



Symposium on Exploring Pathways to Sustainability

February 10 – 11, 2014



CONCEPT NOTE: *Pathways for Environmental Health in Transitional Spaces* **(SESSION 1: FEB 10, 11.00A.M-1.00P.M)**

Theme: Pathways for Environmental Health in Transitional Spaces: moving between formality and informality

Whilst India forges new development pathways, her success in balancing rapid economic growth with the sustainable management of ecosystem services and enhanced social justice will be decisive for the health and livelihoods of its citizens – and also in determining progress on a global level.

There are recognised tensions between urban and industrial development and environmental protection, but limited understanding of how emerging environmental challenges associated with rapid economic development, and the responses to them on the ground, impact on human well-being. Formal decision making takes place in the context of multiple uncertainties, and specific development interventions, which are often based on technologies that have proved successful elsewhere, have brought long-term and often hidden costs in terms of the impact on ecosystem services and human well-being, particularly health. In addition, the very speed of growth has challenged the capacity of public institutions and society to establish the infrastructure necessary to support these interventions and respond to the attendant risks.

These uncertainties are particularly acute in rapidly urbanising, transitional spaces where urban and rural activities and institutions co-exist and there is juxtaposition of poverty and wealth. Whilst urbanisation brings the creation of new opportunities for many, it can also pose enormous challenges for the health and livelihoods of an increasing number of disenfranchised, poor and marginalised citizens. In these highly dynamic environments, often characterised by administrative ambiguity and informality, conflicts emerge as polluting industries, waste disposal, construction or large-scale cash crops compete for space with small-scale agriculture, common lands or existing dwellings. Urban policies for provision of essential services such as food and water draw upon the peri-urban zone; whilst simultaneously the export of polluting activities and domestic waste to peri-urban localities degrades ecosystems and the various environmental services that it provides, with long term implications for communities across income groups and the urban-rural continuum.

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Aims

In this session we will consider mainstream interventions aimed at addressing environmental and resource management challenges in India's rapidly urbanising transitional spaces and hope to debate the possibilities for rethinking urban planning initiatives through a sustainability lens.

We will initiate the discussion through presenting empirical work in Delhi in which the STEPS/JNU/Toxiclinks project team have sought to enhance understanding of how and why particular technological trajectories are dominant, the winners and losers that emerge and the implications for environmental health and social justice. We have also been exploring the possibilities for building alternative more sustainable urban development pathways and to enhance appreciation of them. These pathways might build upon the skills, ideas and experiences of diverse stakeholders who are generally absent from formal decision making processes, and may bring together often divergent initiatives concerned with the environment and with social justice in urban areas.

In examining the characteristics of the dominant and possible alternative pathways for sustainable urban planning, we have paid particular attention to the following issues:

- How and to what extent is risk and uncertainty considered when planning development interventions in transitional spaces?
 - Temporal and spatial scale of impacts; attention to potentially hidden flows of risk & opportunity; Differential impacts between communities and income groups.
- What are the implications of attempts to constrain informality in development interventions in transitional spaces?
- What has been the impact of formal attempts to enhance participation in urban planning and governance?
- How do current institutional arrangements support the necessary cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration required to understand and address the interacting social, technological and environmental dimensions of urban development planning?