

Sustainable Urban Housing Development in Pakistan Through Planning Mechanism: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract:

The issue of sustainable housing is significant in Pakistan's cities due to population growth, scarcity of materials, and poor urban planning. This paper aims to explore the challenges of affordable sustainable housing and suggest solutions. Some of the challenges are an increase in informal settlements, environmental impacts from unplanned development, and social vices from poor housing delivery. The main conclusions of the study point to the importance of sound urban management and adaptive planning systems. The paper supports policies on affordable housing through subsidies, microfinance, and PPPs, with a focus on community involvement in planning. Eradicating bureaucracy and corruption is essential for policy enforcement. The study therefore suggests the need to consider the economic, environmental, and social factors to create sustainable urban shelter in Pakistan with the view of enhancing the quality of urban life and sustainability for generations to come. This nine-point strategy is in response to the challenges of rapid urbanization and is for sustainable urbanization.

Keywords: Sustainable, Urban Planning, Pakistan, Challenges, Opportunities, Community, Involvement.

Introduction:

The issue of sustainable urban housing stock development has become under the spotlight of both the local authorities and central governments of various countries. With the fast rate of growth in urban populations, there is a need for cost-effective and environment-friendly housing policies. The

management of immediate housing needs with the prudent use of resources, in the long run, demands good governance and careful planning (Soodan et al., 2022).

Environmental aspects of construction and urbanization remain one of the major challenges

regarding comfortable living within urban sustainable housing(Niu, 2004). This includes the utilization of clean technologies like energy-saving systems, zero-energy buildings, and reduced pollution and waste. Moreover, the incorporation of green areas and the development of public transport services are necessary to fight the large amounts of carbon emissions that urban areas produce(Glaeser & Kahn, 2010).

Nevertheless, some obstacles prevent development in this direction. Economic constraints, political obstacles, and cultural issues are pivotal. The implementation of state of art technologies and usage of environment-friendly construction materials are usually constrained by financial limitations. In a political context, the level of cooperation between local governments and sustainability initiatives can significantly influence policy performance. The design of socially inclusive and accessible housing is deemed very important in preventing gentrification and dislocation of communities that affect the most vulnerable (Ndou, 2004).

Planning processes should be dynamic enough to take into account not only environmental aspects but social equity and economic-related issues as well. Zoning laws, promotion of green construction practices, and community participation are core aspects of the movement. Close collaboration of planners and developers is to be achieved in the creation of housing solutions that correspond to the demands of urban dwellers and possess features of sustainability (Tang & Lee, 2016).

A strategic question remains: What is the scope of the transformative planning solutions and technologies that might be applied to these challenges? Sustainable urban housing development is an interdisciplinary process involving many stakeholders. It is a key concern in the development of the future built environments and its effective realization is based on creative approaches and the willingness of all stakeholders.

One of the new contributions of this paper is the proposition of a real-time, adaptive framework for urban planning to inform housing policy. With the current advancements in technology like GIS, IoT,

and data analysis, urban planners can be able to develop a planning system that can effectively meet today's housing challenges as well as prepare for future ones. The focus of this approach is to incorporate community relations and accountability in ensuring that all the construction of houses is not only sustainable but also meets the needs of the larger community in urban areas.

Significance of Study:

The importance of this study is that it provides a holistic analysis of the various issues and opportunities for sustainable urban housing delivery in Pakistan. Through identifying challenges like rapid urbanization, environmental sustainability, social equity, and efficient urban management, this study offers policy implications and recommendations for policy-makers, urban planners, and other stakeholders. The adoption of community participation, adaptive planning systems, and innovative financing mechanisms underlines the need to adopt a holistic approach to urban development. In conclusion, the findings have the potential to improve the quality of life in cities, foster sustainable development, and improve access to housing, all of which are crucial for the achievement of social justice and environmental conservation in the future.

Conceptual Issues:

Housing is among several important conceptual issues related to this debate such as housing policy, sustainable development, and urban governance.

