

Upgrading informal settlements in Karachi, Pakistan

A neopatrimonial approach to the study of policy implementation

Moizza Binat Sarwar
St. Hilda's College
University of Oxford

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Thesis Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the implementation of the upgrading policy for informal settlements effective in Karachi from 1987. According to the policy there are two possible outcomes for the allocation of leases according to the status of the applicant: legal settlements and illegal settlements. However, these distinctions are not respected in practice. This gap has been frequently overlooked in current literature, which analyses policy formulation and outcomes while ignoring the implementation stage. I focus on a single site case study of the implementing agency's Karachi Field Office to examine in depth the processes that contributed to differential outcomes in upgrading in Karachi. I draw on the concept of neopatrimonialism to capture the contradictory conduct in the public agency of KFO that leads to inconsistent patterns in outcomes. Analysis of ethnographic and qualitative data, collected over six months of fieldwork, suggests that in the case of Karachi, the use of bureaucratic discretion by a senior level bureaucrat has explained periods of implementation where lease allocation has been close to the formulated intent of the upgrading policy. In times when such discretion has not been used, lease allocation has been selective and occurred at the behest of patrimonial imperatives exercised by provincial level politicians. The significance of bureaucratic discretion in implementation has implications for policy practice and the reform and improvement of public welfare programmes to ensure continuity between policy and outcome. On a larger scale my research contributes to the study of public agencies in Pakistan and, more broadly, to social policy literature, particularly as regards policy implementation in developing countries. Significantly the nuanced effect of neopatrimonialism on the work of public agencies shows that institutions continue to matter in the delivery of welfare programmes.

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Note on Translation

All translations are my own. Interviews were conducted in Urdu and unless otherwise indicated, all quotes have been translated from Urdu into English.

Note on Material

Material on upgrading literature in Chapter One and Chapter Two has in some cases been taken from my Masters of Philosophy thesis titled ‘A comparison of upgrading outcomes and stakeholders in Cape Town, South Africa and Karachi, Pakistan’ submitted and passed by the Department of Social Policy, University of Oxford in 2009. The M.Phil dissertation was originally intended to provide the first two chapters for this doctoral work; however a change in focus resulted in only material on Karachi being used in the background chapters of this dissertation.

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