BAHRIA TOWN KARACHI: A CASE STUDY IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Young Scholar's Contribution

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, many urban housing related projects have been completed in Karachi. This research aims to investigate Bahria Town as a housing development in Karachi. It also studies the impacts of Bahria projects that are constructed in the name of urban development for Karachi and its dwellers. The study demonstrates how these developments are affecting the city suburbs, including demographical changes and impacts of urban sprawl.

Combined methods of research, based on case study and qualitative interviews are used to collect the primary data. This included observational tactics, interviews with the stakeholders, mainly the real estate developers, investors and the residents along with collection of information from secondary sources like newspapers, magazines and articles.

The research concluded that Bahria's urban development does not address the urban realities of Karachi and is a gated housing development that has middle to high income groups as target users, without aiming to have any impact on the housing shortage in the city.

Keywords: Urban Development, Bahria Town, Real Estate, Karachi

INTRODUCTION

The urban problems of Pakistan and specifically in mega cities like Karachi are increasing day by day. Resources are being wasted and housing shortage is accelerating with time. About one fourth of urban population is living in squatter settlements, and in spite of upgrading them, the residents are being forced to either leave the place or else are treated badly to leave the land, so that some profitable works in the name of development can be carried out (Haq, 2014).

When there is a scenario where urban and rural spaces are parceled together and are part of the same political jurisdiction, the dynamics of land management, usage and social and cultural integration are factors that result in presenting a complex set of problems and challenges. The present study tries to understand this relationship and the associated challenges that are present on the fringes of the city of Karachi. Inside Karachi, land acquisition has been a common issue for many decades, but now this phenomena is being experienced towards the fringes of the city, mainly along the Super Highway. This land is easily available for land grabbers without any obstructions and they eventually became the owners of the disputed land (Haq, 2014). All this happens because there are big names attached to this process of land grabbing.

Land ownership in Karachi is divided between number of agencies in which Bahria Town is the most dominating private agency. Some other agencies like Board of Revenue and Malir Development Authority, work behind the scene to facilitate working of Bahria Town developments.

Though ninety percent of land in Karachi is owned by government entities, but when they do not utilize the resources for the right purposes then other private agencies like Bahria Town develop projects, after buying land at nominal price from the government. Bahria Town owns large tracts of vacant land in both the city center and in the remote rural areas along Super Highway. It inhabits land by creating

gated communities on the urban fringes. Consequently, forests, orchards, rich farmlands and drainage systems are occupied, that can lead to possible emergence of massive ecological disaster. This is all due to the incapacity of the government to effectively meet the residential, commercial and related demands of a very rapidly growing population.

When Bahria Town was initiating their projects they stated that they would focus on the construction of housing scheme for the low income group, but this was not fully realised. They did introduce affordable housing units in Bahria Town Rawalpindi, named Awami Villas. The developer initially sold them for less than a million rupees, (US$ 6382) but when they received a profitable response from the people the same units were sold for two to three million rupees, (US$ 19146) making them unaffordable for the low-income households. Therefore, Bahria has been the target of dispute and it is referred to as a sign of social injustice, blamed for unauthorized encroachment of land (Ali, 2019; Hasan, 2019; Hasan, 2004).

This research evaluates the socio economic, political and environment challenges, recent land based legislations and the consequent forms of development taking place in the city that now threatens the sustainability of Karachi's rural land, environment and the livelihood of the rural farming population. The case under study is that of Bahria Town in Karachi. This research has also taken into account the relevant policy and strategic development interventions within an understanding of the prevailing situation, therefore the study is not only focused on the services entitlement dynamics but also on the larger context of land acquisition, that is encroachment of rural land.

Bahria Town Karachi: An Introdeuction

Malik Riaz is the founder and chairperson of Bahria development and it is the largest private real estate development company in Asia. They began their journey in Pakistan by announcing the housing projects in the northern part of the country emphasizing on three major cities of Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore. Subsequently after a good response from the community, entrepreneurs and real estate developers, he lay stone in southeast part of the country. Bahria initially announced projects in interior Sindh mostly in Nawabshah and Sukkur and also focused on Karachi (Shaheen, 2016).

