INSIDE STORIES
on climate compatible development

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Key messages

In peri-urban areas of Gorakhpur city in Uttar Pradesh, northern India, agriculture-based livelihoods are highly vulnerable to climate hazards. Success factors for climate-resilient development in this context include:

- Resilience interventions should recognise the varying climate impacts on different socioeconomic groups in peri-urban areas. Interventions should be attuned to the differing development needs and priorities of residents, especially those of low-income communities. Women require targeted attention, with disaggregated tracking to monitor how they are benefiting from programme measures.

- Women's full and equal participation makes a substantial contribution to the positive impacts and sustainability of climate-compatible development programmes.

- Where possible, programmes should support community institutions to address structural governance challenges that constrain women's participation in decision-making.

- There is a need to strengthen collective community voices for asserting rights and accessing resources for climate-resilient development.

- Programme managers can engage mass media, civil society fora and other social institutions to support climate resilience activities, in order to influence public opinion and augment the voices of marginalised groups.

- Elected representatives at city ward level (known as 'Corporators' in India), as well as officials in city government would benefit from learning more about gender-related interventions and outcomes, through targeted engagements by resilience programmes.

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Fostering peri-urban resilience: Gender-responsive approaches in northern India

Uttar Pradesh is one of India's poorest states and its farmers have experienced considerable changes in the climate in recent years – from longer summers and harsher winters to much less predictable rains. Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG) has been working with local people, mostly farmers on small and marginal plots, to address these climatic changes and to empower women to embrace a more climate-compatible form of development.

The challenges are many. As rapid urbanisation occurs, traditional gender roles are also subject to change. Kinship networks erode, which leaves families and communities with less ability to bear shocks such as extreme weather events.

India has aspirations for its cities, as articulated in the Indian Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and Smart Cities Mission (see box, next page). In the design of these policies, the urban population is treated as a homogeneous group; however, it is anything but that. There are differences of class, age, gender and spatial location in cities, all of which affect

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Don't give us money, just link us with schemes and programmes and access to knowledge – we will prosper.
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Asha Devi, peri-urban farmer

people's exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards, including climate hazards. If the government wants to make cities climate-resilient and fit for the future, they must consider these complex factors.

Women's participation in delivering these major climate-smart development programmes is currently low, especially in urban areas. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of the Government of India devolved planning to the ward, neighbourhood, and city levels, but devolution is not yet well implemented.

Challenges for truly inclusive and effective climate-compatible development in India's cities include:

- Urban local bodies lack sensitisation on gender issues.
- Urban local bodies, parastatal organisations, state development departments and civil society do not coordinate enough.

- Structural governance mechanisms constrain the participation of women, such as the selection of civil servants and election of representatives in a gender-blind way. This favours men's greater influence and power in society and, typically, men's comparatively greater confidence in applying for these roles.
- There is not integrated governance of urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Whereas, in reality, these geographic areas interact and exist and evolve along a continuum, they are governed in silos. Furthermore, peri-urban spaces are becoming the new 'address' for the poorest people.
- Natural ecosystems play a crucial role in urban resilience, and livelihoods that depend heavily on environmental resources are largely women's work. However, there is a general lack of awareness of the gendered nature of ecosystem management and resource-dependent livelihoods. This gendered reality is not adequately recognised or addressed in policy-making and development practice.
- Collection of gender-disaggregated data should be required, but does not happen in practice.

- There is an urgent need to build the capacity of the urban local bodies to assess for, plan for and implement more climate-resilient and gender-responsive development in urban and peri-urban areas.

Bolstering resilience: pilot activities with the potential to be scaled up

A project by GEAG aims to strengthen understanding of the crucial role of urban and peri-urban ecosystems among professionals engaged in policy, resource allocation, urban planning and on-the-ground implementation of development activities.

The existing roles of women as stewards of natural resources are explored as part of the project, with a view to giving women more equal roles, recognition and exercise of legal rights in natural resource management. The project highlights two key opportunities for strengthening and scaling up integrated solutions for urban and peri-urban resilience and gender equality.

Strengthening decision-makers' understanding of resilience

The first area relates to strengthening urban and peri-urban decision-makers' understanding of resilience issues – and the importance of gender and social inclusion dimensions in building resilience.

Decision-makers are beginning to become more aware of the role of improved natural resources management in strengthening society's resilience to climate-related and other shocks and stresses. This recognition is reflected, for example, in the policy guidelines of the National Institute of Disaster

Management, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), Bihar Roadmap for Disaster Risk Reduction, State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs), etc. GEAG is working to build the capacity of these critical institutions.

