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A REVIEW ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF BAHRIA TOWN KARACHI

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Abstract

Karachi is known as one of the largest and fastest growing cities of Pakistan having unconfirmed record of population of about 22 million with GDP of 15 percent, from which 25 percent of revenues are generated and 62 percent is cut down in income taxes. (Twen ty-one, 2016; Hasan, 2015). In past few years, many residential and commercial projects have been completed in Karachi, in order to facilitate the population of all income groups. This research aims to explore the challenges faced by the local communities by the development of most dominating agency "The Bahria Town" Karachi. This study also analyzes the impacts of those challenges on the lives of local communities and their daily activities, demographics, and ethnicity. The methodology of this research is based on secondary data including case studies, books, newspaper, magazines, and articles. The primary data is being collected with the help of interviews with the local communities mainly. After exploring all the facts and figures, through literature review and primary data, this research concluded that Bahria Town being the biggest real estate agency has been failed to full fill the requirements of local communities in the nearby surrounded villages, additionally, became the reason of displacing many villages and also has negatively affected the agriculture and natural ecosystems.

Keywords*:* Urban Development, Bahria Town, Land Acquisition, Land Rights, Migration, Urbanization, Land Contestation, Environmental Deterioration, Real Estate Development.

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Introduction

Urbanization has been a new trend worldwide and it is increasing rapidly more often in developing countries, however Asia is greatly affected by exponential increase in population. The term Urbanization is used for the relocation and migration of people from peri-rural and urban areas towards cities with the aim of development socially and economically(Malik & Wahid, 2014). Pakistan is one of the Asian countries experiencing an immense migration issue to mega cities and causing overcrowding in road traffic when the residential societies are emerging with new entrants as the present housing schemes are not sufficient and somehow lacking in proper water and drainage facilities.

The administrative structure of Pakistan is comprised of four provinces Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh and the Federal Administration of Islamabad as a Capital Territory. Sindh is located at south-eastern part and Karachi is said to be its capital city. The city itself is one of the largest and fastest growing megacities of the world with an estimated population increase of 15.4 million as per recorded in 2010 and 18.04 million recorded in 2015, however Pakistan's 9% of the total population and 24% of urban population is residing in Karachi with 15% of national GDP generation rate, 25% of revenues and 62% of income tax (Hasan, 2015). Additionally various studies shows that Pakistan's total population is expected to have a massive increase and reach to 380 million by 2050 as the urban transformation has been increased with the current rate of 3% per year therefore it is important to consider and facilitate the people with proper housing and education, food, health and infrastructure (Malik et al., 2020).

As the Karachi is under huge urban sprawl, resources are not sufficient also being wasted and shortage of residential schemes is increasing by time, the city itself is now expanding into outer boundaries, although, one fourth of the population is living in open land areas or in squatter settlements, outside Karachi and instead of facilitating, the residents of local communities are being mistreated and forced to leave their lands, so that the large commercial organizations can initiate their projects for the sake of their own profits. Acquisition of land has been seen a very common issue in Karachi since decades but now the situation is becoming very devastating, as the local communities are experiencing forced land grabbing issues primarily at Super Highway (National Highway Pakistan) from various land mafia organizations. (Nazir & Yousuf, 2021). Therefore land ownership of Karachi can be seen as the division between various of agencies and from which The Bahria Town is said to be the most influential and ruling agency working privately for the development of large scale residential and commercial projects, including this some other private agencies like Malir

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Development Authority (MDA) and Board of Revenues (BOR) are also taking part and helping in Bahria Town development projects (Nazir & Yousuf, 2021).

