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POLITICAL ECONOMY OF URBAN CHANGE IN KATHMANDU VALLEY: A CASE FROM SOUTHERN LALITPUR METROPOLITAN CITY

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ABSTRACT

Urbanisation in Kathmandu Valley (KV), comprising the capital city Kathmandu, accelerated after the restoration of democracy in the 1990s, as the neoliberal economic policy adopted by the country opened doors for investments in infrastructure development. Urbanisation further accelerated during the Maoist insurgency and heightened after the conflict resolution in 2006 and since then, the country has gone through multiple (spatial, demographic, political, and economic) transitions. With better access to education, hospitals, jobs, businesses, politics, Kathmandu Valley attracts people from all over the country, resulting in the densification in the core cities and an uncontrolled urban sprawl thereby unplanned growth of built-up areas in the periphery. This paper, taking reference of Lalitpur Metropolitan City in the valley with a focus on Khokana (Ward 21) analyses (1) the trend of urbanisation in KV with a reference to urban growth and land use change and (2) examines the contradictions and contestations brought by the centrally planned development and constructional projects as part of the drivers of the urbanisation process in and around Khokana. We examine how the infrastructural imperatives and real estate boom is shifting the core to the periphery and the periphery again is transforming into a new core due to the expansion of capital and market. The planned infrastructural projects, additionally, have also increased the risk of delinking local communities from their land, which is the main cause of community dissatisfaction. We, therefore, conclude with the policy suggestion to ensure the participation of local people and prioritisation of urban development projects based on local needs to achieve a resilient tomorrow's cities.

Keywords: capital and market; core and periphery; contestations; neoliberal urbanism; tomorrow's cities; urban governance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nepal is one of the least developed but one of the ten fastest urbanising countries in the world (UNDESA, 2014). Its urban population growth has been very fast in the last decade due to both politico-administrative and economic reasons. Urbanisation in Nepal primarily accelerated during the political conflict (i.e., Maoist insurgency during the late 1990s and the early 2000) and heightened after the settlement of the political issue in 2006 continuing multiple (spatial, demographic, and economic) urban transitions (UNDESA, 2014). Till 2013, only 17% of the country's population lived in urban areas of Nepal (CBS, 2011). In the fiscal year 2014/15, the urban population reached 40%, which increased to 66.08% of the country's population in 2021 (CBS, 2021). Similarly, in the year 2013, there were 58 municipalities which increased to 217 in 2014/15 and, subsequently to 293 municipalities in 2016/17. The political decision of the government to transform many rural areas and integrate them into urban areas has increased the percentage of the population living in urban areas, although most of them still lack basic urban facilities (Timsina et al., 2020). The declaration of municipalities by the government is primarily motivated by political dimensions and does not meet the definition and criteria of the concept of urban areas (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). Many declared urban areas lack basic infrastructure and economic activities, basic services like health, education, sanitation, drinking water, electricity and roads, and have low population density (ibid.). In fact, in many of the municipal units, the rural population is also counted as urban population despite not having urban characteristics.

In 2017, according to the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), 16 urban centers cover 33.5% of the total urban population and each has over 100,000 population. Bagmati Province, which also includes Kathmandu Valley (KV) has the highest proportion of it followed by Province 1 and Gandaki Province. The distribution of the urban population is relatively low in the Karnali Province and Far-Western Province (see figure 1).

Kathmandu Valley (KV), comprising the capital city Kathmandu[2] with tremendous opportunities for education, hospitals, job, business, politics and pleasant weather conditions, attracts many people every year resulting in rapid urbanisation, and hence accumulates multiple challenges for urban management (Thapa and Murayama, 2010). The unplanned/haphazard growth of the built-up areas has led to a rapid and uncontrolled population densification in the core cities and haphazard urban sprawl in the periphery (ibid.). With increasing infrastructure development in peripheral areas, KV has its rapid expansion in the outskirts, turning peri-urban settlements into towns. However, proper management of public utilities such as roadways, drinking water, open spaces, solid waste management, sewerage system, and communication channels have not received sufficient attention. This has affected the everyday livelihoods of people and such effects have been prominent after the 2015 earthquake and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 Kathmandu Valley which includes three districts (Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur) comprises two metropolitan cities (i.e., Kathmandu Metropolitan City and Lalitpur Metropolitan City), 16 municipalities and three rural municipalities. The local governments that are declared as municipality and metropolitan city are considered urban in Nepal.

