



Urban Local Management in South Asia: An Overview

Vadranam. Suresh,

Post-Doctoral Fellow, ICSSR (New Delhi), Department of Politics and International Studies, School of Social Sciences, Pondicherry University, Puducherry-605 014, India,

Abstract

The world's population is currently estimated to be 7 billion. In developing countries, the urban population has grown from 680 million in 1970 to 2.6 billion in 2010. By 2030, about 80% of the world's urban population is expected to be intense in developing countries. Growth of urban areas is indispensable to a country's economic development. However, large number of cities in developing countries cannot provide enough housing, infrastructure and employment institutions to receive the large inflows of people seeking jobs. As a result, many people are forced to live on unstable incomes in poor living environments. Furthermore, growth of urban populations causes pollution due to traffic congestion and the large volume of garbage, a decline in public security and many other urban problems that are becoming more complex and serious every year. The present paper emphasis urban management issues and challenges in South Asia.

Key Words: Economic Development, Infrastructure, Management, Public Security, Population,

Introduction

Half of the planet lives in Asia, which is experiencing rapid urbanization, largely thanks to the industrialization of China and India. The world's most populous continent is also culturally and politically varied, with economic edges of wealth and poverty. The influence of Asian cities on the world stage is increasingly apparent. Between 2008 and 2025, Shanghai is expected to soar up the global city GDP rankings from 25th place to 9th, and Mumbai is expected to rise in the same period from 29th to 11th place. In the region, the urban population of 1675 million (41%) in 2010 is expected to rise to 2086 million (47%) in 2020.

Today, cities are at the centre stage of the development processes. The global report titled 'Urbanizing World' produced by the United Nations Centre for Human

Settlements (Habitat) in 1996 characterized cities of the world as places of opportunity and presented a view of cities as engines of growth (Ahmed, M. U. 2002) The globalization phenomenon that is unfolding now across the world requires that cities besides being agents of economic progress within the country should also become internationally competitive to take advantages of liberalized global economic environment. However, in the Southern Asia, cities are unable to effectively play these roles because of the problems associated both with urbanization and globalization. Substantial sections of population are deprived of basic services such as potable water supply, sanitation and drainage. Cities are suffering from environmental degradation. Poverty and lack of housing is reflected in growth of informal sector, slums and squatter settlements. Often the poor people living in precarious



locations are exposed to disaster risks such as flooding and landslides.

Challenges of Urban Management

Urban India today, faces serious challenges of growth and its management. Across geographies, the issues of urbanization manifest in the form of overcrowding, congestion, insufficient infrastructure, inadequate service provisioning—mainly in terms of drinking water, sanitation, energy, transport, solid waste management, environmental degradation, and pollution, etc. These, along with the poor management of rapid growth, affect the socioeconomic development of the country. At the core lies the question of urban planning and its capacity to organize towns, manage their growth and make them more efficient and sustainable. Like many other countries with high rate of urban development, India too acknowledges insufficient and inappropriate planning, which raises the questions of its relevance while triggering scepticism. Large parts of cities today completely ‘escape’ conventional planning. Half the population of Delhi and Mumbai lives in unauthorized areas. The considerable ‘illegal development’ (illegal layouts, un-authorized constructions, slums) in many towns is a frightening reality that threatens the future of urban areas and the credibility of main plan documents and regulations.

Urban Democracy: A South Asian Perspective

The ‘urban question’ has paying attention increasing concentration since the 1990s in the South Asian context because the issues at stake take on a particular urgency in the subcontinent for several reasons. A first, obvious reason is the increasing importance of

