



gatekeeper

# The Urban Resource Centre, Karachi

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**The role of local  
organisations in  
sustainable  
development**

# The roles of local organisations in poverty reduction and environmental management

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All poverty reduction is local. This is easy to forget given how discussion and debate on the subject is dominated by bilateral aid agencies, development banks, national governments and international NGOs. But regardless of higher level commitments and decisions, what actually happens on the ground in particular localities is what makes the difference. Many barriers to poverty reduction are local — local power structures, land owning patterns and anti-poor politicians, bureaucracies and regulations. Much of what the poor require — schools, healthcare, water and sanitation, land, social safety nets, getting onto voter registers — must be obtained from local organisations within this local context.

Local organisations have a major role in addressing these realities, helping poor groups access entitlements and engage with government. They may be local NGOs, grassroots organisations of the poor, or even local governments or branches of higher levels of government. But they function on a local level, have intimate knowledge of the local context and should be accountable to local people. Many operate on very small budgets, outside the main funding flows and frameworks. Yet they are not isolated from larger governance issues; indeed, much pro-poor political change has been catalysed by local innovations and by political pressure from grassroots organisations and their associations.

This publication is one in a series of case studies and synthesis papers looking at the work of local organisations in development and environmental management. These publications were developed in collaboration with the local organisations they profile. They seek to encourage international funding agencies to rethink the means by which they can support, work with and learn from the local organisations that are such a critical part of pro-poor development.

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This is a condensed version of a paper prepared for an IIED initiative on “Learning from Local Organisations for Poverty Reduction and Environmental Management”. The longer paper can be obtained from the author or by e-mailing eandui@iied.org.

# Executive summary

The Urban Resource Centre is a Karachi-based NGO founded by teachers, professionals, students, activists and community organisations from low-income settlements. It was set up in response to the recognition that the planning process for Karachi did not serve the interests of low- and lower-middle-income groups, small businesses and informal sector operators and was also creating adverse environmental and socioeconomic impacts. The Urban Resource Centre has sought to change this through creating an information base about Karachi's development on which everyone can draw; also through research and analysis of government plans (and their implications for Karachi's citizens), advocacy, mobilisation of communities, and drawing key government staff into discussions. This has created a network of professionals and activists from civil society and government agencies who understand planning issues from the perspective of these communities and other less powerful interest groups. This network has successfully challenged many government plans that are ineffective, over-expensive and anti-poor and has promoted alternatives. It shows how the questioning of government plans in an informed manner by a large number of interest groups, community organisations, NGOs, academics, political parties and the media can force the government to listen and to make modifications to its plans, projects and investments. Comparable urban resource centres have also been set up in other cities in Pakistan and also in other nations.

# The Urban Resource Centre, Karachi

Arif Hasan

## Introduction

The Urban Resource Centre (URC) was set up in 1989 because its founders felt that Karachi's planning process did not serve the interests of the low- and lower-middle-income groups, small businesses and informal sector operators. This planning process was also creating adverse environmental and socioeconomic impacts.<sup>1</sup> The founders – teachers, professionals, students, activists and community members<sup>2</sup> – felt the whole city was being adversely affected by a process controlled by uninformed politicians, powerful real estate interests, international development agencies anxious to make loans, opportunistic national and international consultants and profit-seeking contractors and companies. Their objective was to modify the planning process through alternative research, advocacy, mobilisation of communities, and building and supporting alliances for change.

## The context

Pakistan is a federation of four provinces, each with an elected assembly and with representation in the national assembly and the senate. Each province is divided into districts (*zilas*), sub-districts (*tehsils*) and union councils, the lowest administrative unit. The larger cities are run as districts and are also sub-divided into *tehsils* and union councils. All three levels of local government have considerable autonomy and can raise funds and plan and implement physical and social developments independently. Each level is headed by an elected mayor (*nazim*) and deputy (*naib nazim*).

About 40% of Pakistan's population of 150 million live in urban areas. The country is poor and heavily in debt. Total external debt is equivalent to 53.8% of gross national income (GNI) and debt servicing represents 4.8% of GNI; both are higher than for most low- and middle-income nations (Zaidi, 2005). Relative spending on health and education is lower than in all other South Asian countries and on defence, it is higher (UNDP, 2003). Poverty, largely as a result of structural adjustment, increased from 17.3% of the population in 1987–88 to 32.6% in 1998–99 (Asian Development Bank,

1. For more details of the early years, see the NGO profile of the Urban Resource Centre, Karachi, URC (1994).

2. The founders were: Karachi professionals; teachers and young graduates from the Department of Architecture and Planning at Dawood College; NGO activists, mainly from the Karachi-based NGO Orangi Pilot Project; and community organisations from low-income settlements.

2005). A recent World Bank report claims that it has fallen to 27.6% in 2005 (Daily Dawn, 2006).

Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, has around 14 million inhabitants. It consists of 18 towns and 178 union councils. It handles 95% of Pakistan's foreign trade, contributes 30% of industrial production, 20% of the country's GDP and 45% of national manufacturing value added, as well as holding 50% of the country's bank deposits (Asian Development Bank, 2005). More than half of Karachi's population live in *katchi abadis* (informal settlements) or slum areas such as the high-density environmentally degraded inner-city areas. Eighty-nine per cent of the *katchi abadi* population have incomes below the poverty line (Asian Development Bank, 2005).

