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Urban Development Through Participatory Approach: Contemporary methods of Urban Planning in Kabul City

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Abstract

Since 2001, the urbanization trend is unprecedented, and both the government and the people have been making efforts to reconstruct Kabul city. More than 66 percent of Kabul's population lives in informal settlements. The urban planning projects (Detail Plans) are being prepared behind closed doors and are expected to be implemented on the site without the consent and agreement of the residents. The capacity to steer the planning and implementation process is very weak and most of these planners are not up to date. The existing situation of informal settlement and the trend of urban expansion implies that the public was not the main focus and residents were not involved in decision-making. The approach is one way, and the planning process (referred to as a top-down process) is of particular interest. On the other hand, participation is a process where public inclusion is a must for deciding on planning aspects that may benefit or affect a community. Kabul Municipality has introduced some novel methods that focus primarily on people, and decisions will be based on the opinions of affected residents. These methods are supposed to be used as alternatives to detailed planning and land acquisition methods. As it is clear, development is a process that increases choices. It means exploring options, diversifying, thinking about issues, and anticipating change. By involving multiple stakeholders, conflict can be resolved through consensus building and the plan's effectiveness is increased. The Holy Quran also mentions "and hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you and be not divided among yourselves". In this research study, the planning process stream, participatory structures, and the importance of participatory approaches to urban development will be examined. The main purpose of this paper is to encourage methods of planning through citizen participation.

Keywords: Participatory, informal settlement, Detail Plan, decision making, land acquisition

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1. Introduction

A significant amount of urbanization took place in Kabul after the 2000s, which is unprecedented for a capital city. Urbanization is not uniform, as a primate city contains approximately half of the country's urban population (1). More than 66 percent of Kabul's population lives in informal settlements (2). Urban central areas are increasingly characterized by rising poverty, vulnerability, environmental hazard, and health risk (3). In various parts of the city, residents experience insecurity and a lack of safety. However, urbanization offers opportunities for social development and economic growth too. There has been a concerted effort to rebuild Kabul city by the government and the people (4).

Excluding urban citizens from the planning and decision-making process casts doubt on the ability of the Kabul municipality and government. Governmental Agencies have prepared many urban projects without interference from residents. In the meantime, informal settlements have been expanded throughout Kabul city without compliance with these plans. The urban projects could be implemented based on master plans drafted with the participation and coordination of residents. As it is clear, participation is a process where public inclusion is a must for deciding on planning aspects that may benefit or affect a community (5). Kabul Municipality has introduced some novel methods that focus primarily on people, and decisions will be based on the opinions of affected residents. These methods are supposed to be used as alternatives to detailed planning and land acquisition methods. As it is clear, development is a process that increases choices. It means exploring options, diversifying, thinking about issues, and anticipating change (6). Additionally, Holy Quran mentions, "Hold fast, all of you, by the rope that Allah (stretches out for you) and don't split among yourselves"(7). It is therefore imperative that a close relationship between the government and the residents be fostered in order not only to collaborate but also to make decisions together. Because it is the right of residents to be informed in detail about the decisions that affect their lives (8).



1980 ***2018***

Fig1: A portion of Detail plan

Figure 1 depicts a section of the Wazir-Abad detail plan as a sports complex in the 1980s. During the plan's development, the residents were not informed and were not

involved in decision-making. The dilapidated state of the informal settlement areas that have grown without regard for the Master Plan and detailed plan is clear.

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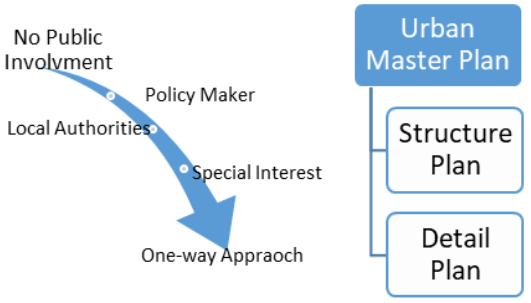


Fig2: Paradigm of Kabul Urban Planning Approach

In Kabul, a detailed planning method is a top-down approach to urban planning. The public was not involved, and the emphasis was on the special interest. In this method, not only is participation at stake but so is the speed with which detailed plans can be developed, which cannot keep up with the current rate of urbanization. This type of planning approach is appropriate for cities with low rates of growth and economic stability, not for Kabul, which has high population growth and economic instability. Depending on the Detail planning system, informal settlement expansion issues may worsen. In the current situation, not only is the government burdened with detailed planning, but residents also do not want to leave communities where they have lived for several years.

