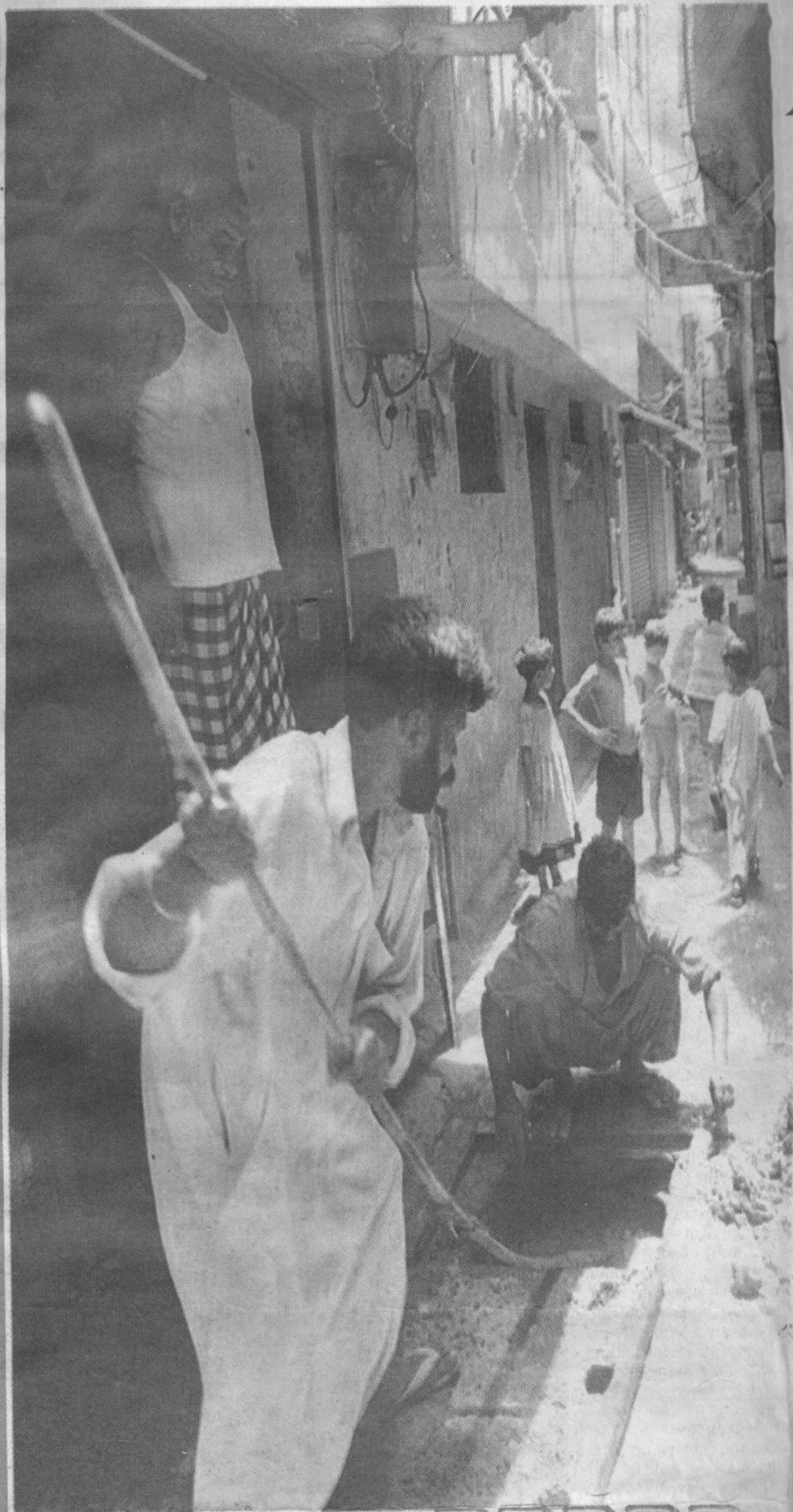


With vision and determination, cities can be turned around and rapid growth does not have to be accompanied by deteriorating quality of life in cities. An important first step is to understand the dimensions of various problems

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**Closed spaces:** A narrow alley in the growing city. Photos: Rahat Dar

Among the most significant phenomena taking place in Pakistan is the rapid increase in urban population, estimated to be increasing at the rate of 3.5% per year compared to 2.2% for the rural popula-

# urbanisation

tion. Such 'urban explosion' is not unique to Pakistan. As the shift from agrarian to industrial economies proceeds, most developing countries are in a similar situation. In fact, a majority of the world's largest cities are now found in developing countries and it is estimated that by 2025, there will be 20 mega-cities (with population above 10 million each) in Asia alone, two of them in Pakistan.