The role of real estate development is an important and growing sector for the economy of Pakistan. Pakistan spends US $ 5.2 Billion on construction in a year. Bahria promotes real estate development business in Pakistan. Since the announcement of Bahria projects in Pakistan the growth of the private real estate sector has been revitalized. All the private real estate developers across the country have fascination with Bahria projects, and they are interested towards buying and selling products of Bahria developers comparable to the other construction projects (Ali, 2016). The reasons behind this are the incentives given by Bahria developers to real estate agents. It has been noticed that many times the bookings are officially closed but private real estate developers have no issue in selling the properties, because they usually buy the files from the seller. Then afterwards they sell those property files according to values, making immense profits (Ali, 2016).

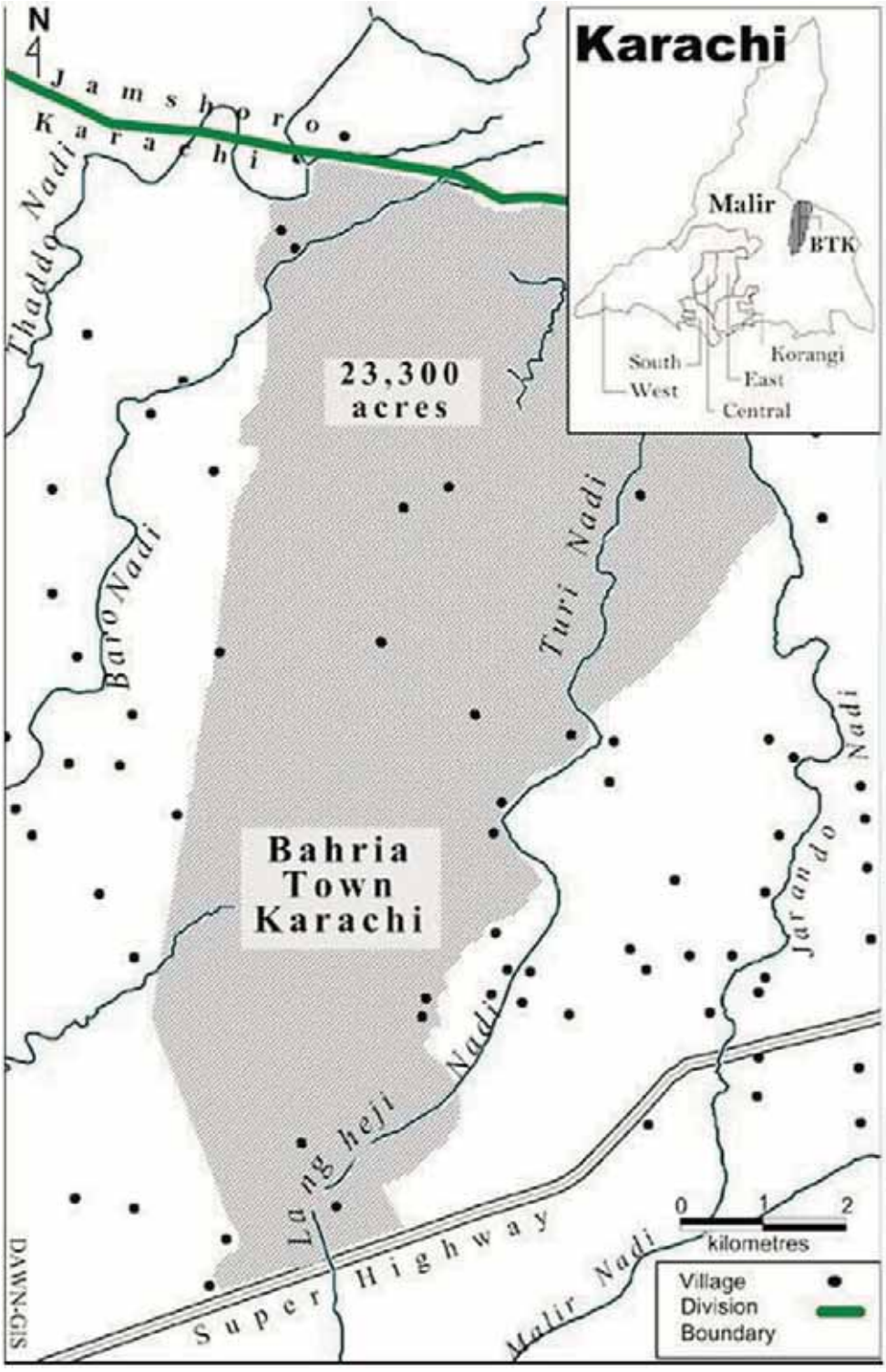
Bahria Town is located in Karachi at the edge of the city, nine kilometers away from Super Highway Toll Plaza. It is under construction and has been facilitated with all the basic amenities such as residential, commercial, and health care and includes houses/villas, apartments, shopping mall, grand Jamia Mosque and a mosque for each sector, schools, university, hospital, cricket stadium and indoor/outdoor sports facilities, five start hotel, golf course, cinema, theme park and a mini zoo.

