

**Environmental Governance  
across the Rural-Urban Divide:**

*The Case Study of Hubli-Dharwad India*

*for*

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**Best Practices Foundation**  
1 Palmgrove Road, Victoria Layout,  
Bangalore - 560 047,  
Karnataka, India

Tel: +91-80-25301861  
Email: [bpfound@gmail.com](mailto:bpfound@gmail.com)  
[www.bestpracticesfoundation.com](http://www.bestpracticesfoundation.com)

## **Environmental Governance across the Rural-Urban Divide. The Case Study of Hubli Dharward, India.**

Adriana Allen and Sangeetha Purushothaman

### **Abstract**

This article discusses the institutional vacuum in dealing with periurban issues in India. In the context of the problems faced by periurban communities, the inability of institutions to handle these problems are highlighted. The web of institutionalisation has been used as an analytical tool to understand the opportunities and constraints within each element of the web, namely the people's, policy, organizational and delivery and knowledge spheres. Formal and informal institutional mechanisms that were explored have been analysed in the context of the peri urban interface (PUI).

### **Introduction**

There is a growing recognition that rural livelihood strategies are becoming increasingly diversified and less reliant on natural resources. Whilst in India and more generally in South Asia the majority of rural poor are still primarily engaged in agricultural activities, the last decade has witnessed several changes that impact on rural livelihoods. On the one hand more rural people are moving to urban areas, while on the other hand, within rural areas, people are moving out of agriculturally-based occupations. This trend is often associated with factors such as growing pressure on natural resources, declining ecological productivity and declining conditions in agricultural trade, among others. The link between the decline of natural-resource based livelihoods, poverty and livelihoods diversification is even more significant – and arguably more complex - in the peri-urban context. This is not only because natural resources are here at the interface of conflictive and competing demands from rural and urban areas but also because the opportunities for livelihoods diversification are more prominent due to the easier accessibility to urban-based jobs, markets and information that characterises periurban interface (PUI). In this context, the opportunities and constraints for the poor to climb out of poverty are conditioned by a complex mix of institutions (urban and rural, statutory and customary, formal and informal). The main purpose of this article is to contribute towards the understanding of the institutional setting governing the use of natural resources and the livelihood options of the poor in the peri-urban context.

In India since the early 1990s, bold institutional reforms towards decentralization have been introduced both in urban and rural areas. All these reforms stressed the role of the 'community' placing, at least in theory, a significant emphasis on local participation, decentralized governance and social capital.

Urban and rural areas are increasingly linked through flows of people, goods, capital, information, natural resources and wastes. This means that in social and cultural terms it is becoming increasingly difficult to establish universal features of urban-rural differences (Qadeer, 2000). This raises questions about the methods of data collection and the information available for comparative purposes, but more fundamentally about the assumptions broadly used that link rural and urban dwellers respectively with agrarian and industrial activities. These distinctions get even hazier in the PUI. As highlighted by Feldman (1999), the study of urban-rural links is essential for the development of “policy alternatives that contribute to sustaining both urban and rural lives and livelihoods, inform new institutional initiatives, and link broad questions about infrastructural reorganisation to new relations of global exchange” (page 5)

The issues faced by periurban communities do not respect administrative boundaries. Thus they need rural and urban services provided by government institutions, which can only cater to one or the other. Thus it is pertinent to ask to what extent do these reforms address the reality of periurban communities? Does decentralization, when divided on rural urban lines, provide the same access to decision making for periurban communities as it does for rural or urban communities?

The analysis is based on the findings of two action research projects conducted by a multi-disciplinary team between the years 2000-2005. The research was concerned with understanding the impact of different strategies to enhance the livelihoods of the poor and natural resource (NR) management in six peri-urban villages in the city-region of Hubli-Dharwad in the State of Karnataka. The projects were supported by the Natural Resources Systems Programme (NRSP) of the UK Department for International Development. The paper examines the opportunities and constraints encountered in the attempt to bridge the rural and urban institutional divide. Thus, reference is made to the institutional structures and arrangements that currently deal with the management of natural resources (NRs) and livelihoods in the peri-urban context of Hubli-Dharwad and also to the evaluation of alternative arrangements explored throughout the life of the projects.

This article examine in brief the history of institutions in India, followed by an analysis of the formal and informal institutional mechanisms that deal with rural urban linkages. It goes on to explore the opportunities and constraints in found within each sphere of the web of institutions that prevent or promote cooperative governance in the PUI.

### ***The Hubli-Dharwad Peri-Urban Interface***

The twin cities of Hubli and Dharwad are situated in the Dharwad district of Karnataka state in the south of India. Located twenty kilometers apart, Hubli and Dharwad cities come under the jurisdiction of the Hubli Dharwad Municipal Corporation. Dharwad historically has housed both the major universities and government headquarters while Hubli is the hub for commerce and trade. .

The choice of Hubli-Dharwad as a site for the research was appropriate because Hubli-Dharwad is a combination of two adjacent medium-sized cities with a rural area between and around them.

This hinterland is heavily influenced by the two cities and presents a significant number of peri-urban characteristics, namely rapidly changing land use patterns, new industry and new populations that seek employment in industry and so on (Brook and Dávila, 2000). The economy of Dharwad district is predominantly agrarian in nature, though the twin cities of Hubli-Dharwad -constitute one of the major industrial centres in the state of Karnataka. The six periurban villages were selected based on previous work done by NGOs and existence of self help groups (SHGs), previous research and information available, village characteristics, institutions governing the villages (rural or urban) and the potential for scaling up.

Mugad located 10 kms west of Dharwad has 1,200 households. It has a large tank, forest land and common lands. Keeping the last criteria in mind, a cluster approach was adopted where Mandihal and Daddikamalapur were included as part of the Mugad cluster. Mandihal is 12 kms west of Dharwad, has 254 households and its main livelihood feature is the existence of stone quarries. Daddikamalapur has 89 households and is located 8 kms west of Dharwad. Its primary livelihood feature is dairy catering to the needs of Dharwad city. Kotur, located 12 kms north west of Dharwad has 700 households many of whose livelihoods are linked to the nearby industrial estate. All six villages fall under the Panchayati Raj (rural) system with the exception of Gabbur which falls under the HDMC. Gabbur is situated 5 kms south east of Hubli, is a small village with 78 households and is known for vegetable cultivation through sewage irrigation. Channapur is 13 kms south of Hubli, with 242 households. Women produce and sell butter and ghee in Hubli. Channapur and the Mugad cluster are surrounded by forests and also have village forest committees. All the villages have water bodies.

### **Approach and Methodology**

A participatory approach was adopted community-based organizations led the entire planning and implementation processes across the two action research projects.<sup>1</sup>. Action plans were built where NGOs played an instrumental role in facilitating people's active involvement defining issues prioritizing them and creating action plans. Most importantly NGOs mobilized people into SHGs and created a broad based platform for both planning and for future implementation.

The study was a qualitative exercise based on primarily qualitative data and analysis. Both the primary and the secondary data were collected from various relevant sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, group discussions and focused group discussions, PRA techniques, observation and interviews with key informants to get the responses and views of the respondents.