cities from a demographic, political and economic perspective. South Asia is home to 5 of the 10 largest cities—in fact, megacities—in the world (Alam, M. and M.G. Rabbani, 2007). At the same time, with an urban population of 485 million, South Asia remains one of the least urbanized regions of the world (30% of its population live in cities). However, with an urban growth rate estimated at 2.7% per annum between 2000 and 2030, only second to Sub-Saharan Africa (Cohen, 2004), the urban population is bound to increase. Since 42.9% percent of this urban population lives in slums (with a proportion as high as 69% in Nepal and Bangladesh and 47% in Pakistan) (Mathur 2010:11, quoting the figures of the State of the Asian Cities Report 2010/2011), the challenges of reducing existing and future poverty are increasingly played out in cities. Internationally, the adoption of new decentralization policies in the 1990s is part of the reform triptych ‘decentralization-privatization-participation’. These reforms were seen as central to ensure that cities can function efficiently and fulfil their role as engines of economic growth. Thus the emergence of a new, international consensus on the major role of cities in the national and global economy translated into visions and policies focused on urban productivity and urban renewal. Indeed ‘the erosion of traditional forms of sovereign political control by the nation state, the transnationalization of economic activity, and the shift to a service based economy have all increased the political centrality of the city, reversing the centuries long historical trends toward the increasing subordination of urban politics to national state apparatuses’ (Tilly 2010, Heller & Evans 2010: 434). However in



South Asia, the 'political centrality of cities' is far from being evident. On the one hand, the contrast between the weakness of cities, as a tier of government and vis-à-vis regional and national political arenas, and their rising strength as a site of capital accumulation, does not conform to the political rise of cities and city-regions observed elsewhere (Scott 2001). This inability of local government to drive urban change is a serious concern, albeit for different reasons, for policy makers and academics alike. On the other hand, South Asian cities are governed by a variety of urban regimes that are more or less democratic, sharing complex but unique historical legacies. Local democracy has had to function in the context of both democratic and non-democratic regimes—for instance under military rule in Pakistan, or under an authoritarian monarchy in Nepal. Urban research on South Asia in the last 20 years has discussed, as we will see below, urban governance, urban movements and urban citizenship. Urban democracy is a much less used concept, and yet—as this issue hopes to demonstrate—it is a concept that provides the missing link between these various brands of research and offers a way out of their respective limitations. We argue that urban democracy is a key concept to think the relationship between urban mobilizations and urban change, or in other words, the relationship between urban politics and urban policies, in South Asia today. According to the United Nation's estimates, Southern Asia's urban population is expected to reach the figure of close to one billion by the year 2030 that is about 120 per cent increase in three decades beginning with the year 2000. Four countries namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran would

accommodate an overwhelming 95.4 per cent of the region's urban population in 2030 as compared to 97.3 per cent in the year 2000. This marginal decline in the share of urban population of larger countries in the region is because of relatively fast increase in the urban population of the smaller countries like Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal. However, growth rates of urban population are estimated to decline in successive decades in all the countries of the region, except India and Sri Lanka.

Urbanization Level

Urbanization level is increasing in all the countries of Southern Asia and this trend is expected to be maintained in future as well at least up to the year 2020. More alarmingly, with the exception of Iran and Nepal, the rate of change in the urbanization level is still increasing. The cities in the region will thus have to be prepared to absorb sharp increases in urban population and resulting pressure on basic infrastructure and livelihood opportunities

Growth of Mega Cities, Settlement Pattern and Primacy Issues

Amongst the countries in the region, there is a trend of population to concentrate in large cities. Number of mega cities (ten million plus population cities) is increasing in the region. In 1995, there were only three mega cities in Southern Asia although Dhaka (8.2 million) and Karachi (8.5 million) were just behind. However, by 2015, the region is projected to have five mega cities and four more cities namely Chennai (8.3 million), Bangalore (7.9 million) and Hyderabad (7.4) in India and Tehran (8.4 million) in Iran following closely. Moreover, settlement patterns in many countries in Southern Asia show signs of



