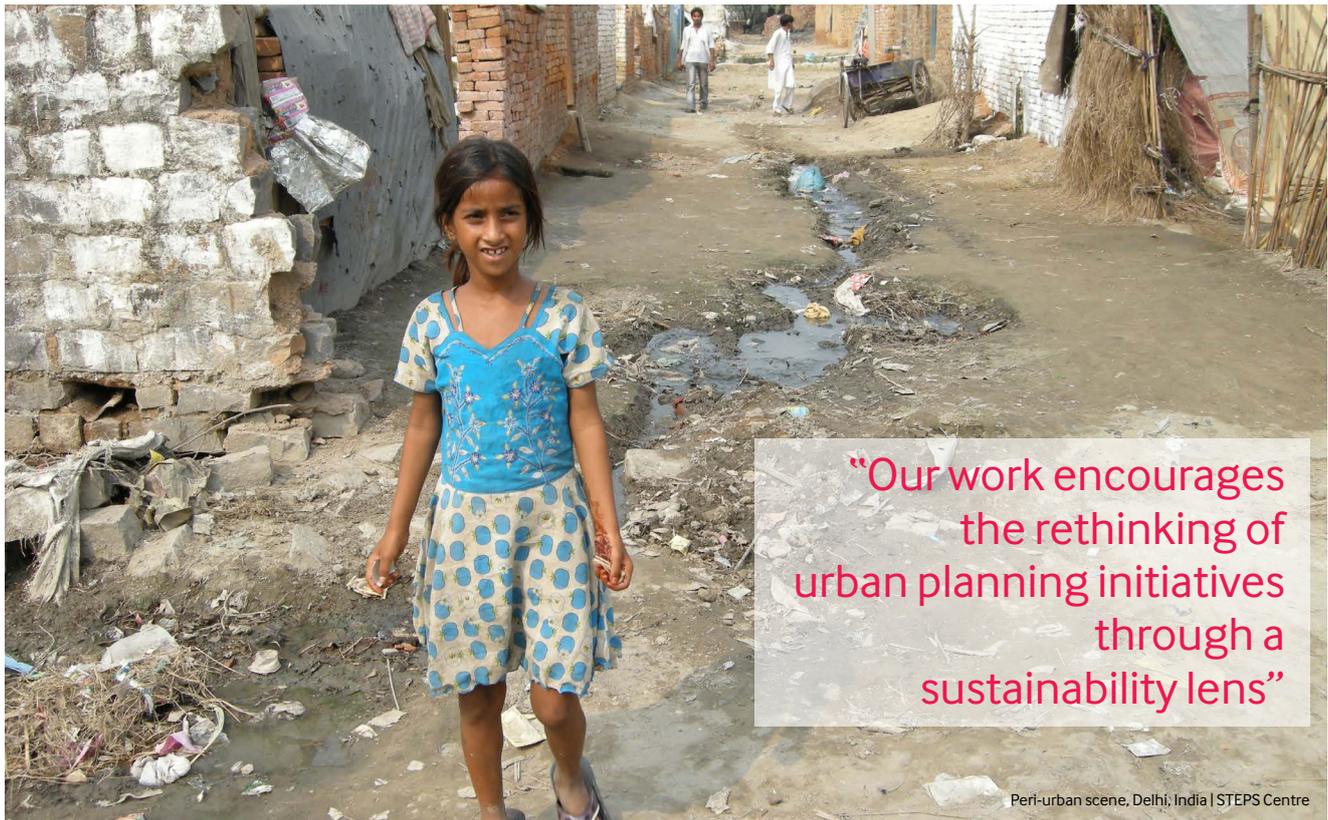


Sustainable cities research in rapidly urbanising India

An overview of our research
www.steps-centre.org/urbanisation

2016



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 her citizens – and also in determining progress on a global level.

For many years the ESRC STEPS Centre has worked with colleagues in leading Indian academic institutions, NGOs, policy makers and practitioners to research mainstream development interventions aiming to address environmental and resource management challenges in India’s rapidly urbanising transitional spaces.

We are now formally joining with colleagues across, initially, four schools at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, to create a ‘Sustainability Hub’ for collaborative, interdisciplinary work between the STEPS Centre and JNU. This exciting initiative will engender cutting-edge, academically rigorous research across the social and natural sciences, policy-oriented engagement, joint events, cross-learning and innovative communications.

This brochure sets out some key resources from the STEPS Centre’s work on urbanisation, tackling how citizens, science, policy and politics interact and how pathways to sustainability based on an enhanced understanding of complex, diverse and risk-prone urban and peri-urban situations can be achieved.

