

AIPS Final Report

1. Significance of the Presentation:

This presentation offered a novel understanding of the processes of urban development in the peripheral cities of Pakistan. There is a growing evidence emerging from many countries of the global south that dispossession and displacement of marginalized segments of society is embedded in the processes of urbanization and capitalist accumulation. But not much is being written in terms of the modalities and intermediary processes which facilitate urban development, dispossession and accumulation in the context of Pakistan. This presentation filled the void in the existing literature by introducing a novel conceptual framework in which the ‘construction of new road networks, i.e. change in relative spatiality of the place’, is introduced as a key intermediary process that facilitates urban development by dispossession in Pakistan. For the empirical case study, the presentation focused on the Sheikhpura district (Punjab) in Pakistan and draws from a newly created household data set. The presentation demonstrated that construction of linked roads connected with the M2 motorway from Lahore to Islamabad facilitated the expansion of urban spaces through dispossession. As a result, the erstwhile farmland is rapidly converted into non-farms (gated housing communities, real estate development) and this has huge implications for land, labor and produce markets at the local level. The presentation argued that that the postcolonial capital is more interested in acquiring land for real estate development rather than transforming erstwhile peasants/petty-commodity producers into wage laborers. In other words, the production of new urban spaces (housing societies, real estate development) has become one of the most effective strategy of capital accumulation in the age of neoliberalism in Punjab, Pakistan and this aspect of the postcolonial urbanization is not delineated in any systemic manner in the existing literature on Pakistan.