

# An approach towards urban policy

Urban Development

By Shahid Javed Burki

PAKISTAN needs to develop an approach towards addressing the numerous problems faced by its urban population. Not unlike other developing countries, Pakistan tends to underestimate the size of its urban population, the size of its large and medium cities and the proportion of the population that should normally be classified as urban.

Other than the usual reasons for the underestimation, there are also political reasons for giving a smaller weight to the urban population. Pakistan was a rural place and a largely rural economy at the time of its birth. Since then, starting with the movement of the population that accompanied the partition of British India into independent states of Pakistan and India, the size of the urban population has increased at rates between two and half times to three times the rate of increase in population.

The country has had one of the highest rates of the urbanisation in the developing world. This should have resulted in the flow of greater political power from the countryside to towns and cities. That did not happen as the powerful landed interests succeeded in preventing the urban areas from gaining a larger space in the political system. This is one reason why population censuses have not been held on a regular basis as provided by the Constitution of 1973. There are at this time no firm estimates of the size of the population overall and its geographic age and gender distribution.

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try that used locally available skills; or again, they were supplying important services to the sector of agriculture as it developed in the surrounding countryside.

Two medium size cities, both in the Punjab, illustrate very well how different approaches towards industrialisation can influence the shape and growth of urban areas. Rahim Yar Khan in the province's south drew a number of large transnational corporations that, taking advantage of the import substitution bias in the first 40 years after independence when they established their operations in and around the city.

The city's choice as a location was influenced by the impressive agricultural potential in the surrounding countryside. Lever Brothers, a prominent multinational that specialised in the manufacture of basic consumer goods, chose to locate its plant in the city. Engro corporation established a fertiliser plant. But the city failed to develop as an industrial hub especially after the economy was opened to trade and import-substitution lost some of its lustre.

On the other hand, Sialkot in the province's centre was able to become a vibrant urban centre by opting for what economists now call "cluster development". By this is meant the location of relatively small enterprises in one area producing same types of goods and services.

Being clustered together makes it possible for them to obtain the inputs, services, physical infrastructure and have access to the markets that, working individually would be expensive and, therefore, uneconomical.

Sialkot is an example of the success of this type of cluster development. The medium-sized cities located in the city built a strong export business based on traditional skills that were abundantly available in the area. The city's entrepreneurs also

decided not to rely on the government for serving their area with the needed infrastructure. Instead they taxed themselves and raised sufficient resources to improve roads and even build an airport. A single urban development approach, therefore, would not work for all medium-sized cities.

Finally, small towns have their own social and economic characteristics. They are much more integrated with the economic and social situations of the surrounding countryside than the other types of urban communities. They will be affected much more by the policies aimed at the development of agriculture and by promoting trade in agricultural commodities.

Urban centres grow and flourish – or decay and perish – by developments that are not strictly part of a state's urban policy. This should be clear especially to the people of Pakistan. After all, the country was once the site of the oldest urban centers in human history. Mohenjodaro and Harappa disappeared into history not because the rulers of the day did not have appropriate urban policies. They were the victims of circumstances and events over which the ancient state had no control.

That notwithstanding, Pakistan's urban future will depend to some considerable extent on how the country builds its economy and how it makes it more productive and competitive. For instance, by encouraging the development of retail trade and by facilitating the entry and expansion of multilateral retail chains, the country may be able to develop a number of centres of agricultural processing. This will create new urban poles of economic activity which, in turn, will reduce the pressure on the large cities by holding back some of the surplus workers from the countryside that would have inevitably migrated to the large cities, further crowding them and further putting pressure on weak urban services.

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By underestimating the size of the urban population and the size of the major urban areas, the country has not properly provided the needed urban services. There is an urgent need for an urban economic and social development strategy that can provide employment and economic security to its young and growing population. Without it, the urban population will become increasingly restive. This is particularly the case with the urban youth. My guess is that Karachi and Lahore alone have 20 million people who are below the age of 20. For designing an urban strategy it may be appropriate to reflect on the economic and social dynamism that shapes urban areas. Policy makers may distinguish among four different types of urban communities: the large cities; the peripheries of large cities; the medium-sized cities and small towns. Each of these urban centers has its own dynamic.

There are also differences among the large cities. The strategy that might well serve the city of Karachi, Pakistan's largest, may not exactly be the same as the one that would be relevant for Lahore, the country's second largest city. Nonetheless, both cities need better supply of water and sanitation, better transport, better education and health care, more focused attention to providing employment to the people who are constantly moving into the cities from the areas outside, more technological advance to increase the incomes of the employed and better integration with the global economy.

While the city centres of Karachi and Lahore and other large cities may need the same kind of public sector attention, their peripheries are very different from one another. Karachi has expanded into its hinter land by extending itself into the essentially empty and desert areas to its south and east.

Those who have arrived in the city in search of jobs, have found or developed slum-like housing in the numerous "katchi abadis" that are located in the city's periphery. Hundreds of thousands of Pathans are living in these cities making Karachi the world's largest Pathan city, larger than Peshawar and Kabul.

There are "katchi abadis" in Lahore as well but its expansion has occurred largely by the assimilation of long-settled towns that were all around its ever-expanding periphery. Public policy designed to address the problems faced by the peripheral areas of the two cities, therefore, will have considerable differences in their content and objectives.

The medium-sized cities are the product of economic and social dynamics that are altogether different from those that are operating in large cities. Most medium-sized cities have grown in size for three different reasons. They were either important links in the system of transport and communication; or they were centered on some indus-

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