On the other hand, many countries have practiced participatory planning, which has led to greater success. In most countries, controversies over planning have been resolved through a participatory approach that directly involves residents in the planning process. To reach this milestone (engage and mobilize the citizens, gain their support and contribution through community organization, settlement regularization, and service delivery), proposed the Kabul Solidarity Program (9). Through KSP, a Neighborhood Development Council has been established by the election of representatives (one male and one female) of families that will be a forum for discussion and prioritization of needs and problems. It can be referred to as a traditional community governance structure such as the Gozer Assembly and Wakil Gozer. The management of KM recently embraced the participatory approach as well in their planning processes. Land Readjustment and Urban Redevelopment (LRUR) are now the two options as alternatives for land acquisition and Detail Planning, all of which require participatory planning.

Participatory approaches allow the public and authorities to reach a consensus, improve decision-making processes, and help a city move forward and improve its social structure. The primary goal of this paper is to promote planning methods that involve citizen participation.

To sum up, the Participatory approach has the ability that can build social capital, helps citizens and authorities reach a consensus regarding a certain matter, improve decision-making processes and finally help a city to move forward and improve social structure. The main purpose of this paper is to encourage the methods of planning through citizen participation.

1.1 Statement of Problems

Because of the influx of internal displacement persons (IDPs) and returning refugees in recent decades, central urban areas have been the primary focus of urban planning. Planning urban development accounts for a relatively small volume in comparison to urbanization. Many urban experts continue to employ the same urban planning methods and standards that they did in the 1970s and earlier. The planning process took one approach, and the implementation process was met with opposition. Even though some participatory methods are used in Kabul Municipality. However, no legally binding document to support the participatory approach has been prepared. The following are the major issues:

- Population growth
- outdated planning methods and standards
- Insufficient development capacity
- One-way approach
- No regulations or procedures for enacting and enforcing the policy

2. Method of Research

The methodology of this study includes a review of literature, records, and secondary data analysis regarding participatory approaches. A validated set of data was gathered from Kabul Urban Design Framework and JICA (Japan International Corporation Agency), as well as the literature and documents on the participation of civil society.

3. Research content

3.1 Reorientation of paradigms

It is necessary to mention the fact that during the last few years, the planning approaches have changed in Kabul city. The non-governmental organizations working in urban sectors mostly played key roles in the involvement of ordinary residents in their planning process and implementation stages. UN-Habitat and the World Bank are engaged in the betterment of informal settlement situations, maximally focusing on boosting social aspects. On the other hand, for a couple of years, Japan International Corporation Agency practicing contemporary Land Readjustment and Urban Redevelopment participatory is essential for the implementation of the projects. Over time, the notion of citizen participation and its designation in development projects is clear., the paradigm of participatory planning is changing from top-down to bottom-up approaches.

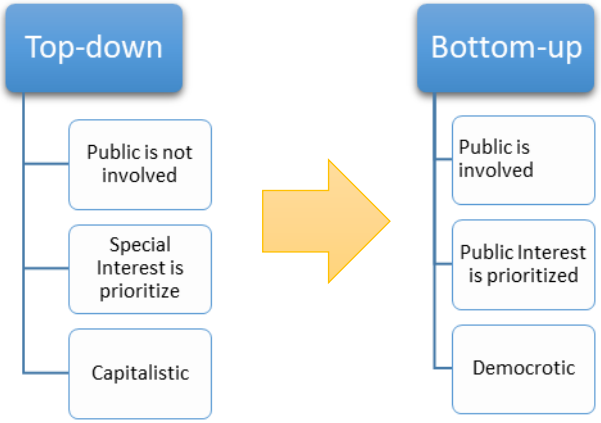


Fig 3: Two paradigm in public participation

Figure 3 shows that the top-down approach implies that public participation is not concentrated and that planners do all the things related to planning and decisions themselves. The outcome will be shared with the community and the implications of the decision will be contested by residents. On the other hand, the bottom-up approach emphasizes community involvement. Community members are involved in the process to get a more comprehensive understanding of the current state of affairs. The participation arrow distinguishes the level of participation in top-down and bottom-up approaches. In figure 4, the participation arrow demonstrates the engagement of the community from open-ended information exchange to exchanging information.

