


Planned Urban Expansion, Social Sustainability, and Spatial Inequality: Evidence from Bahria Town, Karachi, Pakistan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History Received 2025-09-12 Accepted: 2025-12-02 Published: 2026-03-30</p> <p>Keywords bahria town karachi; stakeholder theory; sustainability; urban development;</p> <p>Corresponding author Mian Muhammad Ajmal Khan Email: muhammadajmalkhan956@gmail.com DOI: 10.37905/jgej.v7i1.34424</p> <p>Copyright © 2026 The Authors</p>  <p>This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC-BY-NC) 4.0 International License</p>	<p>Rapid urban expansion in Pakistan has intensified private-sector involvement in large-scale urban development, reshaping urban spatial structures, land-use patterns, and social relations. Bahria Town Karachi (BTK), one of South Asia's largest planned private urban developments, exemplifies these transformations. Despite its planned-city narrative and modern infrastructure, BTK has generated significant environmental, social, and spatial sustainability challenges. This study examines BTK from a social and urban geography perspective, focusing on the spatial dynamics of urban expansion, land transformation, and social sustainability. A qualitative research design was employed using thematic analysis of secondary data, including peer-reviewed literature, government and planning documents, Supreme Court judgments, and National Accountability Bureau (NAB) reports. To situate the case within broader Global South urbanization processes, a comparative spatial analysis was conducted with selected large-scale urban projects in Nigeria, China, and Colombia. The findings reveal systematic socio-spatial sustainability issues, including environmental encroachment into protected areas, forced displacement of local communities without adequate consultation or compensation, and governance weaknesses reflected in opaque land acquisition and planning practices. Comparative analysis indicates that similar spatial inequalities and sustainability trade-offs characterize large-scale private urban developments across the Global South. This study contributes to urban and social geography scholarship by demonstrating how planned urban expansion can reproduce spatial inequality and undermine sustainability objectives. The findings also provide important insights for geography education, particularly in teaching urban sustainability, spatial justice, and land-use change in rapidly urbanizing contexts. Future research should incorporate primary spatial data and participatory approaches to further examine governance and sustainability challenges in urban megaprojects.</p>

How to cite: Khan, M. M. A., Othman, A. B., & Munir, A. (2026). Planned Urban Expansion, Social Sustainability, and Spatial Inequality: Evidence from Bahria Town, Karachi, Pakistan. *Jambura Geo Education Journal*, 7(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.37905/jgej.v7i1.34424>

1. Introduction

Urban development in emerging economies has become a critical determinant of sustainable growth, social equity, and environmental preservation in the 21st century. Neighbourhood safety remains a critical urban challenge (Dede, M., et.al 2025). Rapid urbanization witnessed across the Global South, particularly in countries like Pakistan, India, and Nigeria, has fundamentally altered the landscape of city planning and development practices. Over several decades, urban development in Pakistan has seen rapid changes, mainly because of growing populations, rural people moving to cities, and a growing desire for better and modern housing and facilities. Because of the restrictions and lack of efficiency that public sector organizations experience, the private sector is currently playing a more significant role in shaping the development of cities (Rana and Bhatti, 2018). Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) was launched by Bahria Town Pvt. Ltd., in 2013. BTK was designed as a completed city, covering a vast area, making it the most significant private urban project in South Asia. With this shift, a more general re-directing of urban development to megaprojects led by the privately owned sector, in which accountability, sustainability, and social justice become key questions.

BTK is typically presented as a model of contemporary urban planning in Pakistan, allowing entry into gated communities, improved infrastructure, luxurious living, and ensuring safety and an improved lifestyle. Because of growing interest from Pakistanis living there and overseas, the area has raised millions of projects (Qureshi and Li, 2023). However, underneath this modern image of development

are many big questions about the ethics, sustainability, and rules governing such major real estate projects.

These illegal actions were mostly at the heart of these complaints. In 2019, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) accused BTK and various government officials of wrongly transferring 17,000 acres of land, which allegedly cost the national economy around Rs 708 billion. It was found that BTK participated in deals with government bodies over land, and these agreements were said to violate land-use laws and rules (Nazir, 2021). The Supreme Court of Pakistan recognized the problem and showed that regulatory bodies did not protect the interests of the public and nature. That same year, the Supreme Court decided that many BTK land deals were not legal, which led to imposing a record fine of PKR 460 billion on developers (Memon and Fatima, 2022).

The controversies surrounding such land acquisition are not specific to Pakistan, but they are symptomatic of a larger trend of challenged private urban development in the Global South. A recent study on 439 urban village redevelopment projects (UVRPs) in China identified top-down projects and projects funded by private developers as strong predictors of violent land conflicts and displacement (Yuan et al., 2024). On the same note, in India, the Aerocity Development Project around Chandigarh comprised the intended acquisition of 1,305 acres of land in 14 villages, which raised livelihood and food security issues among impacted agricultural societies (Reuter et al., 2021). Mumbai Slum clearance programs framed as environmental improvement discourses have created a strong contest in eviction and variant dispossession results (Doshi, 2019). The new capital city IKN Nusantara in Indonesia has reported a rapid land-use conversion in indigenous livelihoods and ecosystems (Syaban and Appiah-Opoku, 2024), and the peri-urban developments in Colombia indicate how the incoherence of governance permits dynamics of ordinary land-grabbing (Lombard and Rakodi, 2016). Aburaso housing developments in Ghana have also been reported to have customary land dispossession, disputed responsibility, and evictions that undermined local services (Fosu, 2021). These international examples indicate that the land disputes of BTK are symptomatic of the failure of governance systems to control the private megaprojects of the rising economies.

Malir residents who have lived in the area for a long time are often displaced by new developments, which is a significant issue. According to human rights organizations and people in the area, such displacement is usually achieved by intimidating residents and using violence against those who try to hold their ancestral properties (Arif et al., 2024). This outcome has made people concerned about human rights breaches, not following due process, and the unfair treatment of weak communities because of development.

