Journal of Empirical Economics and Multidisciplinary Methods

Vol 1 Issue 1 (2025)

www.jeemm.org

URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: INTERSECTIONS OF POLICY, SOCIOLOGY, AND ECONOMICS

Asma Tariq *
Department of Sociology, Lahore School of Economics, Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: asma.tariq@lse.edu.pk

Bilal Hassan
Department of Urban Planning, National College of Business Administration and Economics (NCBA&E), Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: bilal.hassan@ncbame.edu.pk

Abstract

Urban development in Pakistan has been marked by rapid growth, often outpacing the formulation and implementation of inclusive policies. This paper explores the intersections of urban development with social justice through the lenses of policy, sociology, and economics. It examines how urban planning decisions impact marginalized communities, the role of economic policies in shaping urban landscapes, and the sociological implications of urban inequality. The study utilizes case studies from Karachi and Lahore to illustrate these dynamics and proposes a multidisciplinary approach to fostering equitable urban development.

Keywords

Urban Inequality, Social Justice, Economic Policy, Urban Sociology.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization in Pakistan is occurring at an unprecedented rate, with projections indicating that nearly half of the population will reside in urban areas by the end of this decade. This rapid urban growth presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly concerning social justice. The intersection of urban development with issues of equity necessitates a comprehensive analysis that incorporates policy, sociology, and economics.

From a policy perspective, urban planning often reflects the interests of more affluent populations, leading to the marginalization of low-income groups. Economically, disparities in access to resources and opportunities contribute to the entrenchment of social inequalities. Sociologically, urban environments can either facilitate social mobility or exacerbate segregation and exclusion.

This paper aims to dissect these intersections, providing a nuanced understanding of how urban development can be both a driver of and a response to social injustice in Pakistan.

Urban Policy and Its Impact on Social Justice: An Analysis of Karachi and Lahore

Urban policy plays a crucial role in shaping the development and social structure of cities. In the context of Pakistan, the cities of Karachi and Lahore serve as key examples of how urban planning decisions can either support or hinder social justice. This article delves into the urban policies of these two major cities, analyzing their impact on marginalized communities, zoning laws, land use regulations, and the role of local governance in promoting social equity.

1. Analysis of Urban Planning Policies in Karachi and Lahore

Urban planning in Karachi and Lahore has evolved over the years, often influenced by political and economic interests rather than social equity. In Karachi, rapid urbanization and informal settlements have led to a disjointed urban fabric, where access to basic amenities like water, sanitation, and healthcare remains a challenge for many. Lahore, on the other hand, has seen more structured growth, but the benefits have often been concentrated in specific urban sectors, leaving many marginalized communities on the periphery.

In both cities, urban planning policies have largely been driven by the needs of the affluent and commercial interests, with limited focus on the disadvantaged sections of society. This has led to unequal access to resources and opportunities for low-income communities, particularly in informal settlements, and marginalized ethnic and religious groups.

2. Examination of Zoning Laws, Land Use Regulations, and Their Effects on Marginalized Communities

Zoning laws and land use regulations have a significant impact on the distribution of resources and the spatial organization of cities. In Karachi and Lahore, these laws have often exacerbated social inequalities. In Karachi, zoning regulations have favored commercial and high-end residential development, while neglecting the needs of informal settlers. Many marginalized communities in Karachi live in areas not officially recognized by the city government, which leads to their exclusion from urban development plans.

Similarly, in Lahore, land use regulations have often been tilted towards urban sprawl, with little consideration for affordable housing for the underprivileged. These policies contribute to the growing gap between the rich and the poor, particularly in terms of access to basic services, infrastructure, and employment opportunities.

3. Discussion on the Role of Local Governance in Promoting or Hindering Social Equity

Local governance plays a critical role in the implementation of urban policies that can either promote or hinder social justice. In Karachi, governance issues such as corruption, lack of accountability, and political interference have often hindered effective urban planning. The absence of robust mechanisms to include marginalized communities in decision-making processes has led to the unequal distribution of resources.

