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Panel 39: Megacities in South Asia as Arenas of Risks and Resilience

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Introduction

Megacities in South Asia as Arenas of Risks and Resilience, *M. Keck, B. Etzold*

Social Transformations, Climate Change Risks, Food Security and Health

1. Structural Transformation of the Villages in Delhi Metropolitan Region, *Tapash Biswas*
2. Environmental and health condition of slum residents living in Dhaka: a descriptive study, *MMH Khan, Alexander Krämer, Oliver Grübner, Patrick Hostert*
3. Social adaptation to climate change: Dhaka's informal settlements in the face of future floods, *Boris Braun, Tibor Assheuer, Clemens Simmer, Insa Thiele-Eich*
4. Climate Change Risk and Food Security in the Emerging Mega City of Hyderabad/India, *Christoph Dittrich*
5. In search of a food policy for the Megacity Dhaka, *Wolfgang-Peter Zingel*

Human Insecurity, Identities and the Everyday Governance of Space

6. Organizing the urban poor of Dhaka with a focus to meet the growing challenge of poverty reduction in Dhaka, *Salma A. Shafi*
7. Negotiating open space for livelihoods in Dhaka: About risks and uncertainty in the urban poors' everyday life, *Kirsten Hackenbroch*
8. Governing every day risks of slum dwellers in Delhi, *Anna Zimmer*
9. Intermediary brokering organizations mitigating risk on the behalf of the urban poor in Bangalore (India), *Swetha Rao Dhananka*
10. Giving comfort, giving fear: The Shrine of Data Ganj Bukhsh in Lahore as a centre of social welfare and potential target of terrorism, *Linus Strothmann*

Conclusion

Everyday Risks and Ways towards Building Resilience in South Asian Megacities, *M. Keck, B. Etzold*

List of Abstracts:

Social Transformations, Climate Change Risks, Food Security and Health

1. Structural Transformation of the Villages in Delhi Metropolitan Region

Presenter: Dr. Tapash Biswas, Programme Officer of the Society for Women Workers and Child Labour Elimination, Dehli, India

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On perspective analysis, it has been revealed that rural population close to the urban centre has better influence of the city and differs relatively from the rural population away from it. The major question addressed in the study are; what are the spatial pattern of agricultural land use changes, education, occupational structure and standard of living and spatial variation of vegetables and food crops within the villages in general and those selected for the field study.

During study a special care has been taken to understand the functional relationship between villages and the urban centers. Primary survey has been done in nine villages of Delhi Metropolitan Region covering 450 households.

Villages have been selected on the basis of distance. Different statistical methods are used to understand these interactions. It has been observed that there is a clear-cut gender bias in the educational attainment in the region. This indicates the existence of male dominance in Indian (patriarchal) society. Major proportion of girls attains only up to high school level. The villages in the vicinity of the metropolis seem to be changing their character (in occupation, standard of living, production of different crops) more conspicuously than those situated away from it. Distance of village from the urban area and mode of conveyance

2. Environmental and health condition of slum residents living in Dhaka: a descriptive study

Presenters: Dr. MMH Khan, Prof. Dr. Krämer, Department of Public Health Medicine, University of Bielefeld, Germany

Dipl.-Geogr. Oliver Grübner, Prof. Dr. Hostert, Humboldt University Berlin

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Introduction: Cities cover about one percent of the planet's surface but accommodate more than 50% of the world's population, about 50% of the world refugees and consume 75% of the world's energy. About one-third of the developing countries' urban population is living in slums. Slums are generally characterised by high individual, social, and physical environmental vulnerabilities. Particularly growing slums in the risk-prone areas of the developing countries' cities are major concerns for global public health and wellbeing sectors, are threats to the sustainable development, UN millennium development goals and governance of the cities. Slum people are more vulnerable because of the lack of necessary institutional, economical and financial capacity, as well as the lack of ability to rebuild the infrastructure damaged by the natural disasters. Dhaka, which is one of the fastest growing megacities in the world with a population of more than 13 million, is recently ranked as the most vulnerable megacity in the world to the impact of climate change. More than one-third of the Dhaka city's population is living in slums. This study briefly reports vulnerabilities towards poor public health based on some selected factors covering socioeconomic, housing, and physical environmental conditions and self-reported health status.

