



NATIONAL WORKSHOP | PROCEEDINGS

Proceedings of the National Workshop



Socio-Economic Baseline of Selected Urban Slums, Urban Poor and Refugee Communities in Five Cities of Pakistan

DATE 09 July 2026

VENUE NED University City Campus, Karachi (Physical + Online)

A collaborative initiative of

UN-Habitat Pakistan and NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi

With the support of the Government of the Netherlands

1 Introduction

The National Workshop was organized to present the findings of the Socio-Economic Baseline Assessment conducted in selected slum settlements hosting Afghan refugees and host communities across five cities of Pakistan. The assessment was undertaken by the NED University of Engineering and Technology (NEDUET) in partnership with UN-Habitat under the project “Harmonizing Afghan Refugees and Host Communities in Urban Slums in Pakistan for Peaceful Coexistence and Social, Gender-positive Inclusiveness.”

2 Background

The socio-economic baseline assessment was undertaken to generate robust and comprehensive evidence on the living conditions of refugee and host communities residing in selected urban settlements across Karachi, Peshawar, Kohat, Haripur, and Quetta. The assessment sought to support evidence-based planning and decision-making by identifying the key socio-economic, physical, and institutional factors influencing the wellbeing, resilience, and development opportunities of these communities. It was intended to establish a standardized evidence base for identifying development challenges and priorities and informing integrated urban development, inclusive service delivery, and longer-term policy and programme interventions.

The baseline assessment examined the socio-economic conditions of refugee and host communities and generated evidence on key challenges related to housing, urban services, livelihoods, governance, public health, and social inclusion. The workshop provided a platform to present the assessment findings, validate key observations, and engage stakeholders in discussing policy and programmatic recommendations to support inclusive and sustainable upgrading of slum settlements in Pakistan.

The workshop marked the completion of a nine-month collaborative research project implemented by NED University of Engineering & Technology in partnership with UN-Habitat. The Socio-Economic Baseline assessment was conducted across selected slums settlements in Karachi, Peshawar, Kohat, Haripur, and Quetta to generate evidence on the living conditions, vulnerabilities, and development challenges of Afghan refugee and host communities. The assessment examined key socio-economic and urban development dimensions, including housing, land tenure, livelihoods, public health, access to basic services, governance, and social inclusion.

The findings provide an evidence base to inform integrated urban planning, support evidence-based policymaking, and guide future interventions aimed at improving living conditions and promoting inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development in slum settlements.

3 Objectives of the workshop

The core objective of the workshop was to develop a roadmap for the sustainable development and upgrading of slum settlements in Pakistan. The discussion was guided by the following key questions:

- 1) How can these slum settlements be integrated into the wider urban fabric?
- 2) What are the legal challenges to achieve sustainable development and upgrading of slum settlements?
- 3) What are the key socio-economic challenges affecting these slum and informal settlements?
- 4) What are the principal physical development challenges faced by these slum and informal settlements?

4 Participants

The workshop was attended by representatives from government institutions, academia, UN agencies, development organizations, local government authorities, civil society organizations, urban planning professionals, community representatives, researchers, and students. A detailed list of participating organizations and institutions is provided in Annex I. NED University of Engineering & Technology

- UN-Habitat
- Provincial and Local Government Departments
- Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority
- Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC)
- Union Councils
- Community Representatives
- Researchers and Academicians
- Development Organizations
- Urban Planning Professionals
- Students and Young Researchers

5 Panel discussion and findings

The panel discussion and open forum addressed the four guiding questions outlined in Section 3, examining the integration of slum settlements into the wider urban fabric, associated legal and institutional constraints, socio-economic challenges, and physical development priorities. It brought together representatives from government institutions, academia, UN-Habitat, development organizations, and community stakeholders. The discussion highlighted several priority themes, including urban growth and migration, governance and institutional performance, land tenure and affordable housing, community participation in settlement upgrading, public health and community

awareness, and institutional coordination for localized planning. The findings are summarized as the following:

5.1 Urban growth and migration challenges cannot be met by infrastructure alone

Continued population growth in Karachi is driven by rural-to-urban migration, natural disasters, economic hardship, and internal displacement, and this is placing increasing pressure on housing, education, healthcare, sanitation, transport, and other urban services. The expansion of slum settlements is one of the most visible consequences, making service delivery increasingly difficult. Growing public health burden, particularly for children, is also a concern, as well as increasing substance abuse among youth in several low-income communities.

