

Pushed To The Outskirts: Congestion And Exclusion In The Twin Cities

Dr. Abid Rehman



In the past two decades, Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan, has experienced a significant surge in its population. According to data from the Pakistan

Bureau of Statistics, Islamabad's population has been growing at an average annual rate of 4.9%, reaching just above 2 million in 2017. This rise can be attributed to several factors, with rural-urban migration being a key driver. However, the rapid population growth has exposed the shortcomings of Islamabad's urban planning and infrastructure development. The city's master plan, which was supposed to be updated every two decades, has not been revised, leading to a reliance on an outdated 40-year plan. This failure to adapt to the changing dynamics of the city has resulted in a shortage of essential amenities, such as housing and water supply. As a consequence, Islamabad has witnessed an unanticipated expansion beyond its designated urban sectors. Many residents have been forced to settle in the outskirts or suburbs, such as Bharakahu, Bani Gala, and Tarnol, which are located as much as over 35 km away from the city center.

This phenomenon has created a situation where a significant portion of the city's population resides far from the central areas, leading to increased commuting times and traffic congestion.

One of the key challenges faced by the low-income households residing in the outskirts of Islamabad is social exclusion. These individuals often find themselves marginalized and cut off from the opportunities and services available in the city center. Limited access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities further perpetuates their exclusion from the socioeconomic fabric of the city. The lack of affordable housing options within Islamabad has resulted in low-income households being pushed to the periphery where housing is comparatively cheaper. However, this relocation often means living in substandard housing conditions with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to basic amenities.

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has not been successful so far in efficiently providing public services to the underprivileged locations, where those people live who need these services the most. Roads, highways, public transport, bus stations, public parks etc. are limited to areas where the private sector is already flourishing. Moreover, the increasingly corrupt authority fails to deliver the services to such communities. This further reinforces the barrier between the places of the rich and places of the poor. Consequently, the poor face social exclusion because of the location of their living, in a phenomenon known as spatial exclusion, often a subtle and unintentional kind of exclusion. It prevents them from fully participating in the city's social, economic and political life. In order to understand the social stigma associated with a place of living, it is important to analyze barriers in the way of social inclusion and equality. Furthermore,

zoning regulations and building codes are structurally biased towards the privileged class. The establishment of many elite housing societies in the outskirts of various cities has often raised issues of land seizure, but the state has long decided to turn a blind eye to it. Because of power, patronage and political influence, no questions are asked from these real-estate tycoons.

To address these pressing issues, it is crucial for Islamabad's authorities to prioritize inclusive urban planning and development. The master plan must be updated promptly to ensure the provision of affordable housing options within the city limits. Additionally, investments should be made in the peripheral areas to improve infrastructure, such as public transportation, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Creating employment opportunities in these areas will also reduce the economic disparities and social exclusion

experienced by low-income households.

Moreover, to address social exclusion of this nature calls for changes and interventions on an administrative level. Firstly, social welfare bodies need to be held accountable and kept in check as there is clearly not enough data on improper settlements, which makes it difficult for policy makers to make policies that benefit people belonging to these areas. Secondly, there is a desperate need for reshaping open-ended laws and providing a clear set of rules guiding both public and private housing-construction companies.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential in tackling these challenges. The private sector can play a significant role in developing affordable housing projects and investing in the infrastructure of peripheral areas. The government should provide the necessary support and regulatory framework to facilitate such initiatives. Social

welfare programs and targeted interventions should also be implemented to uplift marginalized communities and provide them with equal opportunities to thrive within the city.

In conclusion, rapid population growth in Islamabad has not only strained its infrastructure but also led to the social exclusion of low-income households residing on the outskirts of the city. The lack of affordable housing options and limited access to basic amenities exacerbate the challenges faced by these marginalized communities. It is crucial for Islamabad's authorities to prioritize inclusive urban planning, infrastructure development, and social welfare programs to address these issues and ensure equitable and sustainable development for all residents of the capital city.