A number of officials at the district level were interviewed twice first in 2003 and a second time in 2004 covering the following broad areas on their perceptions of: the concept of the periurban interface, the issues affecting periurban areas, potential mechanisms and areas for collaboration

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the research action nature of the projects, the team was constituted by a mix of researchers and practitioners. In India the projects were led by the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) and Best Practices Foundation. Two non-government organisations were responsible for the action component at the grassroots level: BAIF Development Research Foundation and India Development Service (IDS). The School of Agricultural and Forest Sciences of the University of Wales Bangor was the lead research organisation, while the Development Planning Unit, University College London and the School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham were responsible for the institutional analysis component of the projects.

across rural urban lines, participatory processes and capacity building needs. Officials were interviewed twice with the idea of measuring changes in attitudes but most of the original officials interviewed the first time had been transferred and therefore measuring changes in attitudes was not possible. Officials chosen for the first round of interviews were those who were involved in the project in various capacities as well as those who were important to the project but were not involved.

Additionally participant observation and minuting of meetings held to discuss collaboration and the informal agreements made between officials and NGOs supplemented these interviews. Venn diagrams were conducted with the team and the villages to examine their views on the importance of certain institutions at different stages of the project.

## **1. Institutional Arrangements of the Peri-Urban Interface**

The institutional context of the peri-urban interface (PUI) is characterized by fragmentation due to the convergence of sectoral and overlapping institutions with different spatial and physical remits. The changing geographical location of the PUI, leads institutional arrangements, and areas of responsibility that tend to be either too small or too large, too urban or too rural to effectively address poverty and environmental concerns. In addition, private sector bodies as well as non-governmental and community based organisations also intervene in the management of peri-urban areas, but often without clear articulation or leadership from government structures. The constraints faced in the environmental planning and management of the PUI are a direct outcome of this fragmented institutional response (Allen, 2003).

In the context of natural resources, institutions refer to the rules that define endowment, entitlement, access and control over resources, duties and responsibility. These rules may be derived from government legislation, regulation, customs, norms and various other formal and informal arrangements. Ostrom (1991) distinguishes between operational rules that govern day-to-day decisions, collective rules that decide how to change operational rules and who can change them, and constitutional choice rules that are used to craft collective rules. The rules are usually nested, as one set of rules define how other sets of rules can be changed. Formal institutions include government organizations (including local self governments) and regulatory authorities, non-government organizations and users' associations (water user's associations, village forest committees, fishermen's associations and cooperatives). Formal institutions are mostly legal entities, registered under law. Whereas informal institutions are enforced endogenously and are embedded in the local customs, behaviour patterns, norms and traditions. Both formal and informal institutions coexist and influence the use and management of natural resources in the PUI.

Institutional analysis has been pursued from a number of angles and through numerous frameworks, ranging from game-theoretical models that examine how agents deliberate and decide over different possibilities (Aoki, 2001) to those frameworks focused on the analysis of the institutional arrangements, rights and rules that define and affect the context within which different agents operate. In relation to natural resources management, the literature on institutional analysis tends to identify institutions with either predetermined rules that create incentives and disincentives for collective action or contractual arrangements inherently defined

by agents in their interaction with each other and with the environment. The former approach is characteristic of New Institutional Economics, whilst the latter is based on Common Property Management. As argued by Baumann et al (2003), “[b]oth approaches fail to account for the impact of external factors on social power and how these factors constitute, reproduce or change relations between different resource users” (page 16). This has led to a closer examination of the micro and macro institutional processes that frame environmental governance as being deeply embedded within the political economy.

The debate on governance has expanded significantly in the last fifteen years. This has been associated with an increased concern on the side of the international community not only to understand but to improve the general conditions for policy making encompassed by the values of participatory democracy, social justice and environmental sustainability. This preoccupation has resulted in an overarching and often prescriptive debate of the most appropriate governing practices to promote co-responsibility and synergy among different social actors. In some cases, the outcomes of this debate have even become organised as an external conditionality prescribed by international institutions, such as in the debate surrounding the concept of ‘good governance’. But contrary to the general view, the current debate goes beyond a concern for establishing a relatively formalised set of prescriptive governing practices aimed at addressing the perceived evils of corruption and autocracy among the public sector or to facilitate the operation of the private sector in the delivery of services. In the field of environmental politics, increasingly the debate on governance is focusing on the emergence of new institutional forms associated with cooperative management regimes, which “attempt to organise society through the means of association and public deliberation, and represent alternatives to hierarchies and markets as modes of coordination” (Gomez Cosío, 2004:1). A genuine alternative would imply the existence of participation of civil society in both decision making and in implementation.

Over time, the concept of governance has been given many different meanings and interpretations but perhaps the best established definition is one that refers to the ‘governability’ of a polity or, in other words the capacity of a political system to govern efficiently and to provide the necessary political conditions for economic and social development. This definition of governance has its origin in the mid 1970s and was particularly applied to comparative politics, but still enjoys widespread popularity. The association between the notions of governance and governability was initially aimed at providing an analytical framework to examine the ways in which different governments and governing practices facilitate or obstruct the governability of the polity, in particular in the context of the welfare and developmental state. This explains why the focus of the debate and academic research at the time was mainly on the role of the state, and particularly the national welfare state, assumed to act as a unified body upon a homogeneous society, generally understood as operating under capitalist and representative democracies (Bobbio, 1985).

In the 1990s, the concept of governance re-emerged with new connotations as it was re-assessed in a context characterised by significant transformations, including the dominance of neo-liberal politics and consequently, the withdrawal of the welfare state, economic globalisation and the emergence of multi-national corporations as agents with supra-national powers, as well as a wide recognition of the ecological crisis, the emergence of new social movements acting through local and global networks and a reappraisal of the role of local authorities in the development process.

Thus, the current governance debate is dominated by two contrasting definitions and set of concerns. On the one hand, part of the literature on governance still focuses mainly on the institutional capacity and performance of the state and the way it has adapted to recent developments. On the other hand, governance is increasingly being deployed as a notion that refers to “a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or changed condition of ordered rule, or the new method by which society is governed” (Rhodes, 1996:652-653). Pierre (2000) makes a distinction between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ notions of governance, which he re-characterises as ‘state-centric’ and ‘society-centred’ respectively.

Under this distinction, the state-centric approach is concerned with assessing the political and institutional capacity of the state to ‘steer’ society towards certain goals associated with the ‘public good’ and also with examining the relationship between the role of the state and the interests of other powerful actors. By contrast, the so-called ‘society centred’ approach is primarily concerned with the role of civil society in the governing process, and its relation with the state, through a variety of governance forms or institutional arrangements (Peters, 2000). Thus, from this approach, ‘governance’ refers to emerging ‘governing practices’ (Pierre and Peters, 2000) that seek “to develop new patterns of relation between diverse social actors (i.e. the public sector, business organisations, multilateral organisations, the voluntary and community sectors, etc) in an attempt to build greater ‘systemic capacity’ for collective action in the face of ‘cross-cutting and wicked’ policy problems” (Gomez Cosío, 2004:3). From an environmental perspective, this approach has been examined in relation to the scope for building and sustaining cooperative or collaborative governance, through a series of institutional arrangements and multi-agency ensembles, such as partnerships and networks devised for creating synergy among different social actors in the pursuit of public policy goals (Glasbergen, 1998). However, much of this analysis has focused so far on developed countries and on the design of such institutional arrangements to regulate environmental concerns.

This article, and the research behind it, adopts a society-centred approach to governance, as the aim is to contribute to the understanding of the institutional conditions that facilitate or prevent rural-urban collaboration and, in particular, the way these affect the decisions of the periurban poor in relation to livelihood strategies and the management of natural resources. A society-centred approach is relevant to this purpose because it allows the examination of alternative modes of governance to those that mainly focus either hierarchical structures (such as the state) or the market. These alternative modes of governance are less reliant on top down policy instruments and concerned with the need to find more accountable, democratic and interactive means of social organisation.

