

## Helpdesk Research Report

# Urbanisation and conflict in Pakistan

Róisín Hinds

19.06.2014

## Question

*What are the main links between urbanisation and violence in Pakistan? What positive opportunities does urbanisation offer for conflict reduction? Provide examples of donor approaches to conflict reduction in urban environments.*

## Contents

1. Overview
2. Links between urbanisation and violence
3. Tackling urban conflict
4. References

## 1. Overview

This rapid review identifies literature on the links between urbanisation and violence in Pakistan. Pakistan has experienced unprecedented rates of urban growth. High levels of urbanisation have been fuelled by a range of factors, including war, insecurity, economic necessity, and decreasing dependency on the agricultural sector (Arif & Hamid 2009). There is a broad body of literature on violence in Pakistan, however less specific material drawing links between urbanisation and incidences of violence.

Some of the main links between urbanisation and violence identified in the available literature include:

- **Competition for resources:** Urbanisation increases competition for scarce resources, particularly land, water and housing. In various cities in Pakistan, conflict over land has spiralled into violent unrest. Organised criminal land grabs have sparked clashes between ethnic groups and political parties who vie for territorial control of cities.
- **Urban infrastructure and governance:** Pakistan's urban infrastructure is inadequate to meet the growing demands of urbanisation. Extremist and criminal groups have been able to exploit poor governance and infrastructure to establish patronage and recruitment networks. This is often by

providing scarce services and employment opportunities to gain followers (International Crisis Group 2014).

- **Demographic change, ethnic divisions and political conflict:** The changing ethnic composition of Pakistan's cities has contributed to urban violence and ethno-political tensions. Under-representation of migrants, intensifying conflict between political opponents, and the migration of hard-line and extremist groups have been identified as key factors.
- **Socio-economic disparities and unemployment:** Though the connection between violence and economic growth is still not well understood, literature on Pakistan indicates that unemployment and economic disparities are contributing factors to violence and crime.
- **Legal status of migrants:** Lack of legal status and documentation, particularly for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), leaves them vulnerable to threats, intimidation, and violence.

Urbanisation can also provide some (albeit limited) opportunities for conflict reduction. If properly harnessed, the prospective economic advantages of cities could help tackle the socio-economic dimensions that contribute to violent unrest (Kugelman 2013). Experts caution, however, that urbanisation is more likely to increase the chances of conflict in Pakistan, rather than providing opportunities to reduce it.

Curbing urban conflict requires a mix of economic and political solutions (International Crisis Group 2014). Some of the programmes identified in the literature on urban conflict reduction include:

- **Public order initiatives:** Including community policing and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) control programmes.
- **Employment creation:** These are effective when part of wider conflict reduction strategies, such as civil society strengthening, life skills coaching and institutional strengthening of Government ministries.
- **Service delivery:** Such programmes can provide opportunities for communities to work together to implement low-cost infrastructure or service provision.
- **Strengthening urban governance:** Such as community councils and community safety audits.

## 2. Links between urbanisation and violence

### Competition for resources

Urbanisation has increased competition for resources in Pakistan's cities, including land, water and housing (International Crisis Group 2014). When resources become scarce, they are often contested in a violent fashion (International Crisis Group 2014).

In Karachi, for instance, experts indicate that competition for land and real estate has resulted in 'violent turf wars'. In a report for the United States Institute for Peace, Yusuf (2012) notes that criminal gangs orchestrate **land grabs**, and organise the apportioning and sale of encroached land. Land grabs have sparked clashes between political parties who vie for territorial control of the cities, and between different ethnic groups. In 2011, conflict over land between Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) workers and members of the 'Pashtun land mafia' in Gulzar-e-Hijri lead to city-wide riots in which twenty-three people were killed (Yusuf 2012).

The visible manifestation of housing constraints in Karachi is *kachi abbadis*, **informal slum settlements**, which are scattered around the city. Criminal gangs occupy such settlements often through violent or illegal means, including bribery, arson, forgery, and intimidation (Yusuf 2012). The prevalence of informality in Pakistan's urban centres has compromised state capacity to govern (Gazdar and Mallah 2013). Crowded and irregular settlements are difficult to police and can become 'sanctuaries' for petty criminals and organised criminal gangs (International Crisis Group 2014, p. 27).

