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South Asia's Growing Urban Divide

Abstract: *Apart from the sheer pace and haphazard pattern of urbanization in the region, infrastructural shortages and service delivery gaps serve to exacerbate the growing 'urban divide' in South Asia's cities. This policy paper aims to assess the various facets of urban inequality, poverty and deprivation and how it restrains human development for the region's urban residents. The challenge for South Asia is to make its cities develop in a socially just and environmentally sustainable manner for the benefits of urban growth to be equitably distributed.*

Growing urban divide in the context of infrastructural and service deficit

South Asia's growing urban divide has various facets and creates corresponding challenges that impinge on human development outcomes of its urban residents. Many of these challenges stem from infrastructural deficits, which in turn are caused in part due to the sheer pace of urbanization in the region and partly due to lack of systematic urban planning.

Key points

a) Underinvestment in basic infrastructure and key municipal services is a major determinant of the growing urban divide in South Asian cities.

b) Urban poverty stands neglected as a policy issue in the region.

c) Removing barriers to human development for urban residents requires a consolidated approach towards urban planning. Urban policy in the region needs to leverage public-private partnerships and community organizations to improve access to key municipal services for the poor.

Figure 1 South Asia's urban divide

Infrastructure and service delivery challenges constrain people's capabilities and have a strong bearing on urban poverty and deprivation. Underinvestment in basic infrastructure—transport,

water and sanitation, energy, solid waste management systems and the provision of health and education—is a major determinant of the urban divide. Many of the public services provided by the government typically alienate the urban poor, mostly because they live in peripheries of the city or areas which are 'non-notified' or squatter settlements usually not recognized for purposes of mapping out public service urban infrastructure grids. Hence, even access to basic amenities like piped water connections, solid waste management and sewerage remain elusive for the urban poor.

Urban transport: For most cities in the region, there has been a clear shift away from public and non-motorized transportation, while increasing the use of private motor vehicles and intermediate public transport (primarily autorickshaws and taxis). For instance, in India, between 1994 and 2007, public transportation as a mode has experienced a 20-70 per cent decline in different sized Indian cities. Cities in Pakistan are inclined towards using private transportation as opposed to public and non-motorized forms (see table 1 and figure 2). In Dhaka, high population density, limited inhabitable land, and poor infrastructure result in congestion and constrain the ability of the urban transport system to provide accessible transportation to all urban residents. With annual motorization growth of eight per cent in Dhaka, there could be up to half a million cars in 2025, increasing local air pollutants and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the transport sector. Nepal has the lowest road density in South Asia (0.6 kilometres per 1,000 people). Much of the existing road network is not trafficable as about 45 per cent of the road network is unpaved. In Nepal's urban areas, the average travel time to a paved road is about 11 minutes and to a commercial bank it is 21 minutes. Sri Lanka is the only outlier in the region with a high share of use of public transport in her cities as compared to other cities in South Asia. However, quality and reliability are a concern and have led to decline in the share of public transport in recent

Table 1 Mode of transportation in selected South Asian cities

City	Private transport (%)	Public transport (%)	Non-motorized transport (%)
Lahore	24	16	60
Karachi	27	23	50
Delhi	18	40	42
Mumbai	18	60	22
Kolkata	5	78	17

Figure 2 Number of registered motor vehicles in Pakistan, 2001-12
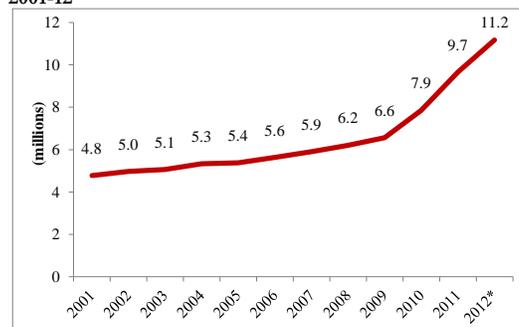
Note: *: Provisional data.

years.