The planning and management of its urban centers is a

major challenge facing Pakistan and it is going to become more so in the coming years. Some key areas in which visionary and innovative interventions will be needed most urgently relate to provision of services and infrastructure and planning and management of the natural and built environment of urban areas.

Most cities of Pakistan face a problem in terms of deterioration of the urban system; their high annual growth rates (estimated to be more than 4% in the case of Lahore, for example) exacerbate the problem. Mere increase in size, however, is not responsible for the problems which are emerging. Poor functioning of institutions meant for planning and managing the city is partly to blame. Meanwhile, millions of city residents find ways to cope and cities grow through a combination of unofficial and official development.

Though supplies of water and electricity, sewerage net-

work, number of schools, colleges, hospitals, etc., all have increased manifold over the past few decades, mere increase hides certain facts. Access to these services and facilities is highly unequally distributed among city residents. Moreover, their quality and long-term availability is not ensured.

To take the example of education facilities, which should be a basic right of all city dwellers, one can reflect on the conditions in municipal schools. Their quality can be judged by the fact that these schools do not attract even the poor. Problems of inadequate and sometimes dangerous buildings, lack of furniture, trained teachers, play fields, and books are widespread.

Private schools have mushroomed all over the city, even in the poorest localities, but the quality of education provided varies. No doubt, it is most desirable for good quality educational institutions to be available on a neighborhood basis. In

# A mega-city called Lahore

the absence of this facility, those who can afford private schools now face arduous and expensive travel to and from the locations where better schools are located. School bus and van arrangements are often inadequate, unaffordable or non-existent. Reliance on private cars results in massive traffic jams in residential areas across the city.

Steps are needed to improve the working of municipal schools through proper teacher recruitment and adequate funding to ensure proper buildings and school supplies. Cities will fare much better if location of schools is also rationalised to a greater extent to reduce traffic related problems. And last but not the least, affordable schools bus and van arrangements for students have to be ensured.

Children as well as adults in cities are increasingly deprived of and in necessity: parks and open spaces close to homes. Until half a century ago, the city of Lahore for example, provided ample open spaces and play areas close by for all residents. This situation has steadily changed. In 1946, there were 2.6 acres of recreational open space per 1000 persons in the city. Today, there are only 0.47 acres of the same per 1000 persons.

Unequal access to the available open space can be gauged from the fact new parks have mostly been developed only in the Planned Schemes on the periphery, whereas existing parks particularly around the older developments, were indifferently maintained and often allowed to be built over.

Before the cities turn into

residential colonies. Most sewers have outlived their effective life.

Storm-water drainage is another major problem. Each rainy season causes large areas of cities to be inundated, the state of northern Lahore at such times provides a vivid example.

Rapid acceleration of the rate at which the city depletes the aquifer for ground water is another cause for concern. In Lahore, the demand for water is projected to rise to three times its current level by the year 2018. Meanwhile, water losses continue unabated due to cracked pipes and joints. It is estimated that in this about 35% of the water leaks out of WASA's water supply system for this reason.

Limited financial and technical resources are partly responsible for allowing the above situation to develop. But another is misplaced priorities for how the few funds available are spent. Usually high priority is given

road conditions particularly for pedestrians and bicyclists. In Lahore, the average annual growth of fatalities is estimated at 11.4%. Road widening has also encouraged high speed driving and resulted in a rise in accidents along avenues like the Main Boulevard, etc.

Traffic congestion has also worsened in some parts of the city due to concentration of bus and truck terminals or due to encroachments on roadways. Recent surveys of 30 major roads in Lahore indicate that Right of Way of 67% of road lengths is significantly wide but due to encroachments and haphazard commercialisation, traffic is frequently blocked.

Road maintenance is problematic due to absence of a unified and coordinated system for the working of various agencies responsible for providing utility service lines.