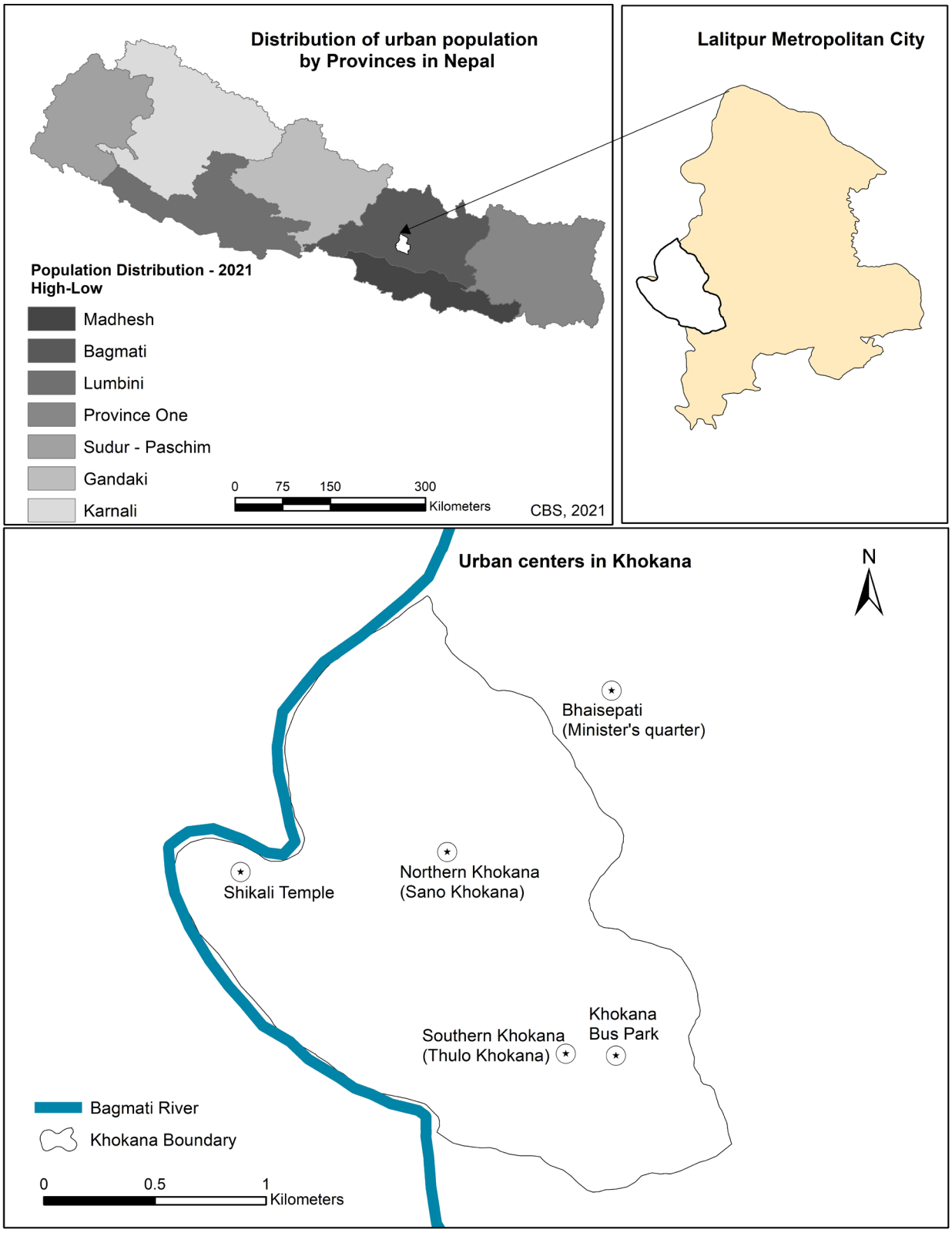


Figure 1: Study location with urban population in Nepal

Additionally, ongoing land use changes in the peri-urban areas triggered by development and construction activities and the real estate boom have also alienated local people from their land. These factors have pushed the local inhabitants to sell their agricultural lands- a major source of their livelihood. Likewise, the public spaces have been grabbed, the history and culture of the indigenous communities have been threatened and the traditional collective institutions are

weakened (The Kathmandu Post, 2018). These phenomena of urban change have brought tension and contradictions in the communities in various forms including protests against the public spaces captured by the powerful individuals, companies, and the infrastructure development project implemented by the central government.

The trend of urbanisation described above is akin to the neoliberal way of framing policy. It is so because the urban expansion in KV is accelerated by the forces of capital and market which are encapsulated in the neoliberal development framework. Neoliberalism holds that the political and economic institutions of a society should be robustly liberal and endorse liberal rights and the free market to promote freedom and economic prosperity (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021). So, it promotes capital investment and creates commercial spaces. Therefore, the neoliberal way of urban planning plays a strategic role to remake political-economic spaces (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Being a hegemonic politico-economic paradigm, neoliberalism has conceptually shaped economic development policies at the global, national and local levels (Duménil and Lévy., 2004; Harvey, 2005). Kirkpatrick and Smith (2011) and Swyngedouw et al. (2002), however, have found private investment through the infrastructure development (i.e., infrastructural imperative) in urban areas as a new form of urban governance prioritising interests of powerful people. They argue that although the infrastructural imperative in neoliberal urban policy tries to rationalise urban transformation combining physical and socio-economic development objectives, it increases economic gaps and social disparities in urban areas. Swyngedouw et al. (2002), characterises neoliberal urbanism as "privatisation of urban governance", and consider that it undermines collective decision making process as it is dominated by selected professionals (technocrats) and investors (e.g., planners, architects, engineers, economists, and so on), whereas other non-professionals and socio-economically less powerful people remain largely excluded.

Furthermore, Brenner and Theodore (2002, 2005) argued neo-liberal market-oriented restructuring as a new form of urban governance, which promotes elite business interests that can directly influence local development decisions, customise urban infrastructures to increase capital flows, and the construction of megaprojects to attract corporate investment reconfiguring local land use patterns. Business elites often deploy "back door" of traditional democratic systems to accumulate economic space and urbanism in their favours (Kirkpatrick and Smith, 2011). In neoliberal urbanism, neoliberalism subordinates urbanism by capitalism, where urban powers attempt to place their cities in higher positions to accumulate more investment and capital (Vives Miró, 2011). Harvey (1989), describing the transformation of urban governance from managerialism to entrepreneurialism, alerts us that the speculative qualities of urban investments in neoliberalism with reduced predictability of achieving success promote economic instability and volatility. Furthermore, Harvey (2013) forwarding the idea of Rebel Cities, found that a city can be a place of both capital flow and class struggles. City turns into a rebel city if its development plan does not orient to achieve a socially just and ecologically sane city. This paper uses the case of Khokana, where local resistant movements are going on against the large-scale infrastructure projects driven by neoliberal capital flows and accumulation of land for development infrastructure. These

resistance movements are rising against the control of the financiers and developers over local land and against the risk of alienation from the land.

Khokana, one of the rapidly urbanising peri-urban settlements, is located in ward no. 21 of Lalitpur Metropolitan City (LMC-21), on the southern edge of KV. It is a medieval Newari town, also known as the capital of mustard oil and covers a total area of 3.2 sq. km (Khokana.org). Primarily inhabited by the indigenous Newar (Jyapu)[3] community, it represents their traditional culture, history, norms, and value systems representing KV. In the last three decades, noticeably after the 2015 earthquake, the flow of in-migrants, increasing investment in real estate and development projects, rising establishment of light manufacturing factories[4], and promotion of local hospitality and tourism have brought substantial changes in land use patterns and livelihoods in Khokana .