Bahria Town - Highlighting the Backdrop

The land on which BTK sits is under the authority of Malir district; however, with the help of powerful actions it is being urged to convert this land into the ownership of Bahria. The covered area for BTK is twenty three thousand acres that is under construction, though the target is to grab forty three thousand acres of land for this project. Activities beyond the boundaries have started and there are some eight to nine existing villages that have been demolished (Ali, 2016). It is estimated that eventually forty five villages around BTK will be affected (Figure 1).

According to architect and planner Arif Hassan,

"This land was purchased through political influence, and the villagers owned much of it for centuries. Most were herdsmen, and their pastureland was this land. By occupying, threatening, arresting, harassing and bulldozing their homes, BTK has forced these villagers (residing in nearly 45 villages) to leave their property. All this was done with police backing. In addition to bulldozing poor villages, BTK has also bulldozed several historic sites, such as shrines, temples and a nearby Buddhist stupa. This was achieved largely with the help of the Malir Development Authority (MDA) by violating its laws by passing modifications that breach



Villages (directly or indirectly affected)

Nasherwan
Hayat
Paripo
Rozi
Badi Khan
Mir Khan
Rabu
Paripo
Larkhmir
Ishaq Baloch
Ali Nawaz Gondar
Radh
Juma
Ali Daud
Haji Achar
Mir Bakhsh
Miro Bakhsh
Bajar
Karim Bakhsh
Nabi Bakhsh
Jalab
Murado Gabol
Hasan Ali Gabol
Allah Rakhio
Ghulam Mustafa
Isa
Banzo
Gohram
Imam Bakhah
Azim
Pahlwan Kamal
Wajid Ibrahim
Ali Muhammad
Kathore
Haji Gul Hassan
Safar
Ismail
Radho
Muhammad Sharif
Siraj Ahmed
Depar
Ali M. Gabol
Alidad
Lal Faqir
Amir Bukhsh
Abdullah
Darya Khan
Sanasi Gabol
Phuto Gabol
Baimen Faqir
Nawaz Ali Gondar
Mario Faqir
Haji Muhammad
Ghulam Qadir
Faiz Muhammad
Amir Bakhsh
Hadi Bakhsh

Figure 1: Goths Effected by the Construction.
Map data Source: Bahria Town Karachi; www.bahriatown.com

certain parts of the law, namely; the 2006 Disposal of Plots Rules passed under the MDA Act. Section 17 of the 1912 Colonization Act was violated as well. The construction of BTK also encroaches upon Karachi's water supply. The above-mentioned evictions create a new housing crisis, and the project causes a major environmental crisis" (Hasan, 2019).

Role of the Law Enforcement Agencies, Development Authorities and Revenue Boards

In the research it was witnessed that indigenous poor people are being wiped off from the outskirts of the city. In the process police is playing a major role in harassing the poor and forcing them to leave their land. The Malir Development Authority (MDA). BTK and Board of Revenue (BoR) are assisting these law enforcement agencies (Siddiqui, 2016). Although the role of the land *sardars* (land lords) is quite important, but they are silenced because they are being bought against huge sums of money (Haq, 2014).