Karachi needs 80,000 new housing units each year to house its growing population but between 1994 and 1999 an average of only 26,700 building permits was issued per year. The gap was partially met by the construction of an estimated 28,000 new housing units per year in *katchi abadis* during the same period (Hasan, 1999) as well as by densification in existing *katchi abadis*. Meanwhile, real estate development, backed by a powerful nexus of politicians, bureaucrats and developers, is evicting the city's low-income groups and pushing them to the periphery, increasing their vulnerability and poverty. Transport, although adequate and cheap, is uncomfortable, badly managed, heavily polluting and the cause of stress and respiratory diseases (IUCN, 2004). The number of private motor vehicles is growing by 9% per year and this adds 280 vehicles every day, leading to massive traffic jams and contributing to high accident rates (Asian Development Bank, 2005).

Although 74% of Karachi households have piped water connections, water supply is inadequate and many areas also have to rely on tankers. Over 80% of households have toilets and lane sewers but these drain into the natural drainage system, polluting natural water bodies. Only a small proportion of sewage/wastewater is treated (Asian Development Bank, 2005) and only a small proportion of solid waste is collected and transported to the official dumping site; the rest is dumped at unofficial sites, causing serious environmental problems.

Karachi's government institutions are badly managed and have deteriorated over time due to political interference and civic, ethnic and political strife. Federal agencies own a lot of land in Karachi but work independently of local governments and do not coordinate their plans with them, which is a major cause of friction in the Karachi planning and development process.

The federal, provincial and city governments have invested heavily in Karachi's development, often supported by loans from international financial institutions. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and Japan-funded projects related to water, sewage, traffic, transport and environment have involved loans of US\$ 654 million (Asian Development Bank, 2005) but all have either failed or proved unsustainable (Gorson Fried *et al.*, 2003). The debt burden from these loans has multiplied many times over due to high interest rates, related conditionalities and the devaluation of the Pakistani rupee. Yet the government is again in the process of negotiating new loans for mega projects, mostly related to transport (see Box 1) but with no coordination between the various international finance institution-funded projects that also do not form part of the city's master plan.

### BOX 1. LOANS BEING NEGOTIATED FOR KARACHI PROJECTS, 2006

PROJECT NAME	IFI PROVIDING LOAN
Public–Private Partnership Project	World Bank/Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Rehabilitation of Hub and Pipri Treatment Works	Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC)
Megacity Development Project	Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Water Supply and Sewage Master Plan Project	Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
Passenger Trip Study for Karachi	Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
Future Development for Industry	Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO)
Effluent Treatment Plants	Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Karachi professionals, academics and a number of NGOs feel that they do not need loans or foreign experts to execute these projects. They also feel that a number of sub-projects under these projects are not required by Karachi at this stage.

SOURCE: ADB (2005), *Aide Memoire, Megacity Development Project for Karachi, Asian Development Bank, September*

## The Urban Resource Centre

### Objectives

The Urban Resource Centre's (URC) mission is to influence the planning and implementation process in Karachi to make it contribute to poverty reduction (which also includes reducing its capacity to create or exacerbate poverty) and become more environment friendly. It aims to do so through:

- collecting information regarding the city and its plans and disseminating this to relevant government agencies, the media, NGOs, community-based organisations, concerned citizens and formal and informal interest groups;
- analysing local and federal government plans for the city from the point of view of residential communities (especially low-income ones), weaker interest groups, academics and NGOs and using these as the basis for forums in which all interest groups are involved, so that a broad consensus may be arrived at;
- identifying and promoting research and documentation on major issues in Karachi and monitoring developments and processes related to them;

- creating professionals and activists in the NGO/community-based organisation (CBO) and government sectors who understand planning issues from the point of view of local communities (especially low-income ones) and weaker interest groups; and
- creating a space for informed interaction and discussions between various stakeholders in Karachi on urban issues and development plans and nurturing this space with the purpose of ultimately institutionalising it.

## The means by which the URC addresses poverty and environmental issues

All urban planning and development affects the poor directly or indirectly, and the URC have developed four criteria against which to evaluate government and private sector projects and plans:

- all plans and projects must respect the ecology and ecosystems of the region in which Karachi is situated;
- land use has to be determined on the basis of social and environmental considerations and not only on land value (or potential land value);
- development has to serve the interests of the majority of Karachiites, 70% of whom belong to low- and lower-middle-income groups and most of whom live in *katchi abadis*; and
- development should respect and protect Karachi's rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including that of the communities who live in it.

The promotion of these criteria and the debates around them has greatly influenced media coverage of urban issues and also civil society and parts of the establishment. This process, along with the questioning of the development paradigm through research, advocacy, forums and media, deals directly with poverty issues. The URC has focused on: evictions and housing; transport; protection of public beaches and other natural assets from encroachment by powerful development interests; and protection of the rights of hawkers and pushcart operators.

The most important way that the URC addresses these issues is through developing an accessible knowledge base on Karachi and on urban planning and projects available for use by all interest groups – including poor communities, media, civil society organisations, academia and government agencies. This then supports community-based organisations and NGOs in negotiating with government agencies, political parties and the formal private sector. It also brings together various community organisations with other interest groups in the city, thus increasing their negotiation powers.