The environmental consequences of BTK projects are concerning. Some sources say that the housing scheme has intruded into the boundaries of Kirthar National Park, protected by the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance. Because of its wide range of plants and animals, the park connects biodiversity and ecology across Sindh and across the entire country. The growth of BTK in this part of the world is a great danger to life forms, habitats, and water bodies because the expansion and activities related to BTK harm the area's eco-balance (Memon and Fatima, 2022). Experts and environmentalists have often warned that unregulated development leads to climate risk, forest loss, and heat in cities that do not agree with Pakistan's stance on sustainability and environmental care, as mentioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement.

Cases of urban megaprojects carried by environmental violations are an international trend. The relocation of IKN capital has caused a quantifiable loss of habitats and biodiversity by converting agricultural and natural habitats into urban development in Indonesia (Syaban and Appiah-Opoku, 2024). The development initiatives of Mumbai, in spite of conservation arguments such as the protection of mangroves and green space development, have generated ecological exchange and social unrest (Doshi, 2019). Demonstrated to overlap with ecologically significant regions, large-scale land acquisitions throughout the Global South have reduced the functions of communal land and raised environmental risks (Barajas et al., 2024). Peri-urban residential areas in Colombia and Ghana have been associated with contentious land conversion to poor environmental planning, lack of sanitation, and poor local services (Fosu, 2021; Lombard and Rakodi, 2016). These empirical examples show that the BTK incursion into the Kirthar National Park into the environment is a continuation of a larger cycle of ecological destruction caused by insufficiently observed urban developments through the privatization of urban areas among developing economies.

BTK demonstrates that there is not always a simple link between doing business and ethical concerns. It states that a clash exists between businesses that promote growth and the common good, and it asks us to consider the true definition of progress in urbanization. What the controversies bring out clearly is that an ESG-based framework would facilitate the prioritization of economic growth with social justice towards the people, environmental protection, and a high degree of accountability.

ESG frameworks applied to urban development have received empirical support in the recent scholarly literature. Based on a multilevel analysis of 4,751 companies in 52 countries, [Ortas et al. \(2019\)](#) prove that national institutions and stakeholder engagement have a significant impact on corporate ESG performance, emphasizing the role of institutional settings in emerging economies. [Guo et al. \(2023\)](#) presented quantitative data that urban-level ESG indices have a positive impact on the sustainability of cities, especially in the higher-GDP ones, showing that the development of the financial sector, the ability to treat pollution, coverage of social insurance, and efficiency of the city capital are the major mediating channels of city governance applications. Moreover, qualitative studies have examined how cities should incorporate ESG standards into the process of urban planning and procurement to promote sustainable city development ([De NICOLÒ, 2020](#)). Research on environmental management accounting and green financing of emerging economies shows that firm-level environmental practices are correlated with better ESG performance and that it is directly applicable to the case of private developers and financiers of urban development ([Zhen and Rahman, 2024](#)). These academic sources offer a theoretical and empirical basis for the implementation of ESG systems in the private analysis of the BTK urban mega-project (and other types of projects of this sort).

The construction of the BTK has led to land theft of others, displacement of local people, and massive destruction to the environment around the area, all of which are real ethical problems ([Hawken et al., 2021](#); [Moser and Avni, 2024](#)). They contradict the ideals of social justice and ecology, and show the incompetence of the government ([Zeković and Maričić, 2022](#)). The uncontrolled growth of BTK illustrates how rapid urbanization financed by non-state actors can oppose the realization of sustainable development and foster increased social inequality ([Biesenthal et al., 2018](#); [Corazza et al., 2022](#)). Such issues have raised concerns regarding the management and duration of such big cities in Pakistan. This study will seek to perform an in-depth analysis of the development of BTK within the frameworks of combined ESG and stakeholder theory to identify how and why sustainability and ethical breaches in private urban development can occur ([Busco et al., 2024](#)). The overall purpose of this study was to examine the ethical and environmental sustainability concerns of developing BTK. To research the effect of BTK on the surrounding and local communities. The other purpose is to identify governance shortcomings that facilitate ethical violations in the BTK project and generate suggestions to help bring ESG ideas into the development of Pakistani cities ([Joss, 2017](#)).

As Pakistan is rapidly urbanizing, cities must be built in ways that support the economy and ethics and are sustainable. Because sustainable growth in cities is demanded in the Global South, while at the same time, speedy urbanization surpasses regulatory checks and ethical care, this study is essential. In the case of BTK, it is important to analyze how urban expansion by private developers harms the environment and causes social problems. Using ESG allows this study to contribute to debates and support policy improvements in sustainable urban growth in emerging economies and inspire future urban workers and leaders to focus on ethical and sustainable development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings: ESG and Stakeholder Theory in Urban Development

Stakeholder theory, which was first formulated by [Freeman \(1984\)](#), assumes that organizational success and legitimacy are determined by the establishment of value to various stakeholders, as opposed to an organization being shareholder-oriented. This model involves employees, communities, government agencies, non-profit organizations, customers, and the environment ([Freeman, 2010](#)). The theory questions the historical model of the primacy of shareholders by arguing that sustainable and ethical business performance should consider and balance the interests of various stakeholder groups by involving and governing ([Harrison and Wicks, 2013](#)).

Recent research has promoted stakeholder theory to the next level of static categorization and adopted dynamic, performative approaches. [Gustavsson et al. \(2024\)](#) showed that stakeholders in big-

city urban development projects are not predetermined categories, but instead are produced as a result of actions, communications, and material practices. This performative style acknowledges that stakeholder salience and influence change as projects progress through project lifecycles, and that mapping and engagement strategies must be maintained constantly and not through a single assessment. [Gabriel and Shafique \(2024\)](#) advance an ethical salience framework that integrates conventional managerial salience and the ethical theory of need, entitlement, and deserts. This will ensure that vulnerable groups continue to remain central to stakeholder considerations, a serious weakness of purely power-based stakeholder prioritization models. The framework establishes deontological and instrumental clusters for stakeholder assessment, allowing a closer perspective on stakeholder engagement within urban development settings.