## Urban infrastructure and governance

Pakistan's urban infrastructure is inadequate to meet the growing demands of urbanisation (International Crisis Group 2014). In a paper presented at the Global Development Network, Ghani (2012) states that the quality of urban governance will shape the future of Pakistan's cities. However, municipal and development **authorities lack the resources and technical expertise** for modern urban planning (Ibid.).

Extremist and criminal groups have been able to **exploit poor governance and infrastructure** to establish patronage and recruitment networks in the provincial capitals of Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi and Lahore (International Crisis Group 2014). By providing scarce services and employment opportunities criminal groups have utilised weak service provision to gain followers, particularly among young people (Ibid.). The 'water mafia' is a notable example of criminality in service provision. The mafia siphon over 40 per cent of Karachi's water supply and sell it at inflated rates (Ibid.).

Experts also point to a **lack of state capacity for law enforcement** in urban areas as a contributing factor to violence (International Crisis Group 2014). Perceptions of state failure have led some urban citizens to turn to local criminals or corrupt politicians to settle urban disputes.

## Demographic change, ethnic divisions and political conflict

Demographic changes in Pakistan's urban centres are noted to have fuelled urban violence and ethno-political tensions (International Crisis Group 2014; Gazdar & Mallah 2013; Gayer 2007).

In a peer-reviewed publication, Esser (2004) contends that the **ethnic composition** of Karachi must be taken into account in understandings of why violence has mushroomed. The native Sindhi population are now in the minority in Karachi, as Urdu-speaking refugees from the Indian sub-continent, Pathans, began moving into the city in the 1960s. Despite this, Sindhi representatives still hold key positions in the provincial government through a quota system, while migrant groups are under-represented (Esser 2004). Lack of political representation and the neglect of migrants concerns have exacerbated conflict in some cities.

Urbanisation has also been associated with intensifying **conflict between political opponents**, which has frequently resulted in violence. In an analysis for the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, Kugelman (2013) finds that urban population growth in Karachi has intensified competition between the Mahajir-dominated MQM and the Pashtun-dominated Awami National Party (ANP). Such ethnic divisions have been accentuated by the links forged between largely ethnic-based political parties and criminal gangs (International Crisis Group 2014).

An additional consequence of urbanisation is the presence of **hard-line or extremist groups** in urban centres. Experts contend that the migration of sectarian and militant groups to Pakistan's cities has been a contributing factor to violence.

## Socio-economic disparities and unemployment

The connection between violence and unemployment is still not well understood (World Bank 2010). However, literature on Pakistan indicates that stark **socio-economic disparities are a contributing factor** to crime and militancy in rapidly growing urban centres (International Crisis Group 2014). Various features are identified in the literature, including unequal distribution of wealth, ownership of land and property, and uneven access to social services and economic opportunities (Ghani 2012).

Growing urban populations place additional demand on an already **constrained job market**, particularly for low-income employment (Kugelman 2013; Haider 2006). In a longitudinal study investigating the relationship between crime in Pakistan and economic indicators, Gillani, Rehman and Gill (2009) find evidence of a long-term co-integration relationship between crime, unemployment, poverty and inflation. In particular, they find that when opportunities to earn an income decrease – and the unemployment rate increases – individuals can be more likely to commit crime (Ibid, p. 93; International Crisis Group 2014). In an analysis of youth violence in Pakistan, Sabir and Zaman (2013) find that lack of employment opportunities has led some young people to join criminal gangs in urban areas.

## Legal status of migrants

Pakistan has a high rate of internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict and disasters, with the northern city of Peshawar becoming one of the largest recipients of IDPs and refugees in South Asia (Mosel & Jackson 2013). A lack of legal status and documentation, combined with highly politicised and unpredictable policies and decisions, has made refugees and IDPs vulnerable to threats and extortion. Evidence indicates that Afghan populations are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and harassment by security forces in Pakistan (Mosel & Jackson 2013).

## 3. Tackling urban conflict

### Opportunities of urbanisation

Despite the challenges of rapid urban growth, urbanisation provides some (albeit limited) opportunities for conflict reduction and prevention. There are several **prospective economic advantages** of cities that, if harnessed, could tackle the socio-economic dimensions that contribute to violent unrest. Urban centres are a locus of employment creation, contain the majority of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and are home to educational institutions that fuel high-growth and dynamic industries (Kugelman 2013; See also Browne 2014).

One expert cautions, however, that urbanisation is more likely to increase the chances of conflict in Pakistan, rather than providing opportunities to reduce it.