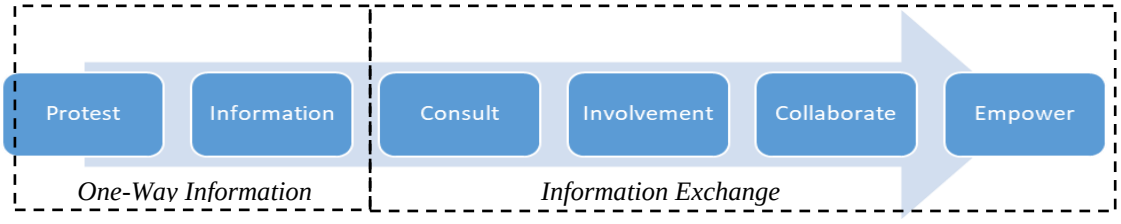


Fig 4: level of Engagement

Under the Empowerment Point, citizens and planners are equally involved in decision-making. Today, the process in Kabul is changing, but it is still struggling to move in the right direction. Planners and authorities are adamant about getting an early estimate of residents' willingness through workshops and meetings. Residents of the project met to discuss and debate the challenges they face and how they intend to address them. During this meeting, the residents frequently inquired about decisions that affect their quality of life and destinations. Following the meeting, the majority of residents provided positive feedback about the planning process, stating that their opinions would be considered and valued. The residents then requested a formal petition from Kabul Municipality, which they signed individually, for the projects to be implemented.



Fig 5: Willingness Evaluation Meeting in district 10



Fig 6: Group Petition from KM

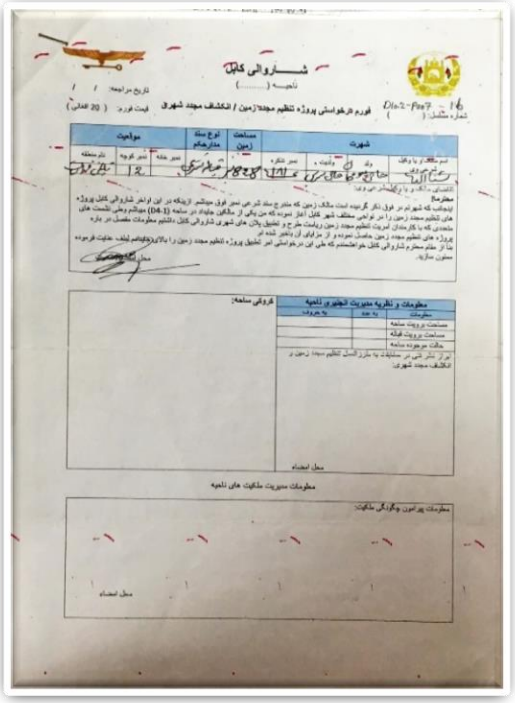


Fig 7: Individual Request Form

3.2 Common Participatory Forms in Kabul

Depending on the circumstances at the local level, participation forms may differ. Planning participation can take one of the following forms:

3.2.1 Direct-mass participation:

The resident is actively involved in a program, project, or decision-making process. Participation is open to all. Everyone in the community, regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic status, is welcome to participate in the program (elders, youths, men, women, disabled, etc.).

3.2.2 Opinion leaders:

An opinion leader in this sense is a person or group of people who have more influence, ideas, and behaviors that can serve as models for others. Chiefs, religious preachers, businessmen, and district heads are examples of these leaders. Wakil Gozer, who coordinates all administrative and community affairs with the government and residents, is a popular model for the Afghan community's opinion leaders.

3.2.3 Representational:

Some residents divide their community based on various functions into different groups. Members are selected from related groups of matters to participate in the community and make decisions.

3.2.4 Self-Appointed Representatives:

This type of participation is more common in Kabul's local communities. A person or group of people imposes their point of view on the rest of the community. These are more radicals who want to be seen as intelligent. As is customary, they appear to be more knowledgeable and have a greater influence on the members of the community. For example, commanders or powerful individuals who act as the community's gods.