In these backdrops, this study analyses the trend of urbanisation in KV with a reference to land use change and examines the contradictions and contestations brought by the recent development and constructional projects and their impacts that surface in Khokana. The evidences presented in this article are based on both empirical data collected from Khokana during the period July 2019 - December 2021 and the review of the literature. Empirical evidences were collected through 30 interviews (six female) with households, local stakeholders, key informants and experts (geographers, urban planners and migration experts), followed by four focus group discussions, several transect walks and field observations during the three years of engagements in Khokana. Additionally, several policy and other relevant documents were reviewed and the relevant information were used in this article. We hope the findings of this study will add value to the urban study along with the policy implications to achieve resilient tomorrow's cities.

2. URBANISATION AND LAND USE CHANGES IN KATHMANDU VALLEY

During the last three decades, substantial changes in the built-up area of the KV has been observed, which is the ultimate effect of rapid urbanisation. A study conducted by Ishtiaque et al. (2017) shows that KV's urban area has expanded up to 412% in the last three decades, mostly with the conversions of 31% of agricultural land.

Until the 1980s, the built-up areas of KV were confined within the traditional settlements of the five municipalities[5]. The outward urban expansion started in the early 1990s and accelerated in the 2000s, especially along the major roads that link the outskirts of the five municipalities converting the highly fertile and productive agricultural lands. Consequently, KV observed 117% growth in the built-up areas during the period 1999-2000 (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). Different pull and push factors were vital for the land use changes in KV (Subedi, 2010; Thapa and Murayama, 2010). A decade-long Maoist insurgency period that began in the mid-1990s led to a massive

3 Jyapus, one of the ethnic categories within Newari caste system, denotes the indigenous farmer of the valley. Etymologically, the word jyapu is derived from 'Jya' as work and 'Phu' as capable (Pokharel, 2020).

4 Light manufacturing factories include, for example, manufacturing of clothes, shoes, ironwork, tobacco, soap, raincoat, hoarding boards, furniture, building materials, plastic & plastic bags, sacks, etc.

5 Name of the five municipalities: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Madhyapur Thimi and Kirtipur

flow of internally displaced people (more than 500,000) from rural areas of Nepal (Bohra-Mishra and Massey, 2011; Shrestha, 2011). Nepal's urban centers, especially KV being the political and administrative center of the country, had to accommodate most of these migrant inflows, which accelerated land fragmentation leading to increasing hazards, pollution, and deterioration of the ecosystem (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). KV is also the economic hub for services and facilities such as tourism, finance, industry, education, transportation, health care, and sports (Thapa and Murayama, 2010). Similarly, government policies including the adaptation of centralised policy by the past successive governments have tempted huge population migration into KV (ibid.). These pull factors have attracted both capital and labour and also expanded the market in urban areas that represent the major characteristics of neoliberal development. As stated above, neoliberalism is an economic philosophy that promotes the free market, capitalism, free trade, deregulation, and investment in the private sector by reducing public sector expenditure.

Both these 'pull factors' in urban areas like expansion of public and private services, better opportunities and security situation discussed above, and the 'push factors' in the rural areas – decade-long civil unrest, low socio-economic development, social stigma (e.g., caste/ethnic affiliation), natural disaster causing loss of lives and properties triggered urban expansion (Shrestha, 2013; Poudel et al., 2021) and land use change from agriculture to commercial uses (Thapa, 2009). As a result, the built-up area of KV has increased from 38 sq. km in 1990 to 119 sq. km in 2012 over the period of 22 years, with a 211% increase (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). The proportion of mixed residential/commercial areas has increased by 524%, and that of residential has increased by 331% over the last two decades (Timsina et al., 2020; KVDA, 2016). Consequently, over the period of 22 years, cultivated land has decreased by 19% from 421 sq. km to 342 sq. km. (Thapa and Murayama, 2010, 2012). Similarly, the rapid growth of built-up areas also pushed the farmers to clear up the forest and expand agriculture in the foothills, whereby about 36% of the tree-covered areas were cleared up for the agricultural purposes (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). Such expansion and land use change were primarily observed in the municipal areas of KV.

With more than 90 percent of cultivated lands and 61 percent of registered lands, private land ownership[6] is a dominant form of tenure arrangement in the valley (USAID, 1986; Ishtiaque et al., 2017). Since most of the land in Nepal is privately owned, urban development has been carried out by either land acquisition or compulsory purchase of private land by the government in cadastral value for physical development works. Land pooling is another method to acquire the land deployed by the government (Faust et al., 2020). Land acquisition for urbanisation is a recent and rapidly expanding phenomenon in Nepal, acquiring productive agricultural land mainly for real estate and other commercial purpose (Upreti et al., 2017). This turns to be the promotion of the infrastructure for market-oriented economic growth, and the commodification of agricultural land. While Nepal's rough mountainous geography and scale of economy restricts large scale direct foreign investment in the land (Portnov et al., 2007), domestic investment for real estate

6 Land ownership in the KV can be divided into private land with absolute ownership (can be held by the owner or may be leased or mortgaged), Guthi (a traditional institution) land, government and public (public land belongs to the government but is used by the public or community whereas government land is handled by itself) (Acharya, 2008).

development in urban centres and other business enterprises is increasing (Upreti et al., 2008; Shrestha, 2010, 2011) especially in urban and peripheral mountainous areas with road access (Upreti et al., 2017).

Moreover, agricultural land is being replaced by built-up areas and most of the land in urban areas is left barren as housing plots, which is affecting the food production, thereby contributing to food insecurity (FGD in Khokana, 2021). In addition, it has affected the livelihoods of those dependent on agriculture. Thapa (2009) indicates a serious threat to agriculture in KV in terms of a decrease in production and productivity triggered by fast urbanisation and real estate development expansion.

