

Presenter – Farhana Sultana

Presentation Title - Urban water crises, informal settlements, and water for the urban poor

Presentation Overview

- Slums or informal settlements are growing at a rapid rate in South Asia
 - Up to 35% of the urban population
 - These are displaced people seeking livelihood options
- They live in poor and insecure infrastructure on public and private land:
 - Constant threat of removal, demolition and erasure
 - Not treated as full citizens or desired urban dwellers
- Poor play an important role in formal and informal economies, but have little rights or power in the governance of the city
- Fractured/fragmented water provision:
 - Property rights and water supply are linked, thus the slum people are excluded from formal water provision system
 - Water crises are most keenly felt in slums, and thus necessitate greater attention
- Lack of formal water systems leads to the flourishing of ‘water mafia’, illegal connections, purchasing water, bartering for water, exploitation...
- Case study from Korail slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh demonstrates all these issues, and further showed how water issues are gendered, classed, and represents a crisis of urban governance.



Key Questions/ Challenges Identified

- Water for slums:
 - Need to address continuing problems of ad-hoc solutions and exploitation/corruption concerns
 - Need to find affordable and reliable public water services
 - Need to understand that the right to water is often seen by the urban poor as their right to life and citizenship
- UN's right to water (goals and criteria):
 - UN ratified the right to water in 2010.

SAI – Urban Water Challenges – Panelist Summary

- Key issues are: Quantity, quality, reliability, affordability, accessibility, acceptability, accountability, sustainability, nondiscrimination, and participation
- This is not prescriptive but contextually derived.
- ‘Right to water’ – This term does both discursive and real work:
 - Foregrounds uneven and inequitable water access and the need to address urban inequities
 - Contestations over citizenship, democracy and social justice
 - Mobilizes claims-making by the poor
- What’s needed first:
 - Recognize urban poor’s human right to water
 - Ensure state’s obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill that right
 - Mobilize stakeholders and actors

Suggested Solutions and Pathways

- Democratize water governance and enable a right to water:
 - Need to see the urban poor as citizens, not quazi-citizens
 - Recognize and respect their voice and opinions
 - Pay particular attention to the inclusion of women’s participation
 - Also need problems of power and political capture
- Possible ways to proceed for water justice:
 - Not link property rights to the right to water
 - Configure mediators that can act as a guarantor (NGO, CBO, etc.)
 - Ensure equitable pricing and subsidies
 - Watch out for privatization of water institutions & commodification of water
- Improve urban planning that includes housing and water for the urban poor
 - Slum-scale solutions require city-scale action and planning & national vision of inclusiveness
- Foster cross-class alliance to ensure water for the poor
 - Reduce fears and change attitudes of wealthy
 - Philanthropy or self-interest for healthy urban population
- Recognize that urban water issues are complex interplays of nature and society across scales
 - Improve water governance across scales, not just at city level
- Measurable outcomes of success:
 - Safe water in slums for the urban poor
 - A robust water system that fulfills a range of criteria that is contextually appropriate and fairly negotiated

Key References

Farhana Sultana and Alex Loftus, 2012. *The Right to Water: Politics, Governance and Social Struggles*, Routledge: London & NY.

Farhana Sultana, Chandra Mohanty, and Sarah Miraglia, 2013. “Gender justice and public water for all: Insights from Dhaka, Bangladesh” *Municipal Services Project (MSP) Occasional Paper* No. 18. Pp. 1-24. <http://www.municipalservicesproject.org/>