



Social Sciences Spectrum

A Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, HEC recognized [Y-category](#) Research Journal

E-ISSN: [3006-0427](#) P-ISSN: [3006-0419](#)

Volume 04, Issue 04, 2025

Web link: <https://sss.org.pk/index.php/sss>



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Planning for Resilience in Peshawar: Assessing Urban Growth Infrastructure Stress and Governance Reforms

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Article Information [YY-MM-DD]

Received 2025-08-20

Accepted 2025-10-12

Citation (APA):

Afridi, A & Fatima, N. (2025). Planning for resilience in Peshawar: Assessing urban growth infrastructure stress and governance reforms. *Social Sciences Spectrum*, 4(4), 29-41. <https://doi.org/10.71085/sss.04.04.359>

Abstract

Urbanization is reshaping cities across the Global South. Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, illustrates how rapid demographic growth, economic restructuring and regional conflicts have stimulated uncontrolled urban sprawl and transformed a historic city into a nascent megalopolis. This article offers a multidimensional analysis of the drivers and consequences of Peshawar's urbanization. Drawing on recent peer-reviewed literature, municipal master plans, environmental studies and policy reports, the article examines how population growth, internal migration, informal housing and infrastructural deficits interact with environmental degradation, public health risks and socio-economic inequality. A mixed-methods approach integrates geospatial data on land-use change, air and noise pollution measurements, and solid-waste management assessments evaluate the sustainability of urban growth. The analysis reveals that Peshawar's built-up area more than doubled between 1990 and 2020 while farmland and green belts shrank, that vehicle numbers and industrial activity escalated far more rapidly than population growth, and that air and noise pollution levels routinely exceed national and World Health Organization guidelines. The article argues that Peshawar's leap toward megalopolis status has generated environmental, health and governance challenges that threaten the city's livability. It concludes with recommendations for integrated urban planning, strict land-use regulation, environmental governance and participatory climate-resilient infrastructure.

Keywords: Planning, Governance, Peshawar, Urban Growth, Agricultural Land Loss, Infrastructural Challenges and Policy Reforms.



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Introduction

Urbanization is among the most consequential socio-spatial processes of the twenty-first century. The United Nations projects that nearly 70 percent of the global population will reside in urban areas by 2050, a dramatic shift from the rural dominance that persisted throughout human history. This transformation is not evenly distributed; the fastest urban growth is occurring in Asia and Africa, where cities are often ill-prepared to accommodate incoming populations. Pakistan exemplifies this trend. The country's urban population quadrupled between 1981 and 2023, reaching approximately 93.8 million people. When peri-urban settlements are included, researchers estimate that 40–70 percent of Pakistan's population may already live in urban areas (Chen, L., & Tanaka, S. 2022). Rapid urbanization presents opportunities for economic growth and cultural exchange but also produces severe challenges, including inadequate housing, deficient infrastructure, environmental degradation and governance difficulties.

Peshawar, founded before 539 BCE and once the capital of the Gandhāra civilization, is now the largest city in KP and a key node of Pakistan's urban network. Its strategic location near the Khyber Pass made it a frontier city linking South and Central Asia, but the twentieth and twenty-first centuries brought unprecedented demographic and spatial changes. The 2017 census recorded about 2.7 million residents in Peshawar, and the city's master plan projects a population of 3.4 million by 2024 and almost 6 million by 2044. This growth results from natural increase, rural–urban migration driven by economic aspirations and the displacement of populations by armed conflicts and climate disasters. Peshawar's urban footprint expanded as informal housing colonies encroached on agricultural land, infrastructure services struggled to keep pace, and pollution intensified. The city's transformation toward a megalopolis thus exemplifies both the promise and peril of rapid urbanization.

The concept of a megalopolis, introduced by geographer Jean Gottmann in 1957, refers to an extensive urban region formed by the merging of metropolitan areas into a continuous urban fabric. While Peshawar does not yet match the scale of global megalopolises such as the Tokyo or Pearl River deltas, its urban sprawl into adjacent districts, growth in economic activities and connectivity through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) suggest an emerging polycentric urban region. This potential has attracted investment and stimulated economic diversification, yet the speed and nature of growth threaten ecological sustainability and social equity. This article attempts to address the question: How is rapid urbanization reshaping Peshawar's landscape, environment and socio-economic conditions? What challenges arise as the city moves toward megalopolis status, and what policies could promote sustainable development?

