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Metropolization and the Right to the City

How can we plan a city with people, for the people ?

New Questions and reflections on “Urban Activism”: Reinforcing Claims in the 21st Century planning of the City"

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“This is an original manuscript of a paper titled, Who Is the Master; What Is the Plan? Deconstructing Master Planning- A case study from Delhi’s civic campaign ‘Main Bhi Dilli’ published by Shahdadpuri, A in Conscious Urbanism, Journal on planning architecture and design on 2021-08-12 , available online: <https://jpad.copalpublishing.com/index.php/j/article/view/2>

Abstract: “Chaos”, “organic”, “contested”, “messy” are terms evidently used to describe the nature of Indian cities, as 60-80 % are nearly “unplanned” and “self-constructed”. However, these expressions stand antithetical to modern urban spatial practices of planning and planned development which are embedded in regimes of formality and legality. Many of the larger cities have some form of a Master Plan to anticipate its urban development and civic infrastructure. Despite their Master Plans, they are largely seen as “unplanned”. What implications do plans have, then, on the inherent form and the self-evident nature of Indian cities? The paper looks at the case of the

capital city Delhi, which is in the process of visioning its future for the next 20 years through its ongoing Master Planning process. By 2041, the population of the city is expected to reach the 30 million mark, struggling with growing housing shortage, disparate urban expansion, growing pollution levels, job-loss growth. Bahn (2013) describes this “chaos that is urban development” as a consequence of planning. It is with these casualties of development, that this paper concerns itself. The paper demonstrates the learnings from the use of the interactive toolkit, ‘Kaun hai Master? Kya hai Plan?’ which was used as a template to discuss planning processes and encourage citizens to become a part of the conversation on future plans for the city.

Keywords: Master Plan, Bottom-Up Planning, Public Participation, Indian cities, Delhi

1. Introduction

In the broadest sense, this study seeks to ask a straightforward urban question: how can we better plan our cities which are inherently described as “unintended” (Sen, 1976)? Yet the question undoes the seeming directness of the inquiry. Who should control, or make decisions about the fate of our cities. Who has a greater say in planning the future of our cities? It raises questions about technocentrism in the reproduction of inequality and socio-spatial fragmentation. This study looks at the city of Delhi which is in the process of envisioning its future for the next 20 years in a context where plans have been argued of being uninformed and unreflective of the actual nature of the city. By definition Master Plans have emerged as the standard technocratic instruments of planning to be developed by urban local governments. However, they have received an increasing amount of criticism in Indian cities on several grounds (IIHS, 2014). First, it has the inherent weakness of being the “master”. The epithet signifies that planning remains far from involving the “Aam Janta” (urban commons). Secondly, experiences from previous Master Plans have shown that the planning process has been “undemocratic” and “non-participatory”, which makes the final Plan divergent from ground realities and not reflective of people's needs (IGSSS, 2020). It is with these casualties that the paper urges for a greater role for public participation and engagement in urban planning processes. It does so by employing an interactive urban toolkit, Kaun Hai Master? Kya Hai Plan? as a framework to examine stories of urban realities and engage with colloquial narratives.

The toolkit is tailor made for the city of Delhi, as a part of the Main Bhi Dilli Campaign (‘I am Delhi too’), an autonomous civil society organisation, engaging with communities that are typically left out of planning processes to represent their concerns and needs in Delhi's Master Plan 2041. These are residents of self-built settlements who are farmers, street vendors, waste pickers, domestic workers, home-based workers etc. Through the different activities, the toolkit focuses on understanding the ground issues ranging from Housing, Livelihoods, Services and Public Infrastructure which form the different chapters in the Master Plan. In telling these stories, the paper seeks to engage with the political, ethical and intellectual call of looking at the question of planning in the Global South and delve deeper into the existing realities of Southern cities. It focuses on three lines of inquiries

1. The first is to understand what implications do Master Plans have on the ground and the lives of people?
2. The second concerns itself with the series of effects, who is more affected by Master Plans? Who has greater say, thus more right? Who is included/left out from the planning process?
3. Lastly, it tries to understand how plans could better reflect realities on ground? What frameworks could be adopted to make them more inclusive and participatory?