### Urban conflict reduction approaches

Curbing urban conflict requires a mix of economic and political solutions (International Crisis Group 2014). Some of the programmes identified in the literature on urban conflict reduction include:

### ***Strengthening public order***

**Community policing** in urban areas can both support urban governance and aim to improve relations between police and the communities they serve (USAID 2013, p. 18). Community policing models have been introduced in a range of countries, including Kenya, Haiti, South Africa and Uganda (World Bank 2010). In Nairobi, the NGO Saferworld implemented a community policing initiative that involved training police officers, setting up community and information centres, and providing anonymous boxes where residents can leave information on violence and crime (Ibid.). An internal evaluation of the programme found that it improved trust between residents and law enforcement, and increased safety and security (Ibid.). Evidence indicates that community policing initiatives work best in contexts where they have a high level of support and where there are existing strong networks of community organisations (Ibid.).

**Small Arms Light Weapons (SALW) control programmes** have had some success in relation to arms control in urban contexts. The Weapons Lotteries in Port-au-Prince was implemented by the NGO *Viva Rio* and allows individuals to return weapons in exchange for a lottery ticket – with which they can win prizes, such as vouchers and household appliances (OECD 2009).

### ***Employment creation programmes***

World Bank (2010) experience indicates that violence reduction interventions need to begin by addressing a lack of viable livelihoods and employment opportunities, particularly for young people. The relationship between conflict and unemployment is complex and multi-faceted, and thus job creation initiatives in insolation are unlikely to generate a reduction in violence (Walton 2010). However, various bilateral and multilateral organisations do support job creation initiatives as **a component of wider conflict reduction strategies**. UNDP, for instance, has linked employment generation programmes with social initiatives to strengthen reconciliation activities (Walton 2010). The ‘Violence Prevention, Peace and Sustainable Programme’ in Jamaica is an illustrative example of this, where job creation is used alongside other measures such as civil society strengthening, life skills coaching, and institutional strengthening of Government ministries (Walton 2010).

Common criticisms of employment programmes for violence reduction include (Walton 2010):

- Not being based on a context-specific analysis of conflict.
- Focusing on formal sector employment at the expense of the informal sector.
- Failing to develop linkages between short- and long-term job creation programmes.
- Focusing on the supply-side of job creation (such as training and skill development) to the neglect of the demand side (such as public works programmes or targeted wage subsidies).

### ***Service delivery projects***

Basic service provision provides an opportunity for communities to work together and build relationships, as well as tackle one of the key grievances that has led to conflict (OECD 2011, p. 26). *Viva Rio* is an example from Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Bel-Air (Haiti) which involves mobilising local providers and young people to deliver basic services, such as water and sanitation. In an impact assessment of the programme, Moestue and Muggah (2009) found that it produced visible and tangible improvements in various areas of service delivery.

Implementing **low-cost infrastructure or service provision interventions** can have positive results within a short time frame, particularly when implemented as part of a broader strategy of urban upgrading (World Bank 2010). In Brazil, the *Campos de Luz* programme is a 'situational prevention and service delivery' programme that involves partnerships between public and private sector actors to provide lighting in open spaces (World Bank 2010, pp. 170-171).

### ***Strengthening urban governance and including communities***

**Community councils** have been established in various cities to promote citizens' participation in public safety and political processes (World Bank 2010). The *Fica Vivo* project in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) and the *DESEPAZ* programme in Cali (Colombia) are examples of community forums where meetings are held to promote transparency, discuss issues relating to crime and violence, and develop local solutions (World Bank 2010).

UN-HABITAT (2005) advocates that vulnerable groups should be involved in '**safety audits**' of cities. These are walks by small groups to identify high crime areas and the factors that make them unsafe (UN-HABITAT 2005). Safety audits provide vulnerable groups with an opportunity to articulate their safety concerns (UN-HABITAT 2005).

### ***Ensuring the participation of women***

Men and women experience violence in cities differently, yet women are often excluded from urban governance and conflict reduction processes. Safety audits and exploratory walks led by women can be a useful way of ensuring women's concerns are legitimised and considered in conflict reduction programming (UN-HABITAT 2005).