Water supply, sanitation and solid waste management: Rapid increases in urban population and continuing expansion of city limits means that ensuring safe, adequate and equitable access to municipal services is becoming difficult in South Asia. In *India,* only 70.6 per cent of the urban population is covered by individual water supply connections. Moreover, the duration of water supply in Indian cities ranges from only 1 to 6 hours. The problem of sanitation is worse, with up to 50 per cent of households in cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad not having sewerage connections. Solid waste collection ranges from 70-90 per cent in major metropolitan cities in India, but is less than 50 per cent in smaller cities. In *Pakistan,* most urban households rely on piped water and motor pumps for extracting groundwater for drinking purposes. Urban areas as a whole tend to fare much better than their rural counterparts in the percentage of population with access to flush toilets (94 per cent versus 51 per cent in rural areas) and underground drains for sanitation (52 per cent versus 5 per cent in rural areas). The disparity in access to water and sanitation within urban areas, especially in the de-notified slums spread across Pakistan's major cities is rather stark and largely goes undocumented. Solid waste in Pakistan is largely unmanaged, with metropolitan governments recovering fewer than 60 per cent of the solid waste generated in the urban centers. *Bangladesh* emerges as a clear laggard when compared to the rest of South Asia for improved

access to drinking water and sanitation coverage in urban areas. Access to improved drinking water sources in urban areas of Bangladesh has declined from 88 per cent in 1990 to 85 per cent in 2008. Access to improved sanitation remains embarrassingly low at 55 per cent in 2011.

Access to urban education and health: Most urban areas in South Asia fare better on access to education and health outcomes when compared to rural areas (tables 2 and 3) The typical statistics reported for urban areas average out access for the whole city, thus masking the wide gaps that exist in access to these capability-enhancing services between the urban rich and the urban poor within a city. The disparity in access to urban education and health between slum and non-slum populations is present in most countries in the region.

Table 2 Urban/rural disparities in access to education in South Asia, 2004-06*

	India	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Nepal
Net enrolment in primary education (male)				
Urban	80.1	78.1	79.0	93.5
Rural	75.3	66.4	81.5	89.1
Non-slum	86.5	83.4	92.5	98.5
Slum	77.7	76.9	77.7	91.6
Total	76.5	69.7	81.0	89.7
Net enrolment in primary education (female)				
Urban	80.5	76.4	80.9	89.4
Rural	71.5	56.2	85.3	83.3
Non-slum	86.5	87.1	78.4	97.7
Slum	78.4	73.7	81.1	85.8
Total	73.8	62.2	84.4	84.0

Note: *: Data refer to most recent year available.

**Table 3 Urban/rural disparities in selected health indicators in South Asia, 2005-07***

	India	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Nepal
Percentage of malnourished children under-5				
Urban	34.3	40.4**	30.6	29.0
Rural	45.2	54.5**	37.4	44.6
Non-slum	21.0	37.2**	11.2	15.6
Slum	39.5	50.7**	37.2	34.8
Total	42.5	49.6**	36.0	42.7
Percentage of children with diarrhea				
Urban	8.9	22.1	10.2	11.5
Rural	9.0	21.8	9.7	11.9
Non-slum	8.2	19.7	6.3	11.7
Slum	9.1	21.5	11.5	11.4
Total	9.0	…	9.8	11.9

Notes: *: Data refer to most recent year available. **: Data refer to 1990.

Apart from slums, even low-income neighbourhoods with poor connections to the city can face deprivation in adequate schooling and health. This is particularly true for many of the sprawling new settlements in the outskirts of cities like Lahore, Delhi and Dhaka. Health outcomes in South Asia are specifically linked to urban poverty and access to other urban services, with the incidence of malnutrition in poor urban areas being twice that in non-slum urban areas.