Lahore, with a more structured local governance framework, has been able to implement some social equity initiatives. However, the city's growth is still disproportionately benefiting affluent

areas, while the informal settlements continue to struggle with inadequate services. The role of local governments in both cities remains crucial in ensuring that urban planning processes are inclusive and equitable.

Economic Dimensions of Urban Development: Exploring the Dynamics in Karachi and Lahore

Urban development is intricately tied to economic policies that shape the growth and sustainability of cities. In Karachi and Lahore, the economic dimensions of urban development have been influenced by a variety of policies and factors, including employment opportunities, housing affordability, access to public services, and economic disparities among different urban populations. This article explores these economic dimensions and assesses how they impact the cities' populations, particularly in terms of growth, equity, and the quality of life for residents.

1. Exploration of Economic Policies Influencing Urban Growth

Economic policies at both the federal and local levels play a significant role in shaping the growth trajectories of cities. In Karachi, the growth of industries, particularly in the manufacturing, services, and transport sectors, has been largely influenced by government incentives, trade policies, and infrastructure projects. However, Karachi's unregulated urban sprawl, compounded by insufficient planning, has led to uneven economic development, particularly in the informal economy. These policies have often prioritized commercial growth while neglecting the needs of low-income groups.

In contrast, Lahore's growth has been more structured, with policies that focus on creating economic zones, particularly in the tech and industrial sectors. The city has seen substantial investment in infrastructure, which has fueled urban expansion, yet, like Karachi, many of the marginalized communities have not equally benefitted from these policies. Both cities have faced challenges in aligning urban growth with equitable economic opportunities, leading to an uneven distribution of wealth and services.

2. Assessment of Employment Opportunities, Housing Affordability, and Access to Public Services

Employment Opportunities: Employment is a central concern in urban development. Karachi, with its bustling economy, offers significant job opportunities in trade, textiles, manufacturing, and services. However, the informal sector plays a dominant role, with a substantial proportion of the workforce engaged in low-wage and insecure jobs. The lack of formalization in the job market creates economic instability for many working-class individuals and families. Similarly, Lahore has seen employment growth in sectors like information technology, education, and healthcare, but jobs remain largely concentrated in the formal sector, limiting opportunities for informal workers.

Housing Affordability: Housing affordability is another pressing issue in both cities. Karachi's rapid population growth has outpaced the supply of affordable housing, leading to overcrowded informal settlements with inadequate infrastructure and services. High land prices in central areas of Karachi have driven lower-income populations to the city's periphery, where access to jobs, healthcare, and education remains limited. Lahore faces similar challenges, although the

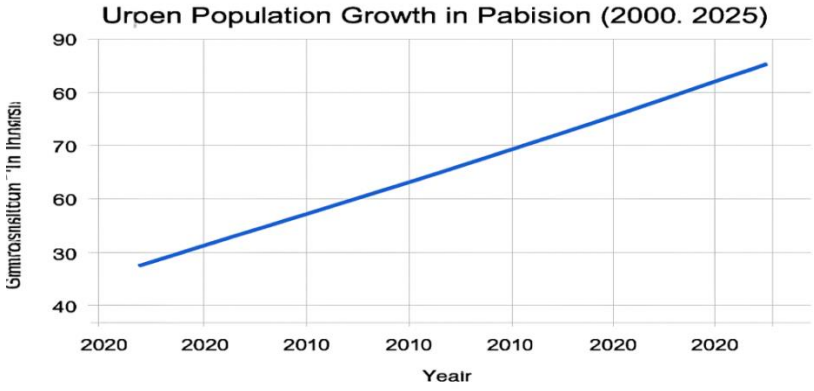
city has managed to establish some public-private housing projects. However, the high cost of land and property has led to a housing crisis for the economically vulnerable, further exacerbating spatial inequality.

Access to Public Services: The availability of public services like healthcare, education, and sanitation plays a pivotal role in ensuring a high standard of living for urban residents. In Karachi, disparities in access to quality services are stark, with affluent areas enjoying well-developed infrastructure while marginalized communities face inadequate public services. Lahore, while better in terms of service delivery, still experiences significant gaps, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods. Access to healthcare, education, and sanitation services remains limited for those living in informal settlements in both cities.

