

# Neglected Futures of India

## Peri-Urban Agriculture in Gorakhpur





## The Peri-Urban Crisis

*Ram Pyari, 45, rues the day she agreed five years ago to allow her husband Ravi Prasad to sell their half-acre land to Mata Din, the insistent middleman. Ram Pyari and Ravi used to eke out a living commercially cultivating vegetables and some paddy for home consumption in Moharipur village north-west of eastern Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur city. Thirteen km from the centre of the city, Moharipur is just outside the municipal limits. Their land, in the heart of the Rohin Basin, was extremely fertile. Mata Din promised them Rs 100,000 but gave only Rs 75,000 saying that he had to pay various people as their papers were not in order. Ram Pyari and Ravi Prasad were too illiterate to understand paperwork. Though they knew they were cheated, it was difficult to protest as Mata Din was a powerful man. The money soon disappeared, with Ravi's taking to alcohol and gambling and the remnant going for Sushma's (their daughter) dowry. Shorn of a livelihood and an identity, Ram Pyari and Ravi Prasad were forced to lock their hut and come to Gorakhpur city as casual wage labourers living on the pavement. Ravi can't work much now as he has tuberculosis. They have no other children.*



Ram Pyari's story is largely apocryphal, but such incidents are common in almost every peri-urban site in India. As the country urbanises, every year the identities of thousands of Ram Pyaris and Ravi Prasads are decimated. The figures don't matter simply because they don't exist, but growing urban sprawls steam-roll small and marginal farmers into a state of non-being, reducing happy homes to marginalised pavement or slum dwellers. Land values go up, but unscrupulous middlemen dupe the small and marginal farmers of their dues. To be urban is to be modern. But such thinking ignores the fact that the elimination of small and marginal farmers and the converting of agricultural lands into housing estates and shopping malls jeopardises the future of the newly created urban space. But all this is about to change in Gorakhpur City, thanks to an initiative by the Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG) and the Rockefeller Foundation (RF).

Gorakhpur city, in eastern Uttar Pradesh saw its population grow from 300,000 in 1981 to 672,000 in 2011. The small 39 sq.km town of 1981 became a city of 147 sq.km by 2011, 'absorbing' 47 villages including Chakra, Sanjhai, Nuruddin Chak, Jungle Bahadur Ali and Semra Devi Prasad. Many of them are not included in the Gorakhpur Municipal Corporation (GMC). The villagers are mostly vegetable growers, with small landholdings less than an acre. They practice peri-urban agriculture, defined as 'Agricultural (including livestock) production, processing, and distribution activities within and around cities and towns, whose main motivation is personal consumption and/or income generation, and which compete for scarce urban resources of land, water, energy, and labour that are in demand for other urban activities. UPA (urban and peri-urban agriculture) includes small- and large-scale activities in horticulture, livestock keeping, fodder and milk production, aquaculture, and forestry-where several activities may be carried out within one enterprise'<sup>1</sup>.

GEAG, supported by the RF through the Asian Cities Climate Change Network (ACCCRN) endeavour, has taken up the cause of the peri-urban farmers. In a project 'Enhancing Livelihood Resilience to Climate Change and Buffering Floods in Gorakhpur City through climate resilient peri-urban agriculture' GEAG seeks to mitigate flood risk through the maintenance of open spaces by strengthening peri-urban agriculture based livelihoods.

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/pdf/ThematicSummaries/Synthesis\\_study\\_on\\_urban\\_and\\_peri-urban\\_agriculture\\_P1.pdf](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/pdf/ThematicSummaries/Synthesis_study_on_urban_and_peri-urban_agriculture_P1.pdf)

The process will demonstrate the importance of ecosystem services such as flood buffering for addressing climate change impacts in Gorakhpur city. Models of climate-resilient integrated agriculture-horticulture-aquaculture-livestock systems in small-marginal landholdings in the peri-urban context employing a diversity of water systems will be developed. This will be done in conjunction with enhancing the food security and incomes of the poor by organising them. To prevent the usurpation of peri-urban agricultural lands by the growing city, GEAG will launch advocacy and educative efforts to put in place appropriate regulatory and incentive frameworks. It will enhance the city's flood buffering capacity as it expands, through the institutionalisation and replication of sustainable management of agricultural ecosystems based on low external input sustainable agriculture (LEISA) practices.