This study has been undertaken at a moment which makes these inquiries both timely and urgent. The population of the city is expected to reach the 30 million mark, tormenting with growing housing shortage, disparate urban expansion, growing pollution levels and growing employment. The COVID-19 pandemic has further revealed that urban planning and technocratic expert-led processes have exacerbated social disparity in cities and made them increasingly exclusionary. In response to this, the DDA Act of 1957 mandates the invitation for people's feedback, but only when the draft is out, in the form of online consultations, reducing the scope of community participation. Additionally, The Urban and Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) guidelines, suggests public participation and representation in the form of focused group discussions at every level of the planning process, but has not set any mandate for the same.

Such measures have reduced public participation to tokenism. The upcoming 20-year plan however, presents an unprecedented opportunity to do things differently. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is making efforts to gather feedback from its residents, unlike the previous Master Plans which have been criticized for adopting top-down processes. It is important to see city planning much more than a centralised and top-down process of spatial development with a view to impose "order" and "formality" on organic growth.

2. Methodology

What should this process look like? In this section, I briefly describe the framework with which I entered the study, looking at legible ways of communicating the Master Plan document beyond its formal and technocratic space. The toolkit helps us just establish that understanding. One way to conceptualize this vocabulary of the Master plan, was to start from empirical narratives. Each of the narratives offered in the next section of this essay draws upon and locates itself in a particular configuration of planning "rooted" in the context (Bahn, 2019). I now turn to the three methodologies adopted in the toolkit for this process-

2.1 Demisfying the master and for people

The process started by breaking down the clunky document written in English into easy to understand concepts in the colloquial language, which was Hindi in this case. The Master Plan report published online as 'PDF documents' was translated into simple playful language of games. Each activity was devised on an urban issue¹ to introduce each sector in the Master Plan to the general public.

¹ Urban issues namely Livelihoods, Housing, Physical Infrastructure, Public Transport and Social Infrastructure