Urban housing: There is a shortage of more than 38 million housing units in the South Asian region, not counting housing in need of repair or replacement (see figure 3). Taking into account average household size, this translates into 212.5 million homeless people, 14 per cent of the region's total population of 1.5 billion. What is worse is that urban housing shortages in South Asia are hiding behind squatter settlements and higher persons-per-room densities. *India's* urban housing shortage is estimated at nearly 18.78 million households in 2012, according to a report by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (MHUPA). The housing backlog in *Pakistan* was at an estimated 7.57 million units in 2009—2.5 million of them in urban areas. In Karachi, an estimated 60 per cent of the population lives in *katchi abadis*. Informal settlements do not fall under the realm of responsibility of city administrations and as such tend to be unserviced or critically underserviced. It is estimated that as much as 45 per cent of the population in Urban Sindh and 50 per cent in Urban Punjab lives in a one room house. For Bangladesh, housing shortages in urban areas are compounded by the temporary nature of most dwellings. Natural disasters in the country are frequent and only 23 per cent of all housing in urban centres is of a permanent nature.

Figure 3 Housing Shortages in South Asia
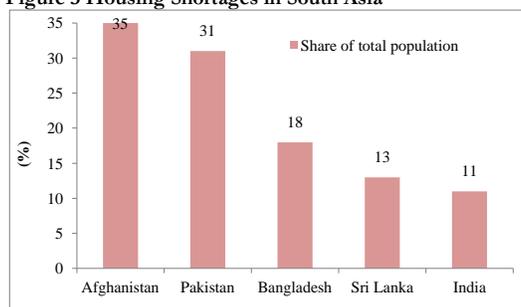
Urban poverty: South Asia has the highest urban poverty levels in Asia and the Pacific with countries like Bangladesh (62 per cent), Nepal (58 per cent), Pakistan (47 per cent) and India (29 per cent) reporting high proportions of urban populations living in slums. Many cities in South Asia have witnessed a coexistence of a large informal economy and urban poverty—majority of working poor in the

cities are employed in the informal sector with low wages and little job security. Women are particularly vulnerable to risks associated with urban poverty and the lack of urban infrastructure and services. Inadequate transport services restrict women's access to employment, while unsafe water and lack of solid waste and wastewater management result in illnesses requiring care that limit women's economic activities and drain family income. Young people who migrate to the cities also suffer disproportionately from the ills that urban poverty generates. South Asia has the highest proportion of youth population compared to any other region in the world, but a large proportion of them remain unemployed or informally employed.

Policy imperatives

A complex interplay of forces determines and exacerbates the challenges that South Asia's cities face, specifically urban poverty, a problem that is often overlooked by policy makers in the region. Infrastructural and service delivery deficits appear to explain much of the challenges that South Asia's urban residents face in their daily life. There is a need for urban policy to address the various facets of the infrastructural and service deficit in a sustainable and systematic manner in order to build inclusive cities that foster good human development outcomes for all people in the future:

- **Improving access to urban transport**: There is a need to look at both demand management for the proliferation of private motor vehicles as well as overcoming the chronic underinvestment in the public transportation sector. So far, South Asia's cities have not made much progress in implementing demand side management measures, such as congestion pricing, restraints on parking, etc. India has taken the lead in implementing some recent measures such as the 2006 *National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP)*. Cities that wish to access funds from the government's US$20 million scheme for upgrading urban infrastructure, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM), must comply with standards set out in the NUTP, such as equitable allocation of road space, prioritizing the use of public transport and integrating land use and transport planning. In 2009, Ahmedabad used this funding to launch Janmarg, India's first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). The positive experience of implementing BRT systems in Ahmedabad has made other municipalities and urban centers in the region look towards such systems as an efficient way to increase density within close proximity to commercial areas, thus reducing travel times and the need for extensive transport. However, the implementation of BRT systems must be undertaken after careful cost benefit analysis. For instance, the Metro Bus System in Lahore came at

the cost of almost half of the development budget of the entire Punjab province, hence creating an imbalance in financial allocations between transport and the already low social sector spending on health and education. Moreover, urban transportation investments like BRT are hardly sensitive to the environmental impacts of such projects, as was in the case of the construction of the Islamabad Metro Bus Project despite the alleged negative impacts on the city environment.