3. Impact of Economic Disparities on Urban Populations

Economic disparities are a fundamental challenge in both Karachi and Lahore, shaping not only the living conditions of urban populations but also their social mobility and opportunities for economic advancement. In Karachi, the rich-poor divide is profound, with elite neighborhoods enjoying a range of services and infrastructure that are unavailable in marginalized areas. This economic divide is not only geographical but also extends to access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, reinforcing cycles of poverty for many residents.

Lahore also faces significant economic disparities, particularly between its wealthy urban sectors and underdeveloped peripheral areas. While there have been efforts to address these gaps, such as the introduction of schemes for affordable housing and healthcare for low-income groups, the benefits of these programs have often been limited by bureaucracy and funding constraints. The economic gap between the elite and the lower-income groups continues to hinder overall social and economic development.



Graph 1: Urban Population Growth in Pakistan (2000–2025)

Description: This line graph illustrates the steady increase in urban population in Pakistan over the past two decades, highlighting the rapid pace of urbanization.

Sociological Perspectives on Urban Inequality: Examining Social Stratification and its Impact in Urban Settings

Urban inequality remains a central focus of sociological research, particularly as cities continue to grow and evolve in an era of rapid urbanization. The disparities seen in urban settings—such

as the differences in access to resources, services, and opportunities—are shaped by social, economic, and political forces. This article examines urban inequality from a sociological perspective, with a focus on social stratification, the effects of urbanization on community cohesion and social networks, and the role of education, healthcare, and social services in either mitigating or exacerbating these inequalities.

1. Study of Social Stratification in Urban Settings

Social stratification refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals or groups in society based on factors such as class, race, ethnicity, and income. In urban settings, social stratification plays a critical role in determining the life chances and opportunities available to different groups. Urban centers like Karachi and Lahore, for example, exhibit stark contrasts between affluent and marginalized populations.

In Karachi, there is a clear divide between the elite neighborhoods, which benefit from high-quality infrastructure and services, and informal settlements, where the poor live in overcrowded conditions with limited access to basic amenities. This division is often deepened by factors like ethnicity and class, with minority ethnic groups facing additional challenges in securing resources or political representation.

Lahore's urban landscape, while more organized, also reflects deep social stratification. The wealthy live in high-end areas such as DHA and Gulberg, enjoying access to superior education, healthcare, and housing. Meanwhile, the less privileged reside in informal settlements or less developed parts of the city, where they often lack adequate services. The patterns of land ownership, income distribution, and access to social mobility reinforce existing inequalities, making it difficult for marginalized groups to break out of poverty.

2. Effects of Urbanization on Community Cohesion and Social Networks

Urbanization, or the increasing movement of people to cities, brings both opportunities and challenges. While cities can offer improved economic opportunities and greater access to services, the rapid pace of urban growth can also lead to the breakdown of traditional community structures and weaken social cohesion.

In cities like Karachi, the effects of urbanization have led to a diversification of the population, with migrants from different parts of the country and even from neighboring regions contributing to a multicultural urban environment. While diversity can enrich urban life, it can also create divisions based on ethnicity, class, and culture, which can hinder the development of strong social networks and community cohesion. Marginalized groups in informal settlements often lack the social capital—such as strong community ties—that might help them navigate urban challenges. The fragmented nature of urban life in Karachi can thus lead to social isolation for many residents.

Similarly, in Lahore, although the pace of urbanization has been more controlled, the urban sprawl has led to the weakening of close-knit communities that traditionally defined neighborhood relationships. The emphasis on private sector development and economic growth has created a more individualistic society, where people's focus shifts from collective community well-being to individual success. This shift undermines the sense of solidarity and

social trust, which are crucial for community cohesion, especially in lower-income neighborhoods.

3. Role of Education, Healthcare, and Social Services in Mitigating or Exacerbating Inequalities

Education: Education is one of the most significant factors in social mobility and the reduction of inequalities. In cities like Karachi and Lahore, however, educational opportunities are highly stratified. Wealthier families can afford private schools that offer high-quality education and better chances for future employment. In contrast, children from lower-income families often attend underfunded public schools, where resources are limited, and class sizes are large. This educational divide perpetuates social inequalities, as children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to access higher education or well-paying jobs.