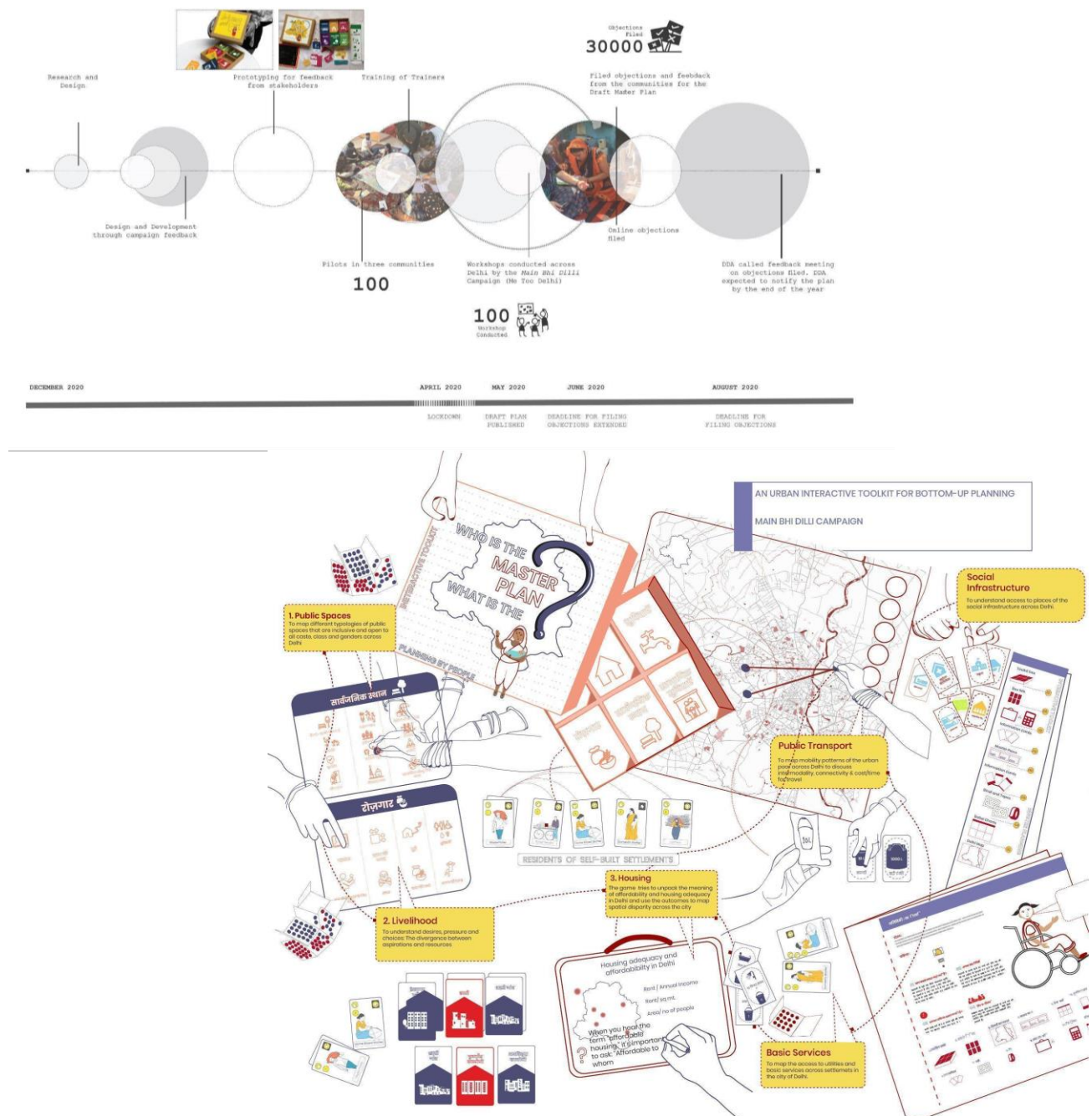


Figure 1- Top: Timeline of the Toolkit illustrating the methodological framework
Bottom: Components of the toolkit, Kaun Hai Master? Kya Hai Plan?

2.2 Community Workshops as a mode of conduct-

While interacting with communities to understand their issues, it was really important to respect and create a sense of belonging. Seen like this, the format of a workshop with focused group discussion became an appropriate methodological tool where both the actors including the participants and researcher could capture multiple outcomes, representing an accurate visualisation of the complex issues and elaborate realities of the ground through dialogue and discussion rather than documenting neat arguments.



Figure 2- The workshop settings across the city

(These workshops were conducted in the neighborhoods of the communities- on the streets, in chowks, near temples, community centers, parks, the open space in front of the house, courtyards to spread awareness on the draft plan and how they could engage with it. This also lent an informal and relaxed feel to the workshops)

2.3 Map as the Language-

In terms of language, there is a critical need to engage with Master Plans beyond their “ideology” or “disputed data” (Bahn, 2018), recognizing the need for legible ways of communicating them beyond a formal space. To be able to question and inform the Master Plan, it became important to first learn the language of the Plan which is essentially spatial and map based. However, maps can be an intimidating medium owing to its abstruse form. The activities were therefore designed to be floor based where the participants could huddle around the map, sit over it. The map itself was made accessible with the help of visual landmarks icons and metro lines whose different colors helped participants easily identify which metro station they stay closest to.



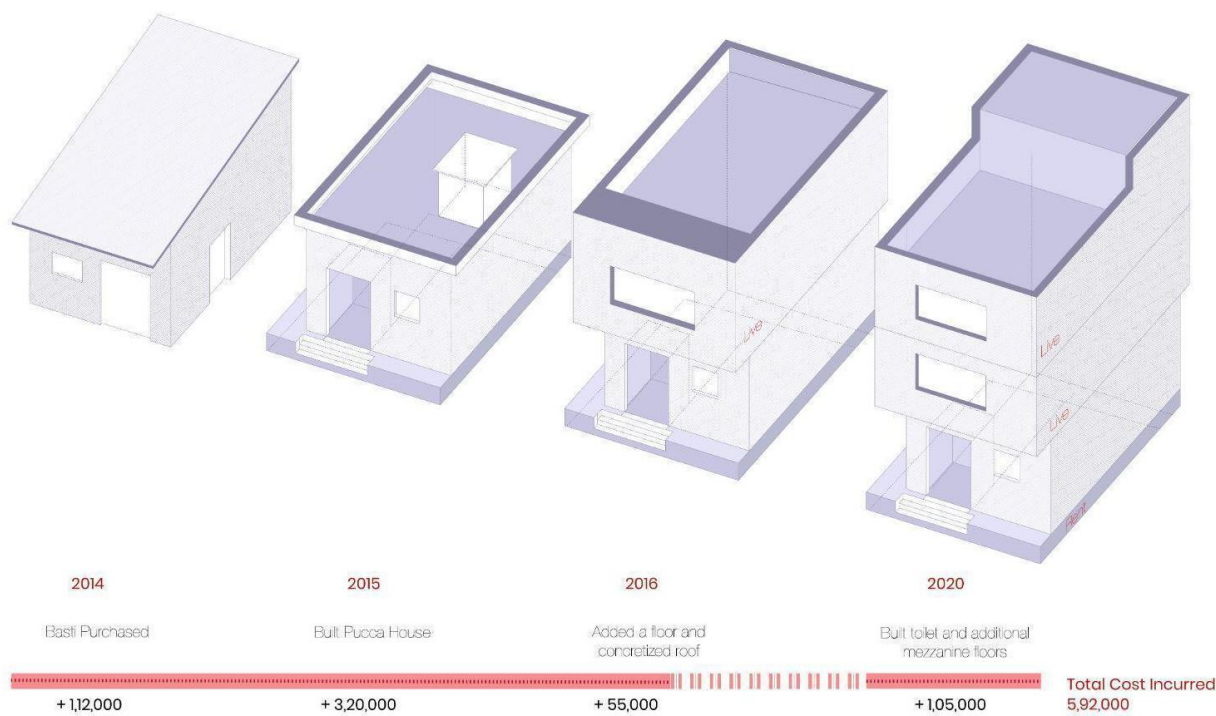
Figure 3- The Map serving as the base for all activities and its interaction with the people