To achieve this, the URC carries out the following activities:

- a news clippings service that covers all major Karachi issues and that is available to researchers, students and the media. This has also proved very valuable in helping to identify key trends and directions over time;



- a monthly “Facts and Figures” newsletter sent to over 1,600 individuals and organisations;
- analyses of Karachi’s development plans/projects documented and published (in English and Urdu) and provided to the media, so the issues they raise become a basis of debate and discussion;
- lectures arranged by eminent professionals and experts on national and international development-related issues for grassroots activists, NGOs, government officials, academia and representatives of interest groups. This helps organisations and individuals to relate their work to larger issues and to become more informed partners; and
- a Youth Training Programme, with one-year fellowships for young university graduates and community activists, who help in research, documentation and interaction with communities and interest groups.

The URC also:

- promotes and supports a network of CBOs and NGOs for networking on major Karachi-related development issues and projects;
- supports a forum in which CBOs from all Karachi’s *katchi abadis* come together to discuss problems, learn from each other’s work and take measures to collectively protect their interests and present their claims;
- monitors and documents evictions. The URC identifies communities at risk from eviction and informs them of possible threats and supports them to help avoid eviction, as well as publishing widely on eviction issues to get broader support to prevent them;
- carries out participatory research into development issues and policies that affect the poorer groups, producing material that communities and networks can use for lobbying with government agencies, politicians, political parties and the media;
- lends support to all civil society movements and organisations that are progressive, pro-poor, environment friendly and against national and international systems of exploitation; and
- maintains links with UN agencies and with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights Network and seeks their support for issues related to evictions and housing. It also shares its programmes and knowledge with them through community exchange and orientation programmes.

## Staff and council

Until 1999, the URC had only three full-time members supported by five to ten interns and fellows. Now there are nine full-time members. The URC’s coordinator is architect Muhammad Younus, a working-class inner-city resident who graduated from the Department of Architecture and Planning at Dawood College. He joined the URC in 1994 after working at the Orangi Pilot Project–Research and Training Institute (OPP–RTI) on the upgrading of *katchi abadis* in Orangi Town. Zahid Farooq, the social organiser, is the

son of a farm labourer who migrated to Karachi. He is an active resident of a *katchi abadi*, worked for the Catholic Social Services for nine years and has strong links with the human rights movements and organisations in Pakistan. Adnan Farooqui, the administrator and accountant, has a degree in commerce and worked for a local newspaper before joining the URC. These three were the full team prior to 1999. All the people who have since been added to the staff come from the lower-middle or working classes, and all but one were previously interns at the URC under the Youth Training Programme. This distinguishes the URC from other NGOs in Karachi, where the management and professional staff invariably come from the elite or from the English-speaking upper-middle class. The salaries at the URC are low but the staff get a sense of satisfaction from fighting for justice and equity and belonging to a larger family in the city.

The URC's council has 14 members drawn from different backgrounds. The Chair, a Karachi planner, is also a Visiting Professor at the Department of Architecture and Planning at the NED University, and Chair of the Orangi Pilot Project–Research and Training Institute.<sup>3</sup> The Vice-Chair is the Director of the Orangi Charitable Trust<sup>4</sup> and the Treasurer is the Dean of the Department of Architecture and Planning at the NED University. Four members are from grassroots CBOs from *katchi abadis* and inner-city areas; two are professionals working with the Orangi Pilot Project; two are university professors, one of whom is also associated with a Karachi NGO working on water issues and monitoring international finance institution-funded projects; one belongs to an important national NGO and one is a well-known Karachi-based development professional. All have their own extensive networks, which are brought together on major issues in the city.<sup>5</sup>

## Other URC stakeholders

The URC Chair and some council members lecture regularly at the National Institute of Public Administration where government staff are trained. Council members have also been on the Governor's Task Force on the Improvement of Municipal Services and helped in research for the task force and the establishment of a network to support task force recommendations. The URC has also arranged forums in collaboration with the city government, where city government agencies present their work to CBOs, NGOs and other interest groups. In addition, Karachi's planning agencies seek the advice and support of the URC for their plans. More recently, the Karachi nazim appointed the URC Chair to his seven-member Consultative Group on Urban Planning, and he and another council member to the Karachi Master Plan committees for transport, and water and

3. The Urban Resource Centre has always worked very closely with this institution; see Hasan (2006), and Orangi Pilot Project (1995).

4. For more details, see Ismail (2005). The Book Notes section of *Environment & Urbanisation* (2006), Vol 18, No 2, October, had a summary of this book on pages 550–551.

5. Council members are members and/or chairpersons of important national and international organisations, including the Aurat (Women's) Foundation, the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research, the Rural Support Programme Network, the Conservation and Rehabilitation Centre, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, ACHR, OPP–RTI, OPP–OCT and the Ashoka Foundation. They lecture at and/or are on the boards of various academic organisations such as the departments of architecture and planning at Karachi University, NED University and Dawood College, the Textile Institute of Pakistan, the National Institute of Public Administration and Lahore Staff College.

sewage, respectively. Thus, one could even consider these government agencies as stakeholders.

The URC's library and research materials provide documentation that exists nowhere else. Today, almost all of the print and media-related stories for Karachi are derived from URC research, forums and literature, and these are recognised as having influenced the nature of journalism on development in Karachi.

A number of rights-based NGOs have involved themselves in issues raised by the URC and so have particular interest groups such as transporters, mini-bus drivers' associations, scavengers' organisations, the informal and formal garbage recycling industry, hawkers' organisations, flat owners' associations and academic institutions. All these are, in a way, URC stakeholders.

