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GENDER IN THE PERIURBAN

Periurban spaces are zones in transition at the urban fringes or close to expanding agglomerations. They are often considered as geographical patchwork spaces characterized by diverse functions (food and water security, provision of livelihoods, ecosystem services, etc.), a mosaic of land uses with rural and urban features, a multiplicity of stakeholders sometimes with diverging interests, and overlapping governance structures. These features create diverse opportunities, but also expose periurban spaces to deep transformations and make them challenging to govern

Policy Recommendations

- Promote and support more co-production of knowledge through participatory action research that incorporates voices from a wide range of stakeholders recognizing differential values, priorities, agencies and actions of different communities, social and gender groups, governance levels, and sectors of knowledge
- Identify, document, and scale scattered innovative civil society and local administrative initiatives emerging for such informal and complex periurban spaces
- Building flexibility in policy designs, convergence between existing policies from different departments, and incorporating gender concepts in policy language can strengthen policy based periurban gender interventions
- Incorporate gender intersectionality in all interventions (class, caste, migrant, age, disability, age, tribal identities)
- Incorporating men in understanding and responding to gendered issues
- Build networks and solidarities among multiple stakeholders to push for more integrated and holistic transformations of issues around unequal gendered work burdens, labour exploitation, and violence. These key stakeholders can vary for different urban contexts and therefore intervention points and nodal stakeholders for impact need to be context specific.
- Use of digital platforms to map, integrate, disseminate, and improve access to basic services to reduce women's domestic work burdens spent on accessing these services

Gender challenges in the periurban

Several characteristics and processes of periurban spaces contribute to creating gendered outcomes. The Census 2011 data shows that for many gender indicators periurban areas are distinct outliers from the expected urban-rural transition. These indicators include population growth rate, ratio of family member dependency ratio on adult women in household, and women's work participation rates. The periurban therefore clearly provides a unique gender space. This gendered space manifests through access to basic material needs such as water and food security, work burdens, access to choices. There are varied sources of gendered vulnerabilities in the periurban spaces.

Deteriorating Periurban water ecology – Periurban water ecologies are rapidly deteriorating due to polluting industries, urban waste flows, and water extraction for urban supply in periurban areas. The burdens of the consequent water scarcity is felt most by women, especially those from the poor households, as they face traditional water collection and management burdens. Women spend more time collecting water in periurban areas particularly in lean seasons and perceive having lesser time consequently for self care, domestic responsibilities, and paid labour.

Inadequate access to public services – These spaces are often excluded from adequate public services such as health and WASH as they do not cleanly fit into rural/urban governance and policy frames. As a result access to basic services like health and WASH here is met through private and/or informal service coverage at high costs which create access barriers for women. The work burdens associated with poor access to basic services exclude women from the labor

market or place them under exploitative contractor driven systems of employment. This affects their access to schemes and public support on nutritional/reproductive health aspects/immunization/family education.

High migrant population inflows and loss of social networks – High migration into the region with nuclear families cause people, especially women, to be uprooted from their social and familial networks of their origin areas. Coupled with

lack of access to quality urban services and declining work opportunities for women, there is high incidence of violence on women both in domestic and public spaces in these regions. There is a lack of safe public spaces in precarious peripheries, as spaces of migration and minimal service provision and governance, poor social and economic viability of these spaces particularly for women. Poverty, lack of transportation, poor community infrastructure such as toilets especially for women from socially excluded and stigmatized groups (indigenous, migrants, disabled, trans communities), further reduces ability of women to participate in social life and services.

Gender related interventions in periurban spaces

Participatory research methods: A Transformation Pathways method used by the H2O-T2S project had significant inputs and potential interventions for a more gendered understanding of periurban areas and their future planning pathways. These include - coproducing with stakeholders, enabling them to envision their futures away from the status quo, and stretching their ability to look beyond their lack of agency to affect their future. It also enables recognition of differential values, priorities, agencies and actions between communities, stakeholder groups, and gender categories.

Innovative grassroots interventions: In informal settlements at the peripheries interventions such as on-site schools, mobile health vans, e-mamta tracking systems for maternal health, clustered anganwadis, incentives for frontline workers to go to these remote locations, were scattered efforts from civil society and local administrative initiatives that were found to be effective initiatives requiring more upscaling (Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi).

Flexible policy designs: Designing government schemes for urban/rural services with a flexible fit for purpose approach with flexible funding structures to enable local governments to customize service provision, was found to be important for periurban areas that often break clean urban/rural/formal/informal boundaries. Policies such as the RURBAN Mission, focused entirely on infrastructural development of small peripheral towns and clusters of villages around main cities through convergence of existing government schemes in these growing peripheries. In most policies however, while benefitting women largely through more general and basic infrastructure development, 'gender' is not specifically incorporated in the policy, the language of gender hardly exists.

Women-led networks and solidarities: Along with the top-down policy framework, bottom-up emergent initiatives like women-led mobilizations and larger solidarities brought focus to gendered burdens of this context. Building and supporting such solidarities and networks was found to be an important direction not only in interventions seeking to improve basic services but also to create safe spaces for women. The Safer Cities Flagship Program initiative of UNWomen built solidarities at grassroots levels with civil society and frontline actors. It approached multiple stakeholders ranging from police to transport corporations, mapped dark spaces through digital apps, and brought together essential services through digital mapping and outreach. It focused on the co-design of locally relevant solutions with affected groups to create safe spaces for women.

Womens' entrepreneurship: Finally, another positive intervention looked at the potential for building womens' entrepreneurship in urbanizing rural areas connecting business models to improved access to hygiene (in this case, menstrual health products). This initiative from NAARI involved making and selling biodegradable cloth pads and creating menstrual health awareness as a business model for women entrepreneurs through womens' collectives. Market linkages with urban centres leverage these businesses and as rural areas urbanise these initiatives get strengthened through improving market linkages. Also women are better prepared and less vulnerable to urbanizing trends than when they are displaced from agriculture labour. This initiative also capitalizes on the trend that among the youth there is greater interest in such entrepreneurship rather than agriculture labour and this can be supported through better skilling and education. The initiative also incorporated men in understanding and responding to gendered issues.

Acknowledgement: The brief is a part of a combined "Transforming Periurban Futures - Policy Report" as an outcome based on research, practises and case study experiences discussed in the conference on "Transforming Peri-urban Futures" in India, January 18-19, 2022: <http://saciwaters.org/t2speriurban/conferences.html> . We acknowledge the presenters, discussants and participants for their inputs into this brief.

Funding was provided via the project "H2O-T2S in Urban Fringe Areas", financially supported by the Belmont Forum and NORFACE Joint Research Programme on Transformations to Sustainability, which is co-funded by AKA, ANR, DLR/BMBF, ESRC, FAPESP, FNRS, FWO, ISSC, JST, NSF, NWO, RCN, VR, and the European Commission through Horizon 2020 under grant agreement No. 730211.

Citation: "H2O-T2S & SPA Bhopal. 2022. Policy Brief No. 3: Gender in the Periurban. In Transforming Periurban Futures. Policy Report. Outcomes of an online science-policy conference, January 18-19, 2022. SaciWATERS, SPA Bhopal, Delft University of Technology and University of Cologne. March 2022: pp 10-11

