HIGHLIGHTING URBAN PLANNING ISSUES OF PAKISTAN AND EMPHASIZING THE ROLE OF PLANNERS THROUGH WORKSHOP TECHNIQUE

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Abstract - The urban planners, generally, focus on making a city physically resourceful, economically efficient, and environmentally sustainable. They analyze and research to improve already built environment and add new additions, if necessary. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, planners are not consulted before most of urban development projects, thereby ignoring and not coordinating with various planning departments, the decisions of government will become nothing but a blot on the future of already blighted cities. There is a dire need to empower the planning profession in order to improve urban contexts of our country. Sharing the field knowledge via hands-on workshops is a solution to better engage planners and help policy makers to internalize the findings. The Department of City and Regional Planning at University of Management and Technology, have gathered planners from all over Pakistan and asked for major planning issues and their subsequent suggestions to resolve these issues. Highlighted in the workshop, most of the core problems are related to housing, transportation and sustainable development. The paper is basically to channelize the findings of a workshop aiming at fostering discussions on urban issues among the professionals who are the ultimate stakeholders. Focusing on a multidimensional urban phenomenon, the paper aims to deepen the understanding of contemporary urban issues of Pakistan leading towards the solutions to be adopted by government officials to advance ultimately progress and sustainability.

Index Terms - Built Environment, Decision Making, Planning, Planning Practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

The task of congregating human progress while protecting the life systems confronts planners, policy makers and, communities at all levels. Planners efforts in research, monitoring, and assessment clearly can contribute to sustainability. Strategies to promote sustainability require a long-term perspective [1]. "The priority is often given to economy in policies and the environment is viewed apart from development" [2]. Ignoring environment resulted in different crisis that lead to major structural changes in the spatial and cultural organization of society. These deviations had a key impact on planning and subsequently the planning profession. This leads us to a novel role of planners. There is need to re-emphasize the political as well as on the managerial and technical role of the planner [3]. The biggest challenge for the policy makers, now a days is to utilize findings from research studies to inspire any kind of action. Typical market research often fails to connect with the policy makers or the stakeholders. This paper will be beneficial to stakeholders as they know the best of their limitations and they are directly involved in the implementation processes.

Therefore, engaging the planners into collaborative workshops, highlighting urban issues and offering clear recommendations and generating potential solutions is a conducive first step towards solving problems like those we face in our urban areas today.

II. ROLE OF PLANNERS

Planners have certain techniques to achieve sustainable development; most importantly, they have the inclination to do analysis, but they lack government's authority [4]. According to Jepson, "With respect to the role of planning, a significant feature of the environmental and sustainable development has been the recognition of an essential interrelationship between land use regulation, environmental, and social problems [5]. Planners can use the results of different analysis to develop strategies that will overcome the principal impediments to action with respect to specific policies and techniques. By doing so, the planning profession can enhance its contribution and become positioned to move beyond its traditional focus on land use planning and regulation toward becoming the holistic discipline".

"This interest has created a momentum that planners can capture to effect real policy and programmatic change. Planners can play a critical role in ensuring policies reflect the reality of the current structure. Planners have a unique facilitating role to play in bringing together planning, economic development, and business. Planners are in the perfect position to facilitate a broader dialogue and ensure the voices of communities that are ignored" [6].

According to Cohen, "The growing and unplanned spread of low-income settlements on the outskirts of many large cities is a cause of growing population and substantial rural urban migrants. Urban functions are seen taking over significant amount of land, creating no distinction between urban and rural areas [7]. Thus, it is observed that those small cities which are well-catered are better able to address to the challenges and problems linked to high population growth".

III. CHALLENGES FOR PAKISTAN

Pakistan, one of the most populous country in the south east Asian countries world has been experiencing an increased amount of demographic change and subsequently the cities are bearing the consequences of urbanization such as auto-dependency, traffic congestion, shortage of houses, slums, sprawls, energy crisis, pressure on ecosystem, unhealthy living conditions, and many more associated with these. The process of urbanization is inexorable that parties with economic uplift and development plus natural increase in population [8]. All this results into dilapidation of water and air quality, deterioration of forests, and farmlands, social disintegration and infrastructure spend [11]. The rate of urbanization in Pakistan is also rapidly increasing. According toHaider and Badami, "Pakistan's urban population is likely to rise by 140% in next 25 years. This intense growth is expected to increase the urban population by 80 million and amounting it to a total of 130 million" [12]. The creation of slums become inevitable because of rural-urban, so there are too many people and no adequate housing, as well as it leads to urban sprawl, speculation, and in turn all those problems that we see around us today. According to Government of Punjab, "Being the most urbanized country in the region, Pakistan's population has seen a significant increase from 1998 to 2014 i.e. from 32.5% to 40%. However, if this increasing pace continues to develop, the population is likely to exceed to 50% by 2025" [13].
Buttin his research highlights "the total figure living in slums reaches 26.6 million where now 48% of Pakistan's total urban population live in slums [14]. During last decade population in many cities of Pakistan has amplified at an alarming rate". This created lot of problems like housing shortage, burden on health and education facilities, land use change from residential to commercial, consequential environmental degradation, and increase in traffic congestion [15], [16]. According toAwan and Iqbal, "the developing cities of Pakistan are currently facing mammoth challenges like that of urbanization which adversely affecting the urban poor" [17].