According to historian and chronicler Gul Hassan;

"The Sardars are so powerful and if they did not want any development then there would have been no Bahria Town." He also states, "Malik Riaz did not own even an inch of land at the time of announcing the Bahria Town project and yet he collected billions through bookings. The land came later thanks to some big bribes for politicians" (Hasan, 2019).

The officials from the BoR, the district administration and police have all colluded with Bahria in various ways to authorize the government land to Bahria. BoR Sindh is the original custodian of all land in the province. Besides collecting revenue and maintaining land records, it is also responsible for allotment of land to individuals, societies and various institutions and development agencies, such as the Karachi Development Authority, Defence Housing Authority Karachi, etc. BoR allotted the land to MDA, but MDA sold the land to private land developers. Although, according to the legal documentation it is clear that the land can only be used for the socio-economic upliftment for the poor people of that area, but this is not the reality.

In 2012, Sindh High Court issued an order banning the Sindh government from issuing any further lease, or effecting any allotment, transfer of government land. A few days later, on Dec 26, 2013, the BoR issued a notification through which forty three *dehs* clusters (of villages) came under the authority of MDA. It was stated that for the purpose of physical survey and preparation of road network the land would be used for development. However, MDA did not get any notice and they kept on selling the land to private developers, even though the land was not allotted by the Sindh Government. In March 2015, the BoR reserved fourteen thousand six hundred seventeen acres of land for MDA.

This was an initial step towards allotment (Ali, 2019a). A senior member of BoR stated that unfortunately, in the notification he neglected to mention that the preservation of the selected area, that the land over nine different *dehs* was only for the purpose of developing low-cost housing schemes, with plots not exceeding one hundred twenty square yards. Soon after through a notification announcement, MDA also claimed that they paid BoR nearly rupees two billion as twenty five percent of the market price as fixed by the latter for incremental housing, as payment for the above reserved land. Substantially, the political parties already involved and taking advantage of the situation with the help of MDA, sold the land to the real estate agencies in the name of BTK development (Ali, 2016).

MDA Supports Bahria Town development

The selling of land was being done with the help of MDA even before land acquisition had been done by BTK. The MDA officials specifically favored Bahria by submitting their application for 'consolidation'. Consolidation is a legitimate course for BoR to facilitate a tiller by exchanging scattered pieces of agricultural land with a consolidated piece of land, which, according to the Colonization of Government Lands Act 1912, should not exceed sixteen acres in a nearby area. Although, as per section seventeen of the Colonization Act, it was clear that the land exchanged would be utilized for the same purpose as it was being used previously. On Dec 19, 2013 a clause was added in the Section of the Act which stated that the consolidation of land as "adjustment of plots in a scheme by way of exchange or otherwise for the purpose of the scheme" (Ali, 2016) was allowed.

DATA COLLECTION

For data collection a survey was conducted based on a questionnaire. This was filled by three main stakeholders, residents of BTK, surrounding villagers of BTK and the real estate developers.

According to the responses given by the villagers residing around BTK this development has disturbed their entire life, and BTK has grabbed their land. After a detailed survey of the villages surrounding BTK, it was observed that the villagers were being forced by BTK to leave their place. It could be seen that BTK was promoting a certain standard of living, but at the same time land acquisition was being done by force and a very small amount was paid to the villagers.

It was observed that there were forty villages effected by the development of BTK. Two main *dehs* namely Langeji and Kathore were completely ruined. In each *deh* twelve to fifteen small *goths* (villages) existed therefore, small *goths* from each *deh* were selected to visit. The *goths* visited were Usman Gabool *goth* in *deh* Langeji and Kamal Khan Jokio *goth* in *deh* Kathore, while from each of the *goths* approximately four persons, farmers and the land owners were interviewed.

These residents claimed that they were living in these *goths* since after the independence and the land belonged to their forefathers which was given to them by their ancestors. According to them most of their land was leased, while *some piece of the land was not leased. "The job of BTK development was quickly completed and the rubble hauled away while hapless villagers looked on in a daze, knowing well that there will be no justice for them," said Ameer Ali, one of the village resident.*

The villages claimed that they had all the property ownership documents but BTK and other agencies did not accept these papers. In some cases leased land was deliberately shown as illegal land. One of the victim explained that the police and other security personnels continued to threaten to vacate his eighty acres of land and he along with his sons was brought to the police station and forcefully asked to vacate the area immediately. Later, construction on his land, related to agriculture was bulldozed.