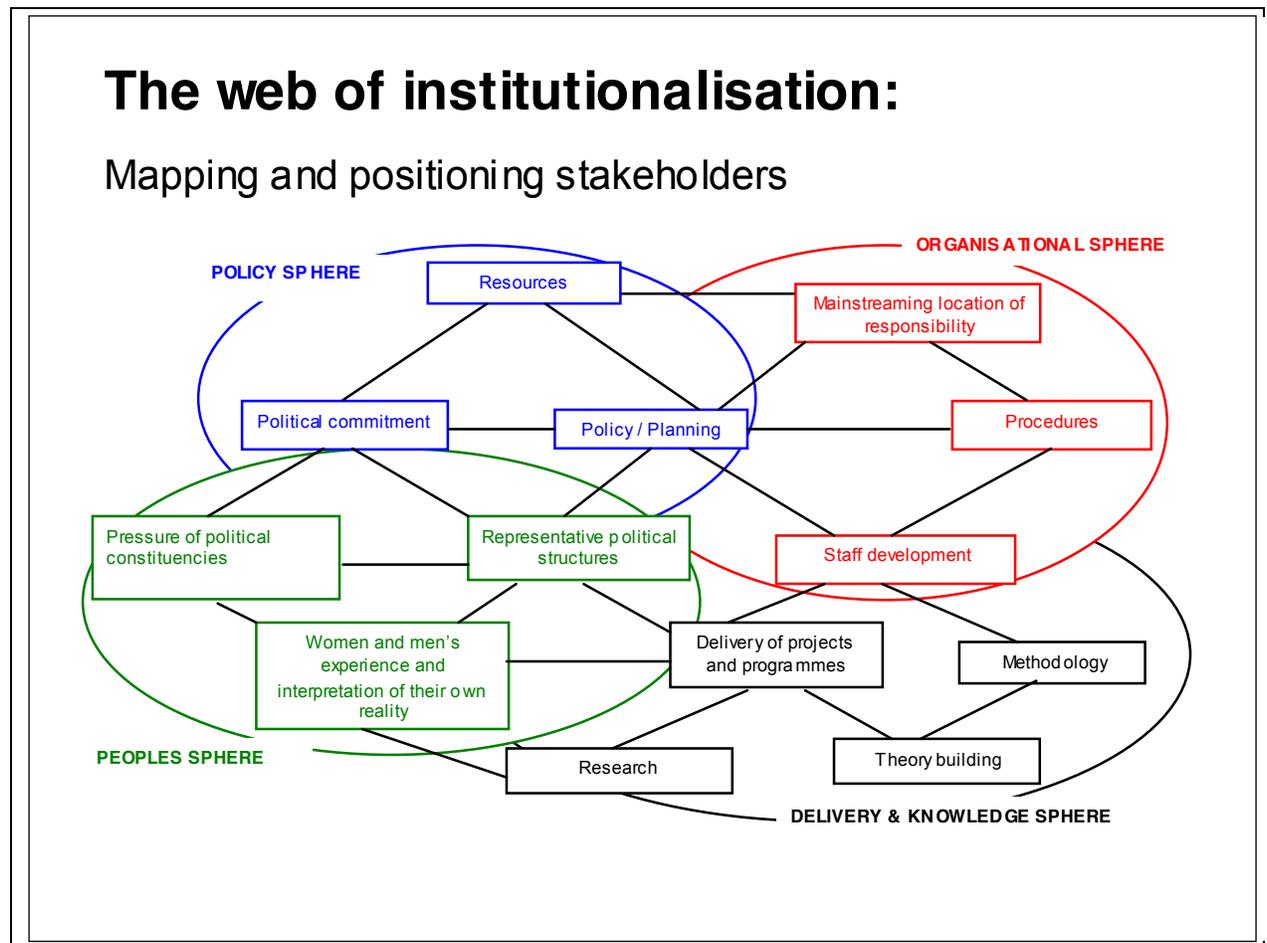
The analytical framework adopted in this article follows Giddens (1984) structuration theory, which sustains that agency makes structure and structure makes agency. This is particularly relevant in relation to the elusiveness of the periurban concept. Paraphrasing Harvey (1996) physical, biological and social processes “do not operate *in* but *actively construct* space and time and in so doing define distinctive scales for their development” (page 53) (emphasis in the original). We argue that this observation is particularly relevant to the analysis of the PUI because the use of predefined urban and rural categories typically exclude the analysis of ‘uncomfortable’ territorial manifestations that cannot be easily apprehended in terms of

relatively fixed and predetermined spatial categories. Therefore, the analysis looks at the PUI as an entity constituted by social and political processes.

With this background in mind, it could be argued that such social and political processes are rooted in four different institutional spheres or decision making domains that which all together constitute a ‘web’ (Levy, 1996, 1998; Allen and You, 2002). The institutional web consists of four spheres:

- Policy sphere (concerning resources, political commitment, and policy and planning)
- People’s sphere (concerning pressure of political constituencies, representative political structures, women and men’s experience and interpretation of their own reality)
- Organizational sphere (concerning mainstreaming location of responsibility, procedures and staff development)
- Delivery and knowledge sphere (delivery of projects and programmes, methodology, research and theory building)

This web shows that any barrier to a particular element inevitably has ramifications on other elements. Thus, any strategy that aims at bringing about positive change needs to link its interventions through the various elements of the web discussed in section 3.



## 2. Evolution of the Indian institutional context

*From centralised government to decentralised governance*

In recent years there has been a significant change in Indian national policies reflecting a changing philosophy of governance. Economic deregulation (1991) has been accompanied by a new emphasis on decentralised governance and on the principles of efficiency, competitiveness and self-reliance. Thus, a series of policy changes adopted since the early 1990s have led to new forms of interaction between political and administrative government structures and between the government, private sector and civic society. To understand the current framework, historical influences since India's colonization will be examined.

Most of the current policy and administrative frameworks for natural resource management (NRM) in India originated during the British rule. The central concern of such frameworks was to secure control over natural resources and local communities. In pursuing this objective centralised proprietary rights were established over natural resources (land, forests and water) securing the right of the colonial state to extract revenue from those resources and to regulate community use both.

Urban local authorities – as conceived in modern India - were also established during the colonial period which also laid the foundation of local self-government adopted after independence.

The model pursued after independence following Nehru's vision of a centrally planned economy favoured centralised public control over natural resources and gave supremacy to scientific and technological means reinforcing the central role of the state in controlling access to and exploitation of natural resources. Thus, there was significant continuity in the pre and post independence NRM policies in which central control was sought as a means to safeguard natural resources "from unsystematic exploitation by local people". This model contrasted with the decentralised Gandhian vision of governance focused on the village and district *Panchayat*, a vision drawn from a close understanding of rural India. The conflict between both visions was clearly present in the debate about the Indian Constitution and resulted in the compromise solution of including the establishment of Panchayats but only within the Directive Principles of the Constitution (Gadgil and Guha, 1992).

Natural resource management in India is rooted in a technocratic and bureaucratic approach which subordinated nature and people to the state (Dryzek, 1997). Another feature of this approach was the establishment of line administrative departments where defined responsibility by jurisdiction and production sectors. The 1950s saw the emergence of land reforms and a range of state initiatives aimed at increasing agricultural productivity including extension programmes, community development programmes and farming co-operatives, as well as significant public investment in large-scale irrigation projects. A third period was ushered in by the so called Green Revolution in the 1970s and 1980s where India pursued national goals of self sufficiency and a recognition of the links between natural resource management and poverty. One of the most significant changes in administrative terms was the creation of District Rural Development Agencies, aimed at establishing direct links between central, state and district government and villages. Here local participation was emphasized as were community knowledge and traditional practices for NRM. The emergence of new social forces, both within civil society and in party politics at the state level pushed for reforms in the hegemonic role

previously played by central government in environmental and development policy making and implementation.