Governance structures and social justice implications demand special consideration when applying stakeholder theory to the analysis of the impact of an urban development project on a private entity. According to [Moser and Avni \(2024\)](#), private or gated towns, or developer-driven cities should be explicitly subject to social and environmental justice investigation since modes of governance, instruments of exclusion, and environmental claims significantly inform stakeholder interests and rights. Such a view is especially pertinent to the case of projects such as BTK, whereby the responsibility of the planning and delivery of services in urban areas is taken over by private developers who become quasi-governmental in the context of the project. [Chiu \(2024\)](#) also discusses the socio-spatial aspects of stakeholder negotiations and how municipal, market, and community actors negotiate urban programs in terms of territory, place, scale, and networks. This study demonstrates that urban development power is negotiated and polymorphous, and the power analysis of stakeholders should consider the spatial and temporal aspects of power relations.

The ESG framework offers a systematic method for analyzing corporate performance on the environmental, social, and governance fronts. Regarding the context of real estate development, specific concerns and applications are addressed in each of the pillars: the Environmental Pillar (E), including the reduction of emissions, resource efficiency, preservation of site ecology, and climate resilience. In practice, this would mean energy-saving initiatives, green building accreditation, water management, and biodiversity protection on development properties ([Lucarelli and Severini, 2024](#)). Social Pillar (S): Inclusion, affordability, health outcomes, and community impact were addressed. The applications of real estate in this case include the provision of affordable housing, community engagement processes, initiatives focused on tenant well-being, and creation of local employment ([Mashayekhi et al., 2024](#)). Governance Pillar (G): Directions on transparency, accountability, land rights, and regulatory compliance. In a real estate setting, this includes transparency in land tenure, practices by developers in disclosure, anti-corruption, and stakeholder grievances ([Lucarelli and Severini, 2024](#)).

Recent studies have pointed to radical methodological issues in the assessment of ESG. [Lucarelli and Severini \(2024\)](#) show that construct divergence and geographic/regulatory differences are commonly hidden by composite ESG ratings, and suggest a pillar-by-pillar approach instead of aggregate scores. This observation especially applies to the context of emerging economies, where regulatory measures and stakeholder expectations are likely to be vastly dissimilar to those of developed economies. [Mashayekhi et al. \(2024\)](#) provided empirical measures of the comparative importance of ESG pillars in different contexts, and concluded that the importance of pillars in relation to industry, geography, and stakeholder priorities differs. Their machine learning-based analytic model states that an effective ESG application requires pillar prioritization based on the context, rather than weighting approaches that are typical. In modern cities, sustainability theory focuses on the interdependence of environmental, social, and economic systems. In their comprehensive review of urban sustainability indicator frameworks, [Gavalda et al. \(2023\)](#) noted the following four main dimensions: environmental quality, social equity, economic viability, and governance effectiveness. They demand indicators that are specific to the context and reflect the conditions of the locality and priorities of the stakeholders in their proposed improvement framework.

Studies conducted on urbanization trends in developing countries indicate complex correlations between urbanization and sustainability. When the pace of urbanization exceeds institutional capacity, as [Clement and Pino \(2023\)](#) find through longitudinal observation of developing countries (1990-2015), the process of urbanization is likely to lead to stressful environmental conditions and social stratification. This observation applies to the governance structure and stakeholder involvement in the

urban development process. To support sustainable urban development, O'Clery et al. (2023) also noted the role of data analytics and stated that sustainability problems can be identified and addressed in real time through evidence-based solutions. Their model assumed that sustainable urban development must be maintained through continuous monitoring and adaptive management tools that respond to the changing circumstances and needs of stakeholders. Kaya and Erbas (2024) present systematic review evidence of how urban transformation and sustainability are connected and highlight some factors affecting sustainability outcomes of urban development projects. They found that sustainability performance is tied to whether environmental, social, and economic factors are incorporated in the planning and implementation stages of a project.

The identification of stakeholders and their ranking should be both dynamic and context-specific, encompassing both managerial and ethical salience aspects (Gabriel and Shafique, 2024; Karrbom Gustavsson et al., 2024). ESG evaluation requires analysis at a pillar-based level, which considers the local circumstances and priorities of stakeholders instead of standard measurements (Lucarelli and Severini, 2024; Mashayekhi et al., 2024). The governance forms of privately developed urban areas must be specifically tailored in consideration of accountability procedures and the aspect of social justice (Moser and Avni, 2024). Sustainability results are determined by the effective incorporation of environmental, social, and economic factors into project life cycles (Gavaldà et al., 2023; Kaya and Erbas, 2024).

The fact that this combined framework is applied to BTK requires specific consideration of a number of contextual issues: governance and accountability, since BTK will be a private gated development, and governance mechanisms and disclosure practices will be central to the evaluation of governance performance and social justice implications (Lucarelli and Severini, 2024; Moser and Avni, 2024). The quasi-governmental character of the project, in terms of urban planning and service delivery, predetermines the need to review the accountability systems and grievance channels of stakeholders. The second is local indicator adaptation; ESG indicators need to be adjusted to the Karachi climate and infrastructure limitations (environmental pillar) and affordability and displacement risks (social pillar) (Kaya and Erbas, 2024; Mashayekhi et al., 2024). This involves prioritizing ground-level-based data collection as well as community representation in the process of indicator weighting and evaluation. Third is urbanization effects, the framework must evaluate whether BTK alleviates housing pressure or redistributes infrastructure and environmental externalities across the broader Karachi metropolitan area (Clement and Pino, 2023). This requires an analysis of project impacts at multiple spatial scales and consideration of cumulative effects on urban sustainability.

2.2 Analytical Framework for BTK Case Study

Based on the theoretical foundations outlined above, the analysis of BTK employs a six-step integrated framework: First is dynamic stakeholder mapping using project communications, land-use actions, and digital footprints to identify emergent stakeholder groups and evolving power relations (Gustavsson et al., 2024). The second is ethical salience weighting to ensure that vulnerable and non-market stakeholders maintain centrality in the analysis despite their limited financial influence (Gabriel and Shafique, 2024). The third is pillar-specific ESG assessment using context-adapted indicators that reflect local conditions and stakeholder priorities (Lucarelli and Severini, 2024; Mashayekhi et al., 2024). The fourth is multi-scale impact evaluation to assess project effects at the site, neighborhood, and metropolitan scales (Clement and Pino, 2023; O'Clery et al., 2023).