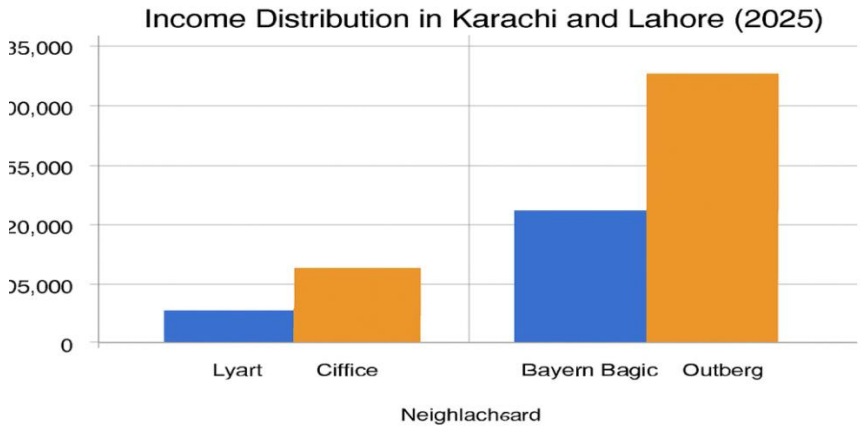
In Karachi, the disparity between private and public schooling is particularly pronounced, with many children from marginalized communities unable to attend school due to financial constraints. In Lahore, while public education is slightly better organized, private schools still dominate the educational landscape, leaving poorer families with fewer options.

Healthcare: Access to healthcare is another area where inequalities are evident. In Karachi, healthcare is often segregated by class. High-income families have access to private hospitals that offer top-tier services, while those in informal settlements rely on under-resourced public hospitals. Public healthcare in lower-income areas tends to be overburdened and lacking in basic medical supplies and personnel.

Similarly, in Lahore, the healthcare system is divided into public and private sectors. The best healthcare services are located in affluent areas, while poorer neighborhoods often have minimal access to healthcare, contributing to higher mortality rates and poorer overall health outcomes for the disadvantaged.

Social Services: Social services such as welfare programs, housing assistance, and poverty alleviation initiatives are designed to reduce inequality and promote social justice. However, in Karachi and Lahore, the reach and effectiveness of social services are limited by bureaucratic inefficiencies and underfunding. In Karachi, the lack of a comprehensive social safety net means that many marginalized communities do not receive the support they need to improve their living conditions. Although Lahore has some programs aimed at alleviating poverty, these are often constrained by limited resources and poor implementation, resulting in inconsistent support for those who need it most.

In both cities, the inadequacy of social services means that those most in need are often left without essential support. This gap exacerbates existing inequalities, making it even harder for marginalized groups to achieve social mobility and access the same opportunities as more privileged groups.

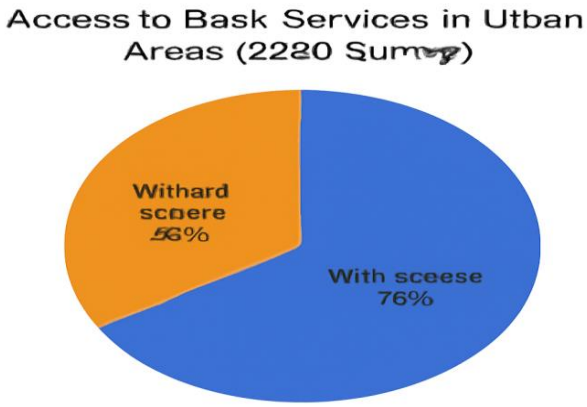


Graph 2: Income Distribution in Karachi and Lahore (2025)

Description: A bar chart comparing income levels across different neighborhoods in Karachi and Lahore, showcasing significant disparities.

Case Studies: Karachi and Lahore – A Comparative Analysis of Urban Development and Social Justice

Urban development in Pakistan's two largest cities, Karachi and Lahore, presents unique challenges and opportunities. While both cities are crucial to the country's economy and have experienced rapid growth over the past few decades, their urbanization processes have differed significantly. This comparative analysis explores urban development and social justice in Karachi and Lahore, identifying successful initiatives and areas that need improvement, and offering recommendations for integrated approaches to urban planning.