urban primacy. For example, in 1990, as much as 53.6 per cent of urban population was concentrated in the capital city Kabul. In Bangladesh also, 38.9 per cent of the country's urban population was concentrated in its largest city Dhaka and the second largest city Chittagong was less than one third and Khulna the third largest city was less than one seventh the size of the largest city Dhaka in the year 1990. Similar trends, though milder in nature, are visible in Iran, Nepal and Pakistan. This situation is not likely to change much up to the year 2015, though with the exception of Bangladesh, the degree of primacy may decline marginally (Table 3). On the other hand, Sri Lanka shows no sign of primacy as its largest city Colombo, with a population of 119,000 in 2005 contained merely 3.8 per cent of the total urban population⁵. But, its urban settlement pattern shows a regional imbalance since the South-western quadrant of the country which occupies only about one-third of the country's area, accommodates 75 per cent of the urban population including ten of the country's largest urban settlements, each having population of more than 50,000 persons. The Colombo Metropolitan Region with a population of above 2 million is also located in this zone.

Local Democracy in the Urban Context

This first definition of urban democracy considers the urban as a bounded locale. Since the 1990s, several South Asian states have adopted decentralization policies that redefine the status, responsibilities and resources of institutions of local self-government. These political reforms owe to the strong emphasis, by international funding institutions, on the expected benefits of decentralization in terms of efficiency

and accountability; but they also meet objectives of domestic politics that may differ from one country to another—a point to which we will come back later. To take the case of India, through the 74th Constitutional Amendment (1992), urban local bodies are given a constitutional status and new functions; municipal elections have to take place every five years under the supervision of State Election Commissions, and no more than 6 months can elapse between the end of a legislature and the beginning of the new one. Further, for metropolitan cities, ward committees are established in order to promote the participatory dimension of this new local-urban democracy. In Pakistan, the 2000 Devolution Plan redefines, too, the institutional architecture, functions, resources and accountability mechanisms of local assemblies. Moreover in both countries, but also in Nepal and in Bangladesh, substantial quotas for women are a strong, democratizing feature of decentralization policies (Ghosh & Tawa Lama-Rewal 2005, Gellner & Hachhethu 2008). On the whole, therefore, one could say that since the 1990s the political role of cities has been institutionally redefined and their responsibilities enlarged.

The City as an Object of Democratic Struggle

Infrastructure contributes to the sustained improvement in quality of life by supporting the economic growth of a country or region and redistributing wealth. In today's era of globalization, developing countries must also become part of the global infrastructure network through measures like building more highways, ports, and airports and developing information and communication networks. They need to



build even more expansive infrastructure due to urbanization, modernization, industrialization, and other forms of progress. One way is by preparing urban and regional development plans that include studies to determine the most suitable social systems and institutional frameworks. Transportation infrastructure, information and communication networks, and other projects are then implemented based on those plans.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Information and communication technology (ICT) has been advancing rapidly in developed countries. In the administrative, social, and economic sectors, ICT has been used to computerize central government operations (e-governance), educate via the Internet (e learning), and facilitate digital trade and commerce (e-commerce). ICT also has the possible to support a variety of improvements that can enhance quality of life, including increasing the efficiency of the economic and social systems of countries, raising productivity, and conserving energy. It is not an overstatement to say that ICT has become vital to the functioning has been slow. This has led to a digital divide with developed countries. Furthermore, developing countries have gaps, within their countries, between areas where communication infrastructure is established and areas where there is little or none. This gap translates directly into a structure of widening economic disparities.

Conclusion

Effectively need of Create a land information system in order to facilitate the generation and exchange of information between users and providers, GIS in urban areas, develop a system of cadastral mapping in all countries of the Southern Asia Region Simplify and rationalize the complex web of laws, institutions and procedures governing tenure rights, transaction and registration procedures, regulatory mechanisms, and development of land for urban uses Work for better coordination between the agencies responsible for steering urban growth, physical planning and provision of infrastructure Initiative for monitoring, evaluation and research on urban development and management, Capacity building of local government institutions to adequately deal with planning, implementation and enforcement measures, Carefully reform age old laws, bye-law, acts and ordinances so as to make them compatible with contemporary and future urban development needs Innovative system of financing urban development needs to be evolved. The system of taxation of land and property should be reform. Value of land not its rent should the basis of land and property tax. Vacant land should be heavily taxed. Need of unearned income should be recover. Reorient planning education to equip planning graduates with skills that are needed to comprehend and resolve problems rooted in the socio-economic and cultural milieu of the region.