The fifth is governance and justice analysis to evaluate the accountability mechanisms, transparency practices, and social justice implications of private urban development (Moser and Avni, 2024). The last is an iterative monitoring framework that combines stakeholder salience shifts, pillar-specific indicators, and urban-scale metrics to track long-term sustainability outcomes (Gavaldà et al., 2023; O'Clery et al., 2023). When working on real estate development, stakeholder theory reminds us of the broader social and environmental effects of city construction. It promotes engaging the public, evaluating ecological threats, and having secure and responsible ways to manage public projects (Caputo, 2013). In this way, businesses earn social legitimacy more easily, make their projects sturdier, and are more likely to survive difficulty. Developers who overlook working with stakeholders might face delays in the project, complainers in the press, reduced public confidence and possible legal suits, all of which can be prevented by proactive management of stakeholders (Poon et al., 2011). BTK is an example

in which the focus is not on stakeholders' expectations. Some critics argue that although it is a major initiative involving huge investments (Qureshi and Li, 2023), BTK has not adequately involved communities and environmental watchdogs (Nazir et al., 2023). From a stakeholder theory perspective, such poor outcomes could have been prevented if the company had used transparent communication, consulted stakeholders, and complied with environmental and social standards (Patel et al., 2025).

2.3 Environmental and Social Breaches in Real Estate Development

Real estate is pivotal in shaping environmental sustainability, contributing to nearly 40% of global energy consumption and approximately 20% of greenhouse gas emissions (Kauko, 2019). Problems in Pakistan are more intense because of weak regulatory laws and rapid urban growth (Razzak et al., 2023). Many real estate projects have caused environmental damage, as observed in notable cases, such as BTK. BTK has faced much opposition due to large-scale deforestation, reduced biodiversity, and the development of protected areas, some of which are included in Kirthar National Park (Zaheer et al., 2023). They not only harm local animals and plants, but also break promises made by countries about environmental protection and cutting emissions (Yan and Wang, 2021).

Social sustainability concerns have often been related to real estate megaprojects, causing the displacement of native people without fair consultation and with little or no compensation (Rauf and Weber, 2021). These developments disrupt traditional livelihoods, create severe historical ties to the land, and erode cultural heritage (Lai and Lorne, 2019). The problem worsens when residents are not involved in decisions regarding how their communities change or develop. This exclusion reflects a broader disregard for social justice and equitable development, raising serious ethical and governance concerns in the real estate sector (Markoc and Cizmeci, 2021). Developers can avoid due procedures because laws to ensure transparency are not enforced well and are too easy to avoid (Newell, 2016). In most cases, people who have been displaced do not get proper long-term housing and struggle with jobs or income, which can make living harder for them. If the state does not respond, it decreases faith in the law and encourages others to commit more violations (Ali and Rasool, 2024).

Like other gated communities, BTK provides improved services for the lives of the wealthy. However, nearby low-income residents still lack basic utilities, travel methods, and green areas (Nazir, 2021). Real estate development should focus on transparency, involve the community, and apply ESG rules (Newell et al., 2023).

2.4 Governance Failures Facilitating Unethical Practices

The leading causes of these shortcomings are political patronage, ineffective bureaucracy, and regulatory capture. Developers allied with politicians can sometimes force planning authorities and land handling agencies to set aside laws and meet the needs of the public (Monfared and Pavlov, 2019). In the BTK case, using loopholes in rules and the inconsistent application of regulations made it easier to rush approvals without paying attention to stakeholder opinions (Mysorewala, 2021). These problems arise because knowing who holds authority or who is responsible in different contexts is not always easy. Having no clear system allows developers to bypass effective checkups by shifting accountability between one authority and another (Ahmed et al., 2023). Failure to coordinate between government bodies allows sensitive natural zones to be affected by illegal activities.

It is also a significant issue that there is no clarity regarding the land records and project information. The public often does not obtain much official information on how land is acquired, what impact assessments are done, or how landowners are compensated (Hasan et al., 2015). Because the public does not know what is going on, neither civil society nor watchdog teams can keep both developers and those in authority accountable (Khan et al., 2023). These governance issues can be corrected by changing institutions to build trust in regulations, give more power to watchdogs, and engage the public in urban planning (Ratcliffe et al., 2021). Land tenure systems should be improved, land records should be digitized, and it is essential to ensure that all documents related to projects are disclosed to build ethical and sustainable governance in real estate (Matemilola and Muraina, 2023).

2.5 ESG Frameworks in Real Estate

Using ESG strategies, the real estate sector can ensure long-term sustainability and resilience to various risks (Newell, 2023). Internationally, developers, investors, and public officials use ESG

frameworks to ensure that their projects help meet sustainable development goals. These systems encourage developers to handle the environmental, social, and governance aspects of the project throughout its lifetime (Kauko, 2019).

Environmentally, ESG requires energy-saving building planning, responsible land use, effective waste management, and efforts to save biodiversity (Robinson and McIntosh, 2022). Practicing sustainability benefits both the environment and the company's assets, and it is gaining interest from environmental investors (World Green Building, 2021). Because deforestation, ecological issues, and pollution are rising rapidly in Pakistan, applying ESG standards in industry would markedly reduce deforestation, help natural ecosystems, and clean the air in cities.

Socially, ESG frameworks support diversity by preventing real estate projects from mistreating people in vulnerable situations. Projects that ignore the impact on people often lead to opposition, harm reputation, and create legal problems (Chiang et al., 2019). A good example is BTK, which faced criticism for skipping community talks and failing to account for displaced people (Syed and Mumtaz, 2024). Therefore, ESG-aligned strategies support meaningful discussions, planning, and equal access to city resources (Newell, 2023).