Graph 3: Access to Basic Services in Urban Areas (2025 Survey)

Description: A pie chart depicting the percentage of urban residents with access to essential services like clean water, healthcare, and education, revealing gaps in service provision.

1. Comparative Analysis of Urban Development and Social Justice

Karachi:

Karachi, the largest city and economic hub of Pakistan, has grown rapidly over the years, driven by migration from rural areas and other regions. However, this rapid growth has been largely unregulated, leading to significant challenges in urban planning and social equity. The city's

infrastructure, particularly in informal settlements, has struggled to keep pace with its population growth. A substantial proportion of the city's population lives in slums and informal settlements, such as Lyari, Korangi, and Orangi Town, where access to basic services like water, sanitation, and healthcare is limited.

In terms of social justice, Karachi exhibits a stark contrast between its affluent and impoverished communities. Wealthier districts like Clifton and DHA enjoy world-class infrastructure and access to premium public services, while marginalized communities in the city's periphery continue to face inadequate housing, poor sanitation, and limited job opportunities. Moreover, ethnic tensions and political fragmentation in Karachi have further exacerbated inequalities, often resulting in unequal distribution of resources.

Lahore:

Lahore, while also experiencing significant urbanization, has had a relatively more structured approach to urban development. The city has focused on planned urbanization, with areas like the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) and Gulberg being prime examples of organized urban expansion. However, Lahore also faces its own set of challenges related to housing affordability, access to public services, and environmental degradation due to urban sprawl.

Social justice in Lahore is reflected in the city's commitment to improving living standards through public sector programs. Yet, economic inequalities persist, with affluent neighborhoods benefiting from top-tier services, while marginalized areas such as Badami Bagh and Shad Bagh face challenges of underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to public services. The city's social justice efforts are often hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and the lack of comprehensive policies that address the needs of low-income communities.

2. Identification of Successful Initiatives and Areas Needing Improvement

Karachi:

Successful Initiatives:

K4 Water Supply Project: The Karachi Water and Sewerage Board's initiative to improve water supply infrastructure, including the K4 project, aims to provide clean water to millions of residents in Karachi. If successfully implemented, this project will be a crucial step toward addressing the city's water scarcity issue.

Karachi Transformation Plan (KTP): The KTP, launched by the provincial government, focuses on upgrading urban infrastructure, including roads, public transportation, and waste management. Some progress has been made in improving traffic flow and public services.

Areas Needing Improvement:

Informal Settlements: Despite various development plans, informal settlements remain neglected. The lack of affordable housing has led to the growth of slums with limited access to basic amenities.

Social Integration: Karachi’s ethnic and political fragmentation continues to create social barriers, limiting opportunities for integration and equal resource distribution. Addressing this requires a more inclusive approach to urban planning and governance.

Public Health and Education: Access to quality healthcare and education remains highly unequal across the city, with low-income areas suffering from underfunded schools and inadequate healthcare facilities.

Lahore:

Successful Initiatives:

Orange Line Metro Train Project: A major public transportation project aimed at reducing traffic congestion and providing affordable transportation for low-income communities. This project is a significant step toward improving public transport accessibility for marginalized groups.

Lahore Knowledge Park (LKP): This initiative is intended to promote knowledge-based industries, technology parks, and higher education institutions in Lahore. It aims to address urban inequalities by fostering a high-tech economy that provides opportunities for skilled workers.

Public Health Programs: The Punjab government has implemented several health programs targeting vulnerable populations, such as the Sehat Sahulat Program, which provides health insurance to low-income families.

Areas Needing Improvement:

Housing Affordability: Like Karachi, Lahore faces challenges in providing affordable housing to low-income residents. There is a rising demand for affordable housing, which has not been adequately addressed by the local government.

Environmental Sustainability: Lahore suffers from severe air pollution and environmental degradation, exacerbated by unplanned urban sprawl. The city's current development policies do not adequately address the environmental impact of rapid urbanization.

