

Urban development and informed decision-making

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Society & Social problems

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IN a briefing recently given by a group of professionals to the chief of a civic agency of Karachi, came up a debate on the issue of katchi abadis. Despite the presentation of facts, figures, evidences and analysis, the said chief had his own view which was a major departure from reality.

According to him, the katchi abadis were settlements of criminals and convicts and the best solution was to bulldoze them and replace them by other options of urban development. The meeting ended with an order from the chief to bulldoze a few of the katchi abadis on priority!

The researchers adjourned dejected at the denial of the scientific inquiry and analysis they had done for the benefit of the concerned administrative head. Such attitude is, however, not new. It is glaringly visible that the decision-making process relating to urban development does not draw feedback from information and its analysis provided by various individuals and institutions in public interest. Bureaucrats, politicians and heads of law-enforcing agencies (who have a vital say in all the key decisions relating to development) mostly act to serve individual or institutional interests disregarding the logic laid down by research and analysis. The whims of power brokers override the substance of knowledge. Personalised agenda of development work is a prominent hallmark of decision-making. For instance, public utilities, such as the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB), have been treated as guinea pigs for test-

transformed. From compact and centrally located settlements of half a century ago, ribbon settlements along major highways, roads and waterways have become prominent. Various research studies and fact finding work have been done to understand the complex processes of urbanisation and its impact on the social and physical environment. From independent exploratory exercises to commissioned studies, considerable work has been done by researchers, institutions and organizations. The following issues have been apparent from the various researches conducted in this direction:-

1. The myth that people from rural areas are moving in large flocks to urban areas has been proved outdated. The geographical pattern of urbanisation clearly shows that the large cities are receiving population flux from smaller urban centres. Besides, the evolution of urban settlements along highways, major roads, transport terminals and mega projects has also changed the orthodox definition of urbanisation. The advent of infrastructure components such as electricity, natural gas, telephone and communication facilities has also changed the typical format of rural settlements to a considerable extent. Remoteness of rural locations is shrinking due to improved modes of transportation and expanding exposure to foreign electronic media.

2. Due to the uneven process of urbanisation, the size, magnitude and number of katchi abadis have considerably increased. This proportion is the highest in Sindh and marginal in Balochistan (see table). The relationship clearly shows that higher urbanisation leads to larger population residing in squatter settlements.

3. Almost all the cities of Pakistan are growing

URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION BY PROVINCE

	Land area (% of (Pakistan)	1981		1993 (estimated)		Urban population as % of provincial population	
		Urban	Total	Urban	Total	1981	1993
Punjab	26	55	56	56	56	22.7	34.9
Sindh	18	35	23	34	24	42.3	50.3
NWFP	9	7	13	7	13	15.3	18.2
Balochistan	44	3	5	3	4	16.3	18.0
FATA, Islamabad, etc.	3	1	3	1	3	11.4	11.4
Pakistan	100	100	100	100	100	28.8	35.0

Source: Asian Development Bank, Pakistan Urban Sector Profile, Manila, 1993.

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ing privatization by a former managing director against all sorts of logic and findings of scientific research. Similarly, clandestine moves and lobbying obstruct the way to logical and rational decision-making. Commercially motivated professional and consulting organizations drag the decision-makers into taking technically incorrect decisions only to serve petty personal gains. The ground realities are very seldom recognized by the decision-makers.

Few decision-makers are conscious of the fact that Pakistan is fast heading to become an urban country. The urban population has grown from 17 per cent in 1947 to more than 40 per cent in the year 1998. The number of urban settlements has also grown rapidly during the same period. Against 67 in 1947, the number of urban settlements is over 500 at present. Pattern of urbanisation in morphological reference has also greatly

without reference to an administratively valid and technically appropriate master plan. It is also interesting to note that various large, medium and small scale cities have had elaborate master planning studies that led to the development of master plans. But these exercises remained at the academic level only. Karachi had a master plan document prepared at a cost of Rs 430 million by a team of the Karachi Development Authority (KDA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS-HABITAT) and many local and foreign consultants. The document is lying idle and outdated. The Sindh Secondary Cities Project aimed at preparing structure plans of 18 medium- and small-sized cities was initiated in the mid-1990s. The project involved

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