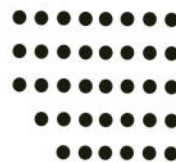


Developing New Cities in Pakistan: River Ravi Urban Development Project





PIDE WEBINAR

07:00 PM PST

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The River Ravi Urban Development Project is a multi-trillion mega project to develop a new city on the banks of river Ravi. The project, spanning over 40,000 hectares along the river Ravi, envisions a modern city with 12 sectors (residential, mixed-use, commercial, financial, innovation, medical, knowledge, sports, downtown, tourism, and urban farm), a 46-kilometer long clean water lake, and trees on 70 % of the land. 1.4 million housing units housing 35 million people are expected to ease pressure on the ever-expanding city of Lahore. A Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) was established to oversee the development of the city as "sustainable, livable and well-managed engines of economic growth". Urban development and its management are critically linked with sound, comprehensive, and strategic metropolitan-level long-term planning. Under the RUDA Act of 2020, RUDA will facilitate quality execution of the Ravi Riverfront development project as per international standards.

The RUDA is mandated to enter any joint venture as a partner with any person, company, agency, authority, or national or international organization or explore the option of public-private partnerships and determine the mode of compensation for land acquisition.

Points to Ponder

- All mega-development projects entail significant displacement costs. The government has acquired (and notified) about 2562 Kanal of land for priority projects by invoking the Land Acquisition Act -1894 (section 4 & 5) for the Ravi River City Project. Here, the question arises about the rate of compensation for the affectees? Historically, the government acquires land at rates that are way below the market price. Given significant forced displacement is involved, what are the social costs of this mega-development?
- The Ravi Development project vouches for improving the ecology of the river and stopping the bio-degradation of the environment by providing clean water to the river through seven water-treatment plants. It also promises extensive plantations on 10,000 acres. However, the new development will significantly alter the environment of the area. Will a transparent environment audit be done? What are the environmental costs/benefits?
- The project is expected to be completed in 30 years. What will be the financial return for this project considering if it is sustainable?
- Will the Ravi River Bank City be able to absorb the rural to urban migration in some parts and put a halt to the rapid urbanisation of Lahore? Will it offer the agglomeration benefits of Lahore or end up being another case of urban sprawl?

Moderator

Nadeem ul Haq
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Speakers



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Dr. Nasir Javed's Viewpoint

- The river Ravi project is not something new idea but this project was under discussion since 2013, to build a city on the other side of the river Ravi.
- The project is the largest in the history of Pakistan, even bigger than Islamabad, and the longest project in terms of its completion. Almost two to five decades are required for its completion.
- It's a complex scheme. Complex in the sense that it is not a housing project or any other DHA or LDA scheme. It has many dimensions like environmental, institutional, socio-economic, etc.

Why do we need new cities?

- New cities are one of the way to accommodate more people in the urban space and responsible for development.
- Pakistan is a rapidly urbanizing country with a population growth of 2.1 to 2.3 percent and city growth is exponential.
- Islamabad has the highest urban population growth of 4 percent and other megacities like Lahore and Karachi have urban growth of around 2.5 percent.
- People are migrating from rural to urban and, if new cities are not built, urban sprawl phenomena are likely to happen and city peripheries are likely to be built which will result in infant development.

Demographic Arguments of Punjab

- According to 2017 population census, Punjab has around 120 million population. Among them 40 to 50 percent are urbanized, which means 60 million of the population is living in cities.
- The rate of urbanization in big cities like Lahore and Faisalabad is 3.5 percent. If we decrease our population rate to 2 percent, the population of Punjab will reach around 220 million in 2050, which will be equal to the current population of Pakistan.
- If we make a conservative estimate of our 2050 population, 60 percent of the population will be urban. So, there is a bigger need for new cities, and or people will end up living in slums or cities peripheries which is not a sign of sustainable development.
- In all these scenarios Ravi River project can provide a decent living condition to the general public and ease the pressure on the existing cities.

Will it reduce Agriculture Productivity?

- Punjab's total urbanized land is 1.37 percent of the total land. The argument that urbanization will reduce the production of agricultural products is baseless. If we double the size of the current cities still there is no harm to agriculture productivity. Agriculture productivity is secure, the only harm for poor productivity is from our non-performing policies.

Can we develop a city in 30 years?

- The answer is "Yes" and Shenzhen city of China is an example for us. In 1984 Shenzhen was a village of a few thousand people and now it is home to around 15 million people in 2016. Why in the proximity of Lahore?
- The best way to invigorate a new city is to build a nearby already established city because it reduces cost and minus the time as compared to build in a place where the development work is almost non-existent.
- Islamabad and Shenzhen are the best cases to note here and the reason for exponential growth from a village to a city is because of close connection to Rawalpindi and Hong Kong respectively.
- In the 100 km radius of the Ravi river project, 30 million population is located of the three big cities, 75 percent industries of Punjab are located nearby, which is a clear sign of if the city is connected smartly, it has tremendous potential for growth.
- Furthermore, it will be a rich area for providing potential labor, raw material, connectivity, and urban centers.



Urbanized the People not just Land

- Owner/custodians of land should be the first beneficiaries of land development because they are people who own the land for generations. By just compensation and asking them to leave the land is not an appropriate approach. They should be the first and real beneficiaries.
- To benefit the real owners of the land it should be identified through a survey about people who have owned land for a decade. Then pre-allocated areas should be allotted where schools, decent housing, and health facilities should be provided. Moreover, TEVTA centers should be established for all adults, so they all get skills and training. Skills are of all vocations that would be needed in the new city. This would develop good will in the general public and not only help to develop the land but also people.

Land Development Act instead of Land Acquisition Act

- The land acquisition act was made in 1894, which is more than a century old, so there is a need to convert it into a land development act by catering people and the environment. Otherwise, according to Dr. Nadeem ul Haque this development further increase in urban sprawl.

Opponent Arguments about the RUDA project

- Dr. Fauzia Qureshi expresses her concerns over the disturbance of the ecology of the river Ravi. Why are we not building cities near Gujranwala and Shekhpura, why are we expanding Lahore and densifying the already 12 million population? The population of Lahore has squeezed to less than one-third of the total area of Lahore. The rest of the area along the southern corridor and eastern corridor which is the cantonment and defense area has less than 30 percent of the population density per square acre.

Why are we not tripling or quadrupling this density?

- The development plan of RUDA is the same as Bahria Town, DHA, and Lake City. The RUDA model is just for the elite to cover hundreds and thousands of acres of land. In RUDA just 10 percent of the land is devoted to green areas and the rest would be for the development and high-rise buildings to accommodate 12 million population.

What kind of density RUDA is talking about?

- Dr. Fauzia said we are developing a city for the catering elite, a city where elitists will live and there is no concept of development for the poor, affordable housing. The visuals of RUDA do not show visuals of affordable housing, the greening of Lahore nor the billion-tree tsunami. This project is anti-development and anti-poor.
- We need to start thinking about the cleaning of the environment, better public transportation densification, and not encroaching on agricultural land.
- Ms. Sima Khawaja said it is the largest urban plan in the history of Pakistan and the person who has done the environmental impact assessment (EIA) is not registered. It has become a common practice around the world if a government is planning to build a new city, strategic environmental assessment is done not the environmental impact assessment.
- Strategic environmental assessment is a systematic decision support process, aiming to ensure that environmental and possibly other sustainability aspects are considered effectively in policy, plan, and program making.
- We easily say that industries and new cities need to be built on a particular agricultural land, but we need that particular agricultural product because our survival depends on that. We can build textile or a mechanical industry on every sort of land but we can't grow agricultural products on every sort of land. With the seven most vulnerable countries in terms of climate change, it can be a serious matter.



- Lahore is the most polluted city in the world and putting the next city around it, the result will be horridness.
- New cities should be built around areas where pollution is less and environmental degradation chances are minimum.
- The biggest problem in RUDA is that 100,000 acres of land is being acquired and 77,000 acres of land is the most fertile and expensive land of Punjab. Building a city on such supreme land is a catastrophe.
- Every inch of RUDA land is productive. That particular land grows wheat, rice, and orchards. By saying we can replace them in another place, what is the probability that that piece of land has the same environment? Orchards take years to grow, how is it possible to replace them?
- The total process of land acquisition and compensation is illegal. Section 5 of law states if the land is being acquired for a purpose the plan should be shared with the public and their agreement is necessary, but in this process, the public has not been taken on board.
- RUDA's act states that if a land is being acquired the consent of the owner will be taken whether he wants monetary compensation, land, or anything else. But no such rule is being followed and the compensation given to the landowners is not market base.

Conclusion

Pakistan is the most urbanized country. Almost 50% of the population is living in cities and this figure is increasing yearly and our cities are on the verge of collapse and can't handle more people. For which new cities need to be built and we are building new cities but keeping our traditions, we in every mega scheme project make blunders and RUDA is one of them. Most expensive and productive land is acquired to build a city that is anti-poor, anti-food scarcity, and anti-environment.



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