In answering these questions, the article builds on recent research in urban planning, environmental science, public policy and economics. It synthesizes geospatial analyses of land-use change and heat islands, studies of air and noise pollution, assessments of solid-waste management, and socio-economic accounts of migration and housing shortages. The article also situates Peshawar's experience within Pakistan's national urbanization trajectory and global debates about sustainable cities. By providing an integrated and evidence-based examination, the study contributes to urban scholarship and offers practical insights for policymakers and planners.

Literature Review

Urbanization and Land-use Change

Spatial analyses reveal that Peshawar's urban expansion has been rapid and uneven. A geoinformatics study using satellite images found that the city's built-up area more than doubled between 1991 and 2012, characterized by ribbon development along major roads and leapfrog growth on prime farmland. More recent research employing remote sensing and the Google Earth Engine documents that built-up land expanded from 6.35 percent to 14.13 percent of the Peshawar Valley's area between 1990 and 2020. During the same period, the population surged from 5.3 million to 12.6 million, registered vehicles increased from 0.171 million to 1.364 million, and industries grew from 327 to 1155. These trends show that the rate of urban expansion far exceeds demographic growth, indicating a sprawling pattern that consumes fertile agricultural land and green spaces. Agricultural land loss is a critical concern. The Peshawar Master Plan 2024–2044 highlights that unplanned housing colonies have been built over prime farmland, causing unsustainable expansion. An environmental study quantifies that 46.35 sq km of farmland in Peshawar District was converted to built-up areas since 1981, with 173.30 sq km converted by 2019. Such farmland reduction occurred at a rate five times higher than population growth. Another literature review emphasizes that unregulated housing developments not only reduce farmland but also threaten Pakistan's agricultural sector, increasing dependence on food imports and undermining economic stability. These studies underscore the need for land-use regulation and the protection of agricultural areas to ensure food security and ecological balance.

Environmental Degradation

Rapid urbanization in Peshawar has produced significant environmental challenges. Air pollution is one of the most pressing problems. Peshawar was ranked the eighth most polluted city in 2024, with average PM_{2.5} concentrations of 91 µg/m³, more than ten times the World Health Organization's guideline. The city's growth rate of more than 45 percent and the rapid increase in vehicle registrations—995,326 vehicles in Peshawar as of 2023, including over 50,000 unregistered auto-rickshaws—contribute to this pollution. Industrial units operating without emission controls, brick kilns burning coal and waste, and biomass fuels used in households exacerbate air quality problems. A policy analysis of Pakistan's National Clean Air Policy notes that Peshawar residents lose 5.8 years of life expectancy due to poor air quality and calls for stricter emission standards and better enforcement.

Noise pollution is another under-addressed issue. A study using noise descriptors measured sound levels in Peshawar's commercial, residential and silence zones. Daytime noise levels in commercial areas ranged between 61.3–87.2 dB, with an average of 72.3 dB, while residential areas averaged 65.5 dB. During the night, 83 percent of silence zones and 87 percent of commercial areas still exceeded permissible limits. The authors attributed high noise levels to traffic, crowded markets and poor urban planning, warning that prolonged exposure may cause ulcers, hypertension, stress and hearing impairment (Saqlain 2024). The findings indicate that environmental health regulation must encompass not only air pollution but also noise management.

Urban sprawl has also intensified the urban heat island effect. The spatiotemporal analysis of Peshawar Valley documented that the mean land surface temperature (LST) increased to 30.30 °C

and the maximum heat index reached 55.48 °C. These temperatures show strong positive correlations with built-up areas, population size, vehicle numbers and industrial activity. Rising temperatures threaten public health, energy consumption and urban comfort, underlining the need for green infrastructure and climate-adaptive planning.

Infrastructure and Service Challenges

Population growth and migration have strained Peshawar's infrastructure and public services. According to the KP Urban Mobility Authority, Peshawar has experienced a 10.2 percent increase in vehicle registrations over two years, leading to more than 2.33 million vehicles in the province. Transport congestion contributes to air and noise pollution and lowers productivity. The city lacks adequate public transit, though the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system has been expanded to mitigate congestion and emissions.