However, the major URC stakeholders are the Karachi community-based organisations. Through the URC they have got to know each other and have been able to articulate their views and concerns regarding issues such as transport, solid waste management, water supply and sewage, and housing and evictions. They have also gained access to the media, which increasingly involves them in discussions on radio and TV and interviews with the print media. Coming together has also made them realise their strength and has encouraged them to negotiate collectively with government agencies and elected representatives.

## The evolution of the Urban Resource Centre

The origins of the URC, together with the nature of its council and staff, determine to a large extent the interest that the organisation has in the planning process of Karachi and the nature of that interest. In 1980, professors at Dawood College's Department of Architecture and Planning introduced the Comprehensive Environmental Design Project with the objective of helping students understand the larger social, administrative and economic issues related to the built environment. This became a yearly project whereby each year, an area of the city that had serious social and/or environmental problems was identified. The class, usually less than 20 students, was divided into four groups: physical, administrative, social and economic. Each group studied the area from its particular perspective, observing problems, ascertaining local government responsibilities, identifying interest groups and local organisations and determining through them the causes of the problems. The groups came together to synthesise their findings and arrive at a group solution. Finally, each student had to make an individual architectural intervention for the improvement of the area. Over time, this annual initiative created links between the students and teachers and inner-city interest groups, the *katchi abadis*, informal sector operators, NGOs and government departments. Some of these links were institutionalised, such as with the Orangi Pilot Project institutions working in informal settlements.

In 1989, the Urban Studies Forum was formed at Dawood College in response to the concerns of graduates who felt unable to use the knowledge they had gained in their current jobs. This forum was to collect information and carry out investigations into

problems in the city and to disseminate the results. However, as it became clear that this forum could not bring about a meaningful change in the planning process in Karachi, the URC was set up in the home of one of the young graduates.

Initially, an annotated bibliography on Karachi was prepared and as many publications as could be acquired were purchased. Discussion meetings were held and documented, and the collection of newspaper clippings on various issues was initiated. While doing this, it became evident that Karachi had a lot of failed projects, many of which had been objected to in their initial stages both by professors from the Department of Architecture and Planning and by citizens. With this in mind, a decision was taken to make the URC a Karachi-focused research, documentation and advocacy organisation.

In 1991, with modest funding from SELAVIP, the URC was able to employ two full-time staff and hire office premises. A more systematic process was developed with the news clippings and separate files were prepared on housing, environment, education, health, solid waste, sewage, water, transport, electricity, economy and law and order. These were analysed at monthly meetings and trends in Karachi were identified. Soon, a picture of Karachi's large and undocumented informal and formal organisations started to emerge. The URC contacted these organisations and began inviting their representatives to its discussion meetings. They also started acquiring details of government plans for the development of the city (much of which had never been subject to public scrutiny and discussion) and analysing them with the help of the interest groups that it had identified and contacted. The documentation and analysis became more regular and the URC's meetings more frequent and better attended. The media were also invited and started giving coverage to the discussions and to the pros and cons of official plans.

This initial period and the people associated with it determined the URC's organisational culture. There was a firm belief in the importance of professionals, grassroots activists, government planners and bureaucrats and politicians coming together as equals; also, that poor communities have to be supported with information and planning expertise to participate in this. Some of the original young graduates are now important professionals, teachers of architecture and planning, NGO activists and administrators, and many are members of the URC's Governing Council and General Body. They have ensured that the organisational culture and the basic objectives of the URC remain true to its origins.

The URC offices were on the ground floor of a small residential house in a middle-income area of the city; although cramped, this was initially adequate. When the organisation was offered a large space in the City Campus of NED University, they turned it down; given the URC's frequent confrontation with government plans and agencies, it seemed inappropriate to function from government-owned premises. Only in 2005, when its credentials with government and civil society were solidly established, did the URC, with funds from a German and a Dutch international NGO,<sup>6</sup> purchase an office in a commercial building in Karachi that was large enough for forums. Over the years, there has been considerable pressure on the URC from professional institutions, international

6. CORDAID and Misereor.

agencies, national and international NGOs and academic institutions to convert itself into a large NGO managed by highly qualified and well-paid professionals, planners and administrators. Generous finance has been offered for this “upgrading”. However, these pressures have been resisted. Such a step would have meant relying on consultancies and thus losing independence; the connection with grassroots movements and organisations that has allowed the URC to be part of the solution rather than part of the development problem might also have been compromised.

The URC functioned from 1989 to 1991 on a voluntary basis, with funds raised through membership fees or contributions. The first funding came in 1991 from SELAVIP, for US\$ 5,000, and early support was also given by the Swiss Development Cooperation. The council decided that the URC should seek relatively small funding from a number of donors so that if anyone withdrew support, the programme would not be too adversely affected and alternative funds would be comparatively easy to arrange. By 1996–97, the URC’s annual budget had increased to Rs 615,037 (US\$ 10,250) and by 2005, to Rs 3,460,000 (US\$ 57,666). The main donors were CHIP, CORDAID, Misereor, the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights<sup>7</sup> and The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions.<sup>8</sup> Of the total budget, 11.4% is spent on salaries, 8.5% on operations and 62.2% on activities. The URC also generates funds through the sale of its publications and from interest on its investments. The idea of acquiring an endowment for the URC is under consideration by the council.