Rapid increase in the number of vehicles on the road means increasing air pollution and resulting harm-

have been evolved to regulate land uses in general. Another neglected aspect is conservation of historic buildings or districts, causing treasures accumulated over centuries to go to waste.

It is now time to assess and if necessary revise by-laws to ensure their relevance for cities, and to make authorities responsible for enforcement of building regulations more accountable. Historic preservation concerns must be incorporated in planning and zoning exercises, as is done the world over. Finally, the focus of city planning exercises must shift from rezoning for commercial use to more comprehensive, city-wide concerns such as open space preservation, control of encroachments, prohibition of noxious land uses in residential areas and rational location of various land uses to discourage sprawled and inefficient urban development.

None of the recommendations presented so far are feasible without institutional capacity within cities to bring about necessary changes. Cities in Pakistan have no dearth of institutions charged with managing growth and providing needed services and facilities. However, their working is marred by a number of problems such as: overlapping functions of agencies, lack of coordination of city-wide activities of different agencies, lack of long-term planning which takes into account existing situation and sets realistic goals, revenue constraints, poor accountability of officials, lack of input from the public regarding improvements in service provision or future planning, entrenched bribery

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to new capital works while neglecting maintenance and upgrading of existing facilities, particularly in older parts of the city.

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ful impact on the health of city dwellers. An efficient and reliable public transport system could lower reliance on private vehicles, but so far the trend is towards more private vehicle use.

There is an urgent need to make the city's roads safer



developed only in the Planned Schemes on the periphery, whereas existing parks particularly around the older developments, were indifferently maintained and often allowed to be built over.

Before the cities turn into unlivable environments, it is imperative to reserve existing valuable open spaces in the poorer and more congested quarters particularly by checking encroachment and conversion of open space into commercial areas. Simultaneous efforts are required to create additional parks and open areas, particularly by identifying which areas can be acquired for this purpose.

The next issue crying out for attention is that of public water, sewers and drainage networks — the veins and arteries of a city. Public arrangements for water supply and waste disposal are among the basic needs of urban living. In most cities in Pakistan, existing system is grossly overloaded. Capacities of sewers are reduced due to silting, dumping of solid waste and unplanned development of

new capital works while neglecting maintenance and upgrading of existing facilities, particularly in older parts of the city.

Meanwhile, cities generate tons of solid waste every day but do not have satisfactory arrangements for its disposal. Presently MCL in Lahore, is collecting only about 70% of the solid waste generated in its jurisdiction. The remaining 30% of solid waste finds its way into open drains, sewers, streets and open areas. Particularly harmful is hospital waste. There are thirty major hospitals in Lahore and only three have incineration facilities for disposal of waste generated by them.

Not only is there a need to improve waste collection on the part of civic authorities, but it is also important to integrate waste collection with recycling industry to reduce volume of waste that must be dumped in landfills etc. and to promote recycling efforts.

Rapidly growing cities also present many problems related to roads and traffic. Traffic accident fatalities rise each year due to dangerous

impact on the health of city dwellers. An efficient and reliable public transport system could lower reliance on private vehicles, but so far the trend is towards more private vehicle use.

There is an urgent need to make the city's roads safer for pedestrians and bicyclists through traffic calming measures and better traffic management and education of general public regarding the issue. Measures can also be considered to discourage private automobile use by providing better public transport coverage and service.

Building control laws and zoning ordinances are meant to make the city more livable. Restrictions on building height, density, setback etc, are meant to allow for a healthy environment. In cities like Lahore there are building regulations and site approval procedures, but both have been ineffective as well as irrelevant. Generally, construction proceeds without permits, and, in cases where approvals are sought, regulations and standards are not followed in implementation. No effective legislation or suitable procedures

which takes into account existing situation and sets realistic goals, revenue constraints, poor accountability of officials, lack of input from the public regarding improvements in service provision or future planning, entrenched bribery and corrupt practices.

Problems such as those discussed above are not unique to Pakistani cities. Many developing country cities have been in a similar situation. Yet, some have undertaken bold initiatives to solve some problems and improve quality of life for their citizens. In 1997, the Asian Development Bank organized a seminar on City Management in Lahore which was attended by representatives of city planning and development agencies from many Asian countries. From a sharing of experiences, it became apparent that with vision and determination, cities can be turned around and rapid growth does not have to be accompanied by deteriorating quality of life in cities. An important first step is to understand the dimensions of various problems.