Methods: Baseline data of a one-year cohort study conducted in early 2009 in Dhaka were used. Information was collected from a total of 1,938 adults, ranging from the age of 10 to 99 years, living in nine slums of Dhaka.

Results: The average age of the respondents was 34.5 years, most of which were migrants from rural areas (87%), married (89%) and illiterate (65%). About 45.6% reported that they had no relative/friend in their slums. About three-fifths of the family had monthly income less than one hundred US dollars. More than 90% were living in temporary provisional houses, which are mostly made by poor quality materials. Respondent's room shared by more than three persons was reported by 58%. About 70% of the respondents reported a common water source shared by 10 or more families. Similarly, same toilet shared by five or more families was reported by 78%. More than 70% reported that their slum areas were affected by stagnant water and above 50% reported that their houses were surrounded by logged and polluted water. A poor drainage system was reported by more than 80%. About 60% said that environmental conditions of the surrounding area negatively affect their health. Poor/fair health was reported by one-fifth of the respondents. Similarly poor well-being (mental health) was reported by 80%. More than 70% suffered from any disease or symptom during the last three months and sought medical care in the last one month mainly from pharmacies, an informal health care sector.

Conclusion: Slum people in Dhaka are highly vulnerable towards poor health being exposed to poor socioeconomic, housing, environmental characteristics. Therefore, interdisciplinary comprehensive strategies should be developed to improve the quality of life for the people living in urban slums of Dhaka.

3. Social adaptation to climate change: Dhaka's informal settlements in the face of future floods

Presenters: Prof. Dr. Braun and Dipl.-Geogr. Tibor Assheuer, Geography Department, University Cologne, Germany; Prof. Dr. Simmer and Dipl.-Meteor. Insa Thiele-Eich, Meteorological Institute, University of Bonn, Germany

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Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is regularly threatened by natural hazards. Risks associated with these natural hazards (mainly floods and cyclones) are expected to increase in future because of the impacts of global climate change and rapid urbanization. Today, the sprawl of slums and informal settlements in Greater Dhaka is primarily taking place in wetlands, swamps and other high-risk areas, with little attempt being made to limit the environmental impairments. In the past, Dhaka has proved that it is able to deal with external shocks. However, an increase of precipitation extremes and tropical cyclones, together with a growing vulnerability of the urban population is likely to put considerable stress on the adaptability and resilience of the social and economic system.

One focus of our interdisciplinary research project is on the social adaptation strategies of the urban poor to recent and future floods by means of micro-level social field research. Another focus of the project is on using both statistical and dynamical downscaling techniques to relate flooding in Dhaka and other extreme weather-related events to past and future climate states.

Our paper will outline theoretical and methodological challenges of the research project. Moreover, it will present findings of an extensive field survey in informal settlements. The dwellers of informal settlements are especially vulnerable to floods due to their poor access to physical and financial capital. At the same time they are very experienced with floods and other kinds of setbacks and show a relatively high degree of resilience. A major aim of our research is to understand which assets are fundamental for this resilience and whether the access to these assets will be disturbed by future effects of climate change.

4. Climate Change Risk and Food Security in the Emerging Mega City of Hyderabad/India

Presenter: PD Dr. Christoph Dittrich, Institute of Geography, University of Bonn, Germany

