

Guiding Urban Growth

Discussion Paper #4, January 2015

This discussion paper examines the importance of urban planning for achieving sustainable urbanization. It shows that urban planning is a key component of promoting Local Economic Development (LED); balancing development and environmental protection; improving access to land, adequate housing and basic services; and promoting inclusive and safe cities in Afghanistan.

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Without a plan you plan to fail

Urban planning is an important tool to achieve sustainable development. Urban planning helps to formulate medium- and long-term objectives and create a spatial framework in order to achieve them. Planning makes the most of national, municipal, and donor budgets by informing infrastructure and services investments, and balancing demands for growth with the need to protect the environment. It can also promote economic development to meet social objectives, and can create a structure for collaboration between national and local governments, donors, the private sector and citizens.¹

Urban planning is essential for Afghanistan because the country is undergoing an enormous transformation from a predominately rural to an urban society. By 2060, nearly 50% of the population will live in cities.² The urban population will triple in the next 35 years: from 8 million today to 24 million in 2050.

A key challenge, therefore, is how to plan and manage the inevitable urbanization process to facilitate access to land and housing, secure jobs and livelihoods, and promote peace and security, whilst reducing negative externalities such as the proliferation of informal settlement, urban poverty, and inequality, which are key drivers of conflict and undermine state building and peace-building efforts.³

Urban planning: A place for every activity, and every activity at the right place

Cities are human constructs that can be shaped and formed in various ways. The characteristics of urban form and land use are not an inevitable and pre-determined consequence of urbanization. Urban planning is one of the key tools to shape and form urban development.

In essence, urban planning is the search for, and the establishment of, the best possible mutual adaptation of space and society for the benefit of society. Urban planning is not about making coloured land use maps but is a way to make a difference. It is a framework that helps cities transform a vision into reality using space as a key resource for development and engaging stakeholders along the way.



Urban planning is about guiding urban development to promote the conditions for inclusive and sustainable cities

Planning great cities

Planning shapes key dimensions of urban development, such as:



1. UN-Habitat (2013) Urban Planning for City Leaders. UN-Habitat: Nairobi
2. UN-Habitat (2014) Afghanistan's Urban Future. Discussion Paper #1. UN-Habitat: Kabul
3. UN-Habitat (2013) Time to think Urban. UN-Habitat: Nairobi

Why planning?

Is planning relevant in a context of weak governance, fragility, and insecurity? Isn't planning only appropriate in stable middle- and high-income countries? While questions such as these are valid, the fundamental basis for promoting planning in Afghanistan is justified for several reasons.⁴ In essence, urban planning should not be seen as a purely technical exercise but rather part of improving sub-national governance for development which can promote citizen engagement, foster a sense of civic responsibility, and stimulate development, which can all ultimately improve state-society relations and advance peace-building and state building goals. Seven key dimensions of why urban planning is advantageous include:

1. Planning for growth: Where to accommodate an extra 16 million urban Afghans? Urban planning can combat informal, unplanned sprawl by facilitating orderly and inclusive urban growth through planned city extensions, densification and infill, and new towns and nodes.

2. Planning for Local Economic Development (LED) to harness the potential of physical proximity, trade flows, rural-urban productivity, and local resource clusters to increase economic productivity and promote job creation.⁵ Having a plan and showing stability also stimulates private sector investment (households, local business and FDI). Business and enterprise is constrained when land is not available or is poorly serviced. Planning coordinates the spatial location and distribution of economic activity, and can facilitate value capture from public investments to help finance development.

3. Planning for urban inclusion, particularly through increasing access to affordable land, adequate housing, and basic services. Housing, employment, accessibility and safety are key concerns for urban dwellers and are strongly correlated to urban form. Planning can help to address infrastructure deficiencies in cities, promote citywide settlement upgrading and regularization, and ensure equitable and inclusive use of land and natural resources.⁶

4. Planning for robust city regions: Urban planning at a metropolitan scale can strengthen rural-urban linkages in city regions to improve economic development (e.g. getting agricultural products to urban and international markets); environmental protection (e.g. water resource management; solid waste management); and social services access (e.g. connectivity to cities from villages for health and education services).⁷

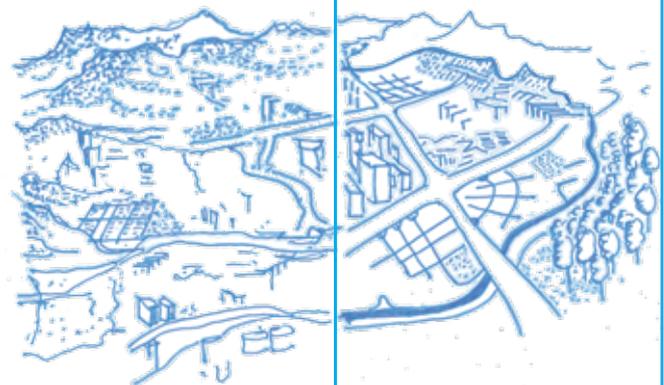
“Since Afghanistan is faced with the rapid growth of cities, we need to create offices in which city planning can be done in a more comprehensive way... for example, linking Kabul to the five neighboring provinces is one of the priorities”⁸

H. E. Ashraf Ghani

Business as usual or smart planning?

