

## **URC Work, vision and impact**

### **A. Growth and Development**

The Urban Resource Centre (URC) was set up in early 1989 at the Department of Architecture and Planning of the Dawood College in Karachi. The objective of the Centre was to collect all available material on Karachi and update it through newspaper clipping and analysis. After a few months of its setting up, the URC became an independent registered organization and its governing body expanded to include urban planning related professionals, representatives of NGOs and community organizations from low and lower income areas, and activists from the Orangi Pilot Project-Research & Training Institute (OPP-RTI). The direction of the Centre also changed. The new members felt that Karachi's official development plans ignored the larger socio-economic reality of the city and as such were unworkable and environmentally disastrous. They further felt that workable alternatives were required and these were possible only with the involvement of informed communities and interest groups.

To promote its objectives the URC identifies the actors and factors that are involved in shaping Karachi's development along with their relationships with each other and with relevant state agencies. In addition, it carries out research on all proposed major urban development projects and analyses them from the point of view of communities and interest groups. This research and its documentation is developed through case studies; profiles of formal and informal organizations and individuals; and by holding forums on different subjects in which the various interest groups (communities, informal service providers, government agencies, political parties) participate. These forums are documented and their results disseminated. This interaction has generated debate and discussion in the press about subjects not discussed before, and brought about substantial changes in how problems and planning are viewed by government agencies and different stakeholders. Almost all the questions on the appropriateness, environmental issues, costs (social and economic) and alternatives that are taking place in Karachi today are the result of the work of the URC.

Through this process the URC has managed to create a space for interaction between poor communities, NGOs, private (formal and informal) sector interest groups, academic institutions and government agencies. The URC feels that this space needs to be nurtured and institutionalized and this is its main objective.

The URC keeps subject wise news clippings on various social and physical issues related to Karachi and prepares folios on them. On the basis of these folios it publishes a monthly newsletter, both in English and Urdu. This newsletter is called "Facts & Figures". Through this process interest groups are identified and contacted and so are government plans, their authors and financing agencies. Forums are then arranged in which all the actors participate. The forums are transcribed and published and the media pick them up. Alternatives to insensitive plans are prepared and presented to communities and interest groups. This is followed by lobbying for alternatives.

The URC had an impact on many Karachi projects and on how development is now viewed in the city. A few examples of this are given below.

1. The Karachi Mass Transit Project (KMTP) consisting of elevated bus ways through the centre of Karachi's historic district was to be constructed at a cost of US\$ 665 million. The URC pointed out the environmental degradation that this would cause along with the damage to Karachi's historic buildings. Cheaper and more environmentally friendly alternatives were developed by the URC and presented to politicians, bureaucrats, communities living along with proposed transit ways and professional institutions. Major changes have taken place in the design of the Project as a result and the press and citizens are better informed of city planning issues. The debate is still continuing and the government seems to be on the verges of accepting the URC railway alternative which is

half the cost of the elevated transit ways does not damage historic Karachi, and serves more than five times the population.

2. The Lyari Expressway was to be built along the Lyari river which passes through the center of the city. The Expressway was going to destroy 25,400 homes, businesses, schools, community facilities and also caused large scale environmental degradation to the old settlements it was going to pass through. It was also going to adversely effect the education of over 15,000 school going children. The URC prepared a detailed analysis of the social and environmental damage the Project would cause and presented alternatives. This analysis was made available to 46 Lyari community organizations who used it to lobby with their political representatives against the Project. The URC meanwhile, disseminated its findings to the press and media. URC also initiated a national and international letter writing campaign against this project, which forced government to come up with a proper resettlement plan for the effected communities.
3. Karachi's 2,000 intra-city and inter city buses do not have terminals, workshops or depots. They use the roads for these purposes and as a result, there is slarge scale environmental degradation and traffic congestion in important areas of the city. URC's research, negotiations with and support to the Karachi transporters has helped them in establishing a more equitable relationship with state organizations. This has helped in identifying 32 sites for bus terminals, workshops and depots on which construction work has begun. In addition, URC has undertaken a major study on transportation to ascertain the view of interest groups and commuters and arrange for an interaction between these views, the transport industry and relevant government agencies.
4. URC's research on the failure of Karachi Solid Waste Management Programme identified that without the participation of the immense solid waste recycling industry no effective solid waste management was possible. URC arranged an interaction between informal garbage collectors and their transporters, garbage recyclers and representatives of state agencies. As a result, the government is now in favour of establishing a "garbage city" as proposed by the URC. In addition, a whole new world of trade and commerce and its actors and potential has been identified for the benefit of the city.
5. Through forums, problems (and their micro and macro level causes) of flat owners, scavengers, theatre groups, commuters, residents of the historic districts of Karachi, working women, wholesale markets, transporters and others, have been identified and documented along with their activists and interest groups. This knowledge has been disseminated and these groups have also been put in touch with each other and with relevant resource persons and professionals. The result has not only been the beginnings of an involvement of communities and interest groups in the planning process but also an increase in the awareness of planning related issues in society as a whole. Many of these groups have used the URC material for lobbying purposes or for improving their conditions.
6. The URC documents and analyses the causes for all evictions and demolitions of informal settlements in Karachi. Its work has clearly established that many of these demolitions and evictions are basically illegal and are the result of a powerful developer-bureaucrats-politician nexus or take place because of badly conceived development projects and incomplete legislation. Because of URC's work evictions and their causes are now publicized and many evictions have been prevented.
7. URC, through its forums, research and analysis, and pushed for reform in the planning process in Karachi. This includes: i) listing of land assets and their publication by all government land owning agencies; ii) publication of all plans at their conceptual stage (along with costs) and the creation of an interest group steering committee to oversee their detailing and construction; and iii) no changes in land use without public hearings.

