still is, unclear to all stakeholders involved how the concerns of the poor are to be addressed. Identifying the poorest groups, overcoming fatalistic attitudes, and organizing people is relatively familiar territory. But how to enable them to develop sustainable livelihoods is as yet unclear

- *Working groups*: One tool originally conceived was the concept of working groups involving government, NGOs and the community. Here, government and researchers dominated the process, with the exception of one village, Mugad, where *sanghas* had already existed for ten years. When the poor and women are organized into *sanghas*, they have a higher capacity to identify and articulate their concerns and are taken more seriously by other community and government representatives. Thus, working groups could not be formed without the prior establishment of *sanghas*. Also, the first working groups formed were composed of district-level officials and village-level community representatives which, in itself, was not workable. On reflection, it was realized that if and when working groups were formed, community representatives should interact with village-level government representatives.

- *Sequencing*: If the process were to be replicated, the sequence would be first, *sangha* formation and, later, building the capacities of the *sanghas* of the poor to plan, and only then to formulate the plans. Building the capacities of the poor would involve training and exposing them to various income-generating activities, building their savings and their skills before plans could be formed.

- *Market intelligence*: Despite the NGOs having a great deal of experience in income generation, none of the institutions could adequately understand the market and the rapid changes due to globalization. Thus, one lacuna in the plans was knowing how to deal with the market, for which institutional capacity building in the planning phase itself would have been very useful.

c. Other lessons

Government interaction

- Timing of government involvement is important in that the capacity and skills of women and the poor need to be built to negotiate with government on equal terms.

- The working group concept needs to be open-ended to accommodate different levels of government. Here, it took the form of a steering committee at district level. At the grassroots level, a strategy for the involvement of grassroots government functionaries is still being developed and groups also need capacity building to deal with government.

- Separate training of government representatives is needed to change their perspectives on participatory holistic planning, to understand their roles as facilitators and to orient them towards the entire process. Government officials need to be trained in participatory methods and in

learning how to involve the community in planning, monitoring and implementation. There should also be some provision for gender sensitization for officials. There is also little awareness among government officials of how urbanization affects peri-urban dwellers or of how policies might be amended to address this.

Implications of peri-urban characteristics on planning and community mobilization
• Kelgeri was seen as having the most peri-urban features in terms of urban attitudes and the degree of commercialization. Consequently, people in Kelgeri were difficult to organize. Frequent interventions by urban institutions and visits by politicians and government generate patron–client attitudes in peri-urban villages like Kelgeri. People here wanted to see a clear material gain in return for attending meetings or getting organized. Furthermore, because their natural resources were controlled by urban institutions such as the university and HDMC, it was difficult to find solutions based on natural resource management. In the end, this village was dropped from the project because of its urban features.
• Urban opportunities such as larger markets overcome one of the most difficult problems faced by *sanghas*, which is the marketing of their produce. Options for earning incomes in the city year-round, and consequent migration, is an incentive for people to seek opportunities, but also a disincentive for self-help and for investing in their own villages. Thus, whilst multifaceted solutions are possible in peri-urban areas, drawing on both rural and urban opportunities, mobilization of the community is more difficult.
• In the peri-urban interface, urban and rural authorities need to collaborate, for which there is no precedent. An example is the treatment of sewage flowing into peri-urban villages, some of which is the responsibility of urban government and some the responsibility of rural government. The obvious solution of a sewage treatment plant was unsustainable as it was not clear which institution would pay for its maintenance. Thus, some orientation would be required for all institutions to set the stage for collaboration in the PUI.