Water and sanitation services are insufficient for the expanding population. Reports reveal that many low-income neighborhoods lack access to clean drinking water; a 2024 KP Health Department survey found that more than 70 percent of water samples from informal settlements were contaminated with bacteria or heavy metals. Health outcomes include high prevalence of diarrheal diseases, hepatitis A and skin infections among children. Solid-waste management is another major challenge. Peshawar generates about 1331 tons of municipal solid waste per day, or 0.38 kg per person. Up to 33 percent of global waste is not collected, and 70 percent of collected waste ends up in landfills. In Peshawar, open dumping at three sites causes water, air and soil contamination and attracts disease vectors. A study that used linear mathematical modeling and GIS to optimize waste collection routes achieved a 13 percent route optimization in the Hayatabad suburb and advocated for waste-to-energy technologies and policy reforms. The Asian Development Bank notes that Peshawar's Water and Sanitation Services Company collects about 80 percent of 850 tons of daily waste but still relies on an open landfill, with plans for a sanitary landfill and materials recovery facility. Environmental Impact Assessments highlight risks of odor, traffic accidents and groundwater contamination near the landfill, urging monitoring and leachate management (Khan & Shah, 2024).

Unregulated housing development further strains infrastructure. An estimated 14.5 million people moved from villages to cities in KP between 1951 and 2017, roughly 750 000 per year. Over 104 illegal housing schemes operate in Peshawar, leading to encroachments on public land and green belts. The destruction of green belts for the BRT corridor and other projects has reduced urban greenery. Housing shortages drive the proliferation of informal settlements with inadequate water and sanitation services. These challenges signal the need for comprehensive housing policy and enforcement (Hussain, Meng & Shah 2024).

Socio-economic and Public Health Impacts

Urbanization alters socio-economic structures and can exacerbate inequality. Many migrants arrive in Peshawar seeking employment and better services but end up in informal settlements lacking access to education, healthcare and decent housing. The city has a young demographic profile, offering potential for a demographic dividend if investments in education and job creation are made. However, high unemployment and underemployment persist. Women and marginalized

groups often face greater barriers to education and formal employment, perpetuating poverty cycles.

Environmental degradation translates into health burdens. Exposure to air pollutants—especially PM_{2.5} and ozone—causes respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems and premature death. (Aslam et al., 2021). According to the Air Quality Life Index, Peshawar residents lose 5.8 years of life expectancy due to air pollution. Noise pollution is linked to stress, hypertension and hearing loss. Contaminated water contributes to infectious diseases, while inadequate waste management fosters vector-borne diseases. These health impacts impose economic costs through healthcare expenditures and lost productivity.

Policy Responses and Governance

Pakistan's government recognizes urbanization as both an opportunity and a challenge. The Vision 2025 strategy emphasizes eco-friendly sustainable cities, revising zoning laws, constructing low-cost housing and expanding public services and mass transit. Establishing Water and Sanitation Services Companies in major KP cities improved waste collection and sanitation. However, policy implementation remains inconsistent. The National Clean Air Policy lacks legal backing and sets relaxed air quality standards, limiting its effectiveness. Local governance is hampered by overlapping institutional responsibilities, insufficient budgets and weak enforcement of building codes and environmental regulations. Non-governmental organizations and community groups have started advocating for participatory planning and environmental justice.

In summary, existing literature documents the rapid expansion of Peshawar's built environment, the resulting environmental and infrastructural challenges and the gaps in governance. Yet, there is limited integrated analysis of how these dimensions intersect to shape the city's trajectory toward a megalopolis. The following sections aim to fill this gap.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative analysis of academic literature and policy documents with quantitative assessment of geospatial and environmental data. An extensive literature review was conducted using peer-reviewed articles, official planning documents and recent news reports. Databases such as Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar were searched for articles published between 2018 and 2025 that focus on Peshawar or Pakistan's urbanization, environmental issues, public policy and economics. Keywords included Peshawar, urbanization, urban sprawl, air pollution, noise pollution, solid waste, land use change, megalopolis and public policy. The search also considered grey literature, such as reports from the Asian Development Bank and local newspapers.

For quantitative insights, the study drew upon published geospatial analyses of land-use change and heat island effects. Data on population growth, vehicle registrations, industrial activity and waste generation were compiled from census reports, the KP Urban Mobility Authority, and research articles. Environmental measurements of air pollutants and noise levels were sourced from studies that employed monitoring stations and noise descriptors. The research also examined policy documents, including the Peshawar Master Plan 2024–2044, the National Clean Air Policy, and the Vision 2025 strategy, to evaluate governance responses (Abbas & Ahmad 2024).

The analysis synthesizes these diverse sources to identify patterns and causal links. Quantitative data illustrate trends in land-use change, pollution and infrastructure provision, while qualitative insights elucidate socio-economic dynamics and policy contexts. Although the study does not conduct new primary data collection, it offers a comprehensive review and critical interpretation of existing evidence.