Bahria Town is a privately owned real-estate company, which is used to own, manage, and develops projects and properties across Pakistan. The company is Islamabad/Rawalpindi based, founded in 1990's and established its first gated community for the elite class in Islamabad, since then the company is also famous for accommodating middle income families. Currently, the company has developed six gated communitiesnamely, Bahria Town Rawalpindi, Bahria Town Islamabad, Bahria Town Karachi, Bahria Town Nawab shah and Bahria Golf City. From all these 6 massive communities, Bahria Town Karachi is the largest projected scheme spread over 16,000 hectares (40,000) acres to accommodate around 1 million people as per estimation and has total project cost over USD 1 billion. (Hasan, 2018). Before taking the first initiative of the development of such massive project, the company highlighted the statement that they would surely consider the rights of local people and focus on the construction of housing scheme for low income local communities who were already residing inside the Bahria Town surrounded villages in poor situations since ages, but unfortunately the promise was not fulfilled by the agency, however the plots were forcefully grabbed from the local villagers by paying very less amount to them(Nazir & Yousuf, 2021).This study aims to explore the challenges faced by local communities of villages and analyze the impacts of thosechallenges on their daily life activities, demographics, and ethnicity, by the development of most influential and powerful agency.

The Bahria Town Karachi (BTK)

Bahria Town Karachi is located at the head start of the Karachi city, about nine kilometers away from Superhighway Toll Plaza. Currently the massive newchain of projects is under construction in order to facilitate middle to high income groups with all basic needs of residential, commercial, healthcare facilities along with many lavish house/villas and apartments, shopping malls, very Grand Jamia Masjids (Mosque), additionally, academic facilities of schools, university, indoor and outdoor gaming, and other sports facilities, five-star hotels and restaurants, cinema houses, theme parks and mini zoo(Nazir & Yousuf, 2021). The real estate development plays a very important role in the economic growth of Pakistan and is also increasing rapidly with the increase of population and lack of such resources to full fill the need for better living (Nazir & Yousuf, 2021). Bahria owns and promotes the development of mega real estate projects in Pakistan, all the private real estate developers show their keen interest in buying and selling the products of Bahria group, as compared to other construction group companies. The reason behind this much hype is the number of

attractive incentives and profits, provided by Bahria to real estate agents, the agents simply buy the original documents of the properties from the sellers and sell those properties in doubled or triple amounts afterwards and make huge profits (Nazir & Yousuf, 2021).

According to research conducted by Arif Hassan in 2019, most of the land area of Bahria Town Karachi was basically owned by the villagers and herdsman since centuries, however the land was forcibly purchased by some political influential authorities of Pakistan by threatening the local communities residing in those villages and by bulldozing their shelters. About more than 40 villages were being displaced and people were forced by Bahria Town Karachi to leave their homes and land as well. Police played a major role in this illegal displacement. Many of the old historic shrines, temples were also bulldozed for the sake of Bahria Town development projects. This is fruitfully achieved by help of Malir Development Authority (MDA) by violating the lawsof 2006: Disposal of Plots rule passed under the Malir Development Act. Section 17 of the 1912, additionally, Colonization Act was also violated.

Bahria Town Karachi Development and Challenges Faced by Local Communities and others

The late Parween Rehman, a Karachi based researcher and activist, and the director of Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) would often state, that “development comes from Human development not with concrete”(Hafeez & Musyani, 2021). The key features of urban centers are Land use planning and development. The pattern of Land-use and Eco-environmental quality of the area is impacted with land using plans. Land use is the systematic and strategic utilization of land for suitable usage. The sustainable way of land use planning is when the social need is fulfilled without any disturbance of the environmental area. The residential development processes are heavenly impacted when the mega cities have the major environmental consequences.

There are studies that suggest about the various development plans that are put together for Karachi city since the Pakistan’s Independence, especially, The Merz Rendel Vatten Plan (MRV) Plan 1952, The Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan 1958, the Karachi Master Plan 1975-85, the Karachi Development Plan (KSDP) of 2000 and the most recent Karachi Strategic Development Plan 2020. However, till today there is not any political entities of Pakistan are involved in the development of the plans, although, the Karachi Strategic Development Plan (KSDP) was approved by country’s elected committee which is unfortunately the effectiveness of such Plan is limited to technical documentation rather than implementing such frameworks. Such absence of legal frameworks and theories in order to interrelate the planning and development by different land investors and agencies in Karachi is somehow intensified by lack of government subsidies, resource and funding allocation and

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technical capabilities. Due to financial depletion, the City District Government of Karachi deals with the commercialization of the economic corridors of Karachi for the purpose of raising funds and revenues for commercialization fees. All of this was done by using Ad hoc method, that caused social and environmental degradation (Hasan et al., 2013).