Research Questions:

To what extent does the modernization of the urban planning frameworks enable the sustainable development of housing in Pakistan?

What measures can be taken for better social equity and community involvement in the sustainable urban housing development process in Pakistan?

Housing:

Housing is defined as a dwelling that is designed to provide humans with a permanent place to live. Frequently called a dwelling, it is a residence, living quarters, or edifice in which individuals

live(Chandler, 2023). The meaning of the word “house” is very wide-ranging and includes simple huts made by nomadic tribes and standalone structures. It acts as a dwelling, hosting one or several people(Mallett, 2004).

A house is not just a building; it is a place where people live and feel safe, having privacy and not being bothered by the weather. House notion goes beyond just housing, and includes the social services and amenities that make a favorable environment for communities or neighborhoods. The role of housing is very important in the social, economic, and health aspects of every country. The history of this science is linked with the socioeconomic, cultural, and political development of mankind. In terms of being an environmental unit, housing greatly influences the health, performance, social behavior, happiness, productivity, and general well-being of a person and a community. It also represents the cultural, social, and economic life of the society, both as material evidence of civilization and as a trustworthy indicator of economic development (Bennett, 2013).

Housing is a key map within a set of the society's progress and quality of life of an individual in general.

Housing Policy:

Policy is a principle or rule, which has been created to direct decision-making and obtain rational results. Alternatively, it may also be viewed as the decision-making process itself, primarily concerning major organizational options such as programs or spending priorities, where alternatives are chosen based on their anticipated implications. Policies operate as instruments of political, managerial, financial, and administrative activities systematized to attain certain objectives. A writer defined policy as a behavior, a statement of intention, and a doctrine. Therefore, housing policy is a governmental approach to the provision of quality housing through relevant approaches such as fiscal, institutional, legal, and regulatory controls(Bemelmans-Videc et al., 2017).

In this sense, a housing policy can be viewed as a plan of direction that includes actions and targets

without prescribing any precise methods on how these targets can be achieved apart from general strategies. It gives guidelines and limits to the discretionary activities of the individuals who are in charge of implementing the general courses of action. Some housing policy decisions capture the accumulated past efforts of the government, while others are statements of goals or prescriptions for fundamental rules of conduct of individuals or organizations. Hence, policies are a series of reflective, well-documented, and coherent texts(Hays, 1985).

Housing policy is important because it acts as a teacher and a monitor to the different players in the housing sector. It aims at full use of existing housing resources to deliver sufficient housing, and control the sites of new housing developments and special groups' housing requirements(de Souza Briggs, 1997). Moreover, housing policy is an important implementer of social justice and macroeconomic stability which guarantees the effective and just allocation of housing resources. Through the establishment of specific guidelines and goals, housing policy promotes the creation of sustainable and habitable communities and contributes towards the larger aims of urban development and planning(Bibri et al., 2020).

Sustainable Development:

Our Common Future” by the World Commission on Environment and Development popularized the idea of “sustainable development.” (WCED, 1987). This report formulated sustainable development as development that can satisfy the needs of the present without jeopardizing the capability of future generations to satisfy their own needs. It highlighted that environmental and developmental aims are not opponents but complementary to each other. The challenge of sustainable development is in its multidimensional nature embracing social, economic, and environmental aspects that were defined by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The main goal is to reduce absolute poverty which is explained in Agenda 21 advocating for good governance and operational alliances among all partners for better social,

economic, and environmental quality of urban areas(Nwaka, 2005).

Urban Governance:

Governance is defined by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as:

“Politics is the process of exercising power economically and administratively in the management of a country at all levels; it includes the structures, processes, and organizations by which citizens and groups make demands, exercise their rights (legal and moral), fulfill their obligations, and resolve conflicts”(Rakodi, 2003).

Governance is the conduct of controlling a country, state, or legal organization. It consists of ruling, reining, regulating, and managing a country. Governance acknowledges that power is located both inside and outside official government actors and structures(Hood, 2005). In most governance systems, the government, civil society, and the private sector are recognized as important actors. At the local level, these groups can also be classified into such categories as central government, state or provincial government (if applicable), local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and the private sector(Botha, 2018).