## Target participants

Eighteen thousand men and women, mostly Dalits, holding 450 hectares across eight villages Semra Devi Prasad, Jharwa, Jungle Bahadur Ali, NarrudinChak, Sanjhai, Chakra II, Pipra and Kathwatia will participate in this project through appropriately formed community organisations. GEAG seeks to empower them by integrating their indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary ones. The people's organisations will consolidate the achievements and continue the unfinished tasks after years project period, ensuring sustainability. Eight farmer clubs, 50 master trainers and eight agro service centres will comprise a new farmer owned climate resilient extension system. Replicable farm models will be developed and the people's institutions will manage their own common property resources. Facilitated by GEAG they will fine tune and adapt LEISA practices like integrated agriculture-aquaculture, horticulture and livestock management. In this, GEAG will use contextually adapted models developed over the last three decades with the people.

## Intervention Approaches and Processes

The intervention will reduce the climate risks and vulnerabilities of poor who depend on peri-urban agriculture. The strategy underlying this is to create a demand for climate resilient peri-urban farming systems among the vulnerable and promote an environmental policy to preserve the agricultural land of peri-urban areas. This will be done by the development of climate resilient agriculture-horticulture-aquaculture-livestock systems; and institutionalising the maintenance of agricultural ecosystems in peri-urban areas as flood buffers. Need based technical assistance (TAs) will be provided by appropriate agencies to aid advocacy efforts for the creation of a favourable policy environment.

## Outcomes

At the end of the three year project period, sustainable and climate resilient models for agriculture-horticulture-aquaculture-livestock systems in marginal land holdings in peri-urban areas will be established. Additional expected gains are:

- Reduced inputs and enhanced net gains for small-marginal and women farmers.
- Enhanced livelihood security of vulnerable groups in peri-urban areas and the food security of urban poor.
- Conservation of agricultural land in peri-urban areas to help flood buffering capacity of the city on the whole.
- Institutionalisation replication of project approaches and learnings.

The intervention's lessons will be documented and used for advocacy with the Gorakhpur Development Authority (GDA) and the GMC to maintain the land use and deliver services to peri-urban areas. These lessons will be disseminated to academics, activists, and policy makers nationally and internationally through workshops, seminars and relevant publications.





## The Future

It may seem that GEAG is curbing the right of property owners, in this case small and marginal farmers, from disposing off their lands to urban realtors to make windfall gains. But that is a rather simplistic assumption as the ground realities are different. GEAG has always espoused the cause of small and marginal farmers and this project too seeks to address that concern.

A recent study of a peri-urban village near Bangalore reported that the per capita incomes of peri-urban farmers are 50 percent lower than that of the average Indian.<sup>2</sup> Coupled with this is the fact that the small and marginal farmers do not get the benefits of the rising realty prices, the gains being siphoned off by a chain of middle-men. This happens also with the produce of the farmers, the crisis being accentuated by the high input costs. Moreover, the total conversion of the agricultural spaces impacts the city adversely. But there is no policy framework for peri-urban locales and peri-urban agriculture and animal husbandry.

This project will develop and implement a policy framework in which the marginalised are empowered and peri-urban agriculture and the

agriculturists get their due recognition and importance. In the long run, even if the agriculturists opt to sell their lands, the processes initiated in the project will ensure that they are not cheated. But the project seeks to create a situation that they do not have to part with their lands. Apart from promoting the LEISA techniques and models to adapt to climate change, the focus is on organising communities so that they can face markets for inputs and produce with an enhanced bargaining power. Collective marketing of high value products like perishable fruits and vegetables will be promoted, and post-harvest losses reduced. Through advocacy and lobbying with the city authorities, the civic infrastructure, including the road and communication network, will be improved. This will reduce transport costs and travel time, thereby preserving the quality of the produce brought to the wholesale markets in Gorakhpur and enhancing the profit margins. Efforts will be made to change and implement the regulatory framework to preserve the peri-urban agricultural spaces for the sake of the city's health, but according top priority to the farmers' interests. If peri-urban spaces, the people living there and their agriculture are not protected, the future of the city is doomed as the buffers against floods will cease to exist.

<sup>2</sup>Gowda, UC Ramalinge et al, 2012: 'The Economics of Peri-Urban Agriculture', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 16, Vol. XLVII No 24, pp. 75-80.



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