3. Narratives of people and their inhabitation in the city

In this section, the paper presents what came out of the process. Drawing from the experience of the workshops conducted using the toolkit, it discusses emerging narratives of urban realities that annotate motivations, triggers, ambitions of people and contextualizes- a) how planning influences the social and economic dimensions of the citizens and moreover; and b) how planning could be better informed by these everyday stories depicting urban realities. I do that by using visual storytelling tools like drawings and collages annotated with excerpted quotations from the workshop activities that document lives, conditions and situations discussed in the paper from each settlement and allow the reader to place their own conclusions. This juxtaposition also compels one to see that behind these narratives are, most importantly, discussions concerning people's lives.

3.1 A tale of One house, two families - Selfbuilding and Incrementality

Imran² lives in Seemapuri, a *basti* (unauthorized settlement) located in the North-Eastern periphery of the city. On entering Imran’s house through a narrow staircase, one would discover that what appeared like a two and a half storied house from the outside, actually consists of four floors from the inside with two different families living under the same roof, tightly consuming every inch and corner of the house. In 2016, Imran decided to construct additional floors in the house and rent them out for earning extra income. Instead of expanding vertically, Imran added mezzanine floors between two existing floors in 2020. He and his family now occupy the upper floors and the terrace, the ground floor is rented out to Faisal’s family. Today, two families of 5-6 members in each family are living in the same area.



² Name changed to keep identity anonymous

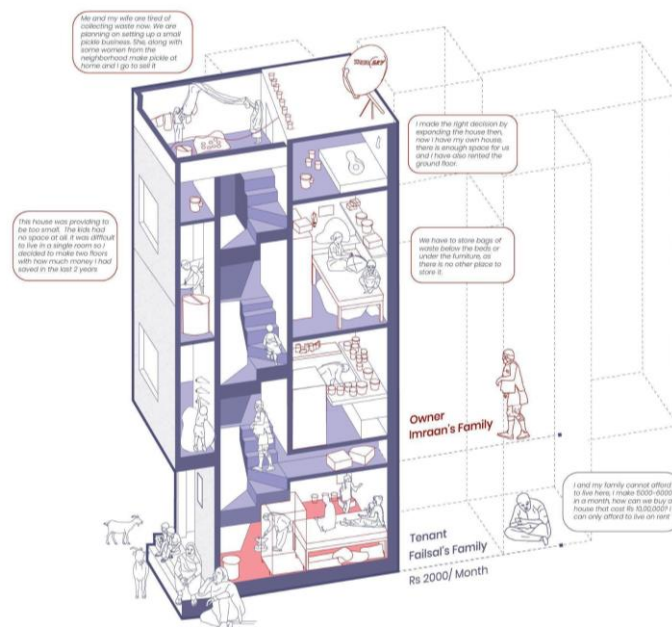


Figure 4- Top: Building timeline of Imraan's House ;
Bottom: Imraan's House in Seemapuri

This process of incremental growth over a period of time is not only indicative of the development trajectory of building but also suggests an important economic strategy. Each house in Seemapuri, ranged between 12-25 *gaj*³ (20 sq m) costing around Rs 15,00,00-20,00,000. Since buying a house was very expensive for Faisal, he rented a floor in Imran's house. Like Faisal most of the people find housing unaffordable in the neighborhood and rely on rental housing. The rent is affordable and varies between Rs 2000-4000/ floor. As a result, an incremental trajectory of building was evidently observed among many households in the basti as it works both for the owner and the tenant, for the owner it generates more income and the tenant gets cheaper housing.