These proposals have now become points of discussion in the media and government organizations.

8. URC's professional support has helped many communities, NGOs and CBOs. For instance the Lyari communities were worried about the deteriorating environmental conditions in their area. The URC pointed out that this was due to warehousing in their areas. The warehousing was documented and negotiations for its relocation are now in progress. Plans for using the vacated space for community purposes are being considered. Similarly, an all Pakistan women's organization, Aurat Foundation, is part of a World Bank supported consultation programme on transportation. The Aurat Foundation representatives seek the advice of and support from the URC. Again, the OPP-RTI has sought the services of the URC for bringing together Karachi interest groups and communities to promote and lobby for the implementation of the OPP-RTI's least cost community supported sewage option for Karachi's Korangi area. As a result, Karachites of various classes now know the causes of their sewage problems.
9. The URC has also created a cell known as the Urban Working Group. This cell consists of professionals, university representatives and low income community activists. The cell organizes lectures on the findings of the URC, urban economics and politics, national and local development issues and the problems of cities in general and Karachi in particular. These lectures are given by prominent people in the fields and over 100 community organizations, NGOs and government functionaries are invited to them. Now URC with the collaboration of Daily Jang holds joint forum on issues which needs mass publicity in press. On the basis of URC's experiences the department of Architecture and planning NED University is holding forums for students on urban issues. Besides this OPP-RTI is also holding forums on macro urban issues for its community members.
10. The URC library has over 2,500 books, research papers, magazines and newsletters on Karachi. It is visited by national and foreign researchers, students, journalists, community activists, training groups and university teachers. The most of URC current activities and information on city is now being posted regularly on URC' WEB SITE.

URC has a five member full time staff (coordinator-architect, social organizer, administrator, documentation in charge And computer operator). In addition, it gives one-year fellowships to young university graduates and community activists who help it in research, documentation and interaction with communities and interest groups. Some fellows stay on for over a year and those who leave usually join development NGOs or government planning and research institutions. As a result the URC is developing a very close link with relevant university departments whose students and professors visit its library regularly and participate in its forums. A number of the programmes and projects of these university departments are related to URC work. Through these fellowships the URC seeks to broaden its base in society as a whole. At present it has 6 fellows work with it.

There are major differences of opinion between government planners and the URC regarding Karachi's present and future plans. However, because of URC's work and the support it receives from Karachi citizens, the state has started to increasingly seek its opinion. This is evident from the fact that in the last one year the URC chairman has been made a member of the boards of Karachi Development Authority, the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board, the Karachi Metropolitan Transport Authority, the Karachi Public Transport Society and the Sindh Heritage Cultural Committee. The URC chairman, coordinator, present research consultant and a number of the board members are architects.

URC's annual budget is only Rs 1.9 million provided by Civil Society HID Program (a Swiss NGO Project), Misereor (a German funding agency) and CORD AID (a Netherlands based donor)

### C. Vision and Goal

In the whole planning process anywhere in the world there are three players; the politicians, the planners and the people. What happens in all countries like ours is that politicians and planners get together. They give a plan to their people. The bigger this zone of interaction, the farther is this distance. Now in this form of planning there is no input from people at all. These two groups get together, plan and implement it. What is required is that the politicians, planners and people come together. What we need to do is that to create this space. The creation of this space is important. The purpose of URC is to create this space. Make it, nurture it and institutionalise it. This is what is required but this space can only be used properly if these three are treated equally. As people are weaker they need support. They need professional support, they need managerial guidance, they need alternatives so that they can negotiate with the politicians and planners. Basically in a nutshell what URC is doing to create this space. This is basically all the URC is about. It is nothing else.

