Toward Sustainable Cities in South

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Key Words
Sustainable development, Agenda 21, action research, ethnography, urban development, hybridisation, mitigation, local initiative.

Objective of the study
To understand better development dynamics of third world mega-cities and to enhance mitigation through supporting implementation of sustainable programmes.

Background
Mega-cities as Part of the Global Environmental Agenda
Recent discourse on the global environmental agenda has been dominated world-wide by two international documents, the Brundtland Commission’s Our Common Future (1987) and Agenda 21 (1992). The purpose of the Local Agenda 21 initiatives has been to move forward from the general definition of sustainable development and to formulate local (i.e. city specific) definitions and development programmes based on local resources, challenges and consultation processes. A clear division of roles between public administration and civil society in urban planning is emphasised as well (see also IIED Briefing Paper 8. Internet: www.ied.org).

Hence, it has been admitted that the ‘universal need’ for sustainable development does not call for ‘uniform solutions’ to global environmental problems. In view of this diversity, it is important to understand that environmental problems are inherently social problems. Consequently, in order to define applicable solutions to these problems, social structures and local experiences and interpretations on them make a topical focus of research (see e.g. Spaargaren, Mol & Butter 2000). This appeal is multiplied in the particular settings of low-income housing areas in large cities of the South, where population growth and poverty stand out as an extreme challenge to sustainable development.

Theory and concepts
The cities and their hinterlands are no longer autonomous units, but tied into a world system, which exerts pressure for social changes that might not otherwise be accepted by the local culture. The landscape as such of a Southern mega-city may exemplify the hybrid character of the Southern metropolis. Simultaneously, the local livelihood and patterns of everyday life in Southern mega-cities such as Lagos (see Picture 2) may strike with its similarity to village life in the nearest rural region (Yorubaland). Consequently, cultural characteristics, such as kinship, kinship, education and political power need to allow and inter-twin with various kinds of changes to create space for greater social and geographical mobility. Nevertheless, the ‘traditionally’ based social control through formal sanctions and religious and political power has often been augmented by the new demands of urban context (see e.g. Peil & Oyeneye 1998).

Methods and data
We have developed a methodological strategy aiming at integrated ethnographic research in the field with accumulating sustainability program policy relevance. We call our research strategy action research ethnography (ARETNO). ARETNO tries to reconcile between realism and social constructionism by observing closely every day life in action, in livelihood pursuit and in cultural tradition and meaning. ARETNO is essentially a qualitative strategy based on dialogical inquiries. Yet, multiple documentary material is collected including statistics to attach local case studies into a general framework of their global and regional embeddedness. Fieldwork actions have been performed periodically over several years (1997 - 2002) mainly in Cairo and Delhi (Susanna Myllylä), in Lagos (Kristiina Kuvaja, Eva-Marita Rinne-Koistinen) and in Manila (Kristiina Kuvaja). Documentation includes transcripts of interviews with individuals and focus-groups, field diaries, time charts and miscellaneous background material of ethnographic relevance.

Figure 1. Community risk perception and mitigation strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk level</th>
<th>Mitigation</th>
<th>Negotiation</th>
<th>Perception</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-environment</td>
<td>Everyday life</td>
<td>Cultural Interpretation</td>
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We propose a general model of mitigation action following the idea of cyclic and reproductive sequence rather than a linear procedure. Our ethnographic evidence supports the cyclic model respecting community initiative and responsiveness in relation to general development programs.

Results
Results of our inquiries imply e.g. that environmentally related urban and rural features of everyday life may be combined in flexible and creative ways. This, in fact, adds to the basic livelihood resources in peri-urban regions and low-income housing areas. In the low-income housing areas of the Third World large cities people are not only poor but also skilled in their survival and livelihood strategies performed by individuals, particularly women. Through experience of fieldwork and analysing interviews we were convinced that action research ethnography is a research strategy that can be efficiently used in particular when focusing community initiatives and strategies for implementing sustainable development and Local Agenda 21.

Consequently, it is important to define by what procedure and by whom should the aims of sustainability programs be confirmed. Furthermore, we suggest based on the case studies as well as review of several urban initiatives, that the main obstacles in the southern urban environmental development are 1) lack of good governance, 2) insufficient tradition of legitimate urban interaction, 3) deficiency of social justice and equality. For contributing on strategies of mitigation and enhancing sustainable development, a summary of the research results is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Hybridisation and sustainable city

- Tackling urban poverty and developing the security aspect of various basic infrastructure and service supplies
- Developing effective health services and campaigns especially in clean drinking water and sanitation
- Increasing possibilities for labour intensive employment, particularly in informal sector
- Recognising the urban-rural interaction and the role of peri-urban areas in city development dynamics
- Creating and implementing city plans and programmes that may open up participation to residents
- Combining the traditional, local knowledge with Western modern knowledge on socio-technological innovations as hybrid practices

In conclusion
When studying social action and agency in large Third World cities we found a multitude of survival and livelihood strategies performed by individuals, particularly women. Through experience of fieldwork and analysing interviews we were convinced that action research ethnography is a research strategy that can be efficiently used in particular when focusing community initiatives and strategies for implementing sustainable development and Local Agenda 21.

References