The third important part of ESG is governance, which underlines the need for accountability, clear information, and ethical behavior in the industry. A well-governed entity has established rules for compliance with regulations, deals with corruption properly, follows fair buying procedures, and routinely tells people about its projects (Gross and Żróbek, 2015). Since Pakistan's lack of strong regulations and land management often lacks transparency and is affected by politics, applying governance according to ESG principles can significantly benefit the country. Being open about land records and letting independent experts inspect environmental situations encourages confidence among people, reduces legal threats, and appeals to international investors (Boaventura et al., 2016).

There is evidence that businesses involved in ESG outperform other firms in terms of their income, risk management, and pleasing investors. Businesses that adopted ESG policies obtained more capital, formed stronger partnerships with stakeholders, and remained stable even when the financial markets were down (Wang et al., 2024). Pakistan, which relies heavily on real estate, including ESG factors, can encourage the industry to prosper while keeping society and the environment in mind (Tauseef and Khurshid, 2025). Because of this trend, Pakistani developers who want access to sustainable finance instruments such as green bonds and social impact investments are encouraged to respect ESG standards. Regulatory organizations, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and urban planning authorities, need to help ESG by requiring disclosures, offering incentives linked to ESG, and setting national guidelines for eco-friendly real estate (Baig et al., 2020). Real estate businesses now need to use ESG frameworks, as they are an essential part of their plans. This provides valuable guidance for addressing possible environmental and social dangers while improving corporate governance and trust within the investment community (Nanda, 2022).

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the ethical and sustainability difficulties involved in developing BTK, mainly by considering how ESG rules have been broken. Using a qualitative method is helpful here, as it allows detailed examination of sensitive, location-specific matters involving various actors, different types of governance, and questions involving ethics and sustainability. Experts want to examine how ESG infractions play out within a larger social, political, and institutional framework.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

This analysis was based on secondary data to explore the ethical, environmental, and governance problems faced during the development of BTK. For secondary data collection, pre-existing studies, official reports, court proceedings, and institutional publications were used. Since this study aims to assess ESG problems in real estate using available studies, this approach is appropriate without conducting new field surveys. This study used information from three different categories of data to provide a thorough, comprehensive, and appropriate view of the BTK case.

The first step was to study peer-reviewed journals and articles on important ESG issues in real estate. Scientific, theoretical, and case studies of urban development crimes have been conducted to discover how the environment is damaged, people are driven out, and governance is weakened (Harrison and Wicks, 2013; Kauko, 2019; Newell, 2023). Examine the important issues linked to real estate development, although the sources of Pakistan's governance and urban setup provide useful insights, especially for this country.

Second, it compares similar urban and infrastructure development issues in other nations that deal with similar governance and sustainability difficulties. Eko Atlantic City in Nigeria, Ordos City in China, and Ciudad del Bicentenario in Colombia were chosen as they resemble BTK in areas of unrestricted urban development, removal of local populations, infringement of ecological laws, and weak stakeholder participation. Such cases from around the world give extra context to BTK, working within a broader discussion of urban sustainability, poor stakeholder care, and ESG noncompliance (Wang et al., 2024). Using a comparative approach adds more insight to the analysis by allowing us to distinguish between problems that are common among countries and those that are specific to one.

Third, data were collected using secondary sources such as government documents, judgments from the Supreme Court, files from the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), impact assessment findings, and journals and articles from non-governmental organizations and the media. By studying these records, we can follow the legal, administrative, and ethical issues related to the BTK project. Evidence of ESG failures also comes from court verdicts over illegal land assignments, charges for disobeying environmental laws, and statements by those displaced. Information from ecological officials and other groups shows that biodiversity is declining, social problems are increasing, and regulatory actions are ineffective.

3.2 Data Analysis

This research employs a qualitative thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) and a cross-case comparison by White and Cooper's (2022) approach to examine the ethical, environmental, and governance-related issues surrounding the development of BTK. Thematic analysis is used for studies of policy documents, judgments, research papers, media sources, and case analyses, as it organizes and identifies common patterns found in different types of information.

The analysis proceeded through three structured stages:

3.2.1 Data Familiarization and Coding

The first step was to read and highlight all the collected sources, such as court papers, journal articles, government papers, and reports from investigative journalists about BTK and similar cases. First, codes were drawn manually by targeting major topics such as land acquisition violations, displacement of communities, damage to the environment, regulatory capture, the lack of public involvement, and non-compliance with ESG standards. Subsequently, these codes were placed into broader groups related to ESG elements.

3.2.2 Theme Development and Pattern Recognition

When coding was performed, the research identified the prominent themes found in the data (Table 1). These include the following: 1). Encroachment on Protected Land and Biodiversity Loss (environmental); 2) Forced Displacement and Social Exclusion of Local Communities (social); 3) Regulatory Failures and Political Influence (governance)

Themes were built using several data sources to make them reliable. Reports from environmental NGOs and EIA documents were compared to assess claims regarding ecological issues. As with corruption, erroneous regulation was also shown by NAB findings, Supreme Court verdicts, and criticism of Pakistan's urban regulation from academics.

Table 1. Theme Development and Pattern Recognition

Theme	ESG Category	BTK Evidence Sources	Comparable International Cases
Encroachment on Protected Land and Biodiversity Loss	Environmental	EIA reports, NGO publications, satellite data, and Supreme Court rulings	Eko Atlantic (Nigeria), Ciudad del Bicentenario (Colombia)
Forced Displacement and Social Exclusion of Local Communities	Social	Testimonies, media investigations, human rights reports	Ordos City (China), Ciudad del Bicentenario (Colombia)
Regulatory Failures and Political Influence	Governance	NAB reports, Supreme Court judgments, and academic papers	Eko Atlantic (Nigeria), Ordos City (China)

Here is a bar chart showing the main ESG topics found in the BTK case and the number of international cases with similar themes. This indicates that these problems occur in cities worldwide that are built similarly. Two similar environmental case studies (in Nigeria, Colombia, and China) include Encroachment on Protected Land and Biodiversity Loss and Regulatory Failures, showing that such problems occur frequently and can affect any part of the world. In two international examples, it becomes clear that the social disadvantages caused by urban megaprojects, including the displacement of indigenous peoples and skewed city-planning policies, are common in developing countries and emerging economies.