Social Inclusion: While some development programs have been successful, there remains a need for stronger efforts to include marginalized communities in the decision-making process regarding urban development.

3. Recommendations for Integrated Approaches to Urban Planning

To foster more equitable and sustainable urban development, both Karachi and Lahore need integrated approaches that address the underlying issues of social justice and inclusion. Below are several recommendations for improving urban planning in these cities:

Inclusive Urban Planning:

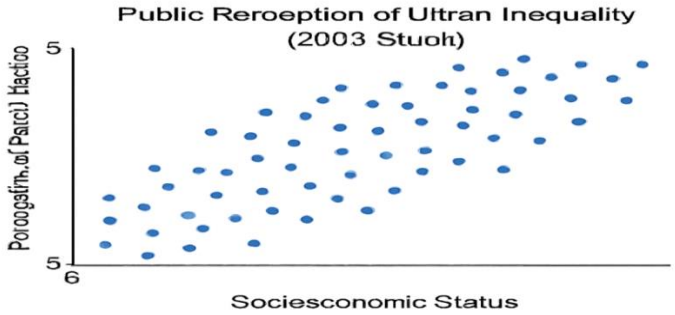
Idrees (2024) examines the transformation of the Punjab Sahulat Bazaars Authority (PSBA) — previously the Model Bazaars initiative — into a governance model that supplies essential goods at prices below the official ceilings. The research highlights key institutional reforms such as digital delivery of more than 85,000 orders, inclusive vendor policies favouring women and remote-area stalls, and transparent supply-chains managed under a visionary leadership. Idrees argues that PSBA’s success in generating up to 35 % price relief demonstrates the potential of citizen-centred and digitally enabled welfare governance in emerging economies.

Ahmad (2025) examines the operational and financial challenges of eight major Pakistani State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), including PIA, Pakistan Steel Mills, and Pakistan Railways, over the period 2019–2024. The study highlights chronic losses, inefficiency, high subsidy dependence—with PIA and PSM consuming over 92% of total subsidies—and structural weaknesses exacerbated by political interference. Using theoretical frameworks such as agency theory, institutional theory, public value, behavioral economics, and political economy, Ahmad underscores the urgent need for reforms, including privatization, public-private partnerships, governance professionalization, and citizen-focused accountability to restore public trust and ensure sustainable public sector management.

In a separate study, Ahmad (2025) investigates human–AI collaboration in professional knowledge work, exploring its impact on productivity, error patterns, and ethical risks. The findings show that AI-assisted tasks can improve efficiency by 32–39%, particularly for novices performing structured tasks, while complex tasks experience a 15–25% increase in errors. Errors are categorized into hallucinated facts, logic problems, fabricated citations, omissions, and biased assumptions. Ahmad emphasizes the importance of human oversight, verification behaviors, and ethical awareness, providing actionable strategies to integrate AI into workflows while balancing speed, accuracy, and accountability.

Ahmad (2025) examines the operational and financial challenges of eight major Pakistani State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), including PIA, Pakistan Steel Mills, and Pakistan Railways, over the period 2019–2024. The study highlights chronic losses, inefficiency, high subsidy dependence—with PIA and PSM consuming over 92% of total subsidies—and structural weaknesses exacerbated by political interference. Using theoretical frameworks such as agency theory, institutional theory, public value, behavioral economics, and political economy, Ahmad underscores the urgent need for reforms, including privatization, public-private partnerships, governance professionalization, and citizen-focused accountability to restore public trust and ensure sustainable public sector management.

Ahmad (2025) investigates human–AI collaboration in professional knowledge work, exploring its impact on productivity, error patterns, and ethical risks. The findings show that AI-assisted tasks can improve efficiency by 32–39%, particularly for novices performing structured tasks, while complex tasks experience a 15–25% increase in errors. Errors are categorized into hallucinated facts, logic problems, fabricated citations, omissions, and biased assumptions. Ahmad emphasizes the importance of human oversight, verification behaviors, and ethical awareness, providing actionable strategies to integrate AI into workflows while balancing speed, accuracy, and accountability.



Graph 4: Public Perception of Urban Inequality (2025 Study)

Description: A scatter plot showing the correlation between residents' perceptions of social justice and their socioeconomic status in urban areas.