The URC’s evolution can be divided into four stages:

**1989–1992:** the URC gathered documentation, identified and contacted various interest groups, held discussions (often rather academic in nature) and tried to create links with the media but without much success. During this period, the main participants were the students and teachers, and OPP staff members.

**1992–1997:** the URC began to question a number of government urban development projects and to propose pro-environment, pro-poor alternatives. Contacts with the media increased considerably, use of the URC’s library increased and the main participants in URC’s work became CBO activists and NGO workers. Contacts with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and visits to and from Asian groups took place. The adverse effects of structural adjustment became obvious and the URC began questioning the role of the international financial institutions in Karachi’s development. This was a period of considerable conflict of opinion between the URC and government planners and local government.

**1997–2001:** relations with government agencies and local bureaucracies improved and there were many meaningful exchanges. Links with the National Institute of Public Administration, where government officials are trained, increased. The URC presented its findings to the provincial governors, ministers, local government administrators and mayors on solid waste, mass transit and inner-city issues, and had an important role in the Governor’s Task Force for the Improvement of Municipal

7. See [www.achr.net](http://www.achr.net). For its early work programme, see ACHR (1993).

8. See [www.cohre.org](http://www.cohre.org); also COHRE (1994) and du Plessis (2005).

Services. It also played a role in civil society mobilisation against international loans and mega projects and the subsequent positions taken by Karachi NGOs. With the military takeover in 1999, in the initial stages there appeared to be some common understanding with the military junta.

**2001 onwards:** the local government devolution plan was implemented in 2001. The elected city government saw no reason for negotiating with the URC and had its own lobbies, consultants and an elitist vision for the city. Relations with the military government became strained due to the URC's opposition to the Lyari Expressway. However, relations with a number of technocrats and government planning agencies continued to develop and a working understanding has developed between them and the URC. During this period, relations with the media (both print and electronic) became excellent. It can safely be said that the URC has won the media war regarding its vision for the city.

## Initiatives and interventions

### Challenging the Karachi Mass Transit Project (KMTP)

The URC's first major initiative became a model for its future research and advocacy work. In 1992, the Karachi Mass Transit Project (KTMP) proposal, prepared by World Bank consultants, was finalised. The project was to consist of six elevated light rail transit ways to be built on a Built–Operate–Transfer basis through an international tender. The URC invited the director of the Karachi Development Authority's Mass Transit Cell and its technical expert to make presentations to NGOs, community organisations, concerned citizens, academics and the media. The URC's own reservations were finally expressed in a newspaper article in January 1994 – the first public criticism of the KMTP – and this generated a lot of media debate. As a result, the URC was invited to become a part of the project steering committee. But its concerns were not seriously considered by the committee and so the URC held its first citizen's forum on the mass transit issue in July 1994. It was well attended and well covered by the press.

The URC's concerns regarding the KMTP were the following:

- the proposed elevated transit ways would pass through narrow corridors of the inner city where Karachi's historic buildings and main civic institutions are located, thereby devastating the old city and making conservation attempts impossible;
- the elevated transit ways would block out light and air and cause major environmental degradation and inappropriate land use changes along this corridor. Over 2,000 trees would be destroyed along just one of the corridors;
- three of the elevated transit ways would run parallel to the existing Karachi circular railway, which was under-utilised and not considered a part of the KMTP;
- Corridor One (the priority corridor) would not serve many commuters, nor were there many *katchi abadis* or other low-income settlements along this corridor;

- the project was going to cause a large number of evictions; no resettlement plan had been prepared so the costs for this were not included; and
- the per kilometre cost of the elevated transit ways was almost twice that of the Ankara Mass Transit System, a substantial part of which was underground.

Through its links with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, the URC acquired photographs of Manila's elevated transit ways, which showed the environmental damage that they had caused especially within the corridors they passed through. These photographs, along with the existing conditions on the Karachi transit ways, were presented at the forum through a slide show, with maps and statistics to explain the URC's reservations.

The forum was a great success. The KMTP was widely discussed in the print media and the city divided into pro- and anti-KMTP lobbies. Professionals interested in culture and heritage, and trade unions and academics contacted the URC. A Citizen's Forum on Mass Transit was created with the URC as its coordinator and a senior retired government planner as its Chair. This forum accepted the URC's reservations and its counter-proposals. Presentations were made to the press, academics, political parties, government functionaries and international financial institutions as well as to residents, shopkeeper organisations and institutions that lay along the proposed transit way corridors. National and international NGOs visited the URC office to understand these concerns.

In all presentations and meetings, the forum and the URC pushed for the revitalisation and extension of the Karachi circular railway as an alternative to the KMTP. This railway already connected Karachi's five main work areas, including the central business district, the port and the major industrial estate, as well as the major inner-city residential areas. Furthermore, many of the informal settlements were along its tracks. If 19 kilometres of extensions were built, about 80% of Karachiites would live within two kilometres of its 98 kilometres of track. The cost would be about half that of the 17 kilometres of Corridor One of the proposed KMTP. The development of the rail corridor would also reduce congestion on roads, whereas the elevated transit ways would increase it.

In June 1996, the federal government made some changes to the KMTP proposal, reducing the widths of the transit ways within the old city and limiting the corridors to three (instead of six). In the end, due to the lack of a viable financial arrangement, the project was abandoned in December 2001.

