Master Planning Approach in Urban India:

Alternatives/Improvements?

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Abstract

Preparing and implementing master plans in India have been criticized for numerous reasons such as inefficiency in addressing challenges of land acquisition, degradation in urban poverty and inequality, social inclusion, inadequacy of infrastructure facilities and lack of urban services. The challenges Indian cities are facing demands renewed attention and innovative thinking for better and effective planning which is however yet to be produced. Significance of the study lies with the growing urbanization, increase in the number of master plans and growing consciousness to have an inclusive and participatory planning approach. Despite several alternatives have been suggested over the years yet none of them were realized practically. Thus the master plans needs to be flexible, inclusive, transparent and accountable which would help in reducing the gap in plan preparation and implementation.

Introduction

Widening gap in plan preparation and plan implementation is the main reason for which master plan has been criticized. Several scholars have noted numerous reasons for the poor implementation of master plans (Nallathiga 2009; Chatterjee 2006; Watson 2009; Kundu 2003; Baviskar 2003). More generally these include: inefficiency in addressing challenges of land acquisition, urban poverty and inequality, social inclusion, inadequacy of infrastructure, transportation, inadequate housing, services like water, sanitation and the problem of environmental sustainability are common in Indian cities. One finds the fact that planning suffers from lack of organizational coordination, human

resource constraints, lack of technological know-how, financial crisis, lack of evaluation and maintenance, no proper regulatory provision, awareness, attitude, as well as motivational crisis and bureaucratic control. Whether planned or organic cities in India that has adapted planning reflects multiple issues of implementation of the master plan. Therefore there is a need for renewed attention and innovative thinking for better and effective planning. Hence, a major thrust needs to be on making the master plan flexible, inclusive, transparent, and accountable.

Contrary to the western cities that are counted as universal models of urbanization, Raka Ray says India has its "own version of modernity and urbanism" (The India International Centre 2011). K. C Sivaramakrishnan has expressed similar thoughts and said, 'Indian urbanization demands renewed attention and creative thinking so that it can have healthy, sustainable and responsible urbanization' (The India International Centre 2011). Further, Chatterjee (2006) says master plan is an imperfect model adapted from western world in the Indian context. Thus in India master plan has been proved to be inadequate and not inclusive. Master plan is not working proactively rather retroactively by regularizing the change that has come in due process of growth of the city.

This has long been debated that master plan gives little attention in addressing a large mass of the public particularly the poor and middle class limiting it into elites and their control (Delhi Master Plan…..2007; Nallathiga 2009; Chatterjee 2006; Kundu 2003; Kundu 2004; Baviskar 2003; Mahadevia and Joshi 2009). Despite master plan has been criticized for not be inclusive, inefficient in addressing the dynamics of the city yet master plan is significant for the city perspective. Master plan has given scope many ways to connect the city to its outer world through decision making. At the same time plan of the city is also get influenced by the external forces. With increasing uncertainty and multiple influencing factors master plan will never find a pattern. Therefore it is important to analyze role of master plan in addressing dynamics of cities in India and how the existing approaches to master plan implementation are inadequate.

Alternatives to Master Plan Approach

While there is widespread agreement amongst all on the need for reforms in master planning, there is no consensus on the way forward. Multiple alternatives have been suggested to master plan approach. Master plan has been criticized a lot and argued to be replaced by flexible and inclusive structure and strategic and growth management plans (Watson 2009). The Urban local bodies need to implement plans based on the strategic-participatory method. Jain (2003a and Jain 2003b) says planning need to be localized and participatory. Further Jain says there is a need to have several basic changes in several areas in the planning approach such as: decentralized governance, information technology, environmental aspects, legal and management reforms, and devolution of planning, building controls and approvals, market economies and privatization. Prasad et al. (1987) has suggested active public participation, reduction in information gap among organizations requires for effective decision making. He has also suggested for integrating and coordinating agency like the development authority to have better inter-organizational coordination, which would help for effective planning. Planning Commission in its 11th five year plan report (volume III, p. 396) has pointed out that master plan is not suitable for the management of the large cities and suggests developing new approach.

With growing criticism of the master plan in India, the Ministry of Urban Development organized a national conference on the theme of 'Alternatives to the Master Plan'. The conference concluded that the only alternative to the Master Plan is a better Master Plan (Ansari 2004), that is, strengthening the existing planning mechanism for better planning. Dilemmas here are now how to characterize a better master plan. Ansari in his paper had no explanation on what a better master is or how a better master plan needs to be. He didn't even say how the conference has characterized the better master plan. School of Planning and Architecture has suggested 'strategic spatial plan' as an alternative.