Another evidence of this was seen in Imran's effort on improving the family's future prospects, which led him to start an '*aachar*' (pickle) enterprise with his wife. Since the house was small with very limited workspace, the roof of the house was used to dry pickle and store it. The home then is as much enterprise, factory, warehouse, and leisure space as it is shelter. This trajectory of the nature of incremental building on the other hand also unravels a very complex interlace of life situations and kinship relations. On one hand they lend financial agility for the house to expand whenever they need. On the other hand, this mode of living has its own tradeoffs. It means sharing residential/ living space with more people belonging to different families. The four storied house sits on a plot of 25 *gaj* housing (20 sq m) 12 members. Such expansions diminish per capita space allocation to 1.6 sq *gaj*/person (1.3 sq m/person). Similar spatial allocations were observed in other self-built neighborhoods where similar workshops were conducted like Savda Ghevra, a resettlement Colony- 2.5 sq *gaj*/ person, Raghubur Nagar, an unauthorised colony with 5 sq *gaj*/ person, Mandanpur Khadar, another resettlement colony- 2sq *gaj*/person which is way below the (Unified Building Bye-Laws) UBBL recommendations for residential buildings in Delhi that recommends a minimum space

³ 1 sq.gaj = 0.8 sq.m

of 12.5 sq.m per person. Is it prudent to ponder at what threshold would these spatial allocations then be considered unviable?

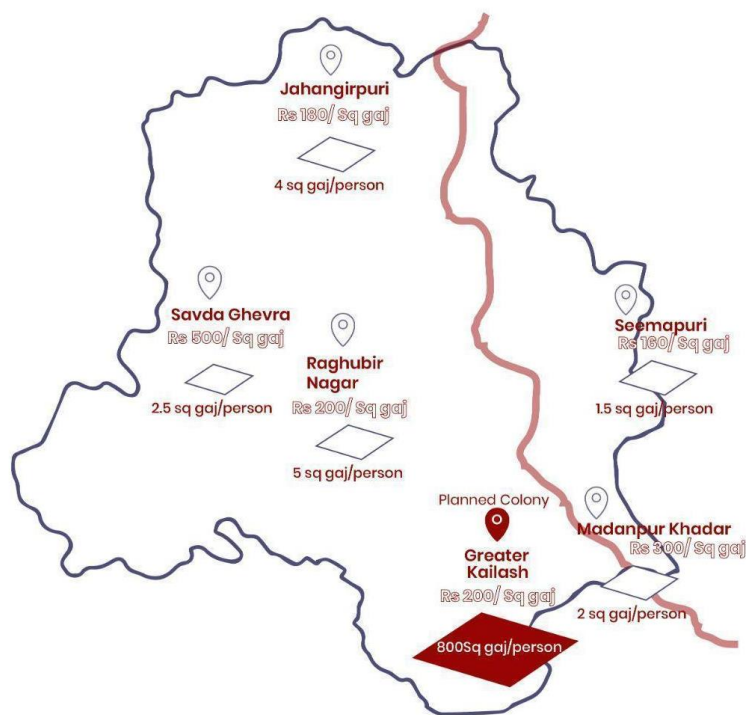


Figure 5- Map illustrating the Housing disparity in the city of Delhi

(The case of Planned Colony in Greater Kailash (elite neighborhood) is considered as a point of reference to analyse the cost of housing and area per person within different self- built neighborhoods of the city where the workshops were conducted)

3.2 Contaminated public parks and the state of sanitation - How are the two connected for the residents of Savda?

Rani is a strong and eloquent speaker. Her gaze is sharp and voice is soft but resolute, further insisting on it. She lives in Savda Ghevra, a resettlement colony⁴ located in the North-West region of Delhi. From 2006 onwards, Savda, as we call it in this case following its residents, is where people have been allocated plots after the forced evictions from their parchis homes throughout the city (IIHS, 2019). During the interview, recounting her shift and eventually settling in Ghevra, her eyes still mist over the harsh memories of eviction. Her grief at the same time is also marked by a sense of repentance for missed opportunities which would have allowed her to make a life for in a good colony prevailing a dignified life.