Panel members agreed that migration is one of Pakistan's most significant urban development challenges, emphasizing that infrastructure expansion alone cannot address this issue. Effective long-term solutions require addressing the underlying drivers of migration, strengthening urban planning, improving social protection, healthcare, and education systems; creating livelihood opportunities, and offering youth development programmes.

5.2 Effective urban services and infrastructure require improving implementation capacities

The effectiveness of public urban development investments are limited as many development projects remain incomplete despite receiving allocated government funding. Delays in project planning, procurement, administrative approvals, and the late release of development budgets frequently result in inefficient implementation and reduced project quality. Weak project management and monitoring systems were also identified as major institutional constraints.

Improving institutional capacity is fundamental to achieving better development outcomes. Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening project preparation, improving budget management, enhancing transparency and accountability, and establishing robust monitoring systems to ensure that public investments are implemented efficiently and deliver long-term benefits.

5.3 Land tenure and affordable housing are significant root problems

Land tenure and housing emerged as central themes with participants highlighting the complexity of Karachi's land administration system, where multiple agencies are responsible for issuing leases, creating confusion regarding ownership rights and legal status. The existing lease process was described as costly, lengthy, and particularly difficult for low-income households to navigate.

Government representatives acknowledged these challenges noting that efforts are underway to improve administrative procedures. However, the panel emphasized that settlement regularization alone cannot resolve Karachi's housing challenges. Future urban planning must prioritize affordable and regulated housing development, simplify land administration procedures, and discourage the formation of new informal settlements. Participants suggested that housing policies should consider residents' dependence on nearby employment opportunities, ensuring that housing affordability, transport accessibility, and livelihood needs are addressed simultaneously.

5.4 Sustainable settlement upgrading requires active community participation

Sustainable settlement upgrading requires considerably more than physical infrastructure improvements. Investments in roads, drainage, water supply, and sanitation are essential, but these interventions are insufficient if they do not involve the meaningful participation of local community members. In fact, too often local communities are relied upon to provide themselves with basic services on their own, but they lack the resources, capacities, and support to do so.

To engage and involve local communities successfully government agencies, planners, policymakers, and service providers must strengthen governance systems, make planning practices more inclusive, and increase institutional accountability. The discussion concluded that sustainable upgrading depends upon a balanced partnership, one in which local communities actively participate, with public institutions providing effective leadership, coordination, and services.

5.5 Public health is undermined by low awareness

Public awareness in improving health outcomes in informal settlements is critical, and expanding healthcare infrastructure alone is insufficient. Participants noted that although many basic healthcare services, including immunization programmes, are already available within low-income settlements, utilization remains far lower than expected because of limited public awareness and insufficient community outreach. Consequently, many preventable diseases continue to affect children and vulnerable populations.

Greater emphasis is needed on health education campaigns, community outreach initiatives, stronger collaboration with community organizations, and improved coordination between healthcare providers and residents to increase awareness and service utilization.

5.6 Weak institutional coordination undermines development efforts

Coordination amongst institutions working within informal settlements remains limited and leads to duplication of activities, fragmented interventions, and inefficient use of available resources. Without effective coordination – such as between government

departments, universities, and NGOs – development partners are not able to share information, jointly plan interventions, or involve all stakeholders in their activities.

6 Recommendations

The panel discussion concluded that the socio-economic baseline assessment should serve as a foundation to shape future urban development and policy interventions, rather than remaining merely a research exercise. The following recommendations emerged from the panelists' discussion.

6.1 Mainstream informal settlements into urban planning and development

Informal settlements should be treated as an integral component of Pakistan's urban system rather than as isolated or temporary spaces. Future planning should incorporate settlement upgrading within city master plans, local development strategies, municipal investment programmes, and sectoral planning processes.