3. REAL ESTATE BOOM

In urbanising Nepal and more specifically KV, real estate has become one of the most lucrative forms of investment (Upreti et al., 2017). Land and buildings have been the major physical assets and the trend of acquiring them is increasing in recent decades as it has limited liquidity compared to other business investments (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). The authors further mention that KV observed the most aggressive form of urban growth between 1999 and 2009 with the huge flow of migrant displaced due to political turmoil and/or stagnant growth in the agricultural sector, ultimately causing the real estate boom in KV.

The increase in the demand for land in urban areas is attributed to the inelastic supply of land and the absence of viable investment opportunities. The speculative assumption of people that the price of real estate will never decline and it is the safest sector to invest, has played an instrumental role in increasing the real estate price. With the accelerating growth of remittances (20% of the GDP) and lack of alternative investment opportunities, a huge amount of money has gone into the land and housing business creating a real estate boom (NRB, 2011). The proliferation of financial institutions together with an excess liquidity situation in the past also fueled the real estate boom, especially in the urban areas (NRB, 2011). As a result, land price in KV has escalated by 300% since 2003, which is one of the key drivers of land use change (Ishtiaque et al., 2017) as agricultural lands were converted into pieces of small plots for housing.

The haphazard construction of houses in the valley is undergoing an urban explosion rather than managed urban growth. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal has stated housing as a fundamental right of citizen (Article 37) and that no restrictions on buying and selling of land can be imposed (Article 25). Investment in the housing sector, thus, has been growing over the years. In its recent report, the Central Bank of Nepal (NRB, 2018) mentioned that about NRs. 88 billion has been invested in the real estate and housing sectors in which the commercial bank has the share of NRs. 65 billion, followed by the development banks with NRs. 12 billion, and finance companies with NRs. 10 billion. But the contribution of the housing and real estate sector to the GDP of Nepal is eight percent. In the fiscal year 2016/17, the market scenario of real estate went through a real transformation. According to Nepal Land and Housing Developers Association (cited in Greentick

Management Consultant, 2021), the investment in housing accounts for 15-35 % of the country's total investment, and only Kathmandu's real estate accounts for 42 % of the organised real estate sectors. Despite the excessive rise in land prices, which was 40-45% in FY 2016/17, the real estate price is still rapidly increasing. It has also been noticed that there has been a substantial increment in the number of individual land brokers, private companies, and projects involved in this sector (Greentick Management Consultant, 2021). Furthermore, the number of companies engaged in this sector (particularly land acquisitions, pooling, and housing) within KV currently stands at above 150, according to the membership roster of Nepal Land & Housing Developers Association (NLHDA) (Greentick Management Consultant, 2021).

Over the years, the number of buyers and sellers of real estate properties has substantially increased. For instance, in the fiscal year of 2008–2009, close to 185,000 individuals and firms bought new land and housing in the valley (Sharma, 2009). *A*ccording to NLHDA (cited in Greentick Management Consultant, 2021), the annual demand for houses and apartments in Nepal stands at around 140000 units. Although KV alone occupies about 42%, the organised real estate sector can barely construct 25000 units per year.

Ishtiaque et al. (2017) argued that the increasing number of middle-class families in KV is further contributing to the land use change in its suburbs with the increasing demands for new modern housing sub-divisions and colonies with modern amenities like private parking, grocery stores, and restaurants. Similarly, the rise of informal settlements, mostly on fertile river banks, forest areas, and open public lands, encroachment by land brokers, landless migrants, and squatters (Toffin, 2010, Upreti et al., 2017), mostly with the tacit backing of political cadres also contribute to it. The growing influx of people from rural areas to KV is essentially the outcome of large differences in economic opportunities between KV and the rest of the country. Consequently, land price in KV has increased drastically which has resulted in the displacement of original landowners from their land (Ishtiaque et al., 2017). The following analysis of Khokana case represents the present chaotic urbanisation, land speculation and dispossession by development activities and associated contradictions.

4. URBAN CHANGE IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF LALITPUR METROPOLITAN CITY (LMC)

4.1 Historical flow of capital and labour to Southern LMC - a hub of urban expansion in the periphery

In the 1990s, the Government of Nepal and the municipal authority of KV implemented planned housing for the first time in a neighbouring area of Khokana called Sainbu-Bhaisepati (administratively located in ward no. 18 of LMC). Sainbu-Bhaisepati Housing is a popular residential area for Kathmandu's elite class (Personal communication with a local child activist, 2021). According to a senior citizen of Khokana,

> Sainbu-Bhaisepati area was initially allocated (by the government) for jail complex to be constructed

> about three decades back. However, local people protested against the government's decision on the construction of the jail. The area was then developed through land pooling technique into a housing project, named as Sainbu-Bhaisepati land pooling project and now it has been one of the expensive core city areas in KV.

This high-class residential area is dominantly inhabited by the politician and business elites. Residential buildings for the parliament members and ministers are also being constructed in this area. About three decades back, the people (farmers) of Khokana owned and used this land for subsistence farming. A child rights activist, one of our respondents who live in Khokana, said, '*Our family used to own land in the Sainbu-Bhaisepati area. As the middleman started to approach the landowners, many families including ours sold land at a relatively higher price.'* He added that later the trend of selling land increased rapidly with the entry of housing companies in Sainbu-Bhaisepati area. With this phenomenon, according to another local activist, the majority of Khokana residents who used to own land in Sainbu-Bhaisepati were alienated from their land. Likewise, another respondent from Khokana also shared a similar story about the history of land alienation of his family. According to him, they used to have ample farmland in Sainbu area. However, his family sold their land to the land brokers following the footsteps of their neighbours. Now, they have limited land to grow crops in Khokana, which is not enough for many of them to meet the yearly household food demands and mostly grow seasonal vegetables.