By 2060, half of the Afghan population will live in cities. What could cities look like if smart urban planning is undertaken now?

Scenario 1: Informal, unplanned sprawl	Scenario 2: Smart planning
Uncontained, informal, low-density, haphazard sprawl	Compact development with infill and planned city extensions
Poor access to basic services, high cost, low coverage, inefficient networks	Infrastructure provided incrementally, systematically and affordably
Continued informal and illegal housing, squatting, and informality	A range of affordable land and housing options provided to meet demand
Rapid loss of agricultural and green land, burden on local ecosystems	Environmental protection and resilience, equitable sharing of natural resources
Water pollution, poor waste and water management	Effective, healthy and equitable water management
Socio-spatial segregation of land uses and income-levels	Socio-spatial integration, mixed land-uses
Congestion, pollution, limited public transport options,	Efficient and sustainable transport options
Limited investment, increasing informality	Investment promoted and expanded, creating jobs
Decreasing public space, civic responsibility, and urban safety	Public space defined and celebrated, urban safety increased



4. Two examples from other contexts include UN-Habitat (2010) Urban Planning Manual for Somaliland. UN-Habitat and UN Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralized Service Delivery.; and UN-Habitat's Municipal Spatial Support Programme in Kosovo: http://www.unhabitat-kosovo.org/en-us/MuSPP3_Municipal_Spatial_Planning_Support_Programme_phase_3

5. UN-Habitat (2005) Promoting Local Economic Development through Strategic Planning; volume 1, 2, 3 and 4; Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

6. UN-Habitat (2013) Planning and Design for Sustainable Urban Mobility. Global Report on Human Settlements. London: Earthscan.

7. Allen J. Scott (ed.) (2001) Global City-Regions: Trends, Theory Policy, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

8. H. E. Ashraf Ghani, A.(2014) Manifesto of Change and Continuity

5. Planning for environment: minimizing urban sprawl and the negative impact on the environment. Planning for quality of life and natural resource management, including equitable, affordable and sustainable use of resources. Improving resilience to natural disasters and climate change mitigation.

6. Planning in advance: Anticipating is more cost effective than reacting to problems. Unplanned spatial patterns are inefficient and require more resources to maintain, and to ultimately regularize/retrofit.

7. Planning by people: good urban planning is participatory and values the process just as much as the output (the plan). This promotes democracy and citizen participation in city building, and can improve cooperation between all stakeholders (e.g. government, private sector, academia, civil society, communities) to improve governance.

Ready, set, action plan!

How to plan in Afghanistan? An important underpinning is to think about implementation from the start, and link three key elements: urban planning and design; legislation and governance (rules and regulations); and finance and economy. This is what we refer to as the 'three-legged' approach, which is a key condition for the implementation of plans and managing urban growth.⁹ In terms of the planning element, three aspects are crucial for Afghanistan:

First, *don't make pretty pictures, be strategic.* In a rapidly changing context with limited financial resources such as Afghanistan, the utility of conventional 'master-planning' is limited. A better approach is Strategic Action Planning (SAP) which is action orientated and more participatory. SAP aims to identify and build consensus amongst a wide range of stakeholders, take account of implementation capability/capacities, and be linked with realistic public and private investment levels.

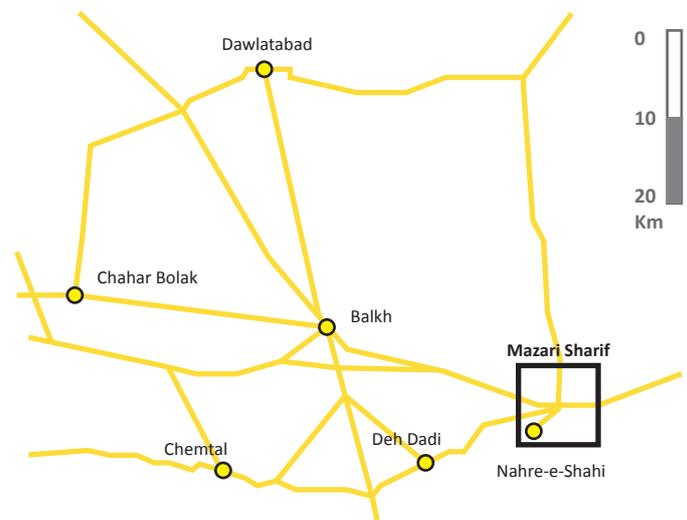
Second, *develop cascading plans.* For cities to function effectively, urban plans need to be interlinked: neighbourhood plans developed by Community Development Councils (CDCs) should be integrated with Gozar and Nahia plans. These plans should link with citywide plans, that should reflect wider city-region planning.

Third, *involve people.* Planning is about makes choices, and is not just a technical exercise. It is essential to involve people in planning processes. Urban planning provides a great opportunity to engage citizens in visioning and fostering a sense of ownership over city development.