As highlighted by Baumann et al (2003) “in the first phase of independent democratic governance and management of natural resources, the village collective was looked upon as the object of planning; agency and control rested with experts and higher levels of government bureaucracy” (page 5). With subtle modifications this approach still characterises the current environmental governance framework applied in practice in India.

The early 1990s inaugurated a fourth period in Indian governance, characterised by the adoption of neoliberal reforms, the retreat of the welfare state and the Nehruvian model of state-led economic development. Simultaneously, the adoption in 1993 of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments (CAs) of decentralisation accorded a new status to rural and urban local governments, carrying the decentralization process up to the neighbourhood levels and widening the democratic base of Indian politics and decision making. This provides a new governance framework in which local elected bodies have become the third tier of governance in the federal system. Until the enactment of these two amendments, rural and urban local bodies derived their status and power solely from state level legislation.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment deals with the legal framework of decentralization in rural India and establishes a three-tier structure of Panchayat, Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishad, designed at the village, intermediate block/taluk and district levels. For many centuries, Panchayats ((literally ‘the assembly of the five’) had been the traditional village government. The 73<sup>rd</sup> CA gives Panchayats a new constitutional status, reshaping them as elected bodies and placing particular emphasis to equalize traditional differences based on gender, caste and ethnicity. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Act also provides for one additional body of local governance, the gram sabha, comprising all voters within a village or group of villages. In relation to NR management gram sabhas potentially have extensive powers with respect to management of irrigation tanks, ownership over minor forest produce and rights to be consulted in land acquisition. A decade before the introduction of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, the State of Karnataka enacted the Karnataka Panchayat Act.

Regarding the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment, also known as the Nagarpalika Act, the composition of municipalities remains under the guidelines of each state but municipal areas are to be declared based on a series of conditions stipulated in the amendment: the population size of the area and its demographic density, the revenue generated for local administration and the percentage of employment in non-agricultural activities. These socio-economic variables are adopted to ensure the viability at municipalisation.

Until the early 1990s, urban local government bodies comprised Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils, Town Area Committees and Notified Area Committees. The 74<sup>th</sup> CAA adopted a uniform structure establishing three forms of urban local government: (a) Municipal Corporation for larger urban area, (b) Municipal Council for smaller urban areas and (c) a *Nagar Panchayat* (by whatever name called) for transitional areas, defined as areas in transition from rural to urban. The latter has significant implications for the central argument examined here and will be analysed in more detailed later in section X. According to the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA nagar panchayats

can only be created for areas with a population of 5,000 to 10,000, whilst for municipal councils the population category is of 10,000 to 20,000 inhabitants.

The 74th CAA aimed at reshaping the existing arrangements for municipal governments in relation to their political context and functional domain. In political terms, the Amendment enables municipal bodies to act as effective democratic institutions of local self-government. The 74<sup>th</sup> CAA parallels many of the provisions of the Panchayat Act, placing emphasis on the principle of social justice and aims at safeguarding the interests of weaker sections of society within the functional domain of urban local bodies. Two significant measures are adopted to further the democratisation of urban local government: (a) the formation of ward committees, conceived as a mechanism to improve the direct representation of local constituencies in urban areas; and (b) the reservation of councillors' seats in any municipality for women, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) members.

Of particular significance to our discussion is the fact the Act provides a new framework for the integration of rural and urban development plans, which should include the needs of all urban, periurban and rural areas.

In practice, the centre continues to administer local level programmes through District Rural Development Agencies, Watershed Development Programmes and Joint Forest Management programmes, bypassing in many cases the panchayats rendering them mere appendices of the rural administration. Effective decentralisation to urban local bodies presents a similar picture. A significant problem is that 74<sup>th</sup> CA has increased the functions and responsibilities of local bodies but without improving their institutional and financial capacity. Particularly in small and medium towns, municipal staff lacks technical capacities in critical areas of municipal planning and management. These factors explain why in most cases, state government still plays a prevailing role over local matter decisions.

In summary, the last decade has seen significant efforts and a growing debate focused on the assessing the effective changes introduced by the two constitutional amendments. Whilst there is general agreement that the changes in the constitutional status alone cannot be sufficient to make the municipal bodies vibrant and effective institutions of democracy, the amendments have been widely commended as a bold attempt to refurbish the whole system of local self-government with the devolution of functions, planning responsibilities, a new system of fiscal transfers and empowerment of women and weaker sections of the society (UN-ESCAP, 2005). Decades of a stratified and hierarchical society based on the caste system mean that any attempt to reform governance in the Indian context is bound to clash with the processes of clientelism, patronage and corruption, deeply ingrained in the relations between central-state, local government and civic society (Mathew and Mathew, 2003). Examining the implications of the reforms introduced in the early 1990s for NRM, Baumann et al (2003) rightly point out that although there is significant consensus on the need for political and administrative decentralization.

### ***Turning urban, staying rural? Census and Administrative Definitions***

Rural-urban classification has significant implications for the governance of periurban areas and rural-urban interactions, as this classification is intimately associated with access (or the lack of

it) to decision making, the composition of revenue bases and distribution of government resources.

Several authors have highlighted that the definition of what constitutes an 'urban' area is highly contested and varies between countries, making international comparisons difficult and in many cases misleading. Urban areas are classified as such based on a population that can vary from 200 in Cuba to 10,000 in Senegal, with many countries adopting a value in between of 1,000 and 2,500 inhabitants.

The statistical definition of 'rural' is no less problematic, as it often constitutes a residual category comprising all settlements that 'are not urban' (Walls, 2004).

From a governance perspective, the 74 Constitutional Amendment in India introduced three urban categories distinguishing between larger and smaller urban areas and transitional areas. The latter are particularly significant for our discussion, as the concept of transitional areas aims at capturing those settlements that do not fit comfortably within the rural-urban distinction. According to the amendment, transitional areas are to be governed by 'Nagar Panchayats', a particular offshoot of urban local authorities. However, the Census of India does not provide information on transitional areas, which are still either classed under the rural or urban rubric. As a result, a significant number of settlements fall outside the ambit of municipal governance.

The gap between the urban classification adopted by the census and the changes promoted in terms of urban governance leads to a series of additional problems. For the purpose of the Census, urban areas are classified as such either of demographic or administrative criteria, including both municipal or statutory towns and census or non-municipal towns. However, while all settlements under the ambit of municipal bodies are automatically declared urban, urban settlements identified as such by the census are not necessarily granted municipal status, as this is a state prerogative.

Therefore it is possible to find settlements characterised by village features with municipal status and large settlements under the influence of large cities, whose economy is largely non-agricultural, still governed by rural local bodies (Gram Panchayats), "such towns are not compelled to maximise their own revenue potential, and are, in fact, rewarded with funds from federal rural programmes. This situation amounts to a diversion of funds meant for rural development to areas that are not rural in the strict sense of the term. In addition, the revenue potential of these predominantly non-agricultural areas is not being realised due to the absence of municipal governance. The long time taken to readjust municipal boundaries results in further loss of revenue" (Bhagat, 2005:70)

There are significant incentives for State governments and small town and peri-urban dwellers to remain under the jurisdiction of rural local bodies. First, funds from the central government Ministry of Rural Development are considerably larger than those available through programmes administered by the Ministry of Urban Developments, with the former including grants to Gram Panchayats and various programmes funding water supply, roads, education and health.

