

**Academic Conference organized in the framework of the Asia-Link Program of the
European Commission**



Project Nr. 147-063

**Euro-Asia Partnership for Development Human Resource Capacity of Engineering
Education in Afghanistan**

Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia
Vienna University of Technology, Austria
Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand
Kabul Polytechnic University, Afghanistan
Herat University, Afghanistan

Current Trends in Civil Engineering and Architecture

March 28 - April 1, 2009 Kabul Afghanistan

AFGAsiaLink.EU

Future of Kabul Indebted to Housing Policies

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Keywords: Housing, Housing demand, Housing trends, Housing policy, Kabul, rebuilding and renewal

There might be different visions, why Kabul has steady been devastated along the period. According to our classic literature, the main reason of cities demolished along the history has been predomination of corruption in those cities. If this assumption can be generalised for Kabul city, then the presence of many confusing factors deteriorate the situation much more.

Although architects are popular to elaborately connect the unknown realms, but contrary to philosophers have not the job to find out the roots of happenings. What architects and planners are responsible for is to rebuild the destructions, cure the injuries remained and make much more ingeniously decisions throughout the country.

In this paper, I will try to bring out the current status of the whole housing either influenced by direct devastation of war or having problems remained of pre-war, together with new requests for housing and trends to new lifestyles. Meanwhile, efforts have been made to find out an answer for the question of, what the demands of the people, in historical term, have been, concerning the housing and settlement in national level; and how it can be tackled. Moreover, the previous policies and the eventual impacts of tendencies to new approaches i.e. democratisation of policy-making and accommodation of it with the social trends and request have been analyzed.

Current status of housing

Recently, significant changes have been appeared in the settlement style throughout the country. Non-sedentary settlement has already been slowed down. According to the estimated figures¹ from about 27 millions population of the country, some 20 millions have spread out in 14200 villages and the rest of 7 millions live in more than 100 small and large cities, which obtained the position of municipality.

As a consequence of long term instability, more than half of urban houses have been destroyed and the same amount of rural houses have also been devastated. According to this estimated figure, about one million houses destroyed either by direct impact of war or by the reason of normal ruination in all over the country. Moreover, during the last three decades some 10,000 new housing requests have been exceeded annually, computing with about 5% population growth rate amounts already to 300,000 new houses.

Substantially, provision of 1,300,000 new houses, which main part of it belongs to Kabul City, is a great social problem and a heavy burden over economy of the country.

Mass displacement and immigration to outside the country caused to make up the minds and visions of the people much more than the past. Consequently, new trends and new patterns of settlement and housing have been appeared.

Housing has to react against all these upheavals. Elevating the quality of lifestyle, diversifying the living areas, improving and making sustainable building materials and techniques of construction are among the most expectable changes, which might be taken place in the future.

Aftermath of recent changes, the structure of spread households and the previous life styles have also been changed. Some of married sons of families might not live together with their parents as before. Perhaps the previous spacious houses would therefore vacate their places to some types of smaller houses and apartment types.

Moreover, more decades of conflict has increased the number of vulnerable and poor groups in the community and provision of some sort of affordable, collective and tenement housing is therefore inevitable.

Informal areas and squatters, which comprise about 70% of the existing housing of Kabul City is an indication of discordance and inconsistency.

Since these sites are built unplanned and out of any prediction, they are therefore lack of the needed infrastructure and facilities.

Obviously, this part of the city is discordant, inhomogeneous and has many serious problems such as ineffective transportation network, lack of infrastructure i.e. drinking water, electricity, waste disposal and other facilities and services.ⁱⁱ

Poor and undeveloped management; inconsistent policies contrary to the social and cultural conditions of national requirements; inconvenient contribution of housing sector in comparison with other sectors in GDP and depressed national economy have been among the problems in the housing sector.

Needs for policy-making

Although, the beginning of planned housing extends back to since 1920, contemporaneous to opening the door of Afghan traditional community towards the West, but there has not seen any significant policy, out of some settlements i.e. Darulaman and Paghman in suburb of Kabul City as of Satellite Cities in Western countries. More significant urban planning and housing development have taken place since 1930.

By the basis of the Afghan exterior relation modification policies regarding the West and the East blocs, planning and urban design of major cities of Afghanistan was steered by the former Soviet advisors.