It was noticed that many of the landowners sold their land due to the pressure from BTK. One of the affected resident claimed that some poultry farms and underground wells were under his guardianship but BTK ruined them. Similarly the resident of Kamal Khan Jokio *goth* in Kathore claimed that one of his relative owned forty five acres of land to be vacated but only in a day forty five to fifty bulldozers, carrying police mobiles, bulldozed everything including the tube well and the heritage site. The land was also illegally occupied. Unfortunately, only some of the land was recovered with the help of some media officials.

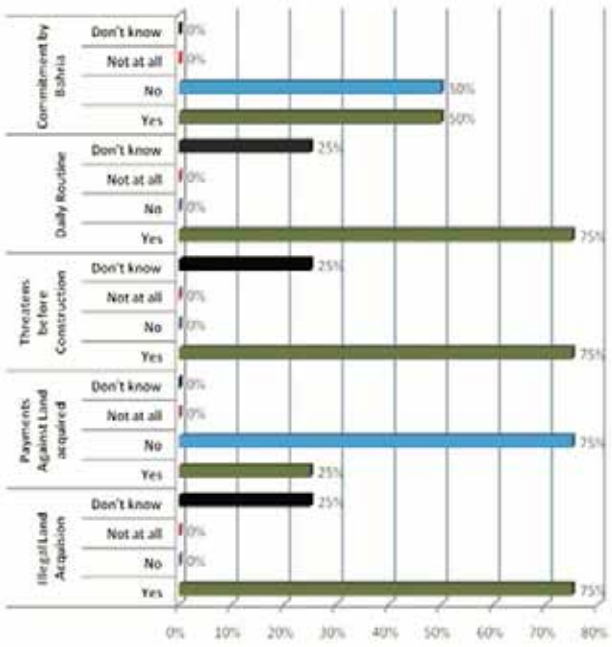


Figure 2: Qualitative Research in Surounding Villages of BTK

Figure 3: Langeji Usman Gabool *goth*

Figure 4: Road Constructed by Bahria Leading to Langeji Usman Gabool *goth*

Figure 5 - 7: Bahria Town Boundary Wall goth

Figures 8 - 16: Kathore Khan Jokio *goth* and Demolished Heritage Tomb

The affected people mostly highlighted the names of some political leaders, MPAs and higher officials of Bahria. Furthermore, it was also observed that Bahria's boundary limits kept on expanding and they continued to bulldoze small goths of *deh* Kathore just to make a road inside their periphery, that will lead to the development of BTK farm houses.

The result of the survey analysis from the surrounding villages and some pictures were taken from these *goths* (Figures 3-7).
These pictures clearly indicate how BTK is demolishing some heritage site to alter their project boundaries (Figures 8-16).

A group of four persons were interviewed between the ages of twenty five to forty years of age in BTK. The questionnaire answered by those residents gave clear evidence that they were proud to be residents of BTK and for them this was the best living place that comprised of all the required amenities. Additionally, for them there was large housing supply gap in Karachi and BTK filled this gap. Living in Bahria relieved them of stress frustrations, noise, pollution and provided a high standard of living that positively impacted their health, physical wellbeing and productivity. These residents were least bothered about the land acquisition process. They also seemed least bothered about issues being faced by the rural villagers around them because to them they bought the properties from Bahria and they considered it a successful development (Figures 17-19).

The third category of interviews were done with real estate developers of BTK. A brief questionnaire was prepared for them and the findings were gathered after interviewing them and are presented in Figures 20-21.