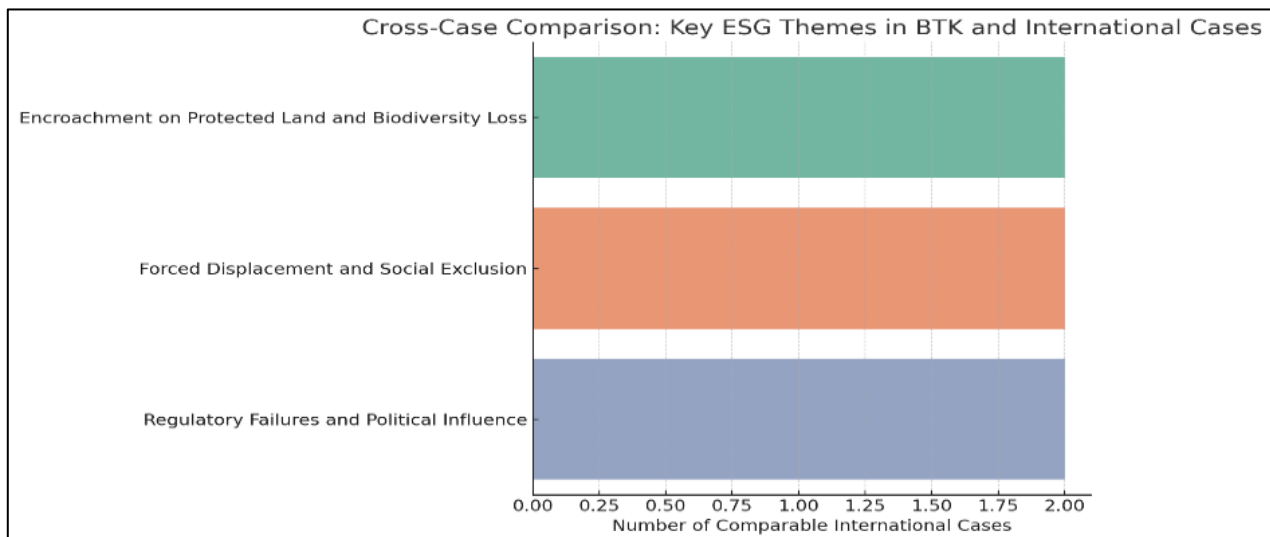


Figure. 1 Number of comparable international cases reflecting key ESG themes from BTK

The cross-comparison map makes it possible to link the three main issues of the BTK case: environmental encroachment, social displacement, and regulatory failure to projects in Nigeria (Eko Atlantic), Colombia (Ciudad del Bicentenario), and China (Ordos City) (Figure 1). The lines on the map show that BTK and other projects have similar themes, indicating that these problems are common globally (Figure 2). For example, the BTK and Eko Atlantic have broken rules that have resulted in environmental issues because they focus exclusively on developing for elites. The forced removal of marginal neighborhoods to create space for mega-projects in BTK is similar to what happened in Ordos City and Ciudad del Bicentenario. These connections show that while BTK has ESG problems, they are examples of larger issues in how cities are managed all over the Global South. This diagram underlines the importance of combining ESG and stakeholder principles with urban planning for ethical and sustainable results.

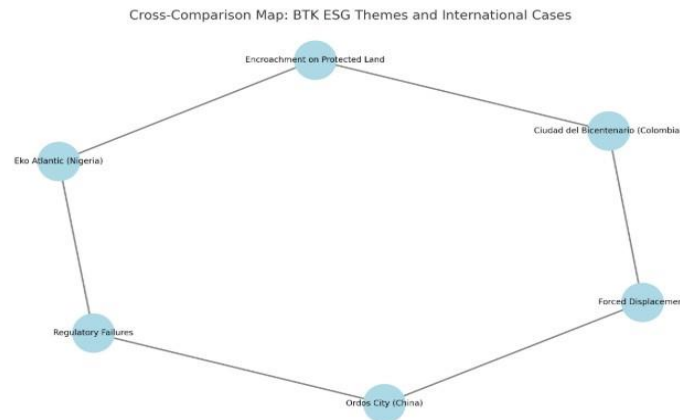


Figure. 2 Thematic linkages between BTK ESG violations and comparable international urban projects

3.2.3. Cross-Case Comparison and Contextualization

This study was also strengthened by comparing BTK with three international projects: Eko Atlantic (Nigeria), Ordos City (China), and Ciudad del Bicentenario (Colombia). The themes found in the BTK cases were explored in the context of other killers to determine whether they were caused by structures in the system or by singular events. One example is the many instances related to elitist city planning that showed how ESG problems in real estate are often signs of underlying government and institutional shortcomings (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparing BTK With Three International Projects

Case Study	Environmental Violations	Social Violations	Governance Failures	Key Insights
Bahria Town Karachi (Pakistan)	Encroachment on Kirthar National Park, biodiversity loss, absence of EIAs	Displacement of local communities without adequate compensation or consultation	Regulatory capture, manipulation of land acquisition laws, and lack of transparency	ESG failures are linked to weak governance, elite interests, and a lack of stakeholder engagement
Eko Atlantic (Nigeria)	Land reclamation is causing coastal erosion and habitat disruption	Elitist planning excludes low-income groups; there is a lack of affordable housing	Close developer-state ties, bypassing community engagement in planning	Emphasizes infrastructure for global investors at the cost of social inclusivity and environmental health
Ordos City (China)	Overbuilding caused land and resource wastage, and environmental degradation	Ghost city phenomenon, minimal public input, communities left with underused infrastructure	Centralized planning led to top-down decisions without stakeholder involvement	Highlights the consequences of speculative, top-down urban development without ESG alignment
Ciudad del Bicentenario (Colombia)	Land use change impacting local ecosystems	Resettlement of poor communities with inadequate integration plans	Poor inter-agency coordination; weak enforcement of social protections	Reveals ESG gaps in public-private partnerships in emerging economies

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Role of Carbon Markets in Financing Renewable Energy