In the subsequent 10-15 years, according to the respondents, housing companies and the land brokers completely occupied the land of Sainbu-Bhaisepati area, previously owned by Khokana people. Local people also said that they lost the property as the money they received from selling their land was mostly used for unproductive purposes and they neither had a chance nor knowledge to reinvest it for wealth creation. The above respondent further added,

> The land was not sold to meet the basic needs of our families. This is the market that attracted us to sell it. We did not invest the money we received from the land for wealth creation, rather we used it to buy luxurious goods and for household consumption.

Sainbu-Bhaisepati area symbolises one of the new urban centers of KV with recent and rapid urban change that is expanding its impact to its periphery, e.g., Khokana. The wealthiest people live in Sainbu-Bhaisepati, making it a high-class residential area, which has pushed the periphery to grow and expand haphazardly. The current trend of urban growth in Khokana indicates that it has experienced an unprecedented level of urban growth in the last two decades.

4.2 Urban expansion in Khokana

The Government of Nepal has considered Khokana as one of the historical places to be preserved for the culture and tradition of the Newar communities and to be promoted as a place of tourism in KV (MoUD, 2017). Khokana is mainly known for the production of mustard oil since ancient times. The mustard oil industry has become the living heritage of the village (UNESCO, 2022). However, Khokana is under huge pressure with the flow of capital and migrants (labours, investors

and residents) as drivers of urbanisation as described above. The flat land in Khokana, which was used for agricultural activities by the local inhabitants, is mostly occupied by real state owners and migrants. The cultivation of mustard oil seed has almost disappeared due to the increasing trend of conversion from agricultural land to built-up area and decreasing interest of youths in traditional farming. However, four mustard oil-producing mills are still functioning and they use imported oil seeds from inside and outside of the country. The owner of one of the oil mills said, *'Nowadays, we do not cultivate mustard oil seed crop, but import it from India, China, Australia, and some other countries.*' This is an explicit illustration of the impact of the neoliberal capitalism and market system in Khokana.

With rapid urbanisation in KV, several large-scale development projects are also planned to be implemented in Khokana as this is a strategic place for linking KV with other parts of Nepal e.g., southern plain or Tarai region of Nepal. Khokana itself had a history of being a commercial centre, as it was a gateway in the medieval Indian-Tibetan trade route to enter KV (National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, 2016). According to a local teacher, during the Rana regime (1846 -1951), Khokana used to be a business hub for the residents of KV and also a major junction for the valley dwellers going to the settlements across the Bagmati River. The once business hub, Khokana came into the shadow after the operation of Dakshinkali road in the 1950s (a road across the Bagmati River in the West). This unique Newari village which was in shadow for many years is back in the limelight and has become the talk of the nation after the government intervened in multiple national pride projects and subsequent local resistance after the mid-2000s.

In addition to the establishment of several light manufacturing factories and commercial/semi-commercial farming in Khokana, the construction of private/modern residences is also rapid and rampant in the recent years. One of the reasons that stimulated and attracted the investors is high concentration of multiple large-scale national projects, among which the following five mega projects are significant.

The Government of Nepal is implementing a Kathmandu-Tarai fast track project where the land of the local people will be occupied by the road infrastructure. The fast track project, also called the national pride project (NPC, 2019), is a four-lane highway starting from Nijgadh (Bara district, central Tarai) and ending at Khokana (at the zero point). It was started in 1996 by the Government of Nepal with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The project came into visible contestation in the form of local resistance when the government started implementing the project and set facilitation office in Khokana under the leadership of the Nepal Army in 2017. But, the government seems committed to implement the fast track project (Kantipur, 2022).

Kulekhani High Tension Transmission Line Project also runs through Khokana, intersecting individuals' farmland. Due to local people's protests against this project, it has been left stranded till date (Basnet and Dahal, 2020). The protest mainly concerned with the compensation issue about the land that lies in the Right of Way (ROW) within 25 metres while the government is providing compensation for nine metres only.