There is also an urgent need to sensitise parliamentarians and high-level policy-makers to urban and peri-urban resilience issues, so that they endorse the required policies and channel the necessary budgetary allocations through the National Institute of Disaster Management. Orientation and capacity-building for related government department officials, urban local bodies and city planners is also needed.

A greater step-change in awareness could be achieved by 'training the trainers': viewing national think tanks and academic institutions as seedbeds for government leadership. Academic institutions, such as the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi, see a clear need to integrate practical case study experiences on peri-urban resilience in their courses. Such institutions would benefit from more training materials and toolkits on peri-urban and urban resilience to incorporate in their ongoing training programmes and course curricula.

GEAG is also pressing for official recognition of peri-urban spaces, so that these could be governed in a more holistic way, thus increasing resilience. At present, unrestricted construction due to lack of coordinated governance has increased cities' absorption of heat (the urban heat island effect) and increased run-off, all of which is counter to climate resilience. Governance issues are explored in greater detail in the sister CDKN publication 'Peri-urban areas in India: the potential for a planned approach'. [1]

Woman farmers in peri-urban agriculture field in Gorakhpur. Photo: GEAG

Delivering resilience programmes in ways that enhance gender equality

The second key area for strengthening and scaling up is in gender-inclusive programme practices. GEAG's experience suggests that popular participatory methods developed in the context of rural settings can be adapted to suit the urban setting.

GEAG has successfully road-tested Participatory Urban Appraisals through numerous small meetings in urban and peri-urban communities. These fore-grounded the diversity of factors and issues involved in vulnerability and resilience-building. GEAG found that project activities could be readily

Glossary of key terms

Corporator: The elected local government representative at ward level (which is a sub-district of a city).

Greenfield site: A greenfield is an undeveloped site in an urban area (e.g. that has been used as a parkland or other amenity) or in a rural area (e.g. that has been used as agricultural land or that has been left in a more natural state).

Urban local bodies (ULBs): This is a catch-all term that refers to all urban local governments in India. The names of these local governments differ, depending on the population size of the urban area they govern (with some historic exceptions). Since 1992, there have been three categories:

- Municipal Corporation: for cities with populations over 1 million people.
- Municipality: for cities with populations between 100,000 and 1 million (with some exceptions of smaller cities).
- Notified Area Council or City Council: for urban areas with 11,000 – 25,000 inhabitants.

Ward: In India, this is an administrative unit smaller than a city; inhabitants of wards elect representatives to sit on the relevant city government.

adapted to address gender differences; for example, by working through community volunteers and arranging meetings to suit men's and women's availability.

Community-based institutions that provide enhanced spaces for women's voices and women's interests have been helpful in compensating for the inadequate space for women in formal institutions. At the same time, community-based organisations have influenced formal institutions to take women's considerations into account.

Mixed meetings and fora have helped men and women of different castes and classes to become more aware of the challenges they face and take decisions jointly. Participatory consultations have brought out the diverse needs and priorities of community members, as well as a range of skills that were used to contribute to climate-compatible development. Local media have also played a crucial role in amplifying marginal voices.

It is difficult to achieve a common understanding and sense of purpose around sustainable natural resource management in peri-urban communities, given the limited social cohesion in such settings and weak degree of community control over common resources; for instance, where in-migration rates are high. Although it is difficult to strengthen collective voices for asserting rights and accessing

Construction in waterbody in peri-urban areas of Gorakhpur. Photo: GEAG

resources for climate-compatible development, it is vital to try.

Finally, just as it is critical to increase public officials' understanding of the need to improve peri-urban resilience, it is also important to brief elected representatives at city ward level (the Corporators) as well as officials in city government, the media and the larger public about gender-related interventions and outcomes.

Conclusion

Peri-urban and urban areas are highly intricate and dynamic. In these contexts, there is no single magic bullet for improving urban resilience and gender equality. However, experience points to the

need for a two-pronged strategy: on one side, careful training of trainers and sensitisation of policy-makers and planners to the complex issues of resilience and vulnerability at play; and on the other side, engagement with peri-urban and urban social groups in all their diversity, with particular attention and space given to those whose voices are traditionally less heard.

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Community women owned climate-resilient farming because they felt their needs and priorities are being addressed.

❞ Amarjeet Sahani, GEAG

Endnotes

1 Verma, Simant (2020, forthcoming). 'Peri-urban areas in India: the potential for a planned approach'. Cape Town: CDKN.

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Front cover photo: A peri-urban woman farmer who works in a guava orchard – one of the important ecosystems in the peri-urban areas of Gorakhpur. Photo: GEAG