Meanwhile, the pro-rail solution lobby both in and outside of government increased, and URC representatives continued to write articles and letters to the press. In July 2001, the government appointed consultants to prepare a master plan for the circular railway and its extensions, and the feasibility of implementing the master plan on a Built-Operate-Transfer basis is being investigated. Meanwhile, the city government has revived proposals for Corridor One, but for it to be underground within the old city areas. After much acrimony, excellent relations have been established between the URC and the city government's Mass Transit Cell.

## Later developments

This work on the KMTP and the circular railway established the URC's credibility. It then took up a number of additional issues, some of which are outlined below:

- the Lyari Expressway project, which was to displace 25,000 families and businesses, was shelved a number of times between 1994 and 2002 due to a movement against it by local communities supported by the URC. It is currently being built but opposition is fierce and this is supported by the URC. After the government decided to go ahead with the project, the URC contacted its Asian Coalition for Housing Rights-related international network, who wrote over 1,200 protest letters to the president of Pakistan and the Karachi mayor. This resulted in a UN-backed ACHR fact-finding mission to Karachi, which met elected representatives and bureaucrats at the federal and provincial levels. The outcome of this mission is an improved rehabilitation plan for those affected by the expressway (Hasan, 2005);
- the northern bypass project, plans for which the government had shelved, was pushed by the URC and is now under construction. It will bring relief to a congested and environmentally degraded inner city;
- the URC's research, negotiations, forums and support for the Karachi transporters has led to an understanding and regular discussions of their problems by the media and by government agencies;
- the URC has developed plans (in collaboration with hawkers and the city government's Traffic Engineering Bureau) for the rehabilitation of over 3,000 hawkers who are periodically evicted from the city centre. These plans are being discussed with the city government and plans for other areas are being researched;
- the URC's research on solid waste management (carried out with scavengers and solid waste recyclers as a contribution to the Governor's Task Force for Improvement of Municipal Services for Karachi in 1998) has led to a greater awareness and acceptance of the informal recycling industry as an important interest group in this sector;
- the URC has been a promoter of the Orangi Pilot Project–Research and Training Institute's (OPP–RTI) alternative sewage disposal plans for Karachi (Hasan, 2006 and Orangi Pilot Project, 1995) and has helped create a CBO–NGO network supported by professionals and local communities, which monitors government and international financial institution-funded sewage and water-related projects. The URC was a major player in getting a US\$ 100 million Asian Development Bank loan cancelled in favour of the US\$ 18 million OPP–RTI alternative proposal for the Orangi Waste Water Management Project; and
- through the Youth Training Project and the young graduates who have gone on to work with NGOs and in the government sector, links have been created between the URC and these organisations and there is now an exchange of ideas and knowledge.



## New initiatives

The URC is currently involved in a number of new initiatives:

- local government and the Defence Housing Authority (an elite housing colony) banned hawkers, pushcarts and jugglers from the beaches in their jurisdiction. As a result of URC advocacy, the authority's residents' association now allows the hawkers and others to ply their trades on the beach. The city government has yet to accommodate hawkers on those parts of the beach that they manage;
- the Defence Housing Authority is privatising 14 kilometres of beach for elite hotels, condominiums, marinas and golf courses. The URC, with other NGOs, CBOs, professional and academic institutions and schools, has launched a movement against this as it will deny these very popular and much-used beaches to Karachiites;
- the URC has made evictions an issue with the media, political parties and other civil society organisations, and also with certain sections of the elite. To support communities threatened with eviction because they live on the railways' "right of way", the URC has helped them document all the formal sector buildings (including factories, middle-income group flats and government offices) that also encroach on this railway right of way. The maps, publications and videos they produced have been used by railroad communities due to be evicted to lobby in protest, and demolitions have been curtailed as a result. A reduction in the size of the "right of way" each side of the tracks will prevent the eviction of tens of thousands of households;
- the URC has initiated a Secure Housing Initiative, whereby settlements under threat of eviction document their history, and government and community investments in their infrastructure, as well as issues related to land title and details regarding the families living in the settlements. This information is then available for use in lobbying against evictions; and
- URCs have been set up by professionals and activists in a number of other cities, including Lahore, Faisalabad and Rawalpindi. The Karachi URC has been supporting these initiatives through orientation and training. Although the URC is a small organisation, and its work is limited to the Karachi city district, through its training and orientation programmes it has also had an influence on various national and international groups who wish to replicate the URC process. In addition to the interest in URCs in Pakistan, support from the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights has allowed the establishment of URCs in Kathmandu, Colombo and Phnom Penh. The Community Organisation Resource Centre in Cape Town also drew on the experience of the URC. ACHR and staff from the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific recently visited Karachi with representatives of organisations who wish to establish URCs in Mongolia, East Timor and Thailand.