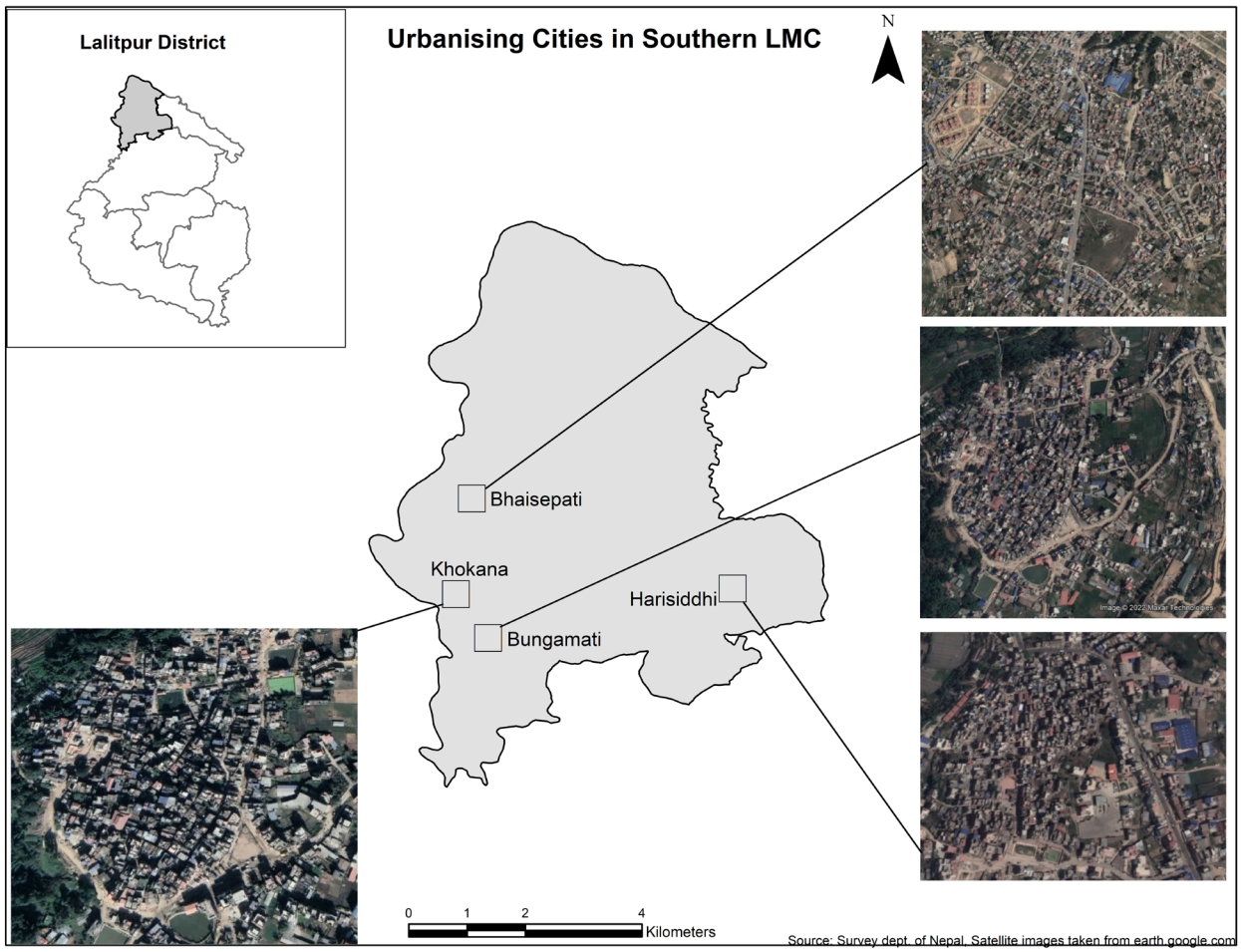


Figure 2: Rapidly urbanising cities in the southern part of LMC

The Kathmandu Valley Development Authority (KVDA) in its 20-year strategy (2015-2035) plans to improve existing urban space within KV through the development of smart satellite cities (KVDA, 2016). Within this scheme, four cities are planned on the periphery of the Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur cores that will span on approximately 6000 ha. of land through the land pooling method. One (southern) of the satellite cities, spreading over 500 ha. of land (Karki, 2019), also includes the areas of Sainbu-Bhaisepati and Khokana. Although, according to a KVDA official in April 2020, they submitted the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the cities to the Council of Ministers for approval, the DPR of the smart city that includes Khokana areas was not submitted yet because of the ongoing protest in Khokana and the adjoining areas against the smart cities.

The 72 kilometres long Outer Ring Road (ORR) project is proposed for the 'homogenous development' of all parts of KV by linking the traditional settlements and the new satellite cities and controlling the urban sprawl (Shrestha, 2013). It has planned to construct a 50-metre wide road and develop 250 metres of land on either side of the proposed road through the land pooling technique (Shrestha, 2013). However, the debate concerning the proposed route of ORR is still going on (Ratopati, 2022).

The Bagmati River Basin Improvement Project (BRBIP), designed under the Bagmati Action Plan (BAP - 2009-2014) (GoN/NTNC, 2009) is popularly referred to as the Bagmati Corridor Project. This project along with the Bagmati Area Physical Infrastructure Development Project has carried

out various activities like canaling of the river through sewer road construction along the Bagmati River and its tributaries in KV, and beautification of the river corridor.

4.3 Trends of capital and labour flow triggering an urban change in Khokana

All the projects introduced above were planned and proposed by the central government. After these projects were put into implementation, the local people are divided into for and against the projects. A section of the community in Khokana is in strong opposition against the projects, primarily fast track road and transmission line. Despite the resistance, some of the projects such as the fast track are progressing well and are more than halfway through during this study time (Kantipur, 2022). Making Khokana a part of the place that intersects several development projects has put Khokana under tremendous pressure of urbanisation with the non-transparent flow of capital and labour (through formal and informal economic channels), which are being shaped by the national level political-economic process.

This contradicts the major policy documents on urban development (KVDA, 2016; MoUD, 2017) that stipulate the protection of the history and culture of KV and what the government brings into implementation. Although the authority said that there will be changes in the original alignment of the fast track which will not ruin local cultural practices, several protests happened against the government's push for the fast track project calling for its withdrawal (Manandhar, 2018). However, despite all those efforts, their concerns and demands are yet to be effectively addressed. In a group discussion held in 2020 in Khokana, the local people expressed that the development projects in Khokana mean human-induced disasters, ruining their culture and livelihoods, thereby increasing threat of the displacement and alienation from their land, particularly the *Jyapu* (i.e., farmers) community.

All these interventions made by the central government through development projects have promoted investments by the land brokers and real estate companies, people who move from the city core to the periphery, migrants from outside of Kathmandu who wanted to be settled in KV and hence positioned Khokana as an attractive space for economic activities in the future especially for business entities such as restaurants and hotels. The vast open agricultural land can be seen rapidly filling up with galvanized iron sheets, factories, warehouses, tunnel farming, and temporary settlements (i.e., *taharas*). With all these emerging socio-economic phenomena, there is fear among the local community about the modification of the traditional looks of the historical Khokana as the flow of migrants is high there.

The proliferation of commercial activities has also created several new settlements of migrants (labours, commercial farmers, factory owners, and residential migrants) in the present Khokana. Additionally, as most of the local youths are reluctant to engage in farming activities and move towards off-farm activities, leasing land to migrants becomes the easiest and most beneficial way for earning their livelihood. A male farmer said, '*Renting out the land is more profitable than doing agriculture since it saves both time and effort*'.

The concentration of the development projects and subsequent expansion of economic and urban activities in Khokana will undoubtedly attract huge flow of capital and labour in the future too. However, as mentioned above, the flow of capital and intervention of the market in urban areas not only create opportunities but have also configured the contradiction and contestation which in the case of Khokana is expressed in the form of resistance movements, particularly against the large-scale urban development projects.