6.2 Strengthen governance, institutional coordination and policy implementation

Stronger coordination is needed between federal and provincial governments, local authorities, UN-Habitat, academia, civil society organizations, and community institutions. Participants noted that fragmented institutional responsibilities often limit effective implementation and called for integrated governance mechanisms, improved accountability, and better alignment between development planning, budgeting, and service delivery.

6.3 Promote inclusive development for vulnerable communities

Sustainable settlement upgrading practices should not make distinctions between different groups or identities when creating access to essential urban services. This comment brings attention to the importance of promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence between Afghan refugees and host communities. This outcome can be achieved through inclusive planning processes, creating economic opportunities, and activities that spur social and institutional integration, while also strengthening physical infrastructure.

6.4 Address land tenure and housing security

Land tenure security emerged as one of the most significant structural challenges that influence informal settlements across Pakistan. Participants highlighted the need to simplify land administration processes, improve coordination among relevant authorities, and explore practical approaches to tenure regularization where it is legally appropriate

to do so. It was recognized that greater tenure security would encourage household investment, improve housing conditions, and facilitate long-term infrastructure development while supporting broader urban development objectives.

6.5 Recognize the diversity of informal settlements

Informal settlements across Pakistan cannot be treated as the same, significant differences exist in their legal status, age, location, socio-economic conditions, settlement morphology, and level of infrastructure provision. It follows that settlement upgrading programmes should move beyond a standardized approach, instead a context-specific planning approach should be adopted that responds to the unique characteristics and needs of each settlement.

Understanding these differences is essential to create the capacity to design appropriate policies on land tenure, service delivery, housing, infrastructure investment, and institutional support. Future interventions should therefore be guided by detailed spatial and socio-economic assessments.

6.6 Strengthen community-based planning and local participation

Sustainable settlement upgrading cannot be achieved through infrastructure investment alone. Participants proposed establishing stronger community engagement mechanisms, including local committees and youth groups, to facilitate continuous dialogue between residents, government institutions, and development partners. Such mechanisms were considered essential for improving project ownership, ensuring locally relevant interventions, strengthening accountability, and sustaining development outcomes beyond individual projects.

6.7 Invest in human development and livelihood opportunities

Improvements in the physical infrastructure of informal settlements should be accompanied by investments in education, vocational training, public health, women's economic participation, youth development, and livelihood generation. Community awareness programmes, sports activities and facilities, and public spaces were also identified as key investments that can strengthen social cohesion, improve public health, and reduce long-term socio-economic vulnerabilities within informal settlements.

6.8 Promote positive public perceptions of informal settlements

Better public understanding of the social and economic realities of informal settlements, and the dissemination of positive narratives about them, should be promoted. Negative public perceptions and portrayals of informal settlements undermine efforts to promote inclusive urban development. Historically informal settlements have been portrayed as

burdens to cities rather than as communities which contribute positively to the urban economy and labour market.

Evidence generated through the socio-economic baseline assessment can foster more informed public discourse and support policies based on empirical evidence rather than contribute to misunderstanding. Changing perceptions is an important step towards building broader political and institutional support for sustainable settlement upgrading and social inclusion.

6.9 Strengthen evidence-based planning and sustainable knowledge management

The socio-economic baseline assessment represents the beginning of a continuous knowledge-generation process rather than an isolated and modest contribution. Participants commented that numerous previous initiatives have generated valuable experience but encountered a host of challenges that limited their long-term effectiveness. A knowledge platform was recommended to enable government institutions, researchers, and development partners to share lessons, challenges, and charting changing settlement dynamics and development priorities.

Recommendations include: i) regular and inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue to critically review current practice and earlier programmes, ii) a comprehensive, regularly updated database of informal settlements, to support policy development, long-term planning, and monitoring, and iii) the documentation of successful upgrading initiatives that capture lessons from across Pakistan. Sharing evidence and knowledge will foster more adaptive and evidence-informed approaches, incorporate lessons into programme design, implementation, and institutional coordination, and strengthen institutional learning, and support evidence-based urban policymaking at the local, provincial and national levels.