Drawing from international experience, Action Aid (2011) make some recommendations for how to include women in urban conflict reduction. These include:

- **Raise awareness** of the issues of women's insecurity and violence in urban areas. Awareness raising must be culturally appropriate and appealing to the target audience. Social media, television and radio may be useful media for advocacy campaigns.
- **Prioritise** the establishment of services for women that mitigate the impact of violence, including sexual and reproduction health services, and rape and violence counselling. Services should be affordable, culturally appropriate, and adequately resourced.
- **Build institutional capacity** in all sectors to address women's urban safety. Training should include integrating gender perspectives into urban design and planning, conducting safety audits, and researching, monitoring and evaluating women's urban safety.

### ***Recommendations for effective urban conflict prevention programmes***

Drawing from experience in the field, the OECD (2011) identifies characteristics of effective urban conflict prevention programmes. These include:

- **Being rooted in the context in which they are implemented:** For instance, through being developed in partnership with targeted communities and with an understanding of the ways violence impacts on different groups, for instance, by gender or age (OECD 2011, p. 17).

- **Engaging multiple sectors in violence reduction efforts:** Violence impacts on all areas of urban governance, however no one government department – with the notable exception of the police – has responsibility for violence prevention. Available evidence indicates that collaboration across multiple sectors ensures an integrated approach to conflict prevention that prevents duplication (OECD 2011, p. 18).
- **Addressing more than one risk factor:** Evidence indicates that conflict reduction approaches are more successful when they tackle more than one risk factor (OECD 2011, p. 18).
- **Intervening at multiple levels:** Working at the local level is essential to address urban violence as it is closest to the affected populations and responsive to local needs. However, it is also essential to work across levels of government to tackle the different dimensions and factors that contribute to urban violence (OECD 2011, p. 18).
- **Maintaining relevant and up-to-date data collection:** This is important for practitioners to refine their analysis of the situation and design programmes with an effective impact (OECD 2011, p. 21). The Municipal Crime and Violence Observations in Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, collects data on people, perpetrators, and institutional responses to violence in urban spaces. The observations involve cross-sectoral partnerships. In Colombia, the establishment of observatories has been credited with helping to design community conflict reduction programmes that contributed to reduced homicide rates (OECD 2011, p. 22).

## 4. References

- Action Aid (2011). *Women in the City: Examining the gender impact of violence and urbanisation – A comparative study of Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Liberia and Nepal*. London: Action Aid. Available at: <http://www.actionaid.org/publications/women-and-city-examining-gender-impact-violence-and-urbanisation>
- Ali, N., Ali, F., Khuwaja, A. and Nanji, K. (2014). Factors associated with intimate partner violence against women in a mega city of South-Asia: Multi-centre cross-sectional study. *Hong Kong Medical Journal*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12809/hkmj134074>
- Ali, T., Asad, N., Mogren, I. and Krantz, G. (2011). Intimate partner violence in urban Pakistan: Prevalence, frequency, and risk factors. *International Journal of Women's Health*. 3: 105-115. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2147%2FIJWH.S17016>
- Arif, G.M. and Hamid, S. (2009). Urbanization, city growth and quality of life in Pakistan. *European Journal of Social Sciences*. 10/2. Available at: <http://www.fcitizenforum.com/PROBLEMS-OF-A-CITY.pdf>
- Browne, E. (2014). *Benefits of urbanisation in Asia*. (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1082). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. Available at: <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HDQ1082.pdf>
- Esser, D. (2004). The city as area, hub and prey – patterns of violence in Kabul and Karachi. *Environment and Urbanisation*. 16/2: 31-38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/095624780401600219>