- *Leveraging non-government organizations, public-private partnerships, and community participation to improve access to improved water, sanitation and better solid waste management:* Expanding access to water, sanitation and improving solid waste management is an acute challenge for urban policy makers in the region, given that a vast majority of its urban population lives in slums, which by definition are characterized by absence of these services. Some countries such as India and Bangladesh are already using innovative approaches to tackle the problem of service delivery in slums. Conveying information about water availability to slum dwellers via text messages and using slum dwellers as waste collectors are steps in the right direction. However, these approaches need to be formalized and scaled up with partnerships of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and relevant public sector utilities in the city. Public-private partnerships and outsourcing of urban services such as solid waste management has also proved to be a successful model for some cities such as Lahore, which recently outsourced solid waste management to two Turkish companies, Ozpak and Albarak, which are now in charge of waste collection, transportation and disposal activities.

- *Improving access to affordable urban housing:* South Asian countries share a common need for expansion of housing to accommodate the region's growing urban population. Each country, however, is at a different level of development with regard to its urban housing needs. Key areas which need to be prioritized in improving access to urban housing include efficient land administration and expanding housing finance to low-income groups which are most likely to resort to living in informal

housing units and slums. For instance in India, the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy (NUHHP) by the Indian government in 2007 and subsequent launching of the national-level housing programme called Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) are significant milestones. Successful slum development projects in South Asia have typically leveraged partnerships with NGOs and the affected communities as was the case of the Orangi Pilot Project, which is now being replicated in more than 46 of Karachi's slums as well as other cities in Pakistan. Another key area where policy attention is needed is collection of reliable quantitative data on housing status. For instance, in Pakistan, the extrapolation of the 1998 census and some survey studies are the only means of estimating the current housing shortfalls in urban areas.

- *Policies to improve conditions of vulnerable youth, children and women to protect them from the ills of urban poverty:* It is necessary to improve access to education and health opportunities especially for young urban migrants and women, who are found to be more vulnerable to deprivations presented by the urban environment. Efforts at recognizing the largely prevalent urban informal economic activities will provide necessary protection to the urban poor earning their living off the informal sector.

Estimates of urban poverty and inequality in most South Asian countries are incomplete and outdated, often being extrapolated from decade old census information, as in the case of Pakistan. More importantly, urban poverty estimates based on income mask the multidimensional nature of urban poverty. Besides income poverty, inequality in cities arising from overcrowded housing and insecure tenure; inadequate access to safe and affordable water supply, sanitation, electricity and transport services; and limited schools and healthcare facilities increase the vulnerability of the urban poor.

Improving access to urban education and health for the urban poor does not simply translate to building more schools or hospitals. These may be necessary conditions, but they are by no means sufficient. It is important to understand that removing barriers to human development for urban residents requires a consolidated approach towards urban planning. It starts with recognizing the link between poor access to urban services like water, sanitation, solid waste management and energy and poor education and health outcomes. It involves recognizing the myriad of informal settlements an-

d slums not notified by city governments and extending immunization facilities to them. It involves engaging the urban poor by making them stakeholders of their own human progress.

Most urban policies in the South Asian region overall, and Pakistan in particular, have been restricted in their approach, aiming to provide merely more infrastructure, not sustainable infrastructure, for bridging the urban divide. It is not simply a question of building more roads to ease the traffic congestion or installing more pumps to increase water supply. The traditional approach to urban infrastructure cannot sustain the present, let alone the future, demands of emerging cities in South Asia. There is a need to rethink the traditional approach of designing and populating cities in a manner that is equitable, sustainable and capability-enhancing for all residents.

This policy brief is drawn on the findings of *Human Development in South Asia 2014: Urbanization: Challenges and Opportunities.* The author, Fazilda Nabeel, is a former Senior Research fellow and Consultant at Mahbub ul Haq Centre.

Themes of the Report of Human Development in South Asia

1997	The Challenge of Human Development
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Other Books on Human Development

1995	Reflections on Human Development by Mahbub ul Haq
2002	The South Asian Challenge by Khadija Haq (editor)
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2008	Pioneering the Human Development Revolution: An Intellectual Biography of Mahbub ul Haq by Khadija Haq and Richard Ponzio (editors)

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