6.10 Integrate climate resilience into settlement upgrading

Future settlement upgrading initiatives should respond to the increasing impacts of climate change, not simply react to infrastructure deficits. Informal settlements remain among the most vulnerable areas of cities due to inadequate housing, limited drainage infrastructure, and greater exposure to environmental hazards. Therefore, climate resilience and disaster risk reduction considerations should be integrated into future planning and investment decisions to enhance the long-term sustainability and resilience of vulnerable communities.

The discussion highlighted that urban planning approaches must evolve to address emerging climate challenges through resilient infrastructure, improved environmental management, and adaptive planning strategies.

7 Conclusion

The National Workshop successfully brought together representatives from government institutions, UN-Habitat, academia, development organizations, local authorities, and community representatives to reflect on the findings of the Socio-economic Baseline Assessment and explore future directions for the sustainable upgrading of informal settlements in Pakistan. While the assessment focused on selected settlements hosting Afghan refugee and host communities across five cities, the workshop deliberately adopted a broader perspective to identify policy directions and development strategies applicable to vulnerable urban communities more generally.

The workshop discussion provided practical responses to the four guiding questions highlighting the need for stronger urban integration, appropriate legal and institutional frameworks, improved socio-economic opportunities, and sustained investment in physical settlement upgrading. Participants reaffirmed the challenges facing informal settlements—including insecure land tenure, inadequate housing and infrastructure, limited access to basic services, socio-economic vulnerability, and weak institutional coordination—are closely interconnected and therefore require integrated, evidence-based, and context-sensitive responses. Successful settlement upgrading must extend beyond physical infrastructure improvements to include more inclusive governance, community participation, affordable housing, human development, climate resilience, and improved coordination among public institutions and development partners.

The workshop concluded that the Socio-economic Baseline Assessment provides an important foundation for evidence-based policymaking, urban planning, and future programming. Participants expressed a shared commitment to strengthening collaboration among government, academia, development partners, and communities to ensure that future interventions contribute to more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban development while improving the living conditions of vulnerable populations residing in Pakistan's informal settlements.

Annex1. Participating organizations and institutions

The National Workshop was attended by representatives from the following organizations and stakeholder groups:

Category	Organizations / institutions represented
Academia	NED University of Engineering & Technology (NEDUET), Researchers and Academicians, Students and Young Researchers
United Nations	UN-Habitat
Government Institutions	Provincial and Local Government Departments, Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), Union Councils
Specialized Government Agencies	Sindh Katchi Abadi Authority
Development Partners	Development Organizations
Community Stakeholders	Community Representatives
Technical Professionals	Urban Planning Professionals

Annex 2. Agenda

Time	Session	Speaker / Facilitator
09:30 am – 10:00 am	Registration	-
10:00 am – 10:10 am	Session commencement	-
10:10 am – 10:15 am	Recitation	-
10:15 am – 10:20 am	National anthem	-
10:20 am – 10:30 am	Welcome note	Agha Humair
10:30 am – 10:45 am	Keynote address	Waqar Syed
10:45 am – 11:10 am	Project introduction	Prof. Dr. Noman Ahmed
11:10 am – 11:45 am	Project Findings and way forward	Dr. Saeed Ud Din Ahmed
11:45 am – 12:45 pm	Panel discussion	Dr. Saeed Ud Din Ahmed (Moderator)
12:45 pm – 01:00 pm	Concluding remarks	Organizer
01:00 pm – Onwards	Lunch and prayer	-

Annex 3. Workshop glimpses



Figure A1: National Workshop poster



Figure A2: Group photograph of workshop participants



Figure A3: Welcome remarks by Mr. Waqar Syed, Country Programme Manager, UN-Habitat Pakistan



Figure A4. Panelists during the National Workshop on the Socio-Economic Baseline Assessment of Selected Slum Settlements in Five Cities of Pakistan.



Figure A5. Prof. Dr. Noman Ahmed, Acting Vice Chancellor, NED University of Engineering and Technology, delivering remarks during the National Workshop.



Figure A6. Participants during the technical session



Figure A7. Dr. Saeed Ud Din Ahmed presented the conclusion of the findings from the socio-economic baseline survey from 30 settlement in 05 cities.



Figure A8: Syed Najmi Alam, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Sindh for Livestock, Fisheries, and Human Settlements, addressing participants during the National Workshop.



Figure A9. Panel members during the discussion.