Sovereignty of collectivism, top-down blueprint as of the Soviet model overwhelmed the urban planning and policy-making of major cities of Afghanistan, including master plan of Kabul City.ⁱⁱⁱ

The policy of building high-rise dwelling apartments as an outcome of the strategy to minimise the investment in housing sector and to stream it towards heavy industry sector was because of the defensive targets of the former USSR.^{iv} Although, this policy was following other social objectives

like qualitative and quantitative equities and equal supportive services for urban and rural areas, but it was not an appropriate platform for Afghanistan.

Imprudent policies of promoting domination of one tribal group to the others and struggling of the others for survival has been entailed to separate all groups living in the country for ages and have made them busy with this play. In situations as of the recent decades, it has been made a serious crisis in the country.

Tribal groups have even not been integrated in urban settlement. Each of various tribal groups has still been settled in distinct regions in Kabul capital of the country. Likewise, other cities located in the environs of any tribal origins are full of the pertaining inhabitants of that group.

The consequence of this policy is that freedom of choice and selection of an appropriate settlement has been taken from any individuals, whilst large appropriate areas have left unoccupied and unsettled through out the country.

Still the existing government, which is outcome of decades of social and political changes, has not presented significant and comprehensive policies, but it would obviously be influential in this procedure.

Afterwards, upcoming governments would not long last, until not to meet the exceeding public demands and requests. Meanwhile, they might also be responsible for ingeniously applying of all resources and potentials of the country.

There is a great challenge, how authorities could accommodate models of urban planning and housing development, as western phenomena with traditional and religious tendency of the people.

Those authorities would be successful in Afghanistan, which could firm the housing policies first by the basis of public welfare and second by the pedestal of social justice.

According to this pre-assumption, simultaneously preparation of National Housing policy and Low-cost Housing policy can therefore be inevitable.

Housing policies in developing countries

Over the second half of the last century, developing countries as a consequence of accelerated urbanisation and housing shortages have experienced various housing policies.

Major policies applied in those countries since 1970 were urban renewal, building low-cost housing and granting of housing loans.

The policy was based by this assumption, that providing sufficient housing was deemed the only way to solve the problem of housing shortages in these countries. Accordingly preparing of enough investment for building housing, use of better constructional techniques, finding out qualified and more appropriate building materials and design of new housing types for optimal area were the main solution.

Thinking about land use and land tenure; control of immigration and demographic displacement; and enrichment of housing standards were among the preferences.

Housing had been recognised as a logical predictable and controllable function. Efficient and effective management had been figured out a significant factor for assembling these procedures.^v

In practice, opposite of this theory was proved. Housing policies of most of developing countries were gradually one after the other failed.

Over the last decades, when Afghanistan was encountering civil conflicts, the framework of speculation of developing countries was considerably changed by earning of the previous experiences.

Centralised planning, top-down blueprints and emphasise on “filling deficits” in capital, skills and technology have given way to market and people-based solutions, process approaches, and an emphasise on building capacities and institution to manage change. Housing policies have been influenced by these shifts and in important ways have also contributed to a better understanding of what is possible through policy and what is not.^{vi}

Today we observe clearly, how focus trends from physical planning and public housing vacant place first to “self-help” housing projects and then to “enabling approach”.

New housing policies

Afghanistan due to special social and economical characteristics and by the reason of fully damages of its infrastructure ought to apply all of the policies experienced by developing countries. In other words, land and services have to be provided to persuade self-help among the low and middle-income groups, or to be subsidised. The authorities have to deliver ready-made housing or tenement housing and on the other hand, efforts have to be made for enabling approaches and mobilising all housing actors.

Generally, the following three measures are accepted as part of the central core of policy options: **first**, a strong enabling state combined with properly functioning markets and independent civic organisations and clear accountability; **second**, a focus on key supply-side measures to bring large amounts of land and finance on to the market over the long term; and **third**, making maximum use of the linkages, which exist between housing and wider economic, social and environmental goals, especially the potential of shelter investments to contribute to poverty reduction through small-scale and community based production.^{vii}

However, the authorities are inevitably encountered the three other tasks: **first**, how to help living in poverty to get more the benefits of the housing process; **second**, where the balance should be between market liberalisation, government intervention and social mechanism in the housing process; and **third**, how to bring out small-scale experiments and successful innovations into sustainable, large scale solution.