- Gayer, L. (2007). Guns, slums, and “yellow devils”: A genealogy of urban conflicts in Karachi, Pakistan. *Modern Asian Studies*. 41/3: 515-544. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X06002599>
- Gazdar, H. and Mallah, H.B. (2013). Informality and political violence in Karachi. *Urban Studies*. 50/15: 3099-3115. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0042098013487778>
- Ghani, E. (2012). Urbanisation in Pakistan: challenges and options. Paper presented at Global Development Network’s 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Global Development Conference, Central European University, Budapest, June 17<sup>th</sup>. Available at: [http://www.saneinetwork.net/Files/Urbanization\\_and\\_Development\\_in\\_Pakistan.pdf](http://www.saneinetwork.net/Files/Urbanization_and_Development_in_Pakistan.pdf)
- Gillani, S., Rehman, H. and Gill, A.R. (2009). Unemployment, poverty, inflation and crime nexus: Cointegration and causality analysis of Pakistan. *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*. 47/1: 79-98. Available at: <http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pesr/currentissues/5%20YASIR%20Employment%20Poverty%20Inflation%20n%20Crime%20Nexus.pdf>
- Haider, M. (2006). *Urbanisation challenges in Pakistan*. Developing Vision 2030. McGill University, Canada, National Institute of Urban Infrastructure Planning, Peshawar. Available at: <http://www.regionomics.com/INDUS/Vision%202030%20Urbanization%20Pakistan.pdf>
- International Crisis Group (2014). *Policing Urban Violence in Pakistan*. Asia Report N°. 255. Brussels: International Crisis Group. Available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/pakistan/255-policing-urban-violence-in-pakistan.pdf>
- Kugelman, M. (2013). *Urbanisation in Pakistan: causes and consequences*. NOREF Expert Analysis. Available at: <http://www.peacebuilding.no/Regions/Asia/Pakistan/Publications/Urbanisation-in-Pakistan-causes-and-consequences>
- Moestue, H. and Muggah, R. (2009). *Social Integration Ergo Stabilization: Assessing Viva Rio’s security and development programme in Port-au-Prince*. Available at: [http://www.comunidadessegura.org/files/relatorio\\_SAS\\_haiti\\_ing.pdf](http://www.comunidadessegura.org/files/relatorio_SAS_haiti_ing.pdf)
- Mosel, I. and Jackson, A. (2013). *Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Peshawar, Pakistan*. HPG Working Paper. London: ODI. Available at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8389.pdf>
- OECD (2011). *Preventing and Reducing Armed Violence in Urban Areas: Programme Note*. Conflict and Fragility. Paris: OECD. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/47942084.pdf>
- Sabir, I. and Zaman, M. (2013). Youth violence in Pakistan: The social structure and culture of violence. *Social Prevention and Resocialisation*. 21: 7-24. Available at: [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/254559012\\_YOUTH\\_VIOLENCE\\_IN\\_PAKISTAN\\_THE\\_SOCIAL\\_STRUCTURE\\_AND\\_CULTURE\\_OF\\_VIOLENCE](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/254559012_YOUTH_VIOLENCE_IN_PAKISTAN_THE_SOCIAL_STRUCTURE_AND_CULTURE_OF_VIOLENCE)
- UN-HABITAT (2005). *The Safer Cities Programme: Making cities safer from crime*. Nairobi: UN-HABITAT. Available at: [http://ww2.unhabitat.org/programmes/safercities/documents/SCpublication\\_blue.pdf](http://ww2.unhabitat.org/programmes/safercities/documents/SCpublication_blue.pdf)
- USAID (2013). *Sustainable Service Delivery in an Increasingly Urbanized World: USAID Policy*. Washington: USAID. Available at: <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/USAIDSustainableUrbanServicesPolicy.pdf>



Walton, O. (2010). *Youth, armed violence and job creation: A rapid mapping study*. Birmingham: GSDRC/NOREF. Available at: <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/EIRS11.pdf>

World Bank (2010). *Violence in the City: Understanding and Supporting Community Responses to Urban Violence*. Washington: World Bank. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/protection/Violence\\_in\\_the\\_city2\\_-\\_WB\\_Study.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/Violence_in_the_city2_-_WB_Study.pdf)

Yusuf, H. (2012). *Conflict Dynamics in Karachi*. Peaceworks – United States Institute of Peace. Washington: USIP. Available at: <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW82-Conflict%20Dynamics%20in%20Karachi.pdf>

## Key websites

- International Crisis Group – Pakistan:  
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan.aspx>

## Expert contributors

Michael Kugelman, Wilson Centre  
Zoha Waseem, Kings College London

## Suggested citation

Hinds, R. (2014). *Urbanisation and conflict in Pakistan* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1115). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

## About this report

This report is based on three days of desk-based research. It was prepared for the UK Government's Department for International Development, © DFID Crown Copyright 2014. This report is licensed under the Open Government Licence ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence)). The views expressed in this report are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GSDRC, its partner agencies or DFID.

The GSDRC Research Helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of key literature and of expert thinking in response to specific questions on governance, social development, humanitarian and conflict issues. Its concise reports draw on a selection of the best recent literature available and on input from international experts. Each GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report is peer-reviewed by a member of the GSDRC team. Search over 400 reports at [www.gsdrc.org/go/research-helpdesk](http://www.gsdrc.org/go/research-helpdesk). Contact: [helpdesk@gsdrc.org](mailto:helpdesk@gsdrc.org).