Governance is a generally complex issue, which can lead to both positive and negative results, thence to the concept of “good governance” in urban management. After the UNDP policy paper bringing up the relevance of good governance for sustainable development, it is obvious that governance becomes important for equitable and sustainable growth and development. Relevant to the context of the Habitat Agenda’s effort to facilitate sustainable human settlements development in a rapidly urbanizing world, UN-HABITAT launched the Global Campaign on Urban Governance in the year 1999(Citaristi, 2022). The campaign is designed to combat poverty through improving urban governance practices, putting a greater emphasis on the importance of good urban governance globally. It is aimed at enhancing the competence of local

governments and other stakeholders to practice efficient urban governance. The campaign is executed through four principal strategies: normative dialogue, advocacy, skill development, and knowledge management, all integral elements of UNDP’s endeavors(Balit & Acunzo, 2020).

The index was designed to facilitate the advocacy and capacity-building initiatives of the Campaign. It serves a dual purpose: The index will show that urban governance has a critical model for achieving a broad spectrum of development goals globally which include Millennium Development Goals and those outlined in the Habitat Agenda. Organizations such as UN-HABITAT, UNDP, and the World Bank have always been calling for more funds to be channeled into urban development, arguing that the world is fast urbanizing and cities, which are population and resource centers, are a perfect center for the use of limited development resources(Kühner, 2024). A 2002 World Bank research study confirmed that good governance leads to positive development outcomes, concluding that A 2002 World Bank research study confirmed that good governance leads to positive development outcomes, concluding that:

“Governance triggers a kind of development that is for the immediate benefit of the population, particularly the poor; women rights advancement, environment protection, and necessary employment and livelihood opportunities.”(Dernbach, 1998)

In 2001, the UN-Inter-Agency meeting endorsed five principles of good urban governance: effectiveness which reflects competition, prevention, interdependence, capacity, and safety. The governance principles laid the basis for producing the Urban Governance Index (Lange, 2010).

The effectiveness is evaluated in terms of efficiency, subsidiarity, and strategic vision.

Equity also includes sustainability, gender equality, and inter-generational fairness.

Transparency, rule of law, and responsiveness ensure accountability.

Participation includes citizenship, consent orientation, and civil involvement.

Security deals with the resolution of conflicts, human safety, and environmental protection.

The principles emphasize the essential role of proper urban governance in improving the quality of life of cities at both global and regional levels. The index is aimed at facilitating city evaluations concerning their urban governance and quality of life. At the local level, the index can play the role of a driver for the enhancement of urban governance through the use of situational and needs-specific indicators. Good governance is characterized by eight main features: it is participatory, consensus-based, accountable, transparent, responsive, efficient, effective, equitable, and fair. It helps to reduce corruption, includes the opinions of the minority, and gives a voice to the least powerful in society. Besides, a responsible government solves current and future societal challenges, making decisions current and integrating(De Guimarães et al., 2020).

The Need for Good Urban Governance in Sustainable Housing Development in Pakistan:

With Pakistan's fast-paced urbanization, the importance of effective urban governance in the development of sustainable housing cannot be overemphasized. Due to a substantial proportion of people moving to urban areas to get better economic opportunities, the demand for housing has sharply increased. Yet, the modern housing facilities are not enough to accommodate this increase hence the growth of shantytowns and slums. Most of these settlements do not have basic facilities such as clean water, sanitary conditions, and electricity, which makes the issue of public health and well-being highly challenging. The need to address these challenges is ineffective urban governance that formulates and implements policies that encourage sustainable housing development(Corburn & Sverdlik, 2019).

The issue of affordability is one of the main challenges of sustainable housing development in Pakistan. Formal housing is unaffordable to many low- and middle-income families due to high land

prices and construction costs. Thus, the informal settlements keep on mushrooming, worsening such problems as overcrowding, horrible sanitation, and social segregation. The affordability gap can be bridged by implementing housing policies that focus on the requirements of the most disadvantaged communities and ensuring inclusive city development. This may involve programs like subsidized housing schemes, microfinance initiatives, and public-private partnerships targeting increased affordable housing alternatives(Sindhu, 2019).