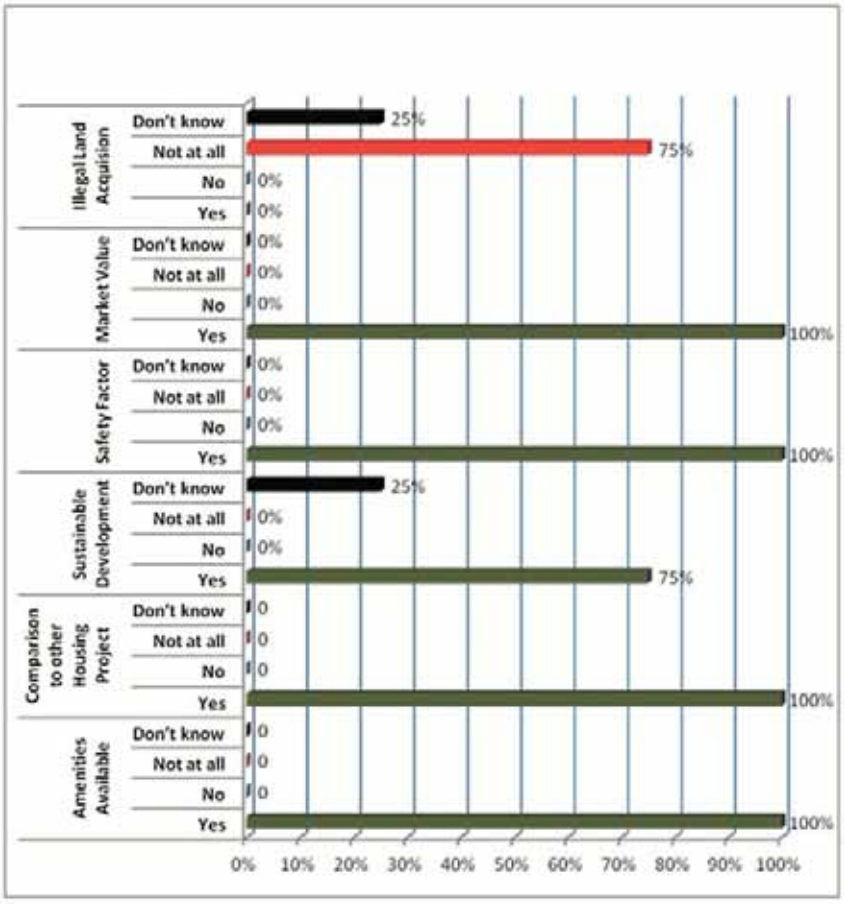


Figure 17: Qualitataive Research within BTK

Figure 18: Images of Finished Project in BTK

Figure 19: More Images of Finished Projects in BTK

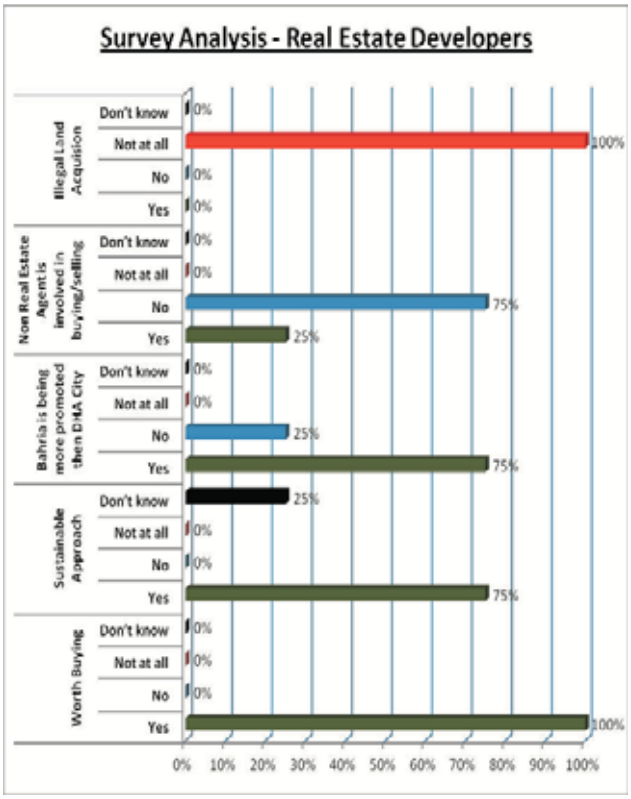


Figure 20: Survey of Real Estate Developers
Source: Author

Prices of Residential Plots and Payment Plan:

4 Year Installment Plan					
Size	125 Sq. Yards	250 Sq. Yards	500 Sq. Yards	1000 Sq. Yards	2000 Sq. Yards
Token	150,000/-	280,000/-	350,000/-	550,000/-	960,000/-
Total Amount	17,25,000/-	28,50,000/-	46,50,000/-	86,00,000/-	18,500,000/-

Prices of Commercial Plots and Payment Plan:

5 Year Installment Plan			
Size	125 Sq. Yards	200 Sq. Yards	250 Sq. Yards
Token	25,00,000/-	36,00,000/-	46,00,000/-
Total Amount	125,00,000/-	199,00,000/-	249,00,000/-

Prices of Bahria Homes and Payment Plan:

4 Year Installment Plan		
Size	125 Sq. Yards	200 Sq. Yards
Token	420,000/-	590,000/-
Total Amount	42,00,000/-	49,00,000/-

Prices Bahria Apartments and Payment Plan:

4 Year Installment Plan			
Size	2 Bed (950 sqft)	3 Bed (2250 sqft)	4 Bed (2950 sqft)
Token	266,000/-	630,000/-	826,000/-
Total Amount	2,660,000/-	6,300,000/-	8,260,000/-

Figure 21: Booking Prices and Installments Plan for BTK
Source: Tristar Real Estate Developers

The questionnaire answered by the real estate developers gave clear evidence that they were proud to be a part of team that is working under the umbrella of Bahria. According to them, all the Bahria Town developments are legal because for every acre of land hefty amount of money is being given to the landowners. They believed that Bahria had good past development record so they were not worried about buying and selling with BTK. On questioning one real estate agent regarding the main reasons behind the promotion of BTK, the name familiarization with the previous record was quoted.

A real estate agent from Tristar Real Estate Developers, said, *"this is the best project for investment, it is a common trend that people are taking the ownership of properties and after doubling the price of this property they sell it and buy another property, in this way a number of investors become billionaires*". Another real estate agent said that land acquisition was being done by Bahria Town and *"there is not a single property of Bahria that is illegal, all land is properly purchased by the Bahria management"*. Further he added that Bahria has given the claimed amount to the villagers but when they saw that the construction is going at peak and the price value is increasing day by day the villagers claim that Bahria has not paid them accordingly. He further added that initially the master plan comprised of thirty one precincts but now more than fifty precincts are under construction and all precincts are in different phases of construction. He emphasized that this is all because the trust of people in Bahria projects is so strong".

ANALYSIS

Considering Bahria Town development in Karachi, from an overall planning point of view of the city, this kind of development has never been done before in Pakistan. Moreover, this land upon which the development is done was never organized or designated for urban development in any of the master plans. Hence, this project is one of a kind.

Besides, this development was probably a blessing for the real estate developers and entrepreneurs, as the projects of BTK were based on speculative grounds and the purpose was to create market hype and to expand the market of real estate. The officials of BTK were not sure about the area allocated for this development, since they were waiting for the response of the hype created and kept expanding on that

basis. The people investing in projects like BTK are the ones who have spare money and no other options to invest in real estate. This has been a trend in Pakistan for a long time that the people, in particular overseas Pakistani, who have undeclared/spare money invest in real estate. This creates a demand for such projects and BTK took advantage of this situation.

However, there are certain observations regarding the development of BTK, out of which one is the blatant transformation of the land use. The allotted land was for pasturing purposes and for livestock grazing. There was no existence of proper farming on this land due to it being semi-arid land, but the importance of the land lies in the fact that it contains a riverine due to the topography. This connects with the city's natural overflows like Lyari and Malir Rivers. The development of BTK has contaminated this natural flow of water.

Additionally, BTK is making money at the cost of quality and standard of design and construction. According to Architect and Planner Arif Hasan, BTK development has impacted negatively on the lives of people who lived in these land because at the time of the launch of the scheme and the opening of the booking procedures to the public, BTK had no land and they acquired land forcefully by pressurizing people. This was against the rules and ethics of a free society, but the government refused to take any action because this was a nexus between political structure and the developer, which resulted in the failure of the state (Hasan, 2016).