Browse the resources online: www.steps-centre.org/urbanisation

Overview

We have been exploring some of the hidden impacts of development interventions associated with rapid economic growth and urbanisation on the wellbeing of urban and peri-urban citizens and the environment. We are highlighting alternative pathways to sustainability based on an enhanced understanding of complex, diverse and risk-prone urban and peri-urban situations, and synergies between them. Our work encourages the rethinking of urban planning initiatives through a sustainability lens.

Challenges associated with rapid economic growth are particularly acute in rapidly urbanising, transitional spaces, where the very speed of growth has challenged the capacity of public institutions and society to establish the infrastructure necessary to support appropriate interventions and respond to emergent opportunities and risks.

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. Similarly, whilst environmental degradation in peri-urban zones is often seen as an inevitable cost of urban development, lack of attention to urban-rural interactions and potential synergies threatens to undermine attempts to build resilient urban food, water and energy systems.

Key research projects

Pathways for environmental health in transitional spaces; moving between formality and informality

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. A STEPS Centre project with partners in India.

www.steps-centre.org/project/environmental_health

Risks and responses to urban futures

Urbanisation brings the creation of new opportunities for many, while also resulting in a dramatic increase in the concentration of poverty and environmental degradation in peri-urban zones. Can recognition of the benefits obtained from ecosystems help alleviate poverty on the urban/rural fringes of cities, and support attempts to develop sustainable urban food, water and energy systems? A STEPS affiliate project funded by ESPA.

www.steps-centre.org/project/urban-futures

The peri-urban interface and sustainability of South Asian cities

Areas at the edge of cities are constantly changing and expanding. No longer solely seen in spatial terms, the peri-urban interface is increasingly recognised in terms of dynamic flows of commodities, capital, natural resources, people and pollution. This STEPS project looked at water conflicts in areas on the edge of Delhi, to explore technological and environmental sustainability challenges in peri-urban areas.

www.steps-centre.org/project/peri-urban

Peri-urban scenes, Delhi, India | STEPS Centre



Uncertainty from Below

Ecological uncertainty has usually been theorised from 'above' by experts. But the theories and models concerning uncertainty from 'above' may have little to do with the way how everyday men and women (poor or rich, urban or rural especially in the global South) live with, understand and cope with uncertainty in their daily lives. Our research covers urban Delhi, the Sunderbans and Kutch, India.

www.steps-centre.org/project/uncertainty



Co-Lab for innovation and sustainability

This Co-Lab project focuses on the challenges associated with peri-urban development, water, poverty and social equity. With innovative collaboration and co-learning, Co-Labs seek to produce novel thinking and solutions for 'wicked' sustainability problems. In this project we are seeking to learn from, synthesise and share our experiences of problem focused interdisciplinary collaborations – sharing cross-cultural, cross disciplinary and cross sectoral perspectives. A project in partnership with Arizona State University, US, and Jawaharlal Univeristy, India.

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Flows of risk

Past DFID-funded research on environmental pollution and urban food systems (Marshall) has informed current work on flows of risk - between social groups and across time and space in many hidden and unforeseen ways. Our 'flows of risk' approach seeks to understand rapid development impacts on the health and livelihoods of the poor. We use Interdisciplinary approaches to explore 'blind spots' in mainstream policies aimed at enhanced urban food security and facilitate dialogue around potential policy and practice.

www.steps-centre.org/urbanisation



Selected resources www.steps-centre.org/urbanisation

- **Journal Article** Policy transformations and translations: lessons for sustainable water management in peri-urban Delhi, India By Fiona Marshall and Pritpal Randhawa Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy, Feb 2014
- **Journal Article** Global environmental justice and the right to water: The case of peri-urban Cochabamba and Delhi, By Lyla Mehta, Jeremy Allouche, Alan Nichol, Anna Walnycki Geoforum, June 2013
- **Working Paper** On the Edge of Sustainability: Perspectives on Peri-urban Dynamics
- **Briefing** Contesting sustainabilities in the peri-urban interface
- **Briefing** Climate change and uncertainty from below and above
- **Film** Water and Justice: Peri-urban pathways in Delhi
- **Website** Peri-urban sustainability website
- **Article** Access to Water in peri-urban India by Alankar
- **Illustrated book** The Water Cookbook by Bhagwati Prasad
- **Blog** Rio+20 must ensure the poor don't lose out from rapid urbanisation By Fiona Marshall and Lyla Mehta
- **Blog** What does peri-urban sustainability mean in the context of Delhi? By Fiona Marshall

Find out more

This brochure gives an overview of just some of our research and engagement activities on sustainable urbanisation. Please get in touch if you would like to know more.

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About us

The ESRC STEPS Centre (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) is an interdisciplinary global research and policy engagement hub uniting development studies with science and technology studies. Based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU), at the UK's University of Sussex, we work with partners around the world. We are funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

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