Sheikh et al. (2007) suggested participatory urban planning in case of Chhattisgarh

which focuses on developing the plan through collaborative partnerships and continuous dialogue between planners, government officials, elected representatives and the community. Authors mentioned that the success of the process depends on effectively facilitating the mobilization and sensitization of the stakeholders for the effective participation by the NGOs and other civil society organizations.

Based on a series of conferences titled 'The 21st Century Indian City' held during the period 2011-13, Saxena and Vijayakumar (2014) have suggested Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) as an alternative to meet the challenges. To quote,

> *"The only way to address this gap is to create a JNNURM-like program, but one that is designed specifically with small and medium towns and the urban poor as its central focus. And any public private partnerships for service delivery must include civil society alongside government and private developers: hybrid models will be required to provide tailor-made solutions and results."*

While acknowledging that JNNURM is contributing for urban infrastructure development as well as in the reduction of urban poverty but as an alternative to master planning for the city it is not adequate enough to address the challenges that cities are facing. For example, most stakeholders of the JNNURM are at central level such as Minstry of Urban Development (MoUD), National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), Planning Commission, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and USAID and may not represent local concerns effectively. Only a few executives from the city level are consulted thereby excluding local level agencies and public inputs. Many instances of inadequacy in infrastructure including housing provisions were discussed (Sami 2012). Implementation of JNNURM has been also criticized because most beneficiaries are business leaders and real estate developers. It has been argued that JNNURM is biased towards urban infrastructure development of large cities, rather than addressing urban poverty. The initiative pays very little attention

to improving environmental conditions in the cities. Therefore, one may argue that JNNURM is not inclusive and holistic rather it exacerbates intra-city inequality.

Alternatives are many and are of significant scholarly suggestions. Despite of the fact that we have suggestions for all the scales includes million plus cities to capital cities to class I and small cities yet these suggestions have remained in pain and paper. Acknowledging these alternatives is just a step to think about possible changes or modifications we required in the existing planning practices. It is significant for the planners and the experts who are involved in the planning process to realize these alternatives in the city and its planned development. Again it is contested to say what alternative plan is for a million cities may not be same for a class I or small city. Alternatives are contested and does not mean complete alternatives to the existing planning approach rather 'alternative' is understood more as improvements in the . But there are broad and similar alternatives that is applicable to Indian cities in the larger context.

Concluding Remark

Master plans in India are third generation plans and their number is constantly increasing. Going back to the history of master plans in India which was adapted from British Planning and slowly accommodating a large number of cities. By 2001 census about 1500 master plans were prepared in India (Jain 2003a) and in the year 2004, more than 2000 cities had master plans (Ansari 2004). Besides that master plan enhance the city by guiding its growth and development, distribution of infrastructures, basic needs, services and amenities. Recent master plans have included some of the strategies to handle the needs of EWS, LIG, and MIG[1] groups by assigning them some percentage of lands and housing. To say master plan is enhancing general living in different settings although the degree is in question. Thus significance of the study lies with the growing urbanization, increasing number of master plans and the need for making better cities.

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[1] EWS stands for economically weaker sections, LIG is for low income groups and MIG is for middle income groups.

Considering the challenges, and issues and concerns that need to be taken into account, a common consensus has already built up saying that there is need for an inclusive, flexible, transparent and accountable framework, which can capture the dynamism and adapt to changing realities of the cities, (Jain 2003a). In this research I therefore suggest the need for an alternative to master planning implementation process. As has been noted by many authors issues like water, sanitation, housing, transportation, and infrastructure development need integrated planning, which could possibly address failure of planning (The India International Centre 2011). One may say the characteristics of the alternative have to be holistic by integrating concerned issues and also has to be inclusive. Since problems/challenges are multiple (both in number and at level) and interconnected, there is a widespread recognition of the significance of bringing together multiple agencies like government organizations, private bodies, through public-private partnerships, civil society, intellectuals, planners, policy makers and the citizens to work together in a collaborative space for a better solution. It is suggested that inclusion of poor into the city system could be possible by building trust and evaluating risk (The India International Centre 2011). Thus, getting information through sharing is also important characteristic of this alternative framework.

We need an alternative to the existing master plan that allows increasing transparency and accountability, increasing participation of actors. Bringing stakeholders together for face-to-face contact and discussion, exchange of information and perspectives, and to foster trust building. Its function makes information comprehensible and ensures resources are available for willingness to meet and talk meaningful and effective dialogue. Alternative needs to have the ability to manage frank and transparent dialogue describes collaboration function by increasing participation, developing trust and mutual understanding, allowing the co-production of relevant scientifically credible and applied knowledge.

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