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India has become a major contributor to global carbon emissions. It is now number four in the world in its overall carbon dioxide emission, after China, the United States and the European Union. The country is also among those most threatened by climate change with experts warning that rising temperatures will lead to more floods, heat-waves, storms, rising sea level, unpredictable farm yields, increasing environmental health risks and new vulnerabilities with different spatial and socioeconomic impacts. The series of extreme weather events in some of India's large cities over the last few years has shed stark light on the vulnerability of these cities to the effects of climate change. Meanwhile, the scientific discourse on climate change in English-speaking India has come to be dominated by the view that the country's rapidly growing large cities themselves are significant net contributors to the build-up of greenhouse gases through transport, industries, housing, and resource-intensive urban lifestyles and consumption patterns. Climate Change directly affects food security and nutrition in both rural and urban areas and acts as a multiplier of existing threats to food security. The paper starts by providing an overview of major climate change impacts in the emerging mega city of Hyderabad, one of India's new leading cities for technology. The main part highlights major trends in the urban food scenario giving particular consideration to climate change induced food risks. Finally, the issue of localizing sustainable food practices as part of a much wider adaptation and mitigation strategy is discussed.

5. In search of a food policy for the Megacity Dhaka

Presenter: Dr. Wolfgang-Peter Zingel, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany

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When drafting a project to study the food systems of Dhaka – part of the German Research Foundation's Priority Programme (SPP 1233) "Megacities - Megachallenges" – we had assumed that there must be a government policy to organize feeding the people of the very fast growing metropolis, or at least of the millions of its poor inhabitants. Was it not that independent Bangladesh had seen the only famine of Independent South Asia and that it had been part of the Indian province that had suffered one of the worst famines of the 20th century, i.e. the Great Bengal Famine of 1943? Was it not that this catastrophe was the reason of founding the world's largest public distribution system that survived the partitions of India in 1947 and of Pakistan in 1971 and still lives on also in Bangladesh? And had Bangladesh not seen umpteen programmes aimed at bettering the food situation on all fronts: production, distribution, trade etc.?

While my colleagues have been concentrating on two aspects, i.e. the trade in two major food items, namely rice and fish, (Markus Keck) and street food (Benjamin Etzold), I have been trying to look at the policies behind the urban food economy. As Bangladesh is a unitary state with no political level between central and local agencies I did expect to find some policies aimed directly and explicitly at the gigantic task of feeding the poor of Dhaka, who – depending on the definition – number by millions. A first round of sifting through published material on food policy in Bangladesh and discussions with Bangladeshi colleagues and friends, however, did not bring to the fore any such explicit policy. The approach, thus, had to be changed. There seems to be no other way than to study any government policy (measures) that could qualify as food policy and try to determine their economic, social and spacial impact on Bangladesh in general and on Dhaka in particular. If such policies have been benefiting the Bangladeshi capital the real target groups – and accordingly the (geographical) target areas – have to be worked out.

As the work of my colleagues brings out a certain degree of formality of “informal” activities in food vending and trading, the study of food policy brings out a considerable informality of “formal” government regulation. The work is in progress and first results will be presented at the Conference.

Human Insecurity, Identities and the Everyday Governance of Space

6. Organizing the urban poor of Dhaka with a focus to meet the growing challenge of poverty reduction in Dhaka

Presenter: Salma A. Shafi, Centre for Urban Studies, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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The population of Dhaka megacity is increasing at an alarming rate with rise in the number of urban poor who receive little or no support from the government for their welfare. Mostly donors and NGOs provide support which amounts to a very meager part of their economic, social and physical needs.

Currently an initiative programme called URBIS supported by the Gates Foundation is working towards empowerment of the urban poor in Dhaka. The vision of the programme is to unite the poor and guide them in self help and community development skills till they become organizationally and financially strong to support themselves. This paper will present the objective and progress of this ongoing programme and provide an insight to the action research that is taking place in order to realise the vision and objectives.

7. Negotiating open space for livelihoods: About risks and uncertainty in the urban poor's everyday life

Presenter: Dipl.-Ing. Kirsten Hackenbroch, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Spatial Planning, Technical University Dortmund, Germany

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In order to pursue their livelihood activities the urban poor need to access open spaces. In Dhaka pavements, street spaces, vacant plots, public parks and city squares are used extensively for all sorts of economic activities, i.e. vending, production and provision of services. There has been considerable research on contested space in ‘visible arenas’ such as public parks and city centres. This paper, however, aims to reveal the highly contested nature of open spaces within low-income settlements, where inhabitants and informal institutions continuously negotiate and dispute the accessibility of space.

