

Node: Suite Summary^{1,2}

PUI: New knowledge of participation in decision-making

Context

Urban expansion is expected to accommodate most of the population growth of developing countries. Many of the urban dwellers will be rural-to-urban migrants who will either originate in areas affected by the peri-urban interface (PUI) or will settle in such areas as they enter the urban economy. Research has found evidence that the in-migration and greater urban contact of a PUI can erode social capital and can change attitudes and that changes in community composition alter traditional social structures and status. One result was a reduction in community-based action; another was a restricted input of the poorest community members into decision making and planning.

Government agencies and NGOs do not always fully recognise the abilities of people, especially those who are poor, to collectively formulate reasonable responses to threats and opportunities. Consequently, they tend to impose their own plans, which may well be inappropriate in the context of a PUI characterised by changing populations, physical conditions and livelihoods, and by fragmented management.

In the course of studying the role of natural resources (NRs) in livelihoods and poverty in the PUI, NRSP research initiated and supported participatory action planning in a number of communities near to two cities – Kumasi in Ghana and Hubli-Dharwad in India. The aim, in the face of threats to livelihoods from the impacts of urbanisation, was to use participatory action planning as a mechanism for generating proposals that could be tested for new or enhanced livelihood activities that might benefit the poor. Subsequently, project team members and NRSP management realised that their research could yield valuable knowledge of participatory action planning in decision making for NR management. Projects in this Node: Suite address this issue.

Research Topics

- What can poor PUI people benefit from participatory action planning concerned with NR management?
- What possibilities are there for interventions to initiate and support such participatory action planning?
- What new knowledge about participatory action planning can be drawn from these experiences?

Projects

Participatory action planning was initiated in Hubli-Dharwad (R7959) and Kumasi (R7995) as parallel but unconnected activities (see project links below). Both projects worked in villages which were studied by previous NRSP PUI research and both utilised NGOs with

¹ This document summarises NRSP's work in one of its Uptake Promotion Node: suites. For further details and links to project and project documents see <http://www.nrsp.org.uk/6.aspx>

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community development experience and worked through community facilitators. Even so, engaging the poorest villagers was a difficult challenge throughout. The planning produced proposals for alternative livelihood activities in each case.

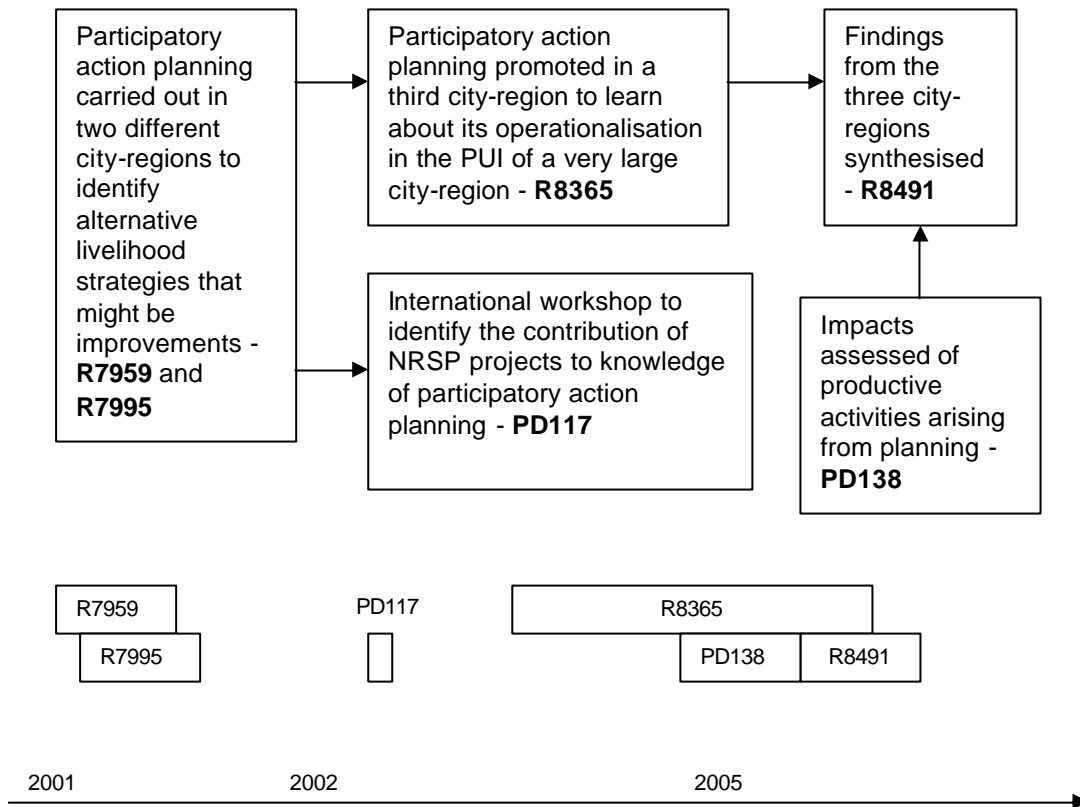
These two projects contributed experiences to PD117 – an international workshop that aimed to draw upon all participatory planning initiated by NRSP research in order that, among other things, the NRSP's area of comparative advantage in research on participation might be identified. Later, support to participatory planning was proposed as a follow up to research on PUI NR production in the East Kolkata Wetlands (R8365): learning about participatory action planning at the PUI of a large metropolitan area was its primary objective.