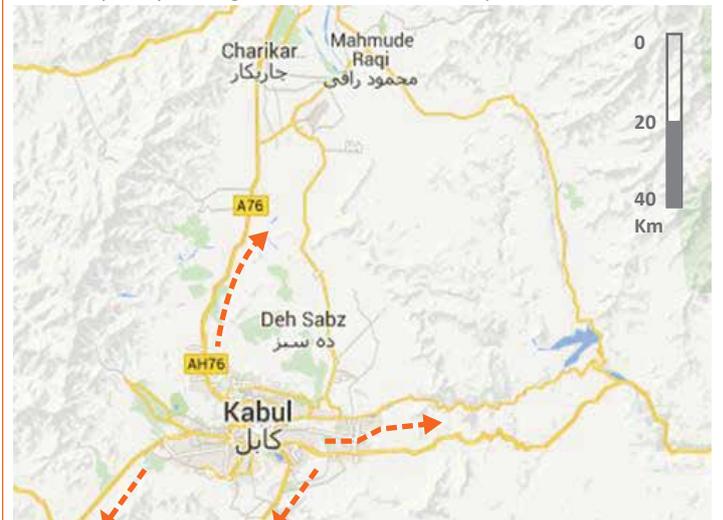
A city region approach to LED

Cities and human settlements do not exist in isolation. They have economic, social, and environmental linkages with their surrounding peri-urban areas, other municipalities, and smaller towns and villages. The term "city-region" describes this phenomenon. It refers to a metropolitan area, hinterland, or conurbation that does not necessarily have shared administration but has economic, social and environmental interdependencies that make it operate as a distinctive entity or eco-system. We can identify two types of city-regions in Afghanistan based on their size and extent of linkages:

First, Provincial Capitals that are physically and functionally integrated with their immediate surrounding areas. For example in the north: (i) Nahr-e-Shahi is already incorporated into Mazar city built-up area; (ii) the 'triangle' of Mazar-e-Sharif with District Municipalities Deh Dadi, and Balkh; and (iii) further links with surrounding district municipalities and villages (e.g. Chemtal, Chahar Bolak, and Dawlatabad)



Second, city-regions that encompass larger economic and geographic corridors. For example Kabul City is in close proximity to the Municipalities of Charikar (Parwan) and Mahmude Raqi (Kapisa). Growth is likely to follow the existing road infrastructure and eventually form one large built-up area. Similar growth is expected along the transport corridors to the east (to Jalalabad) and south (Kandahar). The challenge is to adequately manage this inevitable urban expansion.



9. UN-Habitat (2014) Achieving Sustainable Urban Development (ASUD): Implementing the new strategic plan from an integrated approach to sustainable urbanisation. UN-Habitat: Nairobi.

Challenges to better urban planning

The 'data deficit' is a significant challenge. There is a lack of reliable and up-to-date information on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of urban areas upon which to make realistic, relevant and useful plans. Given this, plans often have not taken into account the existing situation, for example informal settlements and existing land-uses, and relied on conventional planning approaches rather than strategic action planning.

Meaningfully engaging stakeholders in urban planning is a significant challenge. This is true of both citizens and communities as well as donors and development partners. The latter have been too focused on 'their' projects and have not adequately invested in wider urban planning of cities. This has resulted in piecemeal approaches to urban development and eroded national capacities for using urban planning as a tool to guide investments and manage growth. This is part of a broader challenge regarding the insufficient linkages between planning and finance which has hampered the implementation of plans, and has limited national capacities for the development, implementation, monitoring and enforcement of plans.

Strategic Municipal Action Planning (SMAP)

In 2011 UN-Habitat supported the Bamyan Municipality with a participatory SMAP process. The resulting plan identifies key growth areas, and areas to limit building expansion, notably by the historic sites and on prime agricultural land.



Ways forward

- Advocate for the need to plan in advance of urban growth, on a scale commensurate with the challenges faced, in a phased approach and with a view to fostering job creation and the development of social capital.
- Build capacity at national and local levels for participatory urban planning as part of multi-year 'learning by doing' programme. Such a programme should develop human resources, Afghan-specific guidelines and tools, and include organizational development and institutional strengthening components.
- Improve data and information in order to improve urban planning processes and ensure that plans are based on an informed understanding of the existing situation, projected needs, etc.
- Support city-region action planning in key regions (e.g. Metropolitan Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar). The focus should be on strengthening and connecting the existing mechanisms (e.g. Provincial authorities; Municipalities (Provincial and District); DCC/DDAs, and cluster-CDCs) to develop realistic spatial action plans with a emphasis on Local Economic Development (LED), and linked with realistic finance for plan implementation.
- Promote basic urban planning principles such as optimizing the density of urban settlements, ensuring mixed land-use, enhancing social capital, innovation and improved connectivity in order to take advantage of agglomeration of urban economies and to minimize mobility demand.



The State of Afghan Cities 2014/15 Programme is a one-year programme supported by the Government of Australia and implemented in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan, that aims to improve knowledge and information on urbanization in Afghanistan by undertaking a detailed review of all 34 provincial capitals. A detailed State of Afghan Cities 2014/15 Report will be published mid-2015.

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