Environmental sustainability is another important issue in the sustainable development of residential housing. Urbanization too quickly results in the depletion of natural resources, pollution, and green line loss. If not adequately planned and regulated, urban sprawl could damage the environment and further worsen the effects of climate change. Smart urban governance primarily calls for the use of measures that support green housing development including green building standards, energy-efficient infrastructure, and urban greening initiatives. By making environmental sustainability a priority, Pakistan will be able to control the negative influence of urbanization and give birth to healthier and more resistant to negative impacts cities for future generations(Abdul & Yu, 2020).

Moreover, good urban governance as well as social equity and community participation likely will be vital in making housing development processes work. Traditionally, inadequate housing policies and urban planning decisions have adversely affected the communities living on the fringes, which include women, minorities, and the poor. Proper governance allows these voices to be listened to and integrated into the process of decision-making making which in turn makes the results more fair. Through community involvement, marginalized groups empowerment, and social cohesion, urban governance can build more resilient communities, and establish a base of sustainable housing development in Pakistan(Yousaf et al., 2016).

Affordable Housing: Bridging the Gap Between Demand and Supply:

One of the key issues of sustainable urban housing development in Pakistan is the issue of demand and supply of affordable housing. Populations of the urban areas have grown rapidly while the housing inventory from the formal sector has not grown at the same rate. Therefore, the majority of people in these countries are forced to live in slums or informal settlements where people live in poor conditions without essential facilities such as water, sanitation, and electricity. To address this need, it is necessary to develop comprehensive housing strategies that can enhance the availability and accessibility of homes for the population. (Tariq et al., 2018). This can be achieved through good urban governance that ensures some policies support the construction of low-cost houses. These could range from affordable housing schemes, offering incentives to private developers to construct low-cost housing and innovative funding mechanisms such as micro-finance and PPP. Also, the government should ensure that the land use policies and the zoning laws are conducive to the construction of affordable houses. Therefore, Pakistan should focus on affordable housing to establish a more equitable and sustainable urban development.

Environmental Sustainability: Integrating Green Building Practices:

Another dimension of sustainability is the environmental factor, which is evident in the development of urban housing that is sustainable. The urbanization of Pakistan has led to some negative consequences on the environment which include; deforestation, pollution, and reduction in open spaces. It is important to incorporate green buildings in the housing development to mitigate these adverse effects. Effective urban governance is to formulate policies that require the use of sustainable materials, efficient energy use in the design of houses, and the use of renewable energy sources in houses. Adoption of green building codes and regulations can assist in preventing new developments from having adverse effects on the

environment. Also, urban planning should incorporate green areas and parks that improve the quality of life for individuals and assist in the preservation of the environment. Other factors that may also contribute to sustainable development include public information programs as well as the provision of financial incentives for green building practices. (Karrar & Qadeer, 2013). Pakistan can reduce the impact of urbanization on the environment and create healthier and stronger urban societies by focusing on environmental sustainability.

Social Equity and Community Participation: Inclusive Urban Planning:

Social equity and community participation in the urban planning process are significant in sustainable housing development in Pakistan. In history, poor families, women, and minorities have been excluded from the decision-making process in the area of housing and urban development. This has at times resulted in the formulation of policies that are not effective in addressing their needs and in fact, worsen social inequity. Inclusive urban planning is one of the principles of good urban governance and it entails the involvement of all the stakeholders in the decision-making process. This also involves consulting with community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other inhabitants in the area to ensure that housing policies are in a way that is sensitive to the community. The use of participatory planning processes is likely to result in a fair and efficient plan due to the consideration of all the interests of the people in the community. Also, anti-gentrification and anti-displacement policies have to be developed to prevent harm to the most vulnerable population and to foster social justice. Pakistani can create more socially and environmentally friendly cities by enhancing the concept of inclusive urban planning which focuses on the provision of adequate housing to every individual. (Geekiyange et al., 2020).