Figure 1:

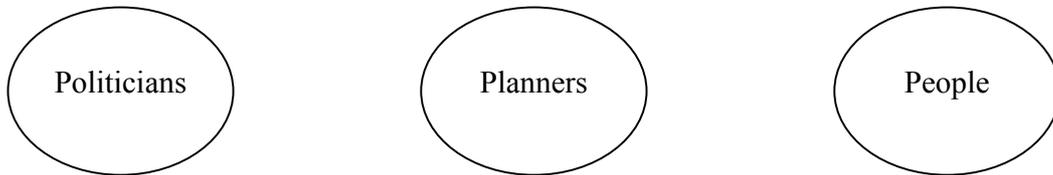
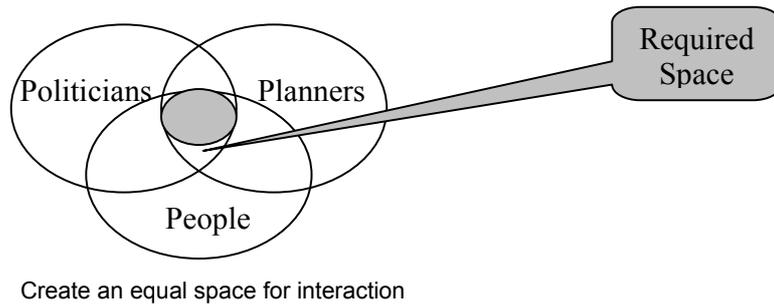


Figure 2:



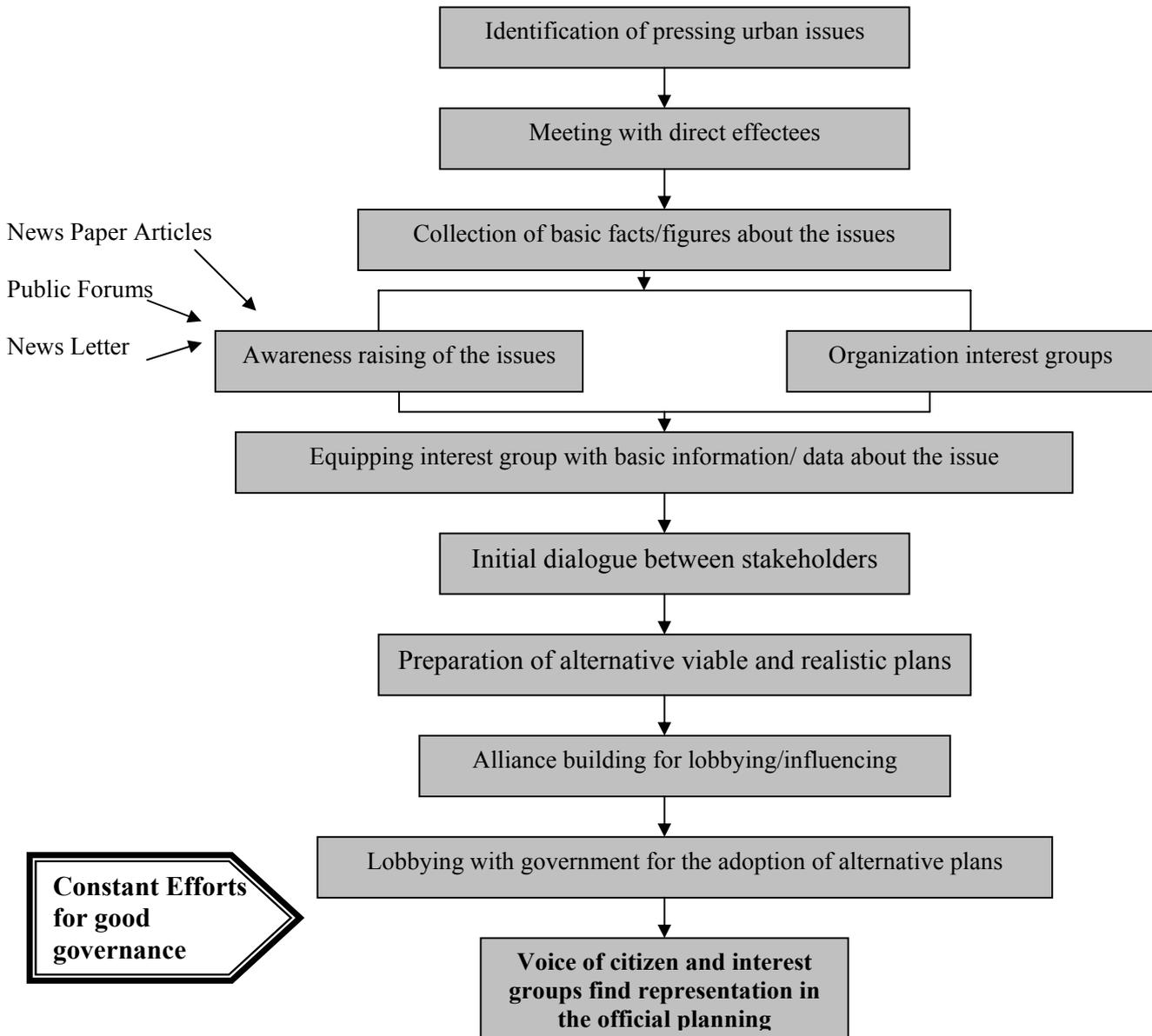
Figure 3:



## **B. Sustainability and extension**

1. Government planners and their national and international consultants are not aware of how a Third World City really functions. The URC's work, by identifying informal actors and factors and their interests, creates a new understanding regarding the city and forces it to be considered by planners
2. In the planning of cities and their expansion, the point of view of interest groups and local communities (especially poor ones) is not taken into consideration. URC's work links up the plans prepared by government agencies and consultants to interest groups and communities.
3. Poor communities, and even powerful interest groups, do not have access to professional advice. Once this advice is made available, their relationship with government organizations and the formal private sector becomes more equitable. This promotes development that is rooted in reality and is more sustainable. The URC provides such advice to communities and interest groups and helps in its articulation.
4. Professional and university education in Pakistan as in other Third World countries, seldom takes the grass root reality of the city and society into consideration. Through the URC, university department and professional colleges have access to problem areas of the city, its inhabitants, leaders and interest groups.
5. Numerous Asian NGOs and academic institutions have realized the need for an Urban Resource Centre. In Pakistan the Punjab Urban Resource Centre is recently established (and is functioning in Lahore and Multan). Similar centres have been established in Cambodia, Colombo, cap town and Kathmandu. The originators and staff of these centres have received their training at the Karachi URC.
6. URC's work and its extension is creating a data base of "the other Karachi" and linking it with officialdom and the elite. As such, it is creating awareness and a culture of dialogue, understanding and tolerance and above all of equal development. The real objective of the URC is to create, nurture and institutionalize a space where politicians, planners and bureaucrats, and people (community organizations and formal and informal interest groups) can interact.

#### D. Stepwise Approach for Ensuring Citizen Participation in the Planning Process



## **E. Publications/Documentation**

1. Newsletter: Facts and Figures, 120 issues since 1992.
2. Evictions, a detail publication with case studies edited by Aqeela Ismail
3. Solid waste Management a detail publication on informal waste collection and recycling industry of Karachi edited by Aqeela Ismail
4. Six volumes of unpublished transcribed proceedings of URC Forums
5. How Communities Organised Themselves by Kenneth Fernandes, 1997 (City Press Karachi)
6. Understanding Karachi by Arif Hasan, 2000 (City Press Karachi)
7. Community Initiatives: Four Case Studies from Karachi:1998 (City Press Karachi)
8. Urban Watch Series publication, published number of booklets and leaflets on urban issues.
9. To improve access and quality of urban transport for urban poor. A case study of Karachi, this research was done by URC and published by Water Engineering and Development Centre at Loughborough University in UK in 2000.
10. A paper on prepared by URC on Urban Poverty and Transport a case from Karachi was published in IIED UK Journal on Environment and Urbanization April 2001 on 'rethinking Aid to Urban Poverty Reduction'
11. 167 folios of Newspaper Clippings on Solid Waste Management; Karachi Metropolitan Corporation; Electricity Supply in Karachi; Water Supply Systems in Karachi; Karachi Sewerage System; Karachi's Environment, Health, Education, Housing and Land Management in Karachi; Karachi Transport and Traffic Management, 170 volummes
12. Case studies (unpublished) prepared by URC fellows on Tongas (animal draw carts) in Karachi; Community Struggle to Develop Manzoor Colony Creek; Case Study on Eviction; Informal Waste Collection and Recycling; Case Study on Liaquat Colony; Technical Support to Schools in Orangi Area, and many others. Lyari Expressway
13. A review of Young Professional and Para-Professional Training Units in Karachi (unpublished) by Asiya Sadiq, 2000.
14. 40 quarterly reports
15. Numerous newspaper articles and reports have been published by the press in Karachi using URC's unpublished material. This material has also been used for television programmes which have highlighted community and interest-group concerns and URC alternatives.
16. Complete documentation on Saddar (traffic, transport and hawkers surveys), Lea Market and Patel Para
17. A research study on "the role of urban women in the development of settlements" by Nora Fernandez and Rehana Rahi in 1995.
18. A pre-feasibility report on solid waste management in Karachi, a cost effective proposal prepared by URC in 2001 to resolve waste management in Karachi and improve working conditions of informal sector waste picking and recycling.