4.4 Contestations and contradictions

The contestation and contradiction created by the process of urbanisation or neoliberal urbanism have been manifested in different forms. While some of the local people are making efforts to protect their age-old traditions and culture as part of the indigenous communities, others have opted for modernised Khokana with urban growth-flow of capital and modern amenities*. 'I will not let the government capture my land until my last breath,'* said a middle-aged woman whose land lies in the proposed bus park of the fast track project (also called 'zero point'). On the contrary, a small group of people said that the ongoing constructional projects will lead to the development of their area, eventually resulting to the improvement in their economic status and livelihood, and enrichment in their culture as it will be enjoyed by the people all around.

However, a section of the Khokana community has a reservation on the fast track project, and the way it was designed and implemented without the consultation with the local people. They are resisting the project with the fear of being displaced and alienated from their lands, places, and cultures as well as loss of livelihoods both by the urban expansion and land acquisition.

To reduce the risk of such displacement and alienation, people of Khokana are demanding the fast track be constructed along the west bank of the Bagmati River. In a group discussion, local people said that although they had heard that the Nepal Army (who are managing the project) has changed the fast track alignment after the expression of public dissatisfaction, they have not made the revised map and DPR public yet. The fast track as development project has attracted the flow of capital as part of the investment both for land and infrastructure in Khokana.

The transmission line that runs through the flat land of Khokana (called *Doh-phat*), has also been stranded due to the protest of local people (The Himalayan Times, 2019). Because they were demanding hundred percent compensation for the land that lies in the right of way (ROW) within 25 metres on either side of the transmission line, while the government is compensating land within nine metres only. Particularly the compensation issue relates to the livelihood issue of the land owners (farmers) who earn from the land. The locals are also against the present transmission route chosen by the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) as the metal truss towers and wires not only affect the aesthetics of local culture and the scenic beauty of the place but also threatens their lives as the wires pass through the northern settlement of Khokana. One of our respondents said, *'We suggested using the route through the jungle but the government officials denied saying it will impact the wildlife.'*

The ORR project has also been an issue of contestation between the government authority and the local people. In one of the group discussions held in Khokana, the participants said that the ORR project has created fear of displacement as they were uncertain about the appropriate compensation and resettlement mechanism that will be in place. They also indicated that after the conception of ORR came into media and public debate, the real estate and land brokers started to buy land in the alignment area, unnecessarily increasing the price of the land and influencing others to sell the land in Khokana area. The transaction of land in the alignment is a phenomenon that dictates capital accumulation in Khokana, although a few earn large sums while leaving many displaced and marginalised.

With the Bagmati Corridor Project, the local community has dual fears, (1) the risk of flooding if the river is narrowed in the name of beautification, and (2) the increasing trend of land grabbing along the corridor which will further delink local from their land in the future.

5. DISCUSSION

Since KV is rapidly urbanising, its peripheries are also growing faster. The southern part of the LMC is an example of one of the emerging hot spots of the urban sprawl in KV for two reasons: (1) the ruling political class and business elite have shifted from core cities to Sainbu-Bhaisepati housing (neighboring Khokana) for residential purpose, remaking a new core and one of the higher class residential area, and (2) factories, hospitals, and educational institutions are also shifting from core cities to the southern part of LMC. Despite the resistant movements primarily against the fast track road, Khokana has become the major site for land grabbing by real estate, business houses, manufacturing factory owners and individuals. In addition to elite migration from the city core, labour migration is also high in Khokana. The current trend of the mobility of labour, capital, and infrastructure development characterises the neoliberal form of urban governance through which elite business interests can directly influence local development decisions and create customised urban infrastructures to favour political and economic space for capital accumulation (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Vives Miró, 2011).

Land acquisition in peri-urban areas is also driven by a nexus of political actors, land brokers and real estate investors, and it has also caused conflicts between the local people and these land deal actors (Upreti et al., 2017). This means the government has little control over the land and housing business and hence in urban expansion in KV. Because of a lack of efficient and meaningful land-acquisition laws in practice, most of the governmental efforts to regulate land use through environmental policies have been largely ineffective. While the existing environmental and sectoral policies and legislations are inadequate to address the challenges brought about by the domestic land acquisition process and the booming real estate market (Paudel et al., 2012), the acts and regulations in place such as Land Use Act have not been enforced effectively yet. The policies on Land Acquisition, Resettlement, and Rehabilitation for Infrastructure Development Projects 2014 and the Land Use Policy 2015 have not been effectively implemented (see also Nepal et al., 2020).

The tensions and contradictions in the five development projects analysed above, demonstrate that the institutional arrangements for implementing urban development plans are not well coordinated and are mostly fragmented. It seems that haphazard urbanisation is taking place in the periphery and only concentrates on capital accumulation and infrastructure development driven by market interests that lack a coordination mechanism. For instance, urban planning and infrastructure development are supported by the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), while urban governance and administration come under the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MoFAGA). Although they share the same urban space for action, they lack coordination mechanisms (Poudel and Blackburn, 2020). Often, there is temporary coordination in place at the project level. There is also a lack of an adequate legal basis to manage and govern large urban regions such as clustered city region (such as Kathmandu Valley) and urban industrial corridor comprising several local municipalities (industrial corridor in Tarai region). Both KVDA and Town Development Acts are also inadequate and/or inefficient to deal with the emerging issues of urban development particularly to address the tensions and contradictions that surface in Khokana. Since 2014, the Government of Nepal has declared several new programs on the development of cities such as megacities, satellite cities, smart cities, new town developments, corridor cities (Khatiwada, 2022), but their planning and implementation are still in discursive level and how the government would materialise these plannings are yet to be known. Many of the projects developed by the government as a part of the smart city does not fully match up the concept of smart city (for example, constructing multi-story building in the core city is not the only indicator for smart cities) (Lokantar, 2018). Furthermore, there are issues about the coordination and relationship between the federal government, provinces, and local governments (i.e., *Palikas*) particularly on the mandate, authority, and resource sharing even after the five years of their tenure after the first election held under the new constitution in 2017 (second local level election was held in May 2022).

