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Editors

Water Security, Conflict and Cooperation in Peri-Urban South Asia

Flows across Boundaries

 Springer

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Preface

This book describes and analyses how urbanization in South Asia changes access to water in peri-urban contexts and how the inhabitants of peri-urban spaces respond to the changes underway. It seeks to address the larger questions of (in-)equity, justice and sustainability that are central to issues of water (in-)security but receive scant attention in mainstream discourses on urbanization, in which this latter process is seen as a necessary and positive step towards development in a way that is conducive to efficiency of resource use, made possible by the economies of scale that cities are able to achieve.

Urbanization has been a key demographic trend in the past and will remain so this century, both globally and in South Asia. Expanding cities tend to be framed as engines of economic growth and development, and as breeding grounds for “smart” and sustainable technologies and lifestyles. Urbanization and the expansion of urban lifestyles can undoubtedly help solving a wide variety of social, economic and environmental problems. For good reasons, growing numbers of citizens all over the world have come to prefer urban life to earlier rural lifestyles and are enjoying the many advantages associated with city life. They may have more economic opportunities, better housing and basic facilities like education and healthcare, water and sewage facilities, and other infrastructure.

There is, however, another side to the story. In a highly unequal world, these urban benefits are not everybody’s share, thus many urban inhabitants lack access to the most basic facilities and rights associated with citizenship. Besides this, processes of urban expansion involved often reproduce existing inequalities or create new ones. Urbanization processes are deeply influenced or even largely driven by neo-liberal reform measures and related policy packages. Land speculation, real estate development, growth of outsourcing and information technology sectors, and policies to promote private enterprise have been key drivers of growth in many of them. This investment in capital-driven types of growth is associated with changes in the use and control of land, water and other resources well beyond the city: urban expansion comes through an appropriation and re-allocation of resources away from rural and agrarian activities and lifestyles towards the urban, revealing a bias towards a specific type of urban planning that facilitates the expansion of global

private enterprise while at the same time jeopardizing the livelihoods of those who lose their land and have to move and find alternative sources of income.

The contributors to this book explore the peri-urban flipside of the generally positive urbanization narrative. Through its focus on the peri-urban, the book seeks to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on issues of peri-urban water security globally, and particularly in South Asia. “The peri-urban” refers to the spaces changed by urban expansion, basically involving “the coming together and inter-mixing of the urban and the rural, implying the potential for the emergence of wholly new forms of social, economic, and environmental interaction that are no longer accommodated by these received categories” (Leaf 2011, p.528). Focusing on Bangladesh, India and Nepal, the contributions in this book seek to address the following questions:

How does urbanization change access to water in peri-urban contexts? What are the implications of these processes for institutions and practices around water, especially for forms of conflict and cooperation? What kinds of approaches are needed to contribute to the analysis and improvement of peri-urban water security in peri-urban contexts and reconcile competing interests and claims?

The contributions originate in various scientific research programmes and projects. These different origins, as well as the various professional backgrounds and affiliations of contributors, translate into a diverse repertoire of theoretical-conceptual approaches and methods used by the contributors. A wide diversity of themes is addressed in the contributions: questions of urban metabolism and ecological foot-print; gender, rights and access issues; participatory institutional analyses; the institutional analysis and development framework; negotiated approaches; and the formation of multi-stakeholder platforms are some of the themes and approaches that inform scientific and policy discourses on the peri-urban. There is not one framework or analytic lens that is universally applicable to the analysis of peri-urban issues, neither is there a “one-size-fits-all” approach to intervening in peri-urban contexts. As the contributions to this book will show, the peri-urban can be studied and analysed at various scales and levels and through the connections between them.

The book seeks to further the debate on several issues related to water security in peri-urban contexts: what constitutes the peri-urban, including questions of scale and levels; the socially differentiated access to water in peri-urban spaces; appropriate approaches to intervention for improving water access and altering power relations in peri-urban spaces; the implications of the creation of urban infrastructure for peri-urban inhabitants; the diversity of ways in which water serves as a receptacle of urban waste as well as a resource for urban expansion; and the intersection of urbanization and climate change as multiple stressors on peri-urban water resources.

Covering these issues from diverse perspectives, we expect the book to appeal to a range of scholars with various disciplinary backgrounds, groups of professionals working in the worlds of national and international policy, national and international NGOs, activist groups, research and development institutes, and individual

readers interested in water security and urbanization, in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and elsewhere.

We hope that the book creates greater awareness of peri-urban water security issues as well as of the need and potential to address it locally, regionally and globally.

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