Second, municipal areas are subjected not only to higher taxation but also to a wider variety of taxes and charges than are Gram Panchayats. Thus avoiding such taxes constitutes a significant incentive for periurban dwellers to remain under the jurisdiction of rural local bodies. In addition, rural electricity charges are lower than in municipal areas but services such as water supply, healthcare and primary education are free. Gram Panchayats rely mainly on grants provided by state governments and it is estimated that on average about 15 per cent of their revenue is from their own sources. By contrast, municipal bodies generate almost 70 per cent of their revenue (Bhagat, 2005). Referring to the state of Karnataka, Aziz (1998) argues that this creates a vicious circle in which given their dependency from state funding, rural local governments have no incentives to increase their own revenue resources.

Third, the granting of municipal status is often followed by stringent planning and building regulations. Thus, it is not unusual to find private developers and well-off periurban families lobbying against such change, as reported by Pandey (2003).

### **3. Using The Web of institutionalisation to Analyse**

Applying the web of institutionalisation introduced in section 1, the analysis focuses on the assessment of the constraints and opportunities found within and across each sphere that prevent or promote the emergence of cooperative environmental governance in the periurban context. The analysis starts by considering the people's sphere and moves clockwise through the rest of the web.

#### ***People's Sphere: Constructing community?***

As noted earlier, governance refers here to "a complex network of interactions among institutions and groups, with government being only the visible tip of the governance iceberg" (Beall, 2001:379). This implies that local social processes and networks are inexorably linked to local governance.

#### ***Experience and reality of periurban women and men***

The extent to which the peri-urban poor are negatively or positively affected by land use changes and changes in the management of NR depends on their livelihood sources, which are usually more heavily reliant on natural resources than those of wealthier, more urban-based groups (Allen, 2005). But it is not just the absolute availability of natural resources in relation to population and its density that helps to explain the emergence of environmental problems and opportunities for the peri-urban poor but the conditions regulating their access to and control over such resources (Tacoli, 2003).

For instance, in a planning workshop<sup>2</sup>, men and women from the periurban project villages talking about their reality discussed the declining access to forests and water bodies, which led further to declining fodder, fuel, water and food availability for animals and humans. The other concern was the need for livelihoods for which credit and fodder access were major bottlenecks

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<sup>2</sup> Presentations made by periurban community representatives to government in September 2001, Dharwad district Karnataka state.

in the PUI. Changing jurisdictions had led to a loss of access to rural programmes although many livelihoods were still rural. Scarcity of labour and shortage of land has led to declining agricultural activities. Government officials responded to these community presentations of their issues and possible solutions committing to help through their programmes.

A comparative analysis of the political capability of peri-urban dwellers to deal with water-related problems in two villages in Hubli-Dharwad sheds light in this respect (Thoday, 2003). The study focused on the villages of Mugad and Kelgeri, falling respectively within the Gram Panchayat and municipal jurisdictions, which in India represent the rural and urban local government structures. Both villages were initially included in an NRSP-funded participatory action-planning project aimed at facilitating the development of local action plans to enhance livelihoods and natural resources management in the peri-urban context around Hubli-Dharwad. Kelgeri was soon dropped from the project because, in the words of one local NGO facilitating the action planning process, the village was subject to “an uncomfortable transition, from being a peri-urban settlement to being urban with some remaining rural characteristics” (Thoday, 2003, p18). By contrast, Mugad was depicted as enjoying “a lot of trust, [which] makes it more rural in character” (Thoday, 2003, p9).

Thoday’s study revealed that whilst local institutions in Mugad appeared to have greater political capacity than in Kelgeri to attract and collect funds and make local changes, formal political processes were highly internalized and dominated by a strong patron-client relationship, which extended to other areas of social interaction and conflict among villagers. In contrast, in Kelgeri, villagers showed a greater understanding of the political processes being shaped by agents outside the bounded location of the village and also of the need to pursue change through other channels than those exclusively managed and influenced by local social structures. This highlights the complexity and diversity of the collective and individual processes of social and political action deployed in the PUI context”.

### ***Pressure groups***

Following the above, the analysis turns now to the extent to which the associational life of periurban poor communities is formalised, scaled up and harnessed in the interests of urban and rural governance (Beall, 2001).

Common barriers identified or perceived in the formation of social capital in urban and peri-urban areas include the heterogeneity and high mobility of the population, the breakdown of traditional networks, adversity, relative poverty and therefore a lower ability to pursue community struggles collectively, and exploitation (Rakodi, 2002). Whilst some of these assumptions can be verified in reality, they can also help to perpetuate the idealisation of rural characteristics against often negatively typified urban features.

Social capital in Hubli Dharwad took several forms including the formation of sanghas, federations of sanghas, user groups such as water user groups, village forest committees (VFCs) and so on. A sangha is an informal collective of men, women or sometimes youth, either exclusively or in combination (Purushothaman et al., 2004). Typically women’s sangha are

more in majority where members get together to save collectively, conduct economic activities and engage in collective action on community-based issues. Federations are a network of sanghas and starts at a basic level of the village and can extend to cluster, district, state or even national levels (Purushothaman, 1998).

However collectives do not always work towards broader or more generalised goals. Most often they are concerned with meeting immediate needs. The extent to which community level organisations move or not into wider associations can help to explain whether or not broader and less immediate issues are addressed. In particular, we are concerned here with the extent to which, such broader organisations act as a bridge between local groups and local government. A typical problem here refers to the way in which such organisations can be captured by political parties, an issue that often makes NGOs use as a justification ‘to stay away from politics’. In the case of the periurban villages, the sanghas moved into forming federations to take on the role of the NGOs in the future, one role of which includes interacting with government.

NGOs can play a key role in providing synergistic relationships between grassroots groups and the government. The federations were found to be able to represent the issues of sanghas to the village government. However to take on the roles played by NGOs at district and state levels, these federations need to become part of larger networks such as district level federations and need to have their capacities built to take on these roles (Purushothaman and Vedant, 2004). The periurban federations were being affiliated to district level federations by only one NGO, namely IDS.

In interest groups such as VFCs the interface between social capital and local government is inbuilt because it is conceived by government in that manner. In the periurban villages VFCs were set up both by government and NGOs. The latter were not allowed to be effective by the local forest officials and this is one danger of community based organizations which have government control. In a study conducted by Beall (2001) found that “ a number of the city case studies provided evidence of community-based organisations not simply being diverted from their own concerns but actually being created by the state or other development institutions for project-based and sometimes political purposes”.

### ***Local representative authorities***

Local authorities constitute the Gram Panchayats in the case of villages and corporators for urban villages. At higher levels local authorities also consist of the line agencies or the bureaucracy. Beall (2001) suggests that when examining the role of local authorities a central question is how they “can value the social resources of the poor and engage with associational life at the community level in ways that are not instrumental.” In the case of the periurban the action planning process was initiated through the sanghas and GPs were involved. These plans were presented to district government who provided resources for implementation where they felt there were resources and could act. However this form of engagement of local authorities to a participatory planning process is more the exception than the rule. It happened also because of individual government officials who were more open to participation. Such a process proved difficult to sustain in the absence of these ‘progressive’ officials

Basically NGOs fall along a spectrum based on the degree to which their CBOs interface with local government. In the case of organizations such as BAIF the GP is seen as corrupt and basically to be avoided. In the case of IDS the GP members are involved in the action planning process in which sanghas take the main leadership role. There are other examples of organizations such as Gram Swaraj Samiti or Mahila Samakhya Karnataka it is the sangha or the federation that interfaces with higher levels of government, not just the GP.