IV. THE WORKSHOP

The Department of City and Regional Planning at School of Architecture & Planning, UMT, Lahore takes pride in organizing it in collaboration with the Institute of Planners Pakistan (IPP) at UMT Campus, Lahore. The event was a blend of different activities including presentations from the honorary guest speakers on profession of Urban Planning, a poster competition among students regarding the "The role of planners to improve the urban contexts" and a workshop to highlight urban contemporary issues of Pakistan, where the experienced planners have put up their suggestions. There are three issue-based themes including Housing, Transportation and Sustainable Development. Each of these three sessions are moderated by experts where issues has been put up on board and the participants are guided to put up their suggestions on sticky notes on relevant question/problem raised. Below is the elaboration of these issues and relevant suggestions from the experienced planners along with referenced sources:

A. Housing

Housing is the basic need of all human beings. The severity of weather, privacy and security needs required shelter for them. Housing has always been the topic of interest for all the planners, decision and policy makers. The situation has gone worse by rapid urbanization in past few years. In Pakistan, the cities especially are confronted with massive housing scarcity. The supply side is extremely pathetic. The Public housing schemes are very few and are unable to reach target group. According to Sassen, "Unavailable affordable yet serviceable land is the key to moving towards residential units, as housing is the basic need of all human beings. The severity of weather, privacy, and security needs required shelter for them. Housing has always been the topic of interest for all the planners, decision and policy makers. The situation has gone worse by rapid urbanization in past few years. The two key problems faced by the urban land markets include inadequacy of land to be able to get converted for serving the housing need and the low dense yet uneconomical use of the existing land. Moreover, compared to other developing countries, where the house finance is around 10 to 15% of the GDP, in Pakistan this is extremely low amounting 1%"[18]. The leading source which supports housing structure in Pakistan is the House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC) where inadequate finances exist which do not meet the annual housing demand. On the other hand, private banks who support the same structure, although, provide huge shares but these only benefit the middle and high income group of people.

According to Drakakis Smith, criticism of the public housing approach led to the evolution of a new innovative approach, which perceives the housing development with the greater involvement of users or the residents of house and the progressive or incremental approach [19]. The innovative approaches mainly include the squatter upgrading and the sites and services schemes. This approach can also be termed as the aided self-help approach. It encompasses government – subsidized programs that involve in varying degrees, co-operation between the conventional and non-conventional sectors. On the basis of the issues being faced widely by housing sector in urban areas of Pakistan, following are the issues in the form questions that have been identified for the sake of recommendations from the participants of the workshop:

1. Is the Government housing schemes reach target

population?

a. No, only to high and middle income; low-income houses/plots must be provided according to their percentage in population.

b. Introduction of low cost housing is a need of time as large percentage of Pakistani population belongs to low-income strata of population.

c. Initially, the practice of providing housing to targeted population was initiated but later on, due to decreasing affordability, the immediate next income group encroached the facility provided.

d. There is no concept of targeting the needy population in public as well as in private housing schemes.

2. Are gated communities contributing towards community spirit?

a. Yes, gated communities enhance community spirit and enhance social life.

b. Partially, they do but overall linkages of the gated community with the outside world are weak.

c. Yes of course, they provide full security for the inhabitants.

d. They isolate people from each other. To enhance community spirit, integrated schemes and neighborhood revitalization should be developed.3.

3. How to increase neighborhood watch and spirit?

a. By developing self-sustained and self-governed neighborhoods

b. With increased interactions at neighborhood level

c. To induct local community councils

d. Through proper planning of road network inside the community to inculcate friendly environment.

e. Neighborhood watch and ward system should be introduced after dividing the city into a number of neighborhood units

4. Should the new housing be facilitated with separate facilities like generators, clubs, and security systems etc.

a. Yes a housing scheme must be self-sustained

b. No, it should be the duty of the local government and development authorities

c. Yes, as these are the emerging needs

5. Poor communities should be catered by public or private sector

6. Are scattered towns the cause of urban sprawl and new cities development?

7. Who makes the housing policy and how the housing policy should be implemented? How to tackle Increasing poverty?

a) Appraisal of socio-economic profiles and subsequent cultural development

b) Generating employment centers

c) Ensuring affordable housing

d) Vision of development for small cities (economic development)

e) Encourage low income housing

f) Increasing housing finance opportunities

B. Transportation

The transportation sector in Pakistan has been facing numerous problems. Travelling within and between cities has increased enormously due to increased economic development, population growth, and low density housing sprawl, which have increased job-home distances and commute. Due to ill transportation planning, roads have become markedly clogged. The public-based bus transport services have declined in terms of fare affordability. Majority of people travel on private vehicles. The mix of local and through traffic, encroachments on roads have increased congestion, traffic delays, and air pollution. In addition to these problems, transportation sector of urban areas of Pakistan are facing some specific issues as well. Following are the issue-based questions highlighted in front of the participants:

1. Is it right to take over green areas and destroying historical heritage for increasing Right of Way e.g On Canal Bank Road?

a. We should suggest alternative routes

b. Metro bus is the best technique which can reduce traffic burden on roads and ultimately there would be no need for road widening

c. Canal can be utilized as a medium of transport

d. Development of modernized bus services e.g. metro bus service.

e. We should go for new construction instead of reconstruction

f. Alignment of underpasses on same side

g. Road widening is not a solution

h. Promote carpooling practice on canal bank road

i. There must be a traffic management plan for canal bank road

j. Ensuring re-plantation after road widening

k. Ban on private vehicles along canal

l. Preservation and conservation of heritage should be the priority

2. How to manage commercialized roads?

a. Separate lanes for different modes

b. Road corridors must be studied in coordination with land-uses

c. Specify modes of transport that may travel through certain corridor

d. Restricting slow moving traffic vehicles such as animal driven carts

e. Recruiting more traffic police and sergeants for busy roads

f. The construction of U-turns on signal free roads e.g. jail road,Main Boulevard, andGulberg.

g. Road widening is the solution for increased traffic.

h. Better transportation system i-e public transport to reduce the load of traffic on roads

i. Passenger load per vehicle should be identified

j. Public transport should be coordinated with the main transportation network

k. There must be an intelligent transportation system

l. Political intervention should be stopped

m. Construction of flyovers is the option

n. Separation of slow moving traffic from fast moving

C. Sustainable Development

"Sustainable development aims at spreading awareness pertinent to the environmental and socio-economic aspects with the view of ensuring a healthy life for all. This principle generates a connection between human beings and the surrounding environment by challenging the vague ideas and interventions by providing a strengthened basis for evaluating different dimensions of development" [20]. The planners of Pakistan are increasingly conscious about the pursuit of growth and development. There is a heavy burden on them for recent and the foreseeable future. Below are the questions of the sustainability of the present form of development; the issues taken up in this context are following:

1. What can be done to reduce Energy scarcity?
a) Energy efficient vehicles through tax relief
b) Sustainable methods of energy generation
c) Generation of energy at Local level
d) Modular grids
e) Solar energy usage even at minute scale such as street lights
f) Incorporation of existing bye-laws with green building regulations
g) Efficient Public transportation system

2. How to reduce pressure on ecosystem &tackle climate change?
a) Development of Smart cities
b) Education about climatic change from school level
c) Plantation campaigns
d) Bye-laws for increased green spaces
e) Conserving natural habitation and wet lands
f) Renewable energy resources
g) Development of pedestrian culture

3. How to withstand the impact of disasters?
a) Through urban resilience programs
b) Revision of building codes
c) Separate disaster management authorities at national & provincial level
d) Coordination of all departments for reduction of impacts of disaster
e) Community building/ social resilience
f) Preemptive approach
g) Structural sustainability
h) Locational sustainability

4.How to improve inadequate water supply, sanitation, and hygienic conditions?
a) Institutional coordination
b) Inclusive urban policies
c) Water conservation
d) Awareness campaigns to save clean drinking water
e) Rainwater harvesting
f) Solid waste; recycling

5. How to incorporate political will in tackling the planning challenges?
a) Institutional overlapping perplexities
b) Define jurisdictions of institutions
c) Improving plan implementation procedure
d) Policies must cater all the sectors in integrated manner
e) Policies must cater a specified percentage of green areas to be provided in a city
f) Strengthening of local governments
g) Empowering the citizens and community capacity building

CONCLUSION

Over the past few decades the swift increase in urban population has led to many problems in urban areas, most important are transportation pitfall, housing shortage, and the overall disturbed sustainable development. However, all these problems are linked with the sustainability of urban areas. In the scenario of a city, there is need to have a sustainable system of transportation and housing. Among the many benefits which the urban surrounding receives through sustainability includes energy efficiency, economic stability and social viability. The sustainable development not only includes the energy efficient and environment responsive built environment but also provide employment, basic education and health facilities. Moreover, it would make locally available services accessible yet affordable for all inhabitants in particularly to the public transport users and pedestrians. The other tactic of attaining sustainable development is to develop mixed land use which refers to the use of land for residential, businesses, institutional, and recreational services. Also all the development should be in proximity of public transport. There are some important potentials of sustainable development which include ensuring safe and secure development infrastructure. It also helps in generating accessible and adequate jobs and employment opportunities for masses. Sustainable Development attempts to maintain equilibrium between the development and environment. It promotes a livable environment for, both, the present and generations to come.

The planners in the workshop suggested that to ensure a quality life in our cities, we must use limited natural resources in a proficient way. They emphasized that it is imperative concern for our coming generation and for the future vigor and integrity of our built environment. They concern that for the quality of life and justice between people including the deterrence of poverty, and for future an environmental sustainability, isolated land use, the reduced residential density, and detached street patterns should be discouraged. Many of the urban planners, believe that only the path of sustainable development can lead us to the future.

They all encourage coercing the government towards building proper co-ordination among community, planners and developers. Moreover, having an aim of meeting the demand by ensuring a balanced economic, environmental and social structure, leading towards a prosperous future.

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