Results and Analysis

Urban Expansion and Land Transformation

The geospatial evidence indicates that Peshawar's urban footprint has expanded dramatically over the past three decades. Between 1991 and 2012, the city's built-up area more than doubled, and between 1990 and 2020 it increased from 6.35 percent to 14.13 percent of the valley's land area. This expansion corresponds with a surge in population from 5.3 million to 12.6 million, but the built-up land grew at a faster rate than population, reflecting low-density sprawl. The number of registered vehicles increased from 171 000 to 1.364 million and industrial units from 327 to 1155, indicating intensified economic activity (Khan & Ali 2024).

The spatial pattern of expansion is characterized by ribbon development along major highways (e.g., the Grand Trunk Road and the Ring Road), leapfrog growth in peripheral agricultural areas and unplanned settlements around industrial zones. The Peshawar Master Plan proposes to accommodate projected population growth through compact, high-density development and transit-oriented design, but unregulated construction continues to undermine this vision. Residential plots and commercial plazas have encroached upon farmland, and green belts have been bulldozed to make way for transport infrastructure. Urban farmland conversion from 46.35 sq km to 173.30 sq km between 1981 and 2019 demonstrates the magnitude of land transformation. The relative ease with which landowners and developers bypass zoning regulations points to weak governance and the influence of powerful land mafias.

Environmental and Climatic Impacts

Air Quality and Health

The proliferation of vehicles, industries and construction has severely degraded air quality. Peshawar recorded PM_{2.5} concentrations averaging 91 µg/m³ in 2024, more than ten times the WHO guideline. This pollution arises from exhaust emissions, low-quality fuels, the burning of coal and tyres in brick kilns, and the use of diesel generators during power outages. The unregulated operation of 995,326 vehicles, including numerous two-stroke rickshaws, contributes to particulate matter and nitrogen oxides. Industrial emissions, especially from marble cutting, steel re-rolling and plastic recycling units, add heavy metals and volatile organic compounds to the air. As a result, Peshawar residents face increased risks of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. According to the Air Quality Life Index, chronic exposure to current pollution levels reduces life expectancy by 5.8 years. Despite these risks, enforcement of emission standards is weak. The National Clean Air Policy lacks enforceable legal backing and sets relaxed standards relative to WHO guidelines. Local environmental agencies are under-funded and struggle to monitor pollutants. Civil society campaigns have raised awareness, but comprehensive emission inventories and real-time monitoring remain absent (Mahmood & Iqbal 2025).

Noise Pollution and Urban Soundscapes

Noise pollution has received less attention but is pervasive. Measurements in Peshawar show that daytime noise levels in commercial areas average 72.3 dB, exceeding permissible standards, while residential areas average 65.5 dB (Jafry & Khan 2024). Even silence zones near hospitals and schools experience nighttime noise above allowable limits in 83 percent of cases. Major sources include honking vehicles, loudspeakers from markets and wedding halls, and construction activities. The absence of zoning enforcement allows commercial activities in residential neighborhoods, amplifying noise levels. Health effects include sleep disturbance, stress, ulcers and hypertension, Urban design that ignores acoustic comfort thus undermines quality of life.

Heat Island Effect and Climate Vulnerability

The combination of impervious surfaces, loss of vegetation and high energy consumption intensifies the urban heat island effect. The spatiotemporal analysis of the Peshawar Valley noted a highest mean LST of 30.30 °C and a maximum heat index of 55.48 °C. These increases correlate strongly with expanded built-up areas, vehicle and industrial growth, and population density. Heat stress exacerbates energy demand for cooling, strains health services and increases mortality during heat waves. Climate projections suggest that urban areas like Peshawar will experience more frequent and intense heat events in coming decades. Without adaptation measures such as green roofs, urban forests and permeable pavements, the city's livability will decline (Khan & Ali 2024).

Infrastructure, Services and Governance

Transportation and Mobility

The surge in vehicle ownership—driven by economic growth and inadequate public transit—has overwhelmed Peshawar's road network. Road congestion reduces travel speeds, increases fuel consumption and contributes to air and noise pollution. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, launched in 2020, provides a segregated corridor for buses and aims to reduce private car usage. However, critics argue that the BRT's construction destroyed green belts and lacked integration with feeder routes (Ullah, et.al 2023). Moreover, the BRT alone cannot accommodate the projected increase in trips if land-use policies continue to favor low-density sprawl. Integrated transport and land-use planning is essential to promote compact growth and multimodal mobility.