References

- Ahmed, M. U. (2002) 'Legal Issues related to Infrastructure Development of Bangladesh with special reference to Khulna City', *Plan Plus* 1(1):41-58



- Alam, M. and M.G. Rabbani, (2007) 'Vulnerabilities and responses to climate change for Dhaka', *Environment and Urbanization* **19** (1): 81-95
- Chettiparamb, A. (2007) 'Reconceptualizing Public Participation in Planning: A view through autopoiesis', *Planning Theory* **6** (3): 263-281
- Clark, B. D. and V. Costello (1973) 'The Urban System and Social Patterns in Iranian Cities', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **59**: 99-128,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/621714>
accessed on 23/08/2008
- Government of India (2007) *Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2007*, Lok Sabha Secretariat and Ministry of Law, New Delhi
- Government of India (2007b) *Master Plan for Delhi- with the perspective for the year 2021*, Delhi Development Authority, New Delhi
- Jain, A. K. (2007) 'E-Governance', *Coordinates* **3**(10):25-27
- King, A. D. (1990) *Urbanism, Colonialism and World Economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundation of the World Urban System*, Routledge, London
- Klein, R. J. T., R. J. Nicholls and F. Thomalla (2003) 'The resilience of coastal mega cities to weather related hazards', in A. Kriemer, M. Arnold, and A. Carlin (eds.) *Building Safer Cities, The Future of Disaster Risk*, Disaster Risk Management Series No. 3, World Bank, Washington, DC
- Kundu, A., B. K. Pradhan, A. Subramaniam (2002), 'Dichotomy of Continuum: Analysis of Impact of Urban Centers on their Periphery', *Economic and Political Weekly* **37** (14): 5039-5046
- Mahadevia, D. (2008) 'Inside Urbanizing Asia', in D. Mahdevia (ed) *Inside the Transforming Urban Asia: Processes, Policies and Public Action*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, pp.1-53
- Mehta, D. (1993) *New Policies and Urban Housing*, Indian Institute of Urban Affairs, New Delhi (mimeo)
- Mendis, W. (1998) 'Improving Urban Land Management in Sri Lanka', J.H. Ansari, and N.V. Einsiedel (eds.) *Urban Land Management: Improving Policies and Practices in Developing Countries of Asia*, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co, Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi: 201-234
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (2007) *National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2007*, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India, New Delhi
- Olavi, E., P. Elina and V. Luc (1996) 'Disaster Reduction in Urban Areas', *ITC Journal Special Habitat II Issue*: 29-37
- Rosser, C. (1971) *Urbanization in India*, the Ford Foundation, New Delhi
- Sanker, S.G., N. Hajime and S. Yumi (2007) *Natural Disaster Data Book-2006 (An Analytical*