Through the neoliberal urbanism, not only have increasing areas of fertile farmland been converted into the residential and commercial areas, but there is also a huge increase in price of land due to increasing demand for land for development activities. Combined with the infrastructure development projects, a supply of financial capital from remittances and transfers of savings from less secure rural areas, it has resulted in real estate boom and land speculating/ brokering in Khokana similar to elsewhere in KV. In the context of weak governance structures, speculative activity and poorly controlled development can become widespread with various negative consequences including the alienation of the local people from their land and unplanned urban sprawl. The resistance against development interventions in Khokana is a negative consequence of neoliberal urbanism. The resistance and struggles expressed against the large-scale infrastructure projects can also relate with the idea of Rebel Cities put forward by (Harvey, 2013) where class struggle occurs to achieve socio-ecologically resilient cities as part of anti-capitalist resistance. The people of Khokana who are likely to be affected by the centrally-planned infrastructure projects have rebelled by protesting the decisions of the central government primarily on the Fast Track

and High Tension Transmission Line projects. With the large scale infrastructure development interventions, the people of Khokana are mainly concerned with the fear of being displaced and alienated from their land and place. Likewise, the haphazard development of infrastructure could not only destroy their subsistence agricultural practices but also the beauty of the traditional settlements, religious and historic places, traditions and cultures of the communities. Therefore, addressing local people's concerns could turn future Khokana into a socio-culturally just and ecologically sane city.

Although this study analyses the evidences of neoliberally spoiled urbanism taking place in Khokana of periurban Kathmandu, the notion of infrastructural imperatives in urbanisation process as scrutinised by Kirkpatrick and Smith (2011) and Swyngedouw et al. (2002) matches up not only with other periurban towns of the Kathmandu Valley but also politically-laden and increasingly urbanising areas in Nepal in general (see Rimal et al., 2020). This study therefore may also provide pragmatic insights to understand the trajectories of urbanisation in the cities of Global South with similar trend as in Nepal.

Finally, most of the urban infrastructure projects that are going on in and around Khokana do not have resilient plans to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the development projects which may turn development into disaster (Madden, 2021). For example, if the Bagmati River bank is narrowed in the name of corridor improvement/beautification, communities fear their areas could be flooded or inundated. Likewise, how the construction of the bus park in zero point near the Bagmati River would be protected from the risk of flooding in future is yet to be known.

6. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of the trend of urban growth in KV in general and the southern part of the LMC with reference to the case study from Khokana in particular shows that the urban growth will be continued in KV in the future, which will form new settlements by increasing influx of people from outside the valley and shifting the core to peripheral areas. The growth of settlements in the southern part of LMC like Khokana is generally spontaneous, and there is very little planned interventions on the part of local government. Whatever projects are planned were imposed by the central government and prepared with little or no space for community voices, and these are the major causes of present conflicts and contestations.

The urban growth is primarily expanded by the flow of capital, labour and market almost in unregulated form. The local government does not have policy to acquire huge parcels of land where planned urban development can be promoted and the current constitutional provision does not allow the government to impose any kind of restriction on the use of private land. Therefore, the government has only one legal tool to regulate the development through the construction of infrastructures (e.g., fast track, smart city, Bagmati corridor projects). This tool, however, has been grossly misused in KV. Moreover, the neoliberal urbanism and political mismatch (Panta and Dangol, 2009; Thapa and Murayama, 2010; Upreti et al., 2017; Timsina et al., 2020) has been the

most important driver for the urban sprawl in Khokana area. There are both contestations and contradictions about these projects in Khokana as a section of the local community is protesting against the projects (mainly the fast track project) fearing that the projects will alienate them from their land, tradition and culture.

The central government is implementing the projects against the people's resistance, while the local government (LMC - Ward 21, Khokana) has no role in these centrally planned projects and also has not clearly come out in favor or against these projects. Additionally, the community from the northern Khokana is in favor of the Kathmandu-Tarai fast track project whereas they are against the potential destruction that can be made by the transmission line, which passes through the middle of their agricultural land. These discrepancies in local mind sets emerged after the implementation of large-scale development projects, however, may erode solidarities within community members in tomorrow's Khokana city. Moreover, people who used to earn livelihoods from agriculture are being rapidly displaced by real estate investment and land pooling for development activities, thereby converting these socio-economically marginalised communities into urban labourers. From the perspective of holistic urban management, this may be a major hindrance in the future that needs urgent attention from the government and other relevant stakeholders.

If rational urban planning and development strategies are not formulated and implemented effectively, its growth is primarily driven by the forces of capital and market that will create unequal development (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Vives Miró, 2011). In the case of Khokana, the government itself has emerged as a prominent actor providing ground for the capital-centric large infrastructures in the expense of the interests of the local communities to whom the government should actually be accountable to create resilient communities. Policies need to be updated where required for the sustainable development of KV at both regional and local levels. While valley-wide strategies should address the issues of the basic infrastructures (drainage, water, road, solid waste management), local level strategies should address the development of city or ward infrastructures (e.g., drainage, water, road, solid waste management). Above all, cooperation and coordination between national and local institutions along with the interests of local people and local resilient buildings are essential in promoting and implementing urbanisation activities effectively.

For the tomorrow's city planning, the authority should reflect on the failure of the neoliberal markets in resolving the problems of the urban environment, which requires agreeing on the non-market forms of urban governance such as, as remarked by Galès (2016), *"rules for the use of land, and the public provision of infrastructure, social services, public transportation, education, planning, recreational and leisure and cultural opportunities".* Drawing on the lessons from the implementation of the policies and programs in the context of state restructuring, the learnings from Khokana provide important avenues to rethink urbanisation policies in a new light. The contestations and contradictions surfaced in Khokana are mainly due to the forces of capital and

centralised decision-making by the national government. Hence, the current contexts of Khokana imply for participation of local people and prioritisation of urban development projects based on the consent and need of the local people.

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