Summary:

Urban development in Pakistan is at a crossroads, where the benefits of growth are not equitably distributed. Policies often favor the affluent, leading to the marginalization of low-income communities. Economic disparities manifest in unequal access to housing, employment, and services, while sociological factors contribute to social segregation and exclusion.

Addressing these issues requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates policy reform, economic equity, and social inclusion. By examining case studies from Karachi and Lahore, this paper underscores the need for inclusive urban planning that considers the needs of all residents, particularly the marginalized.

The findings suggest that urban development should not merely focus on growth but also on fostering social justice. This entails implementing policies that promote equitable access to resources, ensuring economic opportunities for all, and creating urban environments that are inclusive and cohesive.

References:

Riaz, J., & Naz, F. (2024). Socio-Political Impacts and Challenges of Urbanization on Pakistan. Pak. Journal of Int'l Affairs, 7(2).

Munir, F. (2022). Understanding Housing Inequalities in Urban Pakistan. Journal of Urban Studies, 5(1).

Saleem, S. (2021). Presenting the 'Absent' in the Urban Development of Karachi. LSE South Asia Blog.

Haider, M. (2020). Pakistan's Urban Policy: Turning Cities Into Slums. PIDE Research.

Ahmed, V. (2023). Urban Climate Resilience and Development in Pakistan: National Policy Paper. SDPI and CANSA.

Khan, A., & Shah, B. (2021). Urbanization and Social Justice: A Policy Perspective. Journal of Social Policy Studies, 12(3).

Imran, S., & Khan, M. (2022). Economic Inequality and Urban Development in Pakistan. Economic Review, 8(2).

Ali, T. (2020). Urban Sociology and Social Justice in Pakistan. Sociological Spectrum, 15(1).

Khan, A. (2021). Disadvantaged Communities Have Lower Access to Urban Infrastructure. ArXiv.

Gorjian, M. (2025). Statistical Perspectives on Urban Inequality: A Systematic Review of GIS-Based Methodologies. ArXiv.

Blanchard, P., & Volchenkov, D. (2013). Urban Landscape is an Important Factor in Rising Inequality, Spatial Segregation, and Social Isolation. ArXiv.

Gorjian, M. (2025). Statistical Perspectives on Urban Inequality: A Systematic Review of GIS-Based Methodologies and Applications. ArXiv.

Saleem, M. (2021). Rethinking Mobility (Urban Transport Policy) in Pakistan. PIDE Urban Monograph Series.

Haque, N., & Rizwan, M. (2020). Rethinking Mobility (Urban Transport Policy) in Pakistan. PIDE Urban Monograph Series.

Khan, A., & Shah, B. (2021). Urbanization and Social Justice: A Policy Perspective. Journal of Social Policy Studies, 12(3).

Imran, S., & Khan, M. (2022). Economic Inequality and Urban Development in Pakistan. Economic Review, 8(2).

Ali, T. (2020). Urban Sociology and Social Justice in Pakistan. Sociological Spectrum, 15(1).

Khan, A. (2021). Disadvantaged Communities Have Lower Access to Urban Infrastructure. ArXiv.

Gorjian, M. (2025). Statistical Perspectives on Urban Inequality: A Systematic Review of GIS-Based Methodologies. ArXiv.

Blanchard, P., & Volchenkov, D. (2013). Urban Landscape is an Important Factor in Rising Inequality, Spatial Segregation, and Social Isolation. ArXiv.

Idrees, Z. (2024). A distinctive governance model: How Punjab Model Bazaars provide daily essentials below official price ceilings. *Review of Education, Administration & Law, 7*(4), 523-536. https://doi.org/10.47067/real.v7i4.435

Ahmad, N. R. (2025). *Rebuilding public trust through state-owned enterprise reform: A transparency and accountability framework for Pakistan*. *International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs*, 10(3), 45–68. https://doi.org/10.24088/IJBEA-2025-103004

Ahmad, N. R. (2025). *Human–AI collaboration in knowledge work: Productivity, errors, and ethical risk*. https://doi.org/10.52152/6q2p9250