- Overview*), Asian Disaster Reduction Center, Kobe, Japan
- Satterthwaite, D. (2006) 'Climate Change and Cities', *Sustainable Development Opinion*, International Institute of Environment and Development, London
- Schenk, H. (2004) 'India's Urban Fringe', International Workshop on Peri-Urban Dynamics: Population, Habitat and Environment on the Peripheries of Large Indian Metropolises, 25-27 August 2004, New Delhi
- Shetalov, N. (1907) 'Gorod Iezd' Obschestvo Vosto-Kovendniia Sredne-Aziatskii Otdel: Sbornik, 1: 44-197 (translation)
- Siddiqui, K. and J. Ahmed (2004) 'Dhaka' in K. Siddiqui (ed) *Mega City Governance in South Asia*, the Universal Press Limited Dhaka, pp. 353-421
- Siddiqui, K. (2004) 'Mega City Governance in South Asia: Comparisons and Recommendations' in K. Siddiqui (ed) *Mega City Governance in South Asia*, the Universal Press Limited Dhaka, pp. 433-482
- Singh, K. (2000) 'Trends in decentralization and Urban Governance', Presentation to the Seminar on Emerging Perspective on Urban Governance, 15-16 February 2000, New Delhi
- Tewari, V., U. Raghupathi and J.H. Ansari (2007) 'Improving Housing and Basic Services for the Urban Poor in India', in A. A. Laquian, V. Tewari, and L. M. Hanley (eds) *The Inclusive City – Infrastructure and Public Services for the Urban Poor in Asia*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D. C. and the John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore
- United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (1996) *An Urbanizing World – Global Report on Human Settlements 1996*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- UNCHS (2001) *Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements 2001*, Earth scans Publications Limited, London
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2003) *Human Development Report 2003: Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty*, Oxford University Press, New York
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2007) *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York
- UN-Habitat (2007) *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security: Global Report on Human Settlements 2007*, Earth scan, London
- World Bank (2007) *World Development Report 2008*, World Bank, Washington DC



Table. 1 Urban Population and Rate of Change in South Asia, 2000-2030

Country	Urban Population									
	Estimates and Projections (000)						Annual Rate of Change (%)			
	2000	2010	2020	2030	2000-2010	2010-2020	2020-2030			
Afghanistan	5,050	8,838	14,262	22,997	5.60	4.79	4.78			
Bangladesh	29,900	42,292	59,525	82,064	3.47	3.42	3.21			
Bhutan	186	309	501	774	5.06	4.83	4.35			
India	282,480	356,388	457,619	589,957	2.32	2.50	2.54			
Iran	42,606	51,625	62,962	71,827	1.92	1.99	1.32			
Maldives	80	119	175	247	3.99	3.87	3.44			
Nepal	3,281	5,446	8,537	12,679	5.07	4.49	3.96			
Pakistan	47,284	64,812	90,440	122,572	3.15	3.33	3.04			
Sri Lanka	3,118	3,262	3,870	5,064	0.45	1.71	2.69			

Source: UN-Habitat, 2007.



Table. 2 Level of Urbanization in South Asia 1990-2020

Country	Estimates and Projections (%)						Rate of Change (%)		
	1990	2000	2010	2020	1990-2010	2010- 2020			
Afghanistan	18.3	21.3	24.8	29.7	1.52	1.82			
Bangladesh	19.8	23.2	27.3	32.9	1.61	1.85			
Bhutan	7.2	9.6	12.8	17.0	2.90	2.83			
India	25.5	27.7	30.1	34.4	0.82	1.32			
Iran	56.3	64.2	69.5	74.0	1.05	0.63			
Maldives	25.8	27.5	32.1	38.0	1.08	1.70			
Nepal	8.9	13.4	18.2	23.9	3.61	2.72			
Pakistan	30.6	33.1	37.0	42.7	0.96	1.44			
Sri Lanka	17.2	15.7	15.1	16.9	-0.64	1.11			

Source: UN-Habitat, 2007.



Table: 3 Share of Major Cities in the Urban Population of Respective Countries in South Asia

Country	1990	Population (million)		Share in country's urban population
		2015	1990	
Kabul	1.4	4.7	53.6	41.7
Dhaka	6.5	16.8	31.7	33.5
Chittagong	2.0	5.7	9.8	11.4
Khulna	0.9	2.1	4.4	4.1
Mumbai	12.3	21.9	5.7	5.4
Kolkata	10.9	17.0	5.0	4.2
Delhi	8.2	18.6	3.8	4.6
Kathmandu	0.4	1.3	23.5	18.7
Karachi	7.2	15.2	20.9	19.8
Lahore	4.0	8.3	11.6	10.8
Faisalabad	1.5	3.3	4.5	4.3
Tehran	6.4	8.4	19.9	14.7
Mashhad	1.7	2.5	5.3	4.4
Esfahan	1.1	1.8	3.4	3.2

Sources: UN-Habitat, 2007