Water, Sanitation and Waste Management

Inadequate water supply and sanitation infrastructure present serious health risks. Many peri-urban and informal settlements rely on shallow wells or contaminated surface water. The KP Health Department reported that 70 percent of water samples from informal settlements contained bacteria or heavy metals (Abbas & Ahmad 2024). Sewage disposal systems are limited, leading to open drains that pollute water bodies. The spread of waterborne diseases such as cholera and hepatitis A reflects these deficiencies.

Solid-waste management remains a critical challenge. Peshawar generates 1331 tons of waste daily but collects only around 80 percent (Mahmood & Iqbal 2025). Waste is transported through densely populated neighborhoods, causing odor, disease vectors, traffic congestion and property

devaluation. At the open landfill outside the city, leachate threatens groundwater and the surrounding environment. A modelling study achieved a 13 percent optimization of collection routes in one neighborhood and proposed waste-to-energy technology, but such solutions require significant investment and regulatory support (Sadaqat 2025). The Asian Development Bank has completed a feasibility study for a sanitary landfill and materials recovery facility, but progress is slow.

Housing and Land Governance

Housing shortages and unregulated development reflect the disconnect between population growth and planning. The Peshawar Master Plan calls for compact development and designates zones for residential, commercial and industrial uses. However, more than 104 illegal housing schemes operate in the city. Powerful land mafias exploit bureaucratic loopholes to develop plots without providing infrastructure. Low-income migrants settle in informal colonies lacking basic services. The absence of affordable formal housing pushes residents into vulnerable, flood-prone or hazardous areas. Land disputes between formal and informal sectors create governance challenges and often result in violence (Rahman 2025).

Public Health and Socio-economic Outcomes

Environmental degradation and infrastructure deficits translate into public health crises. Air and noise pollution cause respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, stress and hearing impairment (Zhang & Laan 2023). Water contamination leads to diarrheal diseases and hepatitis. Open waste dumps harbor mosquitoes and rodents, spreading dengue, malaria and leptospirosis. These health burdens disproportionately affect low-income households living near pollution sources. Women and children are especially vulnerable due to poor nutrition and limited access to healthcare. Economic impacts include lost productivity, increased healthcare costs and reduced labor participation.

Socio-economic Dynamics and Migration

Peshawar's rapid urbanization is driven by a combination of push and pull factors. Rural populations migrate to the city seeking jobs, education and security. Political instability, particularly from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and subsequent conflicts, displaced thousands of Afghans and internal migrants to Peshawar (Abbas & Ahmad 2024). Climate-related disasters also push rural residents to urban centers. Urban pull factors include employment opportunities in the service and manufacturing sectors, better access to education and healthcare, and perceived social mobility.

However, migrants often find the city ill-prepared to accommodate them. Jobs are scarce, wages are low and social services are overwhelmed. Informal sector employment dominates, lacking job security and social protection. Many migrants live in slums or informal settlements at the city's periphery, where they face eviction threats and discrimination. The concentration of poverty can fuel crime and social tensions. Yet, the city's youthful demographic could become an economic asset if harnessed through targeted education, skills training and job creation.

Climate Resilience and Green Infrastructure

Urban flooding and heat stress will intensify under climate change. Peshawar is located in a semi-arid region but experiences heavy monsoon rains that overwhelm drainage systems. A 2025 case study in Khamosh Colony used the Storm Water Management Model (SWMM) to assess green infrastructure (GI) solutions. Community surveys and economic analyses indicated that permeable pavements and bio retention systems were effective in reducing runoff and flooding. Investing in GI could also reduce heat stress and improve urban microclimates. However, financial constraints and institutional fragmentation hinder the implementation of such interventions (Chaudhry & Alvarez, 2023).

Discussion

The analysis underscores that Peshawar's trajectory toward megalopolis status is marked by a complex interplay of demographic dynamics, spatial expansion, environmental degradation, infrastructure deficits and governance challenges. Rapid population growth and migration have stimulated economic diversification but have also overwhelmed the city's capacity to provide housing, transport, water, sanitation and waste management. The conversion of agricultural land to built-up areas at a pace five times faster than population growth, threatens food security and ecological balance. The proliferation of vehicles and industries has degraded air and noise quality to levels that significantly reduce life expectancy and quality of life (Garcia & Park, J. 2022, June).