3.3 Advantages of a Participatory Approach

The participatory approach has the potential to provide significant support and contribution to reaching a new level of development, and social, and economic performance than the development approach used 50 to 60 years ago (8). This method can achieve goals that would be difficult to achieve in any other way. The fundamental feature of this approach is the inclusion of ordinary people in the process of change. More emphasis is placed on the process because many real benefits emerge when people collaborate, develop skills and confidence, and have individual and group capacity to address emerging issues and opportunities. The major benefits of involving ordinary people in the process are described below.

- **Creation of Shared Visions:** short and long-term strategies for a community's future must be developed.

- **Complex issues and problems** shall be resolved through discussion.
- **Increasing Consensus Building:** Building consensus among different interest groups leads to better and longer-term partnerships.
- **Raising Public Awareness:** An open forum discussion will raise residents' information and awareness.
- **Enhancement of Urban Design Quality:** Through participation, people will consider and reconsider their quality of life.
- **Act as a catalyst:** debates and exchanges of ideas will speed up the activation process.

Furthermore, civil participation will increase resources, social capital and cooperation, mutual aid and services, group learning, and volunteer work. Meanwhile, it will improve community-authority dialogue, the coherence and effectiveness of public policies, and the capacity of authorities, professionals, and experts to engage in communities. Finally, it breaks the community's isolation and brings them together.

3.4 Participatory Paradigm Shift from Real to Virtual-World

Community development is a requirement for long-term development. Since the planning approach is changing in Kabul, the number of meetings, workshops, and mutual discussions with citizens is increasing to reach a consensus. Authorities and planners make every effort to explain everything in weekly or monthly sessions. However, there are some questions and debates that need to be discussed and resolved after the session. Because meeting time is limited and residents are preoccupied with their businesses. As a result, a gap is still reasonable to reach mutual consent, or it takes more time to resolve a minor dispute or minor civil claim. Developed countries that have gained experience with the participatory approach through community development now engage in extensive online or digital participation. There are no time or location restrictions for the online sessions. Residents can log in at any time and from any location to discuss and debate a specific issue that was not addressed during the weekly or monthly session. Japan is one of the countries that is well-known for its participatory planning. The Internet-based discussion has received a lot of attention and will be one of the best methods of outreach for reaching consensus in Japan (10). COLLAGE is a system derived from the collective or collaborative agreement that is used in Nagoya. Residents actively participate in online workshops and discussions about issues affecting their communities. Figure 8 depicts the COLLAGREE consensus-building support system.



Fig 8: Image of consensus building support system on COLLAGREE,

Source, COLLAGREE

Another online participation experiment is taking place in Victoria, Canada, with online dispute resolution (ODR). "Through online dispute resolution, parties can have their issues resolved by enrolled members." Participants in the forum can share videos and documents from their own devices whenever they want, without regard to location" (11).

Kabul, as the capital city, must coordinate sessions in both real-time and online participation systems. Kabul Municipality has already seen widespread participation. It is now time to put online discussion methods into practice alongside in-person participation. The discussion tool can be used on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, or any academic forum. KM and Nagoya Institute of Technology recently signed a joint research agreement to put the online participatory approach into practice. The goal of this research agreement is to discuss a specific topic and obtain agreement from various parties in an online setting.

Finally, I propose comprehensive urban planning methods based on participatory approaches. Civil participation expands development options, and residents will be pleased that they are involved in decisions that affect their lives. As a result of the mutual agreement between planners and community members, sustainable development will be enhanced.

4. Conclusion:

Kabul is one of the world's fastest-growing cities. In recent decades, the city has experienced rapid urbanization. The approach to the planning process was capitalistic, and the public was excluded from the process. In closed-door offices, authorities and urban planners were attempting to prepare urban projects (Detail Plans). Residents protested the projects' implementation because they were excluded from the planning and decision-making processes.

On the other hand, the participatory approach has recently been recognized as an effective method of incorporating it into planning processes. In Kabul Municipality, some new methods are being used to ensure that citizen participation is essential from the start to the end of the project. These methods are intended to be alternatives to Detail Planning and land acquisition methods. Building consensus is a topic that requires discussion and agreement status. The paradigms of the participatory approach vary and can be located and time-dependent or limitless. Meetings or workshops can be held in a specific location with mass participation, or they can be held in online forums with discussions based on each individual's available time.

Acknowledgment

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