Holistic policy-making

Decades of conflicts and insecurity in the country caused fewer of the rural areas to be undamaged of conflicts. Meanwhile, villages figure out the main source of production and employment in the country. Putting only the cities, including Kabul City in the focal point of rebuilding programme will attract a huge bulk of returning refugees from the neighbouring countries and stream a large number of rural dwellers into the large cities.

Moreover, still no land-use plan through out the country has been applied for choosing the current rural areas. Obviously, a number of rural areas have enough water and soil potential to respond the efforts of dwellers, but in many cases, there are no sufficient natural resources to meet the requirements and hardworking sense of the inhabitants. Meanwhile this is an undeniable fact that large areas remain unused throughout the country.

Financial support

Due to more than 90% of housing of the country has been built by individuals; the role of public sector has therefore been negligible. The authorities could perhaps play a more productive and better role, if they could have a financial support.

Housing sector unlike the past, excluding only to some individual projects, has to hold an appropriate position in the micro-developing plan of the country. Share of housing sector has to become considerably greater than of the highest rate in the past.

Besides, establishing the bank of housing development will prepare the opportunity to order the investment market and to absorb cash flows towards housing sector and can bring the investor, bank and consumer together.

Moreover, it opens ways of policy-making and sanction for many executive programs such as land provision, offering infrastructure, granting loan and subsidy for building housing and for tenement housing to gradually be owed and delivered for qualified and vulnerable social groups including low and middle-income classes, handicaps and non care-taker families. Besides, it lets the authorities to control and assemble market of building materials as well.

For the purpose of social justice and public welfare, appropriate allocation and application of possibilities and resources, precise and promptly payment of loans and subsidy to the actual qualified groups, transparent accountability, and retrieval of cost; figure out among the significant steps towards an efficient and effective housing management.

Unlike, poor management and multi-channelizing the existing resources are doubtful and it can be worried that the resources might not be delivered to the actual qualified groups.

Consequently, the resources might be misused, whilst the objectives of the housing policies still remain un-tackled and outreached.

Land assembly

Land is a significant factor for achieving housing policies. Investigations testify that the main problem of land has not been restriction of land supply, but it depends up to other factors such as location, price and land tenure.

Land transaction is an advantageous treatment in developing countries, even in the countries like Zambia, which land transaction is forbidden for any purpose, but the people have invented, many other ways of treatment.

High price of land is mostly a failure factor of housing projects, especially low-cost housing projects.

Although, authorities can confiscate the required land for public projects by the basis of the government rights, but this treatment is contrary to either the civilian rights possessing individual property, or it takes a long and expensive procedure.

The following solutions seems necessary, in order to make sure, whether there is sufficient land or to reserve the required land for achievement of housing projects: **first**, achieving urban land reform; **second**, preparation of property maps; **third**, applying specific financial and tax regulations; **fourth**, achieving land preparation programs; **fifth**, land use control; **sixth**, accumulation and preservation of land or land banking.

Provision of services and public facilities

According to some advices, including the previous Master Plan of Kabul City, fully destruction of the existing informal housing neither has technical justification, nor is in term of economy beyond the scope of both private and public sectors.

Over the past decades, developing countries have recognised informal housing squatters and slums existed into the cities. The official policies of these countries have not been to remove these types of dwelling out of the cities, but efforts have been made to inject infrastructure, services and public facilities into these areas.

Provision of infrastructure such as an effective transportation network, electricity, hygienic drinking water, and refusal of waste materials and likewise, considering public facilities i.e. educational, sanitation and commercial centres, accommodating the required standards would significantly promote the quality of informal sites. Moreover, dwellers try to develop and increase the quality of their own houses as well.

Housing management and governance

In the past, housing governed by the two distinct individual and public sectors. In the public sector all aspects of management and policy-making namely planning, implementation, supervision and distribution managed as a centralised and top-down blueprint system.

Appearance of many informal sites and squatters out of any predicted planning and design, lack of infrastructure and public facilities in all around of Kabul City, capital of the country testify the inconvenience of this system.