The environmental and public health crises illustrate the costs of unregulated urban growth. Urban heat islands, flooding and climate vulnerability will intensify as global warming accelerates, placing additional burdens on infrastructure and public health systems. In addition, the resource scarcity also leads to the intra-state violent conflicts in Pakistan (Aslam et al., 2022). Without effective land-use regulation and enforcement, Peshawar's sprawl will continue to consume farmland and green spaces, increasing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing resilience. Social equity concerns are also paramount: low-income and marginalized populations bear disproportionate environmental burdens and receive inadequate services. Gender disparities in employment and access to services persist.

Governance weaknesses compound these problems. While policy frameworks such as Vision 2025, the Peshawar Master Plan and the establishment of Water and Sanitation Services Companies offer direction, their implementation is hampered by overlapping institutional mandates, insufficient funding and political interference. The absence of a robust legal framework for air quality and environmental protection further limits enforcement. Encouragingly, there are pockets of innovation: the BRT system, waste collection optimization and community-based green infrastructure experiments illustrate potential pathways to sustainable urbanization.

Policy Recommendations

To steer Peshawar toward a sustainable and equitable urban future, this article proposes several policy interventions.

Integrated land-use and transport planning. Urban planning should prioritize compact, mixed-use development and transit-oriented design, as outlined in the master plan (Khan & Shah, 2024). Strict enforcement of zoning regulations is needed to prevent illegal settlements on

farmland and green belts. Transport planning must integrate the BRT with feeder routes, non-motorized transport and last-mile connectivity to reduce reliance on private vehicles.

Agricultural land preservation and green spaces. Protecting prime farmland through land-use regulation and incentives can prevent unchecked sprawl. Establishing urban growth boundaries and requiring developers to provide green space can preserve ecological services. Urban agriculture initiatives and green belts can enhance food security and mitigate heat islands.

Air and noise pollution control. Adopting and enforcing stringent air quality standards aligned with WHO guidelines, phasing out two-stroke engines, promoting electric vehicles and regulating industrial emissions are essential. Noise pollution bylaws should be implemented, restricting loudspeakers and enforcing quiet zones near hospitals and schools. Investments in monitoring infrastructure and public awareness campaigns are necessary.

Water, sanitation and waste infrastructure. Expanding access to safe drinking water and sanitation through investments in piped water networks and wastewater treatment is critical. Implementing sanitary landfills with leachate control, materials recovery facilities and waste-to-energy projects can mitigate environmental impacts. Route optimization and public-private partnerships can improve collection efficiency (Garcia & Park, J. 2022, June).

Affordable housing and land governance. Public housing schemes and incentives for private developers to build affordable units can reduce informal settlement growth. Transparent land administration systems and digital land records can curb land grabs and illegal developments. Community participation in planning can ensure that residents' needs are recognized.

Climate resilience and green infrastructure. Integrating green roofs, urban forests, permeable pavements and rain gardens into urban design can mitigate heat islands and flooding. Climate risk assessments should inform infrastructure projects, and early warning systems should be developed for heat waves and floods. Funding for GI can come from green bonds and climate finance mechanisms.

Participatory governance and social inclusion. Engaging communities, particularly women, youth and marginalized groups, in planning and decision-making can improve legitimacy and responsiveness. NGOs and academic institutions can facilitate participatory urban planning and environmental monitoring. Vocational training and job creation programs can harness the demographic dividend and reduce poverty.

Conclusion

Peshawar's transformation from a historic frontier town to a sprawling urban agglomeration epitomizes the opportunities and challenges of rapid urbanization in South Asia. The evidence shows that urban expansion has outpaced population growth, consuming agricultural land and exacerbating environmental degradation. Air and noise pollution levels far exceed safety guidelines, while inadequate water, sanitation and waste management threaten public health. Infrastructure and governance systems have struggled to keep pace with demographic and economic changes, leaving large segments of the population without basic services.

Yet Peshawar also possesses assets that can be harnessed for sustainable development: a young population, strategic regional connectivity through CPEC, and emerging policy frameworks that recognize the need for integrated planning. By adopting policies that prioritize compact development, environmental protection, infrastructure investment and social inclusion, the city can avoid the pitfalls of an unsustainable megalopolis. Collaboration among government agencies, civil society, the private sector and international partners will be crucial. Future research should employ longitudinal studies and participatory methods to monitor implementation and assess the effectiveness of interventions.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

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