The development of Bahria Town Karachi has also been the reason of disturbing social norms and values and environmental degradation as the development scheme have displaced most of the villages and heritage places, rich farmlands and agricultural lands, forests that will cause the massive ecological disaster in future, not only natural ecosystems were disturbed but various villages were also being raided by the police and potential authorities (Rizvi, 2020).The topography of the land area has been notably changed due to such development (Hafeez & Musyani, 2021).

Bahria Town Karachi was not only involved in illegal land grabbing scandal but also many of the properties has been cancelled for which the customers had already paid millions of rupees to the business tycoon and owner of Bahria. One of the customers named, Arshad Ali while interview in the private new paper, stated that his property had been cancelled and now he is roaming helplessly for the refund of his property of about 4.1 million, He further stated "Only I know how I paid these instalments, just so an asset is made for my children. The property is cancelled, actually it never existed, while I am being humiliated and disgraced by the Bahria Town goons (staff). They promised 100% refund, but it's been over three months, and I got nothing"(Rizvi, 2020).

According to the investigation carried out by Dawn News Paper indicates that the state is failed to support the locals and protect their land from illegal grabbing by the influential predators, however Sindh Government is also involved in land grabbing of thousands of acres of land in Jamshoro District, and the process of acquiring is going on. The satellite images and by interviewing locals the information was carried out that the Bahria Town Karachi was supposed to be developed on the land area over 23,000 acres in Malir District, The green belt of Karachi, however neither the Supreme Court of Pakistan have given permission in order to expand the scheme, although the verdict presented on March 21, 2019 stated that the total area of land over 16,896 acres were allotted to the Bahria town Karachi by the Sindh Government. But unfortunately, the land mafias were supposed to grab the land by threatening the local communities in various ways with the help of police (Syed Ali, 2019).

The Recent act of the news began on March 19, in the high-noon, various police officials directed by head inspector attacked Juma Morio goth, a small village of about 250 houses hardly in deh Langheji, district Malir, approximately 13 kilometers in the north of Superhighway. According to Ameer Ali, one of the residents of the village, the officials were

with full proof plan to do unfair demolishing, accompanied by large vehicles, bulldozers, wheel loaders, and dump trucks. Their planned objective was to completely demolish a number of houses in order to clear out the way for Bahria Town routing through the center of village. This audacious task was swiftly completed, and the remains of dwelled huts were dragged away while the poor local villagers were only able to see with their eyes full of tears, knowing well there will be no justice (Zaman & Syed Ali, 2021).Another resident of the village Kandan Khan Gabol stated "The police have been arresting our people, threatening them that they'll show their arrest as being from places such as Wana, Mastung or Kalat, They took me into custody for several hours and only let me go when a crowd gathered and it seemed as if the highway would be closed down."

On June 06, 2021 a First Investigation Report (FIR) was launched against Murad Baksh, a resident of Goth Noor Muhammad where his family has lived since before Pakistan's independence. Baksh and his father have been resisting the acquisition of their lands by Bahria Town Karachi. Baksh got interim bail and despite that the police raided his house and arrested two of his cousins, this isn't the first time Baksh has had a FIR launched against him by Bahria Town Karachi. His father was jailed in 2015 and recently Baksh and his brother were beaten and locked up for resisting the evictions by Bahria Town in April. "We haven't heard of such injustice before, taking someone's land and house. Bahria Town and the Karachi police are both mobsters," said Baksh (Hafeez & Musyani, 2021).