In the peri urban villages, Gabbur which is under HDMC jurisdiction, had no interface with their corporator and had no GP. The involvement of their elected representative in planning was non-existent. For the other villages there was much stronger representation of the local government. The differences here demonstrate that although distance to the city was comparable, the jurisdiction, urban or rural, can vastly change the involvement of government in participatory processes.

The Gram Sabha (village assembly of all voters) is the basic unit of Indian democracy. Although this is only a forum with no executive powers, it represents the lowest level at which local people can influence (and be part of) local government institutions. However the constitution makes no provision for the functions and powers of Gram Sabhas and many states have given them only a marginal role. In practice, local participation in the Gram Sabhas has also been handicapped by their large size and the long distance to attend meetings. However, some states have taken measures to overcome these problems by creating smaller and viable units for people to meet, examples of these include the Gram sansads in West Bengal, ward meetings in Kerala, palli sabhas in Orissa and village-based meetings in Madhya Pradesh (Mathew and Mathew, 2003). Furthermore, these bodies have been entitled with specific powers. For instance, in West Bengal, the gram sansad has absolute power in the selection of beneficiaries of poverty alleviation programmes. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, the state law establishes specific measures to ensure the participation of women and members from Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Ibidem). Furthermore, in some cases gram sabhas have been entrusted with specific mechanisms to improve accountability, involving different forms of social audit through right to information and public hearings among other mechanisms. With this regard, the state of Kerala has empowered the role of the Ombudsman with legal powers and also created special women’s watchdog committees, as mechanisms that help to reduce clientelism and patronage (Ibidem).

The State of Karnataka has introduced a mechanism denominated *Panchayat jamabandi*, which consists of an annual official inspection held in public of the accounts, registers and selected works undertaken by the Panchayat<sup>3</sup>.

The Gram Sabha thus represents a constitutionally mandated space for community participation and planning for local governance. However the Gram Sabha is not automatically pro poor or gender sensitive. It is vital that the poor start to articulate their needs and demand access to programmes and resources in the Gram Sabha. In the periurban villages, the sanghas began to participate in the Gram Sabha only three years after they had been formed. This implies that the capacities of the poor have to be built before they can have a say in this forum.

## Policy Sphere

As noted earlier, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment dealing respectively with the Panchayat and municipal systems aimed at changing state-local bodies relations. The State of Karnataka had taken decentralisation forward even before the enactment of the amendments. However, efforts towards the full implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Acts at the state level have been ambivalent in the last decade. Successful decentralisation however requires a strong political commitment. As highlighted by Heller (2001), effective decentralisation requires strong support from political leaders, bringing down decision making competences and resources. On the contrary, if “the political status of the central leadership depends on its nurturing traditional networks of corruption and patronage, it is normally only half-heartedly interested in strengthening lower organs” (Hadenius, 2003:5).

However, successful decentralisation cannot be accomplished by central and state government alone. It requires changes at the ground level. The strong links between decentralisation and local democratisation have been highlighted by a number of studies (Ostrom, 1990; Putnam, 1993), the importance of local democracy is also stressed by Hadenius (2003), who argues that “[a] strong organisational life can certainly be a great asset, as it serves as a means of popular influence and may also have important effects in the area of democratic schooling” (page 6). But civil society is not homogeneous and it often comprises both groups that are highly open and supported to reforms and groups attached to clientelistic and patronage structures that might resist such reforms in the interest of preserving the status quo (Azfar et al, 1990; Hadenius, 2003). Hadenius (2003) argues that in such cases, a mixed strategy that links “a reform-minded centre and supportive groups at the grassroots level” (page 7) might be the most effective way to put the local elite under pressure from above and below. Such a process can in time change the attitudes, perception and behaviour of the local elite and prevailing groups resisting change.

The above discussion implies that there is “a reciprocal relation between state capacity (i.e., the quality of governance) and democratic activity. These factors mutually reinforce each other, often functioning as components in a vicious circle. Low levels of governance and state capacity breed low levels of democratic activity among the citizenry – which, in turn, makes it easy for the traditional local elite to stay in power and utilise public resources to its own advantage” (Hadenius, 2003:8). However, such vicious circle can be broken but this depends on the

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr Srinivas Murthy, State Secretary of the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Bangalore, August 2001.

establishment of strong links between the policy and peoples spheres. An additional reason challenging the local democratisation of decision making might rely on the attitudes and perceptions but also effective capacity of the bureaucracy to support such reform, an aspect examined in the following section.

The majority of the provisions, instruments and mechanisms introduced as a result of the Constitutional changes enacted by central and state governments still remain on paper. The project revealed that elected representatives, functionaries and local groups are to a large extent, still unaware of their existence. Thus, awareness-building constitutes an important strategy, for instance Mathew and Mathew (2003) argue in the States of Kerala and West Bengal are good examples of how the involvement of civil society organisations and political parties in advocacy work has led to large scale changes.

Other policy influences have also been brought about through multi-lateral agencies such as the World Bank. Through their insistence on participatory processes, these agencies have inadvertently changed policies and raised awareness among government officials on the importance of participation. Interviews with government reflected this finding although none of the officials quite understood exactly what participation entailed.

The lack of clarity in the definition of what constitutes urban and rural also has implications for the allocation of resources. The economic powers of rural and urban local bodies are still very different. In Karnataka the state assembly has recently passed a government order on 18 September 2003 saying that 19 development plans or 1800 crores rupees will be transferred to the Gram Panchayats<sup>4</sup>. This will substantively increase the current budgets of the panchayats.

In the PUI the biggest problem experienced was the sharing of resources across rural urban lines for problems that clearly did not respect these boundaries. Also not a single official was able to articulate national or state support for the periurban or for agencies to work across jurisdictions. Therefore political commitment at higher levels and awareness was not there on transcending the urban rural divide. At the local level this barrier was transcended through creating informal mechanisms. At national events however officials continue to stress the importance of formal (statutory) institutional mechanisms such as the District Planning Committee to undertake integration.

## **Organisational Sphere**

Resistance to decentralization can be rooted not only on the attitudes and capacity of local administration staff but also on the procedures ruling their daily decision making and on the distribution of responsibilities and roles. The analysis turns now to the examination of the constraints and opportunities found in these three areas.

## ***Planning***

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<sup>4</sup> Government order under the Panchayat Raj Act, 1993. Government circular GRAP/121/JIPASA/1998 dated 28.11.98

The physical planning of periurban areas falls mostly on the urban development authorities (UDAs) who are in charge of planning for the 'urban areas to be'. The planning system is based on the master plan or comprehensive planning model adopted in India several decades ago and shows serious shortcomings and contradictions with other current Indian policies, in particular with regards to those that promote decentralized, participatory and integrated planning. First of all, the planning system still operates under the outdated assumption that the 'government does all', operating as developers and housing and infrastructure suppliers. This approach ignores the role played by many agents operating in the periurban context, including private operators and the informal and unorganized sectors

Second and in relation to the previous point, a major shortcoming of planning comes from the fact that it is still largely based on single use zoning and operates with strict land use restrictions, zoning regulations and a compartmentalised view of the distribution of activities. This clashes with the reality of mixed land use, exemplified for instance by the many small enterprises that operate from living places and ignores the role and contributions of the poor through self-help housing and services provision. Jain (2003) highlights that in the current Indian planning system the *"land policies, plans, byelaws and zoning regulations fail to accommodate most of the sub-standard, self-help and community housing development (hence "unauthorised"), that comprises nearly half of the total dwelling units built every year, and these plans prove to be the impediment to an organic, indigenous and community approach to construction and housing that is largely catering to the poorer section of the society"* (page 144).