Measures to counter these Challenges:

The concept of sustainable urban housing development in Pakistan cannot be addressed by a

single factor. First of all, it is necessary to update the approaches used in urban planning. Therefore, cities should adopt fluid and dynamic planning strategies that will enable them to cope with rapid urbanization and dynamic city systems. This entails enhancing zoning laws, promoting the incorporation of both residential and commercial uses, and adopting green building codes. This is where strict codes and regulations should be put in place and developers encouraged to incorporate efficient designs and renewable energy sources into their projects. Incentives such as subsidies and tax reliefs may be provided to encourage the adoption of green practices. Besides, the establishment of public-private partnerships (PPPs) may offset the financial shortcomings in housing development. The PPPs should be carefully designed with regulatory frameworks that focus on social and environmental returns as opposed to financial returns; this way, developments would be able to address the needs of all income groups especially the bottom of the pyramid.

Also, enhancing the efficiency of city management is crucial. Reducing bureaucracy and increasing openness can help to get rid of much of the ineffectiveness and dishonesty. The formation of a central urban planning authority would enhance collaboration between various governmental departments, eliminate overlapping of functions, and increase effectiveness in the implementation of policies. By inclusive urban governance, it means that the people should participate in decision-making processes. The involvement of local communities, NGOs, and CBOs will ensure that the housing policies are in line with the needs of the population. The integration of the participatory planning processes assists in fostering ownership and responsibility among the residents thus leading to better and sustainable urban development. Social equity should be a key consideration in the formulation of housing policies that can involve specific measures such as subsidized housing, microfinance, and slum upgrading to provide affordable housing to low-income earners. To this end, Pakistan can come up with sustainable urban housing solutions that are inclusive, strong, and

sustainable due to the challenges posed by rapid urbanization.

Discussion:

The issue of sustainable urban housing development in Pakistan is closely connected with the process of urbanization, economic challenges, and population growth in the country. This is because the population in cities is increasing at a very fast rate and they require more housing, infrastructure, and services which cannot be met by the current planning tools. If not checked, this growth results in urbanization, environmental pollution, and social injustice. Numerous problems hinder the construction of sustainable urban housing in Pakistan and therefore there is a need to have a general solution and new strategies.

Another major challenge that affects sustainable urban housing development is the outdated urban planning frameworks. Many of the cities in Pakistan are governed by master plans that are as old as 20-30 years and do not address the need for contemporary urban growth and development. This leads to chaotic and uncoordinated development that often culminates in the formation of slums with no proper infrastructure. It is an issue because informal housing is a big component of urban housing, which shows that there is a discrepancy between planning policies and the real state of affairs. These settlements arise due to the cost and affordability of the standard housing opportunities for the urban poor, thus requiring inclusive housing policies suitable for all income classes.

Furthermore, in Pakistan, planning has always been linked with bureaucratic procedures as well as a lack of accountability. This is because there are overlapping responsibilities of several government agencies that lead to the failure of coming up with integrated urban development plans. These issues are exacerbated by corruption and poor governance, and land mafias and other influential individuals also benefit from the current situation. All this not only affects the effectiveness of urban planning but also poses a significant danger to the most susceptible population, whose representatives are

often evicted without a proper valuation of their property or possible relocation.

One more problem of the urban housing development is the issue of sustainability. The major environmental threats affecting Pakistani cities include air and water pollution, improper disposal of wastes, and shrinking green areas. The construction industry which is crucial in the development of houses is a threat to the environment through deforestation, energy consumption, and carbon emissions. Hence, sustainable housing development should involve the use of green building practices, energy-efficient structures and designs, and the use of renewable resource materials. However, the adoption of such strategies is hampered by factors such as expensive investment, lack of necessary skills, and low levels of information concerning the process.