# Lessons learnt and policy implications

## Effectiveness

It is difficult to judge the URC's effectiveness. Certainly, with a modest annual budget, it has provided the information base and the forum for discussion for a great range of issues relating to planning and development in Karachi. Its primary objective, of changing the planning process for Karachi to make it far more pro-poor and less environmentally damaging, has far to go. Karachi's planning process is still controlled by those who want to convert it into a "world class city" through very investment-intensive infrastructure projects (most of which will increase debt burdens), and whose main partners in development are national and international consultants and contractors and a nexus of politicians, bureaucrats and developers. However, the URC's work has:

- **Created an accessible alternative information base** to the official one, with regard to Karachi's development, through its library, clippings service, publications and interaction with formal and informal interest groups, grassroots community organisations and NGOs. This information base has influenced the media, academia and government and NGO thinking on Karachi affairs, and has made it more environment-conscious and pro-poor. Politicians, bureaucrats, international consultants, international agency task managers and national and international contractors are part of this process.
- **Introduced new subjects for debate in the media and within government agencies and political parties** through its research and forums on: evictions; inner-city issues related to traffic congestion and heritage; questioning government projects on environmental and social grounds; problems of *katchi abadi* dwellers related to infrastructure and larger city planning issues; the needs and priorities of informal and small formal businesses in the urban planning process; and issues related to hawkers and transporters.
- Through its lecture series and forums, the URC has **made it possible for community-based organisations to become aware of the larger development issues that affect their lives**. As a result of this, CBO networks have been created and CBOs now participate in city-level movements in support of, or against, government development programmes and projects. This is something that did not happen before.
- **Created a space (however fragile), both physical and institutional, for interaction between people (communities, academia, NGOs, formal and informal service providers and interest groups), politicians and government planners and bureaucrats**. As a result, people's concerns have reached official planners and politicians and have impacted positively on government plans in a number of cases.

The major constraint faced by the URC has been the power of the nexus of contractors, consultants, bureaucrats and politicians. The two elected nazims of Karachi in the last five years have been in favour of "investment friendly" development and are constantly signing Memoranda of Understanding with international companies and

international finance institutions for mega projects that do not take into consideration the needs of the majority of population and that adversely effect the natural and built environment. Their vision is an antithesis of the four points developed by the URC as criteria for urban planning.

The URC has a lot of information and alternatives for development. However, it does not have the capacity or capability to lobby as effectively as it could given the research material it possesses. It is more comfortable working with communities and the media. It also requires staff and/or consultants who can turn the transcripts of its forums into effective lobbying material, especially in English. Various NGOs and government officials have pointed to the URC's inability to lobby with government agencies more effectively. They feel that the URC needs to widen its base and increase its interaction beyond the networks of its council and general body members. The URC council is aware of these shortcomings but feels that a separate organisation specifically for this purpose is required for Karachi. Attempts at setting up such an organisation are underway.

## Lessons learnt

The vision of national, provincial and city politicians in Pakistan regarding urban planning is governed by the more glamorous aspects of cities in Europe and North America and by political opportunism. They prefer high-rise apartment blocks rather than upgraded informal settlements; flyovers and elevated expressways rather than traffic management and planning; malls rather than traditional markets; removing poverty from the city centre to the periphery (so as to hide it); catering to tourism rather than supporting local commerce; planning for short-term impacts during the time they are in power rather than the long term; and above all, linking themselves and their plans with international financial institutions, the international corporate sector and the elite of the city. This does not serve the interests of the environment nor of the lower-middle or low-income groups, and increasingly not of the middle-middle income groups either.

These politicians are supported by Karachi planners, architects and engineers, drawn largely from among the elite or from the new affluent middle classes who have no links with the low-income settlements in which most of Karachi lives, and hence no understanding of the problems of the communities that reside there. Furthermore, they were trained to deliver the "First World" model of urban development, so their planning is anti-street, anti-pedestrian, anti-mixed land use and anti-dissolved space. In short, their planning is anti-poor and anti-environment and it complements the vision of the politicians.

The national and international corporate sector and the international financial institutions cultivate the politicians and the planners to sell their technology, promote their investments and push their loans, consultants, contractors and investment companies. Their main motif is profit even if it is at the cost of the environment, equity and social justice.

The nexus of politicians, bureaucrats/planners and developers (national and international) is powerful enough to violate government laws and related rules, regulations and procedures, many of which are pro-poor and environment friendly. Such violations

deprive city planning and management agencies of power, and promote corruption and adversely affect the judicial system.

Karachi has numerous grassroots organisations and small interest group organisations constantly presenting their claims and guarding their gains. Although they sometimes succeed at the local or neighbourhood level, their concerns are not taken into consideration in the larger planning process. Similarly, a number of academic institutions have research relevant to city-level environmental and social issues that is never used.

Within the planning establishment there are planners, bureaucrats and academics who understand the injustices in the present system and who would like to support a pro-environment and pro-poor paradigm. However, they are isolated and have no platform to express their concerns.

Trade unions and chambers of commerce and industry are unaware of government and international financial institution projects, many of which affect their members and the organisations as a whole. If they have information, they readily involve themselves.

**If the questioning of government projects in an informed manner is backed collectively by a large number of interest groups, community-based organisations, NGOs, academics, political parties and the media, then government is forced to listen and to make modifications to its plans, projects and investments. Over time, this can allow a new paradigm to emerge.**

For there to be effective questioning of government projects, interest groups need to be identified. Project details need to be presented to them and then analysed and modified, after which they need to be presented to civil society organisations, donor agencies, politicians, government organisations and the media. The results need to be transcribed and follow-up meetings arranged. Sometimes, it may take years and continuous lobbying before decisions that take into account the alternatives are finally made.

Interest groups and community-based organisations are willing to become partners in participatory research and in questioning or supporting projects and processes, if only to understand the causes of their problems and the constraints in solving them. However, they do not partner sincerely with organisations they do not trust. URC staff and council members who share a culture with or can relate well to grassroots organisations and interest groups help enormously in this regard.