Although adequate time had not elapsed for full impacts to become visible, the immediate consequences of the new livelihood activities inspired by the planning of Hubli-Dharwad and Kumasi PUI villagers were identified and assessed in 2004-2005 (PD138).

As the NRSP research on the three PUI came to an end, the findings were compared and contrasted in a synthesis study (R8491). This report included significant conclusions regarding participatory action planning.

In Kumasi and Hubli-Dharwad, it was intended that participating PUI villagers would benefit from the participatory action planning by formulating proposals for new productive activities. In the later Kolkata project (R8365), the intended beneficiaries were not only the villagers, but also those agencies of government and international development that engaged in the planning process. It was also anticipated that some general lessons could be drawn about participatory planning in PUI circumstances that could benefit the wider academic and development assistance world.

Project links within PUI Suite 3: 2001 - 2005



Outputs

Findings

Interventions that enable poor people living at the PUI to experiment with new productive activities can improve livelihoods. Planning and implementing new productive activities in the research villages had a positive impact on basic livelihoods assets in that there was a positive impact on financial capital, on skills (human capital), and on cooperation, empathy and unity (social capital). Where actions were initiated as part of the research, there was more change to new or enhanced productive activity compared with those PU people or villages that did not participate in the research. For project participants, there were gains in self-respect, confidence and increased status within the family and the community. Project participants became more confident in their ability to make livelihood change and to approach a wider range of institutions, either individually or collectively, to obtain the services and support they needed to improve their lives and incomes.

Poor people affected by a PUI can be helped to move to new livelihood activities by participatory action planning. Rural communities that are poor can formulate plans for managing their livelihoods to cope with urban impacts, and this appears to promote their enthusiastic experimentation with the proposals of these plans. Their proposals may include non-NR based productive activities as well as those that are NR-based, in order to take advantage of new urban opportunities.

NGO action to initiate and support participatory action planning – where this included implementation of a unique action plan for the whole community, creation of self help groups, and provision of credit, training and information – appeared to help people to move into new productive activities from which they benefited directly.

An innovative approach used at the Kolkata PUI succeeded in giving poor people a better voice in planning. Stakeholders of various powers and incomes were successfully brought together using planning groups that cut across existing geographic, administrative and interest boundaries. The groups were formed by organising stakeholders around a focus on the use of land or on a particular production process, as opposed to the more usual focus on a particular geographic place or area.

Research messages

- Participatory planning can assist the PUI poor to experiment with alternative livelihood strategies leading to direct pro-poor benefits. It can also help PUI people articulate demands for support from service providers.
- The findings of this research demonstrate the relevance of development agencies of all kinds collaborating with communities for participatory planning, even in the difficult circumstances created by a PUI.
- Policy makers can use the initiation and/or support of participatory action planning, along with other interventions such as promoting NGO action, community facilitation, and access to credit, to help PU poor people to move to alternative livelihood activities that may benefit them.
- The participation of poor people in development planning can be improved by forming a planning group whose membership is defined more by a common interest in specific productive activities than by a common interest in a geographic location.

Key research products

- Final Technical Report for Project R7959. 2001. School of Agricultural and Forest Sciences, University of Wales, Bangor.
- Final Technical Report for Project R7995. 2002. CEDEP (Centre for the Education and Development of People), Kumasi, Ghana.
- Purushothaman, S., Purohit, S. and Ambrose-Oji, B. 2004. The informal collective as a space for participatory planning: the peri-urban interface in Hubli-Dharwad twin city area. In Purkayasha, B. and Subramaniam, M. (Eds.) The power of women's informal networks: lessons in social change from South Asia and West Africa, Lexington Books, USA.
- Final Technical Report for Project R8365. 2005. Institute of Aquaculture, University of Stirling, UK.
- Final Technical Report for Project R8491. Development Planning Unit, University College London, London.

Impacts

- In both the project locations of Kumasi (12 villages) and Hubli-Dharwad (8 villages), beneficiaries who took part in the planning and subsequent trials of alternative livelihood activities, perceived an increase in their overall well-being and the number of households ranked as poor declined.

- Within the organisations on the research teams, knowledge of participatory planning has substantially increased, changing attitudes, practices, and institutional knowledge. These are all organisations that operate well beyond the sites of the research.
- Local NGOs and governments have approached the project teams for knowledge of participatory action planning.
- The Department for International Development, UK, asked for these findings to put into briefing documents destined for its country desks and advisers.
- Proposals for improvement of poor PU people's livelihoods produced through their participation in planning in the East Kolkata Wetlands are being included in the draft overarching management plan for the wetlands.
- Evidence of uptake of knowledge about participatory action planning in a PU context has so far been limited to the participating villagers, to those neighbours who are learning from them, and to the organisations in the research teams.
- Uptake by other local, country, and international users is not yet evident. Uptake occurring in these organisations is not likely to be discernable in the short term.

Further work

Participatory action planning was initiated in Hubli-Dharwad and Kumasi as a means to an end. The analysis of projects' experiences of participatory action planning under this Node: suite was not exhaustive and there are opportunities for further analysis of these experiences. For example, process documentation exists for all three PU locations and could yield new knowledge about what occurs during participatory planning in a PUI context. In the Kolkata case there is particular potential to extract important lessons about the linking of a wide range of levels of power, from the community to the government of an enormous city, across traditional rural-urban divides of policy and jurisdiction.