The other drawback of this development includes the demolition of protected heritage and the physical environment. The data collected indicates that the residents and real estate developers have an interest in the illegal development that is being done by BTK. The initial land approved for Bahria was twenty three thousand acres, but now it being been pushed to more than forty five thousand acres of land. Thus agricultural reserves are wasted due to this type of development. The environment of the city is continuously being degraded and the pollution in air and water has increased. Although urban planning is institutionalized and development plans are being produced, but it seems that they are not achieving sustainable urban development goals. Indifferent to the environmental needs of the area, once called the "green belt", the builder mafia is busy violating all the laws including those enacted for protecting the wildlife, as some parts of the project fall in internationally recognized Hub National Park and Khirthar National Park. Moreover, the archeological sites of the area, like ancient graveyards, remains of the Buddhist era, were under threat, as the project erased the historic sites and removed any traces of history. Unfortunately, none of the national and international organizations have taken notice of the ensuing catastrophe at the hands of the builder mafia in the name of development (Malik and Wahid, 2014; NewsDesk, 2019; Shaheen, 2016).

The infrastructure department plans to provide power plants for electricity generation for BTK, which will be extremely costly and deteriorate the environment further. It will also become a huge source of pollution, affecting the surroundings adversely and will decrease the land value around the neighborhood. It is predicted that in the future a large informal settlement will spring around the neighborhood to provide domestic services to residents of BTK. Distance between places in BTK itself makes it a suburb which is going to be highly dependent on vehicular transport. The internationally rising trend of more sustainable cities friendly towards pedestrians and cyclists has been completely neglected here. Hence Bahria will add to levels of pollution as it is a car dependent development (Siddiqui, 2016; Taylor, 2008; Thomas, 2001).

In order to predict the future of BTK it is important to understand the existing and legal reality, which still remains an unanswered question. There is no official document which states that the pasture land was given to BTK for urban development or the transformation of the land use was allowed. According to current regulation the government of Sindh should provide ninety nine years lease to its allottees, but there have been no such arrangement in this case.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the development as per Land Acquisition Act. Currently the Board of Revenue Act is violating and breaking many byelaws of MDA and SBCA. The Sindh Gothabad Housing Scheme Act was formed in 1987. However, this practice was then banned because of open misuse of the Act, such as handing out of money to private landowners. This act should be reformed and indigenous people alliance should be formed for the local people so they have a voice.

CONCLUSION

Bahria Town claimed that their respective projects would be master-planned with world class infrastructure and facilities, but BTK neglected all the ethical, legal and environmental norms.

BTK did not undertake the study of environmental hazards the project might cause to the wildlife, agriculture, fauna and flora of the area before launching of the mega project. This project would certainly destroy the eco-system, as it has blocked the rain water channels which are major source of raising the ground water level. Similarly, sandstone is being dug from the rivers for construction purpose, which again affects the subsoil water level and would bring only drought and calamity for rural areas surrounding Karachi.

With time BTK will become a drag on Karachi's resources. BTK might try its best to make this development a successful one and in order to do so the limited resources of Karachi will suffer especially public resources of water, electricity, water supply, gas and sanitation, connectivity and communication links. These resources are already constrained, especially water. It is very important to increase the quota of resources to create an overall balance so that the existing population does not suffer as a result of this development.

After a thorough research, it has been noticed that in the name of urban development, the rights of poor people are being suppressed and indigenous community has always been ignored in our society, despite the fact that the value of their land is like a gold mine for the investor. Mega-projects such as BTK and many of similar projects have progressively overtaken the planning of the city and are taking up space from low-income groups via a gentrification process. These projects will completely dominate over plans for the near future. Given this fact, the criteria for judging projects has to be redefined. What is identified in the study is that projects should not affect the environment of the area in which they are situated; land use should be assessed on the basis of sociological and environmental factors and not land value alone. Development should meet the needs of the majority of the population, specially those who belong to low and low middle income groups; and it should respect the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the area.

It is suggested that the Land Acquisition Act, Board of Revenue Act, MDA, SBCA, Law Enforcement Agencies and NAB should address the needs of the locals and develop proper strategies related to land use. The government should ensure that proper investigation is made related to the land ownnership document because there is no such official document that exists. This means that BTK is required on behalf of the government of Sindh to provide ninety nine years lease to its allottees, but there has been no such arrangements.

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