Bahria Town Karachi has been raised up on the land where old heritage places, Hills, temples, and fertile landscape with perennial streams that were used to fall into the Malir river, all can be seen bulldozed and grounded down, changing the topography of the land and completely reshaped. Local historian Gul Hasan Kalmati said that the most revered poet of the Sindhi language and a Sufi mystic had stayed in this area. "The site where Bahria Town is being constructed is archeologically rich. For 500-600 years the site has continuously been used by people for residence," Kalmati said. "There were trade routes here. Allah Muhammad Gabol area has stones with engravings from Buddha's time period. If Bahria Town continues its expansion, these too would be damaged. This development is anti-human."

In the research, it was assured that Malir Development Authority (MDA) along with the Board of Revenue (BOR) with the influence of Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) are accommodating the law enforcement agencies. The observation took place in research conducted by (Nazir & Yousuf, 2021) suggested that more than 40 villages were affected by the development of Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) in which two of the deh namely; Langeji and Kathore were completely demolished and dwelled. Each one of deh's have 12 to 15 small goths (villages), therefore small Usman Gabol goth in Langeji deh and Kamal Khan Jokhio

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goth in Kathore deh were selected to conduct the survey, approximately four persons from each goth were interviewed including landowners and farmers. The villagers claimed for their property ownerships and explained that they are residing in these goths since after the time of Pakistan's Independence and the land belongs to their forefathers and they also have property ownership documents but Bahria town Karachi along with other agencies refuse did not accept these documents.Another resident stated, that one of his relative were owned a 45 acres land to vacate but one day 4o to 45 bulldozers came along with police force and destroyed everything including huts, heritage sites and also a tube well(Nazir & Yousuf, 2021).

Data Collection

Impacts of Challenges faced by Local Communities

For data collection a survey was conducted in Murado Gabol goth and Hasan Ali Gabol goth, based on the questionnaire adopted in this research to answer the questions of the current situation of local communities, what are the impacts of the challenges that are faced by local communities during the development of Bahria town Karachi.

According to the responses, the development of bahria town has completely disturbed the lives of the residing villagers, as they are facing hunger issues because the land is no where in their hands now for agricultural cultivation, additionally local communities are also facing water unavailability issues, as the rain water channels has been blocked by the development, and natural water ecosystems are destroyed that will cause the shortage of ground water level in future years and slowly gradually water table recharge will be decreased. The villagers are also facing health and sanitation problems due to inadequate facilities of fresh water. Air pollution is also problematic factor as the locals are at risk due to air pollution carried out by the infrastructure development and causing health risk to the communities.

Most of the local communities have been migrated to the Hyderabad and Karachi cities as well, as their houses were demolished, therefore they found themselves an opportunity to overcome from this hurtful displacement and to start their new life with new occupational opportunities. The development of Bahria Town Karachi has carried out many drawbacks to physical environment and heritage sites. The affected residents also highlighted the names of the various political officials and powerful people who were majorly involved in this massive demolition. Additionally, it was observed that the actual boundary level of Bahria is continuously expanding with a rapid construction and infrastructure development.

Conclusion

After exploring the literature review carried out from newspapers, research articles, journals, books, this research concluded that the massive infrastructure planning and development of Bahria Town Karachi, has negatively affected the surrounded local communities, in different phases. From forcibly land grabbing to threatening the poor people, in the name of development, with the help and support of land managers and mafias, police officials and political figures, Bahria Town Karachi has been involved in such hurtful activities. This research was primarily based on the secondary data analysis of challenges and problems faced by Bahria Town surrounding communities, however, a very little part of primary data was possible to address. Moreover, after the possible analysis both from secondary and primary data, this research concluded that the mega real-estate project The Bahria Town Karachi" has been failed to full fill the requirements of local communities in the surrounded villages and also became the reason for demolishing and displacing many villages and has also negatively affected the physical environment. On the basis of this research analysis, future recommendations would be possible in order to address the challenges with the long-term solutions and benefits and opportunities to be provided for the betterment of local communities. Therefore, it is suggested that Board of Revenue, Malir Development Authority, and other Law enforcement agencies should take in to account the needs and willingness of the local communities and to develop proper strategies based on regulations and acts for future land use planning and development. The government of Pakistan should also consider the rights of locals and ensure that the proper and fair investigation should be made so that injustice would not be entertained anymore.

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