What could Savda be if the numerous basic conditions were in place? What issues can the Master plan address for a legal colony like Savda, specifically to reflect on the

⁴ The “colony” refers to the colloquial term used in Hindi and English to describe the settlement in contradistinction to the parchi—that is home to households evicted from informal settlements across the city. (IIHS, 2019)

approach that plans and policy must take to address the lack of basic elements that make housing adequate and just? Since the residents are rather knowledgeable of making a viable social, economic and affective life in Savda for themselves and their families, they were asked to vote for various desires that could ensure better living conditions in Savda. Some retaliated with an urgent need for parks to be maintained, streets to be cleaned, more schools, clean water and so on. Access to more open spaces for women and clean parks for kids became a major demand.



Figure 6- Top: Kids voting for what they need within their neighborhood ;
Bottom: Diagram illustrating different edge conditions contributing to the current state of parks in Savda Colony

Rani exclaimed that they do not need more parks, nor is maintenance of the parks going to change anything. In common understanding, with so much park space the problem just seemed of maintenance. At the start of the interview the residents persisted upon this reason. However, according to Rani, the absence of a sewer system was responsible for the poor condition of parks and open spaces. Savda did not see infrastructure and services put in place before households were constructed here as one would expect within a planned colony. Today, they are open and constantly clogged, as a result the excess water from the drains overflows into the open spaces. Over time residents have installed their own septic tanks, but none of the infrastructural capacities - water and sewer lines – to support their workings are available to them. Rani remarks, *phir har bar septic tank ko clean karne ke Rs 700 kaun de?* (Then, who can afford to pay

Rs 700 from their own pocket to clean the septic tank every time)? As a result, in many cases, households adjacent to the parks, drain the sewage water and the solid waste directly into the park.

Moreso, the parks are rarely cleaned, turning them into a festering ground for all kinds of diseases, mosquitoes and insects. As a community organiser with the Mahila Housing Sewa Trust (MHT) and living in Savda since a decade, she is cognizant of both the department's and its employees' apathetic attitude towards complying with their duties and responsibilities. In her reckoning, if Ghevra was a proper, *acchi* (good) colony they would not have left the parks and the drains to the state they do. Rani and others in the locality regularly undertake cleaning both the park and the drains in their area; and have spent Rs 5,000- 7,000 in the past year to just drain the dirty water from the park. She remarks *farak tho humko hi padega na, bimaari, humki ko gandagi me rehna padta hai* (diseases and dirt will only affect us, as we do not have a choice, but to live here). Blame the mentality of the people, or their circumstances- but *jab tak sewer ghevra me nahi lagaye jayenge, tab tak hum parko me nahi jaa payenge* (unless we have proper sewer lines and drains set up in the colony, we cannot access or use parks here in Savda).

What emerged was that the problem is not only the lack of monetary support in the case of such settlements. Neither are other factors like labour, intentions, or willingness to do something lacking. It is the lack of access to basic public services like sanitation, sewage and water that enmesh the residents of Savda even after a decade. The provision of services is the most basic entitlement from the state with respect to inhibition and is far more important than any investment in terms of improving the living condition. Like in this case, the access to clean parks was driven by the need to cope with missing services. Public infrastructure therefore has a great desideratum in communities dominated by low- income households and its absence often has detrimental impacts on the inhabitants of these communities. In other words, they are lacking in the elements that make a life in a place just and liveable.

3.3. Free water yet not accessible to all: State of services and inhabitation

On interacting with the women from Raghubir Nagar, a neighborhood in the North-West region of the capital, one of them with a sign of relief said, “*Didi, humme toh yaha paani ki koi takleef nahi hai, yeh bhagwan karke ek achi baat hai*”. (Sister, here we do not face any water issues which is one good thing by God's grace). *Hume toh paani ka bill bhi nahi bharna padta*. (Sister, one good thing here is that we do not have any water problem). Immediately, the other announced, “*Nahi nahi didi, bahut takleef hai, humme toh muft me paani nahi milta paani aur kafi baar ganda aata hai*. There were two contrasting stories emerging from the same neighborhood. Meanwhile Sunita started quarrelling with Poonam suggesting she get a water meter reflecting the drawback of the current situation.



