“We are neither of the hills nor of the plains...”:
the peri-urban context

Rethinking conceptual issues for gender and sustainable development

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Rethinking ‘sustainability’ in a rapidly changing world

• What does sustainable development need to look like for populations that are increasingly peri-urban in terms of location as well as aspirations?
• What new vulnerabilities are emerging from changing conditions?
  – Whose livelihoods are increasingly divorced from the land and in varying degrees dependent on the urban economy
  – And whose mind-sets are shaped by very different compulsions
• What new gender issues arising out of this scenario?
  – Gender relations serve a lightening rod when old equations are challenged
  – Emerging opportunities & possibilities also provoke tensions
The peri-urban as a geographical location

- An interface representing rural/agricultural and urban eco and social systems
- Socially and economically heterogeneous
- No longer rural but with varying degrees of embeddedness in urban economy
- High land values / sales – often resulting in ‘false prosperity’
- Diverse land uses
- Environmentally sensitive & vulnerable (seasonal & locational)
Home to diverse populations and representing degrees of wellbeing/insecurity
The peri-urban as a mind-set

• New ways of thinking, behaving
• Aspirations shaped by engagement with national consumer culture & urban lifestyles
• Moving ‘up the hill’ influenced by migration flows, education & employment opportunities that are encouraging, encounters with ‘others’ and other ways of life
opportunities created by modernity have different meanings for women & men

• Behaviours change more easily than the thinking
• Women’s lives more closely bound by cultural dictates
• More easily seen to challenge the status quo
“sometimes we stand tall, other times we fall and then it’s hard to get up”

- Peri-urban circumstances are altering HHs’ relations to the land
  - High land valuation = land sales
  - Land as source of sustenance and basis of identity: what happens when it’s gone?
  - Land sales can transform lives but equally underscore vulnerability of both men & women
“from difficulty to freedom...”

• Contours of women’s lives are changing as relationship to environment and use of natural resources is altered

• what they do, how they do it, the knowledge of place that once was embedded in daily routines

• use of cooking gas, access to piped water
Frame other issues as more pressing

“we can no longer help our children”

“families are peaceful when women and men do their own work”
Girls’ education...mixed messages

“My son will inherit this shop...all I can give my daughter is a good education”

“let girls stand on their own feet...”
Emerging concerns

“Young women can turn their husbands’ heads like the wheel of a bus”

• ‘making it’ opens up new vistas but also highlights emerging conflicts within HHs, between different generations of women

• “Akelapan” / alone-ness of contemporary life (overt & hidden impacts on the elderly, men & women and children)

“I (the children) are my parents, and my brothers too”

• Cultural isolation of certain groups of women

• Impact on children who have to carry burden of stress on parents

• Boys may be better off relative to sisters but in an economy in crisis their situations aren’t enviable

• Hidden mental & physical conditions of contemporary life

• Gender-based violence
Thank you!