This section provides a detailed investigation of ESG non-compliance in the BTK development project by applying stakeholder theory to the ESG aspects of the project. This study uses several sources of

information, such as Supreme Court records, environmental impact assessments, human rights reports, and comparative international case studies. It has been found that there are systemic breaches of all three pillars of ESG, which include encroachment in ecological areas without permission and forcible settlement of the natives, as well as gross anomalies in governance in the procedures of acquiring land. Thematic analysis was conducted in three steps: data familiarization and coding, theme development and identification of patterns, and cross-case analysis with other similar megaprojects in the Global South. Important insights reveal that the main violations were environmental violations, which were associated with illegal encroachment on Kirthar National Park, which is estimated to affect about 2,500 acres; social violations; and governance failures, which were manifested in land acquisition anomalies of PKR 708 billion. Compared to global examples, Eko Atlantic (Nigeria), Ordos City (China), and Ciudad del Bicentenario (Colombia) prove that there are steady trends in the ESG non-observance of international urban development projects in developing countries. These findings argue in favor of the urgent need to establish mandatory ESG compliance systems, a more coordinated institutional response, and legally binding mechanisms of stakeholder engagement in Pakistan's urban development sector. The discussion is a synthesis of these findings, which offers holistic regulatory changes to systemic institutional flaws that allow such violations to persist.

Thematic analysis of the secondary data indicated that systematic violations occurred in all three ESG pillars of the BTK development project. The results are arranged based on the embedded ESG-stakeholder theory framework, and present clear sustainability and ethical violation patterns that correspond to other megaprojects in the Global South (Watson, 2014). It was determined that the analysis occurs in three organized phases: data familiarization and coding, theme development and pattern recognition, and cross-case comparison that discloses interrelated violations that manifest systematic institutional weaknesses of the urban development sector in Pakistan (Braun and Clarke, 2006; White and Cooper, 2022).

4.2. Systematic ESG Pillar Breaches in the BTK Development Project (ESG–Stakeholder Theory Framework)

The environmental pillar infractions were mainly focused on illegal intrusion into Kirthar National Park, which was the most serious ecological violation detected throughout the research. As the documentary record of the Supreme Court decisions and environmental impact assessment suggests, the development of approximately 2,500 acres of land within the boundaries of the park under the protection of the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance was a violation of the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance to which BTK was developing (Memon, 2012). It was also found that native vegetation is being destroyed, and biodiversity protection regions in the form of wildlife corridors are being disrupted (World Wildlife Fund Pakistan, 2020). An analysis of satellite images and reports prepared by NGOs demonstrated this. The lack of compulsory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) is also an important legislative error that helped bring about environmental degradation in that projects of such a high scale should have undergone thorough EIAs in accordance with the requirements of the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997, but it has been proven that such an assessment was not completed or was performed insufficiently (Roquet et al., 2017).

Environmental organizations reported field reports of widespread ecosystem disturbance, including destroying more than 15,000 native trees without replanting commitment, disturbing the natural migration trends of local wildlife species, and modifying natural water drainage systems, resulting in higher floods, soil erosion, and degradation due to massive construction work (Ranjan and Sood, 2024). Environmental offenses reflect the calculated negligence of Pakistan's obligations to international environmental conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Climate Agreement (UNEP, 2019). These discoveries demonstrate that, even in the face of weak regulations, private developers may engage in ecologically devastating developmental behaviors without being held responsible for causing environmental harm (Haider et al., 2024).

The analysis of social impact indicated widespread infringements on the rights of the indigenous community through the practice of forced displacement, which involved some 3,000 families being displaced off their ancestral lands without proper consultation and compensation procedures (Yntiso, 2008). Intimidation of residents who refused to leave their property, inadequate compensation packages that could not compensate for restoration of livelihoods, lack of substantive community

consultation during the planning of the projects, and disturbance of traditional social structures and cultural practices were among the techniques employed in the displacement process. Patterns of coercion and insufficient support for resettlement were documented in a systematic manner and contravened national and international development-induced displacement standards by human rights organizations (Nghi and Singer, 2022). Because, settlements serve as spaces where social interactions occur, relationships between individuals and groups develop, and community identities are formed (Amrullah, M.F., E. B. S., & Tabbu, M. A. S., 2023).

The gated community system developed by the BTK resulted in intentional social stratification that effectively kept low-income people out of better urban infrastructure provision. The price mechanism of the development, where residential units started at PKR 5 million, systematically locked out 85 percent of the Karachi population in terms of income demographics (Bandauko et al., 2022). This policy of exclusion conflicts with ideas of inclusive cities and social sustainability, producing what urban theorists refer to as splintered urbanism, in which enhancement of the infrastructure favors elite groups at the expense of the surrounding communities that remain undermarginalized (Moser and Avni, 2024). Project documentation analysis showed that there was little stakeholder involvement in the design process, that the representatives of the community complained that they were not consulted in the planning, and that there were no official grievance channels in place to address the concerns of the affected groups (Sikder et al., 2015).

The most likely systemic violations of the governance pillar were massive irregularities in land acquisition procedures valued at PKR 708 billion. The investigation by the NAB found that land classification (agricultural to commercial) was not properly approved, developers and government officials colluded to accelerate the transfer of land, competitive bidding to allocate government lands had been bypassed, and land records were falsely prepared to justify unauthorized land acquisition (Ahmed et al., 2023). Materials that were part of the Supreme Court hearings revealed massive regulatory capture, with BTK developers buying their way into regulation through political access without going through the normal process of obtaining construction permits, forcing environmental clearance processes despite non-compliance, receiving better treatment in infrastructure development approvals, and escaping regulatory offences through political intercession (Mysorewala, 2021). It was found that there were serious transparency gaps in project governance, such as insufficient public disclosure of the project financial arrangements, lack of independent oversight mechanisms, insufficient public access to environmental and social impact assessment reports, and lack of transparent redressal and complaint systems (Unegbua et al., 2024).