Inherent in the constant negotiation of space for everyday life are the risk to be dislocated from a specific place and thus the uncertainty whether the current livelihood strategy can be maintained. The notion of risk here refers to the social field of a specific place, which is produced through the various institutions and actors claiming space as well as the existence of social norms and values. The results from two different case-study areas will be presented to illustrate the difficulty of securing one's ‘right to space’ in an environment where informal institutions dominate. From the case study analysis the questions evolve whose risks are actually minimised through informal modes of regulation and whether new patterns of social exclusion emerge.

8. Governing every day risks of slum dwellers in Delhi

Presenter: Dipl.-Geogr. Anna Zimmer, Geography Department, University of Bonn, Germany

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Illegal housing in Delhi's slums exposes the residents to a number of risks in their everyday lives: lacking tenure rights, the way houses are set up, and lack of public infrastructure are sources of insecurity of slum dwellers. Moreover, obtaining address proofs and subsequent official documents may be difficult, and reaching out to the government for dealing with these problems is therefore more difficult than in other parts of the city. Interestingly, administration and politicians are in conflict over how to govern these spaces of risk: while the first wants to implement proper planning and make Delhi a world city before the Commonwealth Games 2010, politicians understand themselves as representatives of the inhabitants – and hope for a trade off between political assistance to the slums and support by slum dwellers during the next elections. Different modes of governing the risks that affect slum dwellers therefore exist parallel to each other. The contribution will explore these parallel modes of governance in order to identify sources of empowerment for slum dwellers.

9. Giving comfort, giving fear: The Shrine of Data Ganj Bukhsh in Lahore as a centre of social welfare and potential target of terrorism

Presenter: Linus Strothmann, Zentrum für Entwicklungsländerforschung, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

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The shrine of Data Ganj Bukhsh, situated in Lahore, Pakistan's second largest city, is among the most important sufi shrines in the country and by far the largest in terms of numbers of visitors and size. The shrine is state run by the Department of Religious Affairs and Auqaf since 1960 and has been enlarged with a new mosque and an expanded courtyard, sama hall for religious concerts, car parking basement, a library, a madrassa and various offices in the 1980s and 90s. Apart from its religious importance it has over the years become a center of social welfare activities. At the shrine food is distributed by visitors all through the day and night, the large complex gives shelter and security and for those who are sick but financially poor there is a hospital offering free treatment, run by the Department with the help of donations made at the shrine, the largest income source for the Department.

In my paper I will present the shrine as a center for redistribution of wealth in a dimension otherwise unknown in the city and maybe the subcontinent. I will show that the shrine is seen as a space of higher moral standards in which diverse actors, private, from the civil society and governmental are trying to fulfill their self-imposed islamic obligations.

Because of this it is an exceptional "social space" giving food security, health, but also business opportunities and to a certain extend informal money generating opportunities, sometimes in the form of organized crime. The last part however has recently seen a decline due to a massive police presence because the shrine is now considered a potential target of terroristic attacks. The reason for this lies not in its religious significance but in the simple fact that it is one of the most crowded places in the city while at the same time being almost impossible to overview or control through police barricades or searchings because of the number of visitors. It can thus be said that while on the one hand being an example of how a sacred space, through the anticipation of higher moral standards has become a center of social welfare activities and a space securing basic needs of a large number of people, this has lead the same space to become one particular vulnerable for terroristic attacks.

What the case study shows is thus the enormous potential for sacred spaces to be, or become, local centers of security (in one sense of the word). However, if this is done only in singular cases the centrality of these places can, in a setting of violent conflict, become a potential target thus making the poor the most vulnerable again. The implications of this are obvious: shrines and possibly other religious sites can be used to secure the basic needs of the poor. Depending on the circumstances however a decentralized approach should be considered.