The above shortcoming were observed in the course of discussions with planners from the Hubli-Dharwad Urban Development Authority (HDUDA) who persistently referred to the designated green belt as an effective means to contain urban sprawl, failing to register the existence of long term established periurban settlements within it. Thus the green belt remains on paper and for all intents and purposes it is already a brown belt, through encroachment and tends to be officially regularized by politicians especially during elections.

The widespread use of statutory/comprehensive planning is clearly at odds with any form of decentralized governance based on integrated action planning. The nature of the current planning system helps to explain why the provisions for community participation in the approval of comprehensive plans remains to be only a wish. Paradoxically, several of the planners interviewed throughout the life of the project refer to any attempt of community consultation as something that would make the approval of comprehensive plans inefficient and lengthy.

In recognition of the lack of integration the Constitutional Amendments provided a new mechanism called the District Planning Committee (DPC) which was assigned the role of integrated planning. It also was conceived as a forum that would widen participation in planning beyond just the UDAs to now include the elected representatives, both rural and urban as well as the line department. However the DPC was only given advisory status and no budget and is seen as a political body with no teeth, not a planning body. The DPC in Hubli Dharwad exists mostly on paper, and is typical of DPCs throughout the country. Far from serving as the body for integration of planning across rural urban lines, it at best 'staples' the plans provided by rural and urban agencies.

District and state level officials advised the team not to work through the DPC as it was a political body and instead suggested other informal mechanisms. At the national level, officials felt that the project had the onus of responsibility of getting the DPC to become more effective and functional.

### ***Staff capacity***

Government agencies do not have the room for their officials to have developed any experience in working across jurisdictions. Therefore largely their attitudes reflect this divide. Most officials saw the need for building official capacities to work across jurisdiction to deal with periurban issues.

Creating the informal mechanisms and discussions on the PUI was one of the means through which such awareness and capacities were built. In fact interviews with government reflected this change where several actually said that only because of this exposure they were aware of the peri urban areas and of the value of participatory processes. However later on it became hard to measure these changes due to officials being transferred.

### ***Procedures***

As highlighted before, land use planning procedures are complex and often operate with contradictory and overdetailed rules. Jain (2003) argues that applications for planning permission in the Indian urban context can take several years and involve a minimum of 30-40 government bodies. These are staggering figures if compared with an average 4-8 week in Singapore (Ibidem). Inflexible procedures reinforce a built-in bias against the expansion of urban areas and consolidation of periurban settlements located within the designated green belts and also favour the use of administrative discretion, breeding patron clientelism and in some cases corruption. Few officials were able to articulate the procedures that allowed for rural urban collaboration because in the current situation such procedures in fact do not exist on the ground. However, the DPC specifies procedures to work across rural urban lines. The problem was more that the DPC was not as yet functional. Another problem with the DPC was that it excluded important agencies such as the National Highways because they were national and not state. The DPC is also mainly a planning body where it is seen as being responsible only for decision making and not for implementation. Thus officials did not see the need to extend training on periurban issues and institutional mechanisms like the DPC to anyone besides the heads of agencies.

### ***Delivery and knowledge Sphere***

Delivery of projects and programmes: There are extraordinarily few initiatives on the periurban, either government or civil society in India. The only known ones was the current DFID funded project and another project, funded by the European Union which had a thematic network on peri urban issues to create dialogue and raise awareness on the PUI. There were also very few materials on policy or research on the Periurban interface.

Thus it was in such an isolated programme, policy and research environment that the project operated. It was to a small extent able to help six periurban communities identify and implement

their own solutions with varying degrees of success. The project was also able to help the communities raise funds from government for tank restoration and obtain resources for other interventions like agro forestry, animal husbandry and livelihoods. It created an innovation on access to urban markets for the peri urban poor especially for women. This process and the solutions were documented to generate and disseminate knowledge on tackling peri urban problems.

Methodology: A set of participatory methods were used for planning, implementation and monitoring to deal with peri urban poverty and the management of natural resources in the PUI. This methodology emphasized generating attitudinal changes of working outside the box (especially across jurisdictions) and the importance of participation.

Research and theory building: The project team findings are being disseminated through a series of outputs at village, district, state and national levels. Through books and academic articles the project is attempting to disseminate research findings and build theory. Through street theatre and workshops at village and district levels, it is attempting to disseminate findings to district government and village communities. At the district, state and national levels workshops have taken place to launch the books and to share research findings. The current workshop in February 2005, aims at the production of a product designed by government and other stakeholders towards providing recommendations for rural urban collaboration and addressing peri urban issues to be provided to state government.

## **Institutional Mechanisms for Rural-Urban Collaboration**

The institutional mechanisms for dealing with periurban issues include formal (statutory) mechanisms like the District Planning Committee and the Nagar Panchayat. Informal mechanisms used included a district steering committee consisting of a range of government agency representatives. A second mechanism which was constituted but did not continue was a rural urban taskforce. This taskforce was stopped because the official leading the initiative was transferred.

### **Formal mechanisms**

#### *Nagar Panchayat*

As mentioned earlier, Nagar Panchayats are the elected local government bodies introduced by the 74<sup>th</sup> CA to govern transitional areas from rural to urban. It is estimated that since then nearly 2050 nagar panchayats have been created in the country and 175 in Karnataka state.<sup>5</sup> In practice however the Nagar Panchayat has been interpreted by the bureaucracy using population benchmarks. Thus if the population of an area has reached a certain level then it becomes a Nagar Panchayat. If reinterpreted the Nagar Panchayat has the potential to become the institutional mechanism that can integrate rural and urban concerns both.

#### *District Planning Committee (DPC)*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://Karnataka.nic.in/pris>

As mentioned earlier, one of the innovations introduced by the amended Constitution was the provision for the establishment of district planning committees (DPCs) and also for metropolitan planning committees (MPCs). DPCs are conceived as a means to integrate at the district level matters of common interests between the panchayats and the municipalities, or in other words, to produce integrated rural-urban plans covering aspects related to spatial planning, sharing of physical and natural resources, environmental conservation and the integrated development of infrastructure. As such, DPCs are not only conceived as a mechanism for the integration of rural and urban plans but also as a means of initiating the planning process from below.

However neither the Nagar Panchayat nor the DPC talk about the need for participation of the communities or the constitution of a urban equivalent or periurban equivalent of the Gram Sabha. In fact the urban equivalent is not even specified in the constitution and there are initiatives on the part of civil society institutions to bring this body into existence.<sup>6</sup>

### *NRM Partnerships models*

A parallel development to the decentralisation policies introduced through the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> CAs, the 1990s also witnessed the emergence of partnerships between state-funded programmes for NRM and local resource user groups. Although strictu sensu NRM partnerships are not specifically conceived as mechanisms for rural-urban collaboration, they have significant potential to enhance natural resource management in periurban areas, bringing different users together.