4.3. Cross-Case Patterns in the Global South and Implications for Mandatory ESG Governance Reform

The comparative analysis of international cases showed some shocking similarities in the patterns of ESG violations in various geographical and political settings. Each of the four analyzed cases (BTK, Eko Atlantic in Nigeria, Ordos City in China, and Ciudad del Bicentenario in Colombia) was characterized by a lack of proper environmental impact assessment and prioritization of economic gains over environmental protection, poor implementation of environmental rules, and a low level of climate change discussion (Ajibade, 2017). The displacement of vulnerable populations without sufficient compensation, development models that were not designed to cater to higher elite populations, lack of community involvement in planning activities, and poor affordability of housing in the developments were common social violations across cases (Moser and Avni, 2024). In every case, the systemic failures of governance were the regulatory capture of powerful developer interests, absence of transparency in decision-making, weak institutional checks and balances, and political impact of regulatory procedures (Grubbauer and Čamprag, 2019).

The BTK case demonstrates the importance of considering ESG models along with stakeholder theory when examining a private urban development project. The systematic breaches of all three ESG pillars are indicative of a fundamental failure in stakeholder identification, prioritization, and engagement. This intrusion into Kirthar National Park is part of a larger failure to balance the pressures of urban development with the protection of biodiversity in developing nations. Deforestation of wildlife corridors and native vegetation is not only a breach of national environmental commitments, but also a breach of international biodiversity conventions that bind Pakistan. The results indicate that

institutional coordination between urban planning authorities and environmental protection agencies is required to achieve good environmental governance. The disaggregated system of environmental approvals helped BTK seek approval without environmental impact assessments; thus, integration of these regulatory frameworks is necessary to avoid such coordination failures.

The indigenous displacement of BTK is characteristic of more widespread trends in the Global South of development-driven displacement. Poor compensation structures and the lack of livelihood restoration initiatives provide evidence that urban development by private actors contributes to worsening pre-existing social inequalities. The results confirm the statement of Moser and Avni (2024) that the analysis of the social justice of private urban development should be conducted explicitly, especially with respect to the system of governance and the mechanisms of exclusion. Failure to carry out any meaningful community consultation in the planning exercise of BTK contravenes international best practices of sustainable urban development. The United Nations Habitat III New Urban Agenda focuses on the role of participatory planning processes, in which all stakeholders are given a voice in making urban development decisions (Thabit et al., 2020). The BTK case illustrates how a lack of institutionalized participatory mechanisms can result in development projects that only pursue the interests of a small minority at the expense of subjecting wider communities to negative externalities. This observation reflects the demand to introduce mandatory community engagement requirements and make the development of mega-urban development projects legally binding and supervised by an independent body to ensure that community participation is meaningful and not a token gesture consultation.

The BTK case offers a wealth of evidence on the mechanics of regulatory capture in Pakistan's urban development sector. Through NAB investigation, it became clear that developers may be able to affect the regulatory process by using political access, campaign donations, or revolving door relations between regulatory agencies and the regulated industry. The cross-case comparison reveals how the institutional capacity constraints of developing countries contribute to comparable ESG breach patterns while having different political and economic contextual factors. All four cases involved an inadequately regulated environment and regulatory capture because of poor community involvement and developer interest (Stehle et al., 2022). These results indicate that efforts to address the issue of ESG violations in city development should involve institutional reform rather than project-oriented intervention. The fact that these violations are systematic means that broader governance reforms are necessary to reinforce both regulatory frameworks, enhance transparency, and institutionalize stakeholder participation by providing regulatory mechanisms that are legally binding and possess the authority of independent oversight and enforcement (Parnell and Robinson, 2012).

The case of BTK illustrates how a system of compulsory ESG compliance rules must be immediately implemented in Pakistan's urban development environment. Existing voluntary solutions have not been sufficient to ensure systematic breaches of ESG levels (Newell et al., 2023). It should be reformed to include compulsory ESG impact assessment of any urban development project over a certain set of predetermined thresholds, independent oversight bodies with the power to stop any project that breaches ESG requirements, public disclosure of all documents related to ESG, and the stakeholder participation requirement as legally enforceable (Kabra and Das, 2019). These reforms would provide some institutional incentive to developers to internalize ESG factors across project lifecycles, instead of considering them as peripherals or PR exercises.

The BTK case demonstrates the extreme inadequacy of coordination among various agency bodies in the government charged with environmental protection, urban planning, and social welfare. Good ESG governance involves combined institutional structures that guarantee inter-agency coordination through common information systems, holistic accountability mechanisms, and decision-making procedures. The proposed reforms would involve the creation of integrated urban development authorities with cross-sectoral mandates, the requirement that large-scale development projects entail a mandated inter-agency consultation, shared information systems that allow real-time tracking of ESG adherence, and joint accountability mechanisms so that agencies are not tempted to offload the blame of ESG failures (Hoornweg, D., and Freire, M., 2013).

The government of Pakistan is recommended to require developers in the real estate sector to use ESG principles and make ecological and social impact assessments necessary for all big projects. Reforms should guarantee openness in land acquisition and provide fair payments to displaced

communities. Developers must involve the people and organizations directly affected by their plans. Preventing corruption, digitalizing land records, and promoting green and ethical investment schemes will make the country more responsible and enjoyable for ethical investors.

5. Conclusion

This study examines the ethical and sustainability issues surrounding the development of Bahria Town Karachi using integrated ESG-stakeholder theory frameworks in a systematic analysis of the case showing systematic violations of all three pillars of ESG. The review reported environmental encroachment on Kirthar National Park (around 2,500 acres) without compulsory Environmental Impact Assessments, the displacement of 3000 native families with no proper consultation or compensation, and governance failures comprising acquisition anomalies of land worth PKR 708 billion. The cross-case analysis of Eko Atlantic (Nigeria), Ordos City (China), and Ciudad del Bicentenario (Colombia) revealed that the ESG violations committed by BTK are not isolated cases, but the failure of the urban development governance systems to consider all the institutional vulnerabilities to urban developments across the Global South, which include regulatory capture and elite-biased planning that leaves marginalized populations out and concentrates more on economic benefits than environmental and social sustainability.

The results suggest urgent regulatory changes in the urban development sector in