Figure 7- Calculation of Water consumption with communities of Raghubir Nagar

Sunita's⁵ case is indicative of successful implementation of the Aam Aadmi Party's⁶ first big electoral promise, 666 litres of free water supply every day to each household of 5 with functional water meters (The Hindu, 2016). However, there is a drawback here, the government's scheme of free supply of water serves only to households that have access to an official water connection. According to the government statistics, around 30 percent of Delhi's population lives in urban villages and unauthorised colonies (The Indian Express, 2021), and these localities mostly house the poor sections- many have no record of any official water meter and remain uncovered by the pipelined supply. Although these policies focus on universal delivery of many basic services, yet the dichotomy of the case evidences the arbitrary nature of water distribution precisely in the settlements that are the most precarious. The latest report from the Comptroller and Auditor-General says there remains inequality in water distribution (The Hindu, 2016). The per capita availability varies from 29 litre per capita daily (LPCD) on the outskirts to 509 LPCD in planned areas (The Hindu, 2016). According to the report, "the Delhi Jal Board has neither a proper system to measure the water supply to different areas, nor does it have access to reliable data on population in different areas. It, therefore, cannot ensure an equitable supply of water" pointing to an insurmountable evidence of this precarity. Furthermore, using the toolkit resource cards to understand their daily water consumption of these communities, Sunita's case presents another empirical reality of urban poor in Indian cities- Sunita claimed that she did not pay for water, since her daily family consumption was below 700 liters. She has a family of six including herself, her two sons, one daughter, a husband and a mother-in-law. With more than five people living in a single household, each member in the household uses only upto 90-95 liters of water as opposed to the standard norm for domestic water usage in India which is 135 litres per capita per day (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2020). This is reflective of two things, they *choose* to consume less water because they cannot *afford* to pay for water. They are more cautious and stringent in their usage. Secondly, the repercussions of the adversities of government-run programs and policies are often faced by communities that are the most marginalised.

⁵ Name changed to keep identity anonymous

⁶ Party in Power in Delhi from 2013- present

4. New Questions and Directions

Throughout the study, the paper has emphasized both on how planning in Delhi has indeed had a “series of effects in the real”, particularly for the poor (Bahn, 2013) and how communities based interactions and bottom-up inquiries can ameliorate this situation. These bottom-up initiatives of planning could lead to stronger, inclusive and more equitable contexts of action and planning. In this context, the Main Bhi Dilli Campaign has been conducting several workshops and meetings with under-represented communities since 2019. The campaign has drawn up various recommendations for the city’s master plan after talking to all stakeholders, especially the urban poor and its recent efforts helped in getting a 30 day extension for filing suggestions on the draft plan.

The Campaign also suggests that the Master Plan itself has one of planning’s most visible presences in the city, the instrument therefore has an elevated importance bearing on how the city will evolve over the next coming years. It is evidently crucial to continue to engage with planning. In this section, the paper illustrates the campaign’s efforts and two ways moving forward to engage with planning-

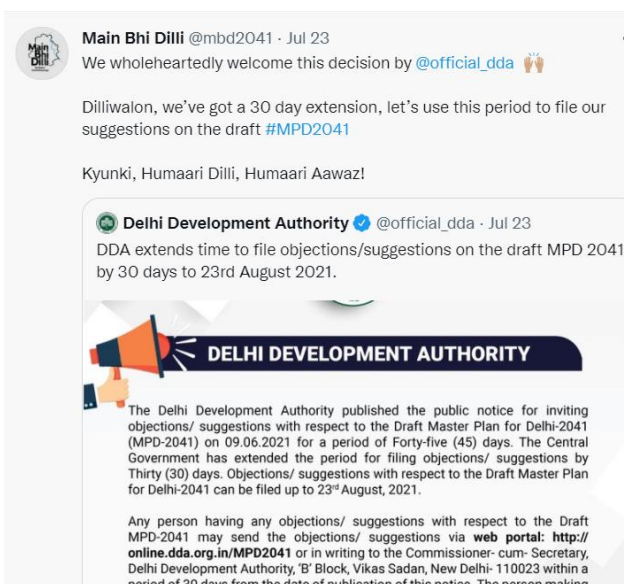


Figure -8 Top- Screenshots of from silent protest carried by individuals from the Campaign demanding extension of the deadline to file objections and suggestions; Right- Screenshot of the notice issued by DDA extending the deadline by 30 days for filing objections/suggestions on the Draft Master Plan 2041