Another important aspect is the social equity in housing development. The problem with urban planning in Pakistan is that it has always been designed to benefit the elite and not the masses. The outcome of this is a very clear socioeconomic differentiation with marginalized communities in poor living conditions without basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. Achieving affordable housing for all also demands strong policy environments that engender inclusive growth, as well as targeted actions like the provision of cheap houses, slum rehabilitation programs, and social housing programs.

The government also faces financial challenges that do not allow it to invest in housing projects on a big scale. Partnerships between the public and private sectors (PPPs) have been suggested as a remedy, using private sector funding to supplement public resources. Although PPPs are promising, their realization is tied to clear regulatory frameworks, effective governance, and trust between the public and private sectors. Thus, it is vital to consider social and environmental objectives for PPPs in sustainable urban housing development than for the financial goals only.

This paper therefore emphasizes the need to involve the community and other stakeholders in

the planning process to achieve successful urban planning. However, in Pakistan, such practices are either not given due attention or are not properly applied. It is important to involve the people in the planning and the decision-making process to ensure that any development project initiated is relevant to the community's needs and the people's dreams. Participatory planning can also aid in the identification of local answers to housing problems, strengthening the resiliency and sustainability of urban development initiatives.

Conclusion:

To sum up, sustainable urban housing development in Pakistan has to deal with several problems that need complex and innovative solutions. Urbanization has been fast and as a result, there has been an increase in housing in formal settlements, which tend to be substandard living. These challenges need to be addressed by updating outdated urban planning frameworks, making them flexible and responsive to current urban dynamics and growth patterns. Effective urban governance is one of the central factors, requiring transparent, effective, accountable, and corruption-free ways to operate that eliminate bureaucratic inefficiencies. However, an approach of promoting green building approaches and energy-efficient designs has been stated as an effective measure for overcoming negative effects on the environment, yet a need for such investments lies in financial, technical, and awareness aspects among stakeholders. Therefore, an integrated approach that takes into account economic, environmental, and social aspects is key to promoting sustainable urban housing.

In addition, to building inclusive urban spaces, achieving social equity in housing is extremely important. Involvement of policies that focus on affordable housing, slum rehabilitation, and social housing programs to narrow the difference between demand and supply, especially for lower and middle-income families. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) provide a good way forward if they are based on transparent regulatory frameworks and aimed at social and environmental objectives. Community involvement is equally

important, ensuring that development projects meet the requirements of the local population and their hopes. Through an inclusive decision-making process, urban governance can help marginalized groups gain power as a result of social cohesion and resilience. Essentially, the development of sustainable urban housing in Pakistan needs a comprehensive approach, which encompasses creative planning, good governance, environmental sustainability, and social equity to produce live resilient, and inclusive urban spaces for the next generations.

Disclosure Statement:

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations in sustainable urban housing development in Pakistan through planning mechanisms involve addressing several key challenges and opportunities. Ensuring equitable access to affordable housing is paramount, requiring policies that prioritize the needs of marginalized and low-income communities to prevent socioeconomic disparities. Transparency and inclusivity in the planning process are essential to fostering community trust and participation, allowing for diverse voices to influence decision-making. Environmental sustainability must be balanced with human needs, ensuring that development projects minimize ecological footprints and promote green practices. Additionally, combating corruption and ensuring accountability in implementing housing policies are crucial to upholding ethical standards and achieving long-term, sustainable urban growth in Pakistan.

Consent to Participate:

All authors confirm that they have obtained consent from all participants involved in the research. Participants were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and potential implications of the study. Informed consent was obtained in writing, ensuring that participants understood their

voluntary participation and their right to withdraw without penalty. The authors adhered to ethical guidelines and maintained strict confidentiality of participant information throughout the research process.

Consent for Publication:

All authors give explicit consent, indicating that they are aware of and support the publication of the research. This consent ensures that all contributors have had the opportunity to review and approve the final manuscript, and it acknowledges their willingness to be publicly associated with the work. This consent is crucial for maintaining transparency, accountability, and ethical standards in academic publishing.

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Disclaimer:

The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of any institution.

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