**Community mapping**

BY A R I F H A S A N 2021-02-14

WHENEVER Karachi floods, the government announces the widening of its nullahs that carry the floodwater to the sea. The decision of the extent of widening is taken in an ad hoc manner. As a result of recent decisions, 5,916 houses along Gujjar nullah, 1,049 along Mehmoodabad nullah, and 992 along Manzoor Colony nullah are to be demolished apart from commercial units.

The affectees are not being allocated land or funds for rehabilitating themselves and are becoming homeless, having been declared encroachers by the judiciary in Pakistan.

Affected communities argue that their encroachments are just one of the reasons why Karachi floods. Other reasons are that the nullahs are choked and as such cannot function to capacity, inevitably flooding the areas throughwhichtheypass. Communities also claim they have paid corrupt government officials for the land they sit on and in addition paid billions of rupees for legal electricity, gas and municipal connections and taxes over the last 50 years. Nongovernment planners are also of the view that another reason for flooding is that three of the major outf alls to the sea at Gizri Creek in Defence Society, Chinna Creek backwaters around Mai Kolachi, and the Kalri nullah at Machhar Colony are blocked and even if the nullahs are widened flooding will still take place.

At a meeting of civil society organisations in September 2020, when demolitions were supposed to begin along the Manzoor Colony nullah, it was decided that the community should undertake its own mapping.

Architect Fazal Noor was given the responsibilityofarrangingthisprocess.Sirajuddin, head of technical training, Resource Centre, an NGO trained in community mapping by the OPP, was given the responsibility of surveying and mapping the Manzoor Colony natural drainage system with community involvement. The Urban Resource Centre was appointed as adviser.

The findings of the community mapping show that the Mehmoodabad nullah drains into the Manzoor Colony nullah and that a network of nullahs passing through 34 settlements (which include Mohammad Ali Society and PECHS Blocks 2 and 6) drains into the Mehmood abad nullah. The depth of the Manzoor Colony nullah is about seven feet (approximately two metres) of which three to four feet are filled with sewage sludge and silt reducing its effective depth.

At 21 points in this drainage network the nullahs are blocked with garbage, debris, and parts of collapsed infrastructure. All this has been mapped with photographs.

The communities are of the opinion that if these obstructions are removed and thenullahs are cleaned and subsequently maintained, flooding will not take place as the capacity of the nullahwill be increased by well over 100 per cent. However, government planners point out that for cleaning the nullahs heavy machinery will be required and for that a minimum clear space of 20 feet is required on either side of the nullah. This can be provided in the case of the Manzoor Colony nullah by the removal of 39 houses which can be accommodated within the existing settlement.

But there is another problem. The Manzoor Colony nullah drains into the Defence Society drain in Phase 7 to which the sewage and floodwaters of Phase 2 and 7 of DHA are added. During heavy rains this drain floods Defence Society and at high tide there is a backwash which makes it difficult for the Manzoor Colony network to drain into the sea. The reason for this flooding is that the Defence Society has encroached upon the one kilometre-wide estuary of the Gizri Creek and reduced its width to a 60-foot nullah. Heavy pumpingwill be required to deal with this situation or alternatively restoring the estuary which would mean the demolition of a large number ofposh houses that have been built on it. This is seldom pointed out.

The building of a 20-foot road will keep the settlement as it is. However, a 60-foot road, which has been planned, will invite developers and slowly coerce the inhabitants out of the settlement. Thus a lowincome settlement will be lost to the city centre leading to a densification of other katchi abadis or the creation of new ones. It is claimed that such a road will help in the circulation of traffic. However, without a city-level traf fic management plan this will be a disaster as we will be creating new congestion nodes just as the construction of signal-free roads have done.

It is suggested that mapping, decisionmaking, and future management should be done with the involvement of communities and local expertise and on the basis of a vision to promote equity and justice and not on an ad hoc, anti-poor basis. If this is not done it is feared that apart from adding to the ranks of the homeless, the planned upgrading process will result in f ailure, as it has done so many times in the past.  The writer is an architect.

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