4.1 Co-creating Planning Processes-

The study suggests that in the socio-economic system, bottom-up institutional practices bring out colloquial dialogues that can better inform modern technocratic planning thereby, pushing or triggering the evolution of the urban planning ecosystem. By adopting different instruments for people's participation, more space in the planning process can be created for the communities that are typically left out. These could take the form of community workshops, focused group discussions and interactive toolkits and flyers, posters. The study adopted community workshops as a mode to learn about the ground realities and engage with their lived experiences. These workshops were arranged with marginalized communities in interactive settings as educational and brainstorming activities to create more awareness about the Master Plan. Moreover, these were conducted as focus group discussions with a small number of people from the community. Such meetings enabled qualitative discussions, especially in devising and evaluating alternatives. Additionally, the campaign demanded accountability from the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), the campaign requested baseline studies and existing land-use information to analyse the on-ground existing study carried out by the planning authority. These reports form the basis for drafting the plan as they map the actual reality. Through the constant demand of the campaign, DDA released these studies publicly on their website to be accessed for the common public. Based on these reports and studies, the individuals associated with the campaign held sector-wise meetings to identify issues and draft suggestions. Activists, researchers and organizations who work on housing, livelihood, gender, transport and public spaces drafted issue specific demands and took it to the communities for feedback. Through this rigorous engagement and process, the campaign was able to collect over 30,000 objections and suggestions from the various communities across Delhi. The community suggestions were then submitted to DDA as physical copies to include in the final Master Plan 2041.

4.2 Lexicon of the Plan-

As mentioned above, the conventional development proposals and policymaking often reveal an absence of empathy to everyday life in the city and the way residents build their own city. A large part of this can be attributed to the language of these plans and policies which indicate a narrow understanding of the incremental and self-organised characteristics that shape urban growth in Indian cities. Keeping this in mind, colloquial vocabulary is critical to facilitate collaborative planning. Here the language can also become an entry point to understand social dynamics of the community and learn from tacit knowledge within the neighbourhood. One way to overcome this shortcoming in planning discourse is to question technical and official terminologies, using local terms instead. For instance, the official terminology for "squatter" settlements in Delhi is '*jhuggi-jhopdi*' cluster (JJC) which in Hindi translates to 'shanty-hut'. This is an output of the lexicon of the formal regime of planning, wherein these self-built settlements are often referred to as "slums", synonymous with poverty (Roy, 2009) and precarious living conditions, neglecting the dynamic aspects of dwelling and living

within these settlements. The politics of social exclusion is a result of such expressions and has detrimental implications within the development discourse.

At the same time, it was important to speak the language of the plan itself. As a part of the campaign, technical reports and issue specific propositions for the Draft Master Plan 2041 were prepared and written in the language of the DMP in order to be able to be used as direct insertions into the Plan. These were submitted to NIUA on 11th August after being presented at a web meeting on 7th August 2020 (MPD, 2021). While the Draft Master Plan 2041 took a step in the right direction by providing the document in Hindi for the first time, along with English; can we imagine more ways in which the technocratic knowledge is made increasingly accessible to the residents of the city?

5. Conclusions

The aim of the study was to understand what relevant and inclusionary planning could look like within an Indian city; to draw out cases detailing everyday realities of urban poor challenging the regimes of formality and legality; and delve deeper to inform and shape the context of urban spatial practices in Global South. Rather than desolately viewing urban planning as an apparatus in the arms of the State, the paper argued to place the focus on the importance of planning by people by adopting the medium of an interactive toolkit as a rubric to generate inquiries, concepts that shape the urban systems in Southern cities. Such a rubric emphasizes on looking, listening and paying attention to the instantiations of the city and its relationship to people and context. In addition, it also reveals real experiences of people, particularly the urban poor and their aspirations that press socio-spatial and political effects, affecting the regimes of “citizenship”, “right” to the city and the question of “difference” through which certain population groups are differentiated - shape and are shaped by claims to the city. What is clear in the findings of the paper is that spatial planning has been a projection of this inequality and disparity, making it imperative to engage with it.

I emerged from this study realizing these workshops were warming, because of the abundant vitality, earnestness and sense with which so many citizens willingly came to participate in these workshops. Very ordinary citizens, the most marginalised, differentiated against, reveal themselves as people with gains of percipience and eloquence about the things they know from first hand life. They speak with passion about concerns that are local but far from narrow. The experience of living, responsibility and concern in abundance among these people. It is clear from the study that the people, particularly urban poor who are typically neglected from planning processes, have all the desire, ability and knowledge to determine the conditions they want for their life. That they have to do so in the face of so many odds is an evidence of a systematic planning failure in a context where planning seems to be exclusively engaging with the issues of formal city. It is here, the paper advocates for the power of inclusive and bottom-up planning informed by voices from the ground to restore failures of Master Planning in Indian cities.

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