The government as a central coordinator might take responsibility for comprehensive planning and governance and supervising of all housing affairs, whilst individuals and private sector can overtake the duties of research, design, implementation and supervision as well.

Meanwhile, any of the public and private sectors in addition to upgrading and updating their knowledge, ought to foster their self-reliance. They ought to struggle this idea, dictating that Afghans can not overtake the rank of management, this role has to be delivered to the foreigners' advisors.

Considering this fact, the authorities could now compensate the required shortages of skilful human resources by forming a consultant cadre among the Afghan distinguished expertise, who are now living out of the country.

Moreover, consultant companies should be registered and helped to enhance their capacity and make them ready for undertaking different tasks in the community.

By this means one will be assured that the whole rebuilding resources and possibilities will optimally be applying.

NGOs could be activated in different parts of research, design and implementation of housing projects. Perhaps, it does not include the NGOs, which are converted as the irresponsible and poor functioning actors of larger receiving fund organisations, but they have to substantially be changed as of many others, who play a productive role in other developing countries.

It is not expected, that the international agencies achieve the parallel job as of the Afghan authorities. They could rather play a key role in transition of advantageous global knowledge and technology compatible with social and cultural characteristics of Afghanistan.

The international agencies according to the latest guidelines of Habitat II summit in Istanbul could contribute in oncoming rebuilding housing programme by consulting the successful housing policies, production of small scale supplies and semi-industrial building materials such as polymerisation of mud materials, substitution of renewable building materials like wood instead of concrete and steel by planting the industrial trees and other aspects of housing.

Conclusion

Rebuilding and renewal of devastated houses over more than two decades of war, Regulating and making the remained problems of pre-war in order, in addition of new request for houses and urban facilities are among the immediate and serious request of the people. These requests could not be met, unless the previous housing policies to fundamentally be changed and to vacate place to more democratic and people based approaches that social justice and public welfare goals make the headlines of its duties.

By the basis of these policies, the authorities, on one hand ought to provide land and services in order to meet the required demands and on the other hand assemble all housing actors to mobilise self-help in the community. Attendance of private sector and community based and well-done NGOs have to be welcomed and the global experiences, knowledge and resources should sufficiently be operated.

References

- i Common statistics of Prime and Interior Ministries
- ii Informal sites and housing has been the primitive and undeveloped consumer of natural resources. Continuation of this procedure might only not evacuate natural resources in short term, but it does not accommodate the developing lifestyle of the dwellers as well. The housing has either been pollutant or destructive of natural environment. Unbehave use of soils either for building housing or for burning of mad brick in locale kiln (*daash*) entails to erode the outer shell of soils, which after that is neither suitable for cultivation nor meets the demands of building materials. Moreover, locale kilns providing fire brick and lime cause to spread out heavy smoke outcome of burnt wood (*recently rubber of vehicles tire*) and releasing of some dangerous gases out of the combination of gypsum, disturb steady the normal life of nearby dwellers.
Informal sites are well known of manifestation of pollutants such as gathering of wastewater, disposals and wastes coming out of locale latrines. Slippery passages full of mud and during rainy and snowy seasons and spreading out of dust causes to pollute the environment and provide worse problems for dwellers.
- iii According to the last 25 years Master Plan of Kabul city (1971-1975), 80% of the existing housing of the city had to be destroyed in order to build 4-12 stories apartment blocks instead. Building of high-rise and monotone dwelling apartment had only not been an alternative for the native traditional and Islamic architectural style, but the significant land topography has also been ignored. The Master Plan deemed to be unpractical, because it could not draw attention of the people and it was beyond the scope of either the public or private sectors. Moreover applying industrial materials and construction and relying mostly on imported building materials i.e. cement and steel inconsistent to the domestic climate were among the consideration of the Master Plan.
- iv Jack, Anderhil (1990) *Soviet New Towns*. Town Planning Review 3.
- v Aprodicio A. Laquian (1983) *Basic Housing: Policies for Urban Sites, Services and Shelter in Developing Countries*. Ottawa, Ont.: IDRC.
- vi UNCHS (1996) *Shelter for All: Conference on Human Settlement- Habitat II*. Istanbul: UNCHS.
- vii UNCHS *ibid*