The two most developed examples of this approach include Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Micro-watershed Management (WM) programmes. In the case of forests, the framework for JFM was introduced by the 1988 Forest Policy and guidelines for the involvement of forest users were specified by a Circular issued in 1990 by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Together these policy documents pave the way for a significant shift in relation to previous forest management approaches, giving priority to local subsistence needs and environmental sustainability over forest revenue. JFM is only confined to degraded lands and the intention is to promote their rehabilitation to meet local needs. Although this framework does not imply changes in property rights, local users organised under Village Forest Committees (VFCs) are able to be the involved in the management of forest. However, the Forest Department retains significant power in the implementation of this scheme. JMF has been subject to several criticisms and there is an ongoing debate about a number a measures to improve the status of traditionally marginalised groups who rely heavily on forest resources for their livelihoods (Baumann et al, 2003).

Prior to the 1990s, watershed management programmes in India presented two significant limitations. First, their focus was almost exclusively on increasing productivity (relegating aspects like equitable access). Second, they typically involve a large number of ministries and line departments operating without coordination and with very limited inputs or scope for local participation. A number of high level advisory committees examined these problems in the early 1990s resulting in new guidelines for watershed development issued in 1995. These guidelines

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<sup>6</sup> Presentation made by Ramesh Ramanathan, Janagraha at a workshop entitled Periurban: A bridge for Rural Urban Partnerships, held in Bangalore, February 2005,

marked a significant shift from previous approaches in favour of integrated resource management, poverty alleviation and local participation. However, in their evaluation of micro-watershed management programmes at the field level Baumann et al (2003) highlight that the given the emphasis on land and irrigation, the landless and those dependant on common resources are highly unlikely to benefit from the new initiatives in water management. In addition, there is still inconclusive evidence to assert that the new approach has led to more participatory resource management, although higher levels of participation can be seen in those projects run by NGOs in contrast with those led by government departments.

## **Informal mechanisms**

### *The District Steering Committee (DSC)*

The District Steering Committee was initiated with the help of the then Chief Executive Officer Mr. Vastraad who had a more open attitude towards participation. Under his aegis, the DSC meetings were held for about 10 months till he got transferred to another district. However being head of the ZP the main officials attending the meetings were those agencies that fell under the ZP. The officials from HDUDA and HDMC barely attended.

Officials were interviewed on their perceptions of formal and informal mechanisms . While at least half the officials had been transferred of those remaining many found mechanisms like the DSC useful except for the HDMC and HDUDA who felt that no toher issue except the ones raised by the only village that fell under the HDMC boundary, Gabbur, were relevant to them. Thus having only six project villages of which only one was under the urban jurisdiction was a limiting factor in the interest generated in the urban agencies. Furthermore the CEO of the ZP and the Commissioner of the HDMC are of the same stature in the administrative hierarchy. Therefore the CEO did not find it appropriate to summon the Commissioner nor would the latter attend a meeting called by the CEO. Thus only when the Deputy Commissioner (DC), who is senior to both, called a meeting did they attend. .

The DSC meetings created a forum where community representatives could directly interact with the officials and problems could be solved on the spot. These meetings were instrumental in getting the action plans off the ground. The contact with the officials in these meetings built the confidence and capacity of the communities to approach other officials as well. The new CEO objected strongly to the meetings as he felt that the formal procedure on paper was not in place.

Eventually, as the implementation of the plans became full-fledged, the local team decided to discontinue the DSC. On foresight, it could be argued that this was a mistake, as despite the low involvement of urban local bodies and the shortcoming highlighted above by the officials interviewed, the DSC could have been a seed to upscale the process of rural-urban collaboration. Instead an attempt was made to initiate a new mechanism called the Rural-Urban Task Force, headed by the Deputy Commissioner, having learnt from the previous attempt , to ensure equal participation of urban and rural agencies both. The Task force was constituted and priorities outlined. However immediately thereafter the DC was transferred and the task force discontinued.

#### **4. Concluding remarks: Links and gaps among the four spheres**

The PUI, with its combination of urban and rural features, requires an integrated approach to planning and implementation. However, existing institutions not only fail to integrate their work but instead have either urban or rural biases. From the state point of view the lack of clear demarcation of the peri-urban area is another problem. Some of the existing institutional mechanisms, such as the DPC and the Nagar Panchayat, while currently only on paper, need to be constituted or made more effective.

Functionally the DPC needs to be streamlined to have the required expertise to integrate participatory plans created by communities across the district. This integrated plan which reflects people's priorities should then be presented to elected officials. This follows the same process as is done nationally with the planning function lying with the National Planning Commission ratified by the Parliament or in this case the elected bodies namely the Zilla Panchayat and the Municipal Corporation. The one major difference being that the process being proposed is participatory.

Instead, the District Planning Committee as currently constituted brings together elected representatives and the bureaucracy thus creating what has been often referred to as a "political body" instead of a "planning body". Consequently as a functional planning unit, the DPC has proved to be unwieldy and unable to separate the personnel and institutions, responsible for planning as well as legislating those plans. Being only advisory in nature with no budget the DPC has proved completely ineffective.

For the PUI, this has meant that there is an institutional vacuum to address the issues faced by periurban communities. The Zilla Panchayat is unable to respond to the urban characteristics of the PUI and similarly the Municipal Corporation to the rural needs of the PUI. Further, neither of these institutions are equipped to deal with what are specifically peri-urban features such as the health and environmental effects of sewage irrigation, soil erosion due to intensified brick making spurred on by urban development, land use and consequent livelihood changes that result from spurts of public infrastructure expansion catering to urban needs and so on.

Hence a constitutional body as defined by the Nagar Panchayat in the constitutional amendments is supposed to help communities in transition. However again this body too remains only on paper in terms of its capacity to handle rural urban transitional communities.

Therefore as more and more settlements get absorbed into municipal boundaries and overnight experience the loss of rural services and programmes, institutions need to be in place to facilitate the transition. This would entail the phasing out of rural needs and building the capacities of peri-urban populations to take advantage of urban opportunities.

Furthermore, since the peri urban interface is a dynamic area with rapidly changing needs and the area itself does not remain peri-urban but becomes urban while surrounding rural areas turn peri-urban. Thus, the type of governance structures required need to be dynamic and responsive. Therefore, there is a need for flexible mechanisms tailored to the particular needs of the PUI. The

“one size fits all” type of policy or governance mechanism has been shown to fail and is symptomatic of top down governance which needs to be rethought and reformed.

Flexibility also needs to be complemented with balance in planning as per the needs of different communities. Urban expansion should be balanced against natural resource management. Finally peri urban populations today have no say in whether they want to become a part of the urban environment nor do they have a say in the planning, which is done by the DPC, urban development authorities and line departments. This points to the need for participatory planning where communities can be informed and have a say in the planning of their neighborhoods. This would require new institutional mechanisms to be put in place to begin with the urban counterpart of the Gram sabha. There is also the need for urban and rural communities to plan together which requires mechanisms completely outside the DPC but that ultimately should act as feeders into the planning process led by the DPC.

Most initiatives including this one focussed its efforts in the people’s sphere and to a lesser degree in locating responsibility through informal mechanisms in the organizational sphere. However there remains a weak link between all spheres. In order to have state responsible and accountable in dealing with the PUI, work in the policy sphere has to be strong enough to ensure the existence of functional DPCs. If not, it should allow the formation of informal mechanisms to deal with the periurban issues.

Whilst many policy provisions promote decentralization in natural resource management, rural-urban collaboration and more democratic forms of decision making that give the traditionally disadvantaged a voice, the organizational sphere shows that current planning approaches and practices are not responsive or even compatible with such policy reforms. Furthermore the current approaches have no room for integrating rural and urban planning and therefore for addressing periurban issues.

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