Media reports, especially TV and radio coverage, lead to the participation of concerned citizens, some political parties, academics, community activists and private (and even public) sector organisations in support of pro-poor, pro-environment movements and proposals. With them they bring their knowledge and the support of their sometimes very large networks. Elite support is usually effective but seldom available. But to get media coverage, the media has to be fed with stories, facts and figures. Cultivating reporters and writers is more important than cultivating editors and managers. Letter-writing campaigns on particular subjects generate more response and concern than articles, perhaps because politicians and bureaucrats do not have the time to read long articles.

It is more important to establish good relationships with middle-level government staff than with big bosses; middle-level staff guarantee continuity and work out the details, whereas the big bosses change frequently.

All material available through an organisation such as the URC has to be public property, and all public, private and civil society organisations should have the right to use it without permission. Similarly, presentations for advocacy and lobbying in forums and meetings, using URC research material, should not be made by URC representatives alone but by other organisations as well. Sharing the ownership of information is necessary for the creation of effective networks.

Filing news clippings by different issue and by year provides instant information to researchers, students and government and public representatives. When viewing this material over a number of years, it also helps identify trends and directions. If analysed regularly, it is an enormous resource.

In its initial stages, an organisation like the URC has to be low budget. It should only expand when it has achieved some credibility or it will not be trusted. Its budget should be covered by relatively small sums from a number of donors so that it can be more independent and so that funds do not have too many conditions attached to them.

NGOs and community-based organisations often overlook the pro-poor, pro-environment international covenants that their governments have signed. If these covenants are publicised and made available to lawyers and judges, they will eventually become important documents for the national judicial system. Links with such UN agencies and international NGOs also helps to develop a larger development-related vision and can help in promoting alternatives to insensitive urban projects.

Presentations of the URC's work and concerns have made a number of bureaucrats and their trainers supportive of the URC process; they have also established links with students and helped in networking. Teaching by URC council members at government training institutions and at academic institutions has been especially helpful.

A weekly staff meeting is essential. The past week's work should be assessed, responsibility for the next week assigned, new trends discussed and identified, and modifications and additions to long-term planning made. Quarterly reports, also essential, can be based on the minutes of these meetings. These are the self-monitoring and evaluation processes that keep all the staff and council members on the same "wavelength".

## Policy implications

The URC feels that if the five-point agenda given below is adopted along with the four-point criteria for developing urban projects presented earlier, changes beneficial to the environment and to the majority of Karachi's population will take place. The issue is how to do this – and this is yet to be fully answered. The five-point agenda is:

- all development plans for Karachi should be advertised in the press at their conceptual stage and exhibited at the civic centre exhibition space. Plans for local neighbourhood projects should be exhibited at an appropriate place in the neighbourhood;

- a steering committee of interest groups should be formed to conduct public hearings on a project, to work out its future development process and to oversee it. Steering committee members should be paid by the local government for their services;
- a government official should be appointed to oversee each project from its inception to its completion and should be responsible for all matters related to it;
- accounts of the project and its development should be published every quarter, approved by the steering committee and made available to the public; and
- all government and semi-government landholding departments and agencies should publish a yearly report listing land and real estate assets, their value and their current land use. This will help prevent the misuse of land and will provide communities and grassroots organisations with information about land ownership and use in their neighbourhood that is currently hard to access.

In addition, the URC recognises a need to nurture and institutionalise the space that it has created for interaction between people, politicians and government planners and bureaucrats. This cannot take place without local government accepting the concept and then supporting it institutionally and financially. Two other policy implications are also evident as a result of the URC's work and experience:

- there is a need to change the curriculum of academic institutions, especially for the disciplines of law, medicine, architecture, urban planning, civil engineering and media studies. The revised curriculum should relate to the problems of residents of informal settlements who form the majority of Karachiites. Problem solving should be an essential part of the educational system, to help create professionals who can innovate and can question well-established, outdated theories; and
- a similar process to the above has to be created for government bureaucrats, administrators and elected local government representatives. This, along with the creation and institutionalisation of a space for interaction between people, politicians and planners, will help create a culture of continuous learning in government without which environment friendly and pro-poor development is difficult, if not impossible.

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The Sustainable Agriculture, Biodiversity and Livelihoods (SABL) Programme coordinates the editorial process for the Gatekeeper Series. The Programme seeks to enhance and promote understanding of environmental sustainability and equity in agri-food systems and the use of biodiversity. It emphasises close collaboration and consultation with a wide range of organisations and takes a multidisciplinary approach. Collaborative research projects are aimed at identifying the constraints and potentials of the livelihood strategies of marginalised groups who are affected by ecological, economic and social change. These initiatives focus on the development and application of participatory approaches to research and development; resource conserving technologies and practices; collective approaches to resource management; the values of wild foods and biodiversity; rural-urban interactions; strengthening citizen voice and agency in policy processes, and policies and institutions that work for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity-based livelihoods.

SABL is part of the Natural Resources Group (NR Group) at IIED, which encompasses two other programmes: Drylands and Forestry and Land Use. The NR Group and its partners work to enable greater participation of marginalised groups and to promote more sustainable and equitable patterns of land and natural resource use. We build partnerships, capacity and wise decision-making for fair and sustainable use of natural resources. Our priority is the control and management of natural resources and other ecosystem services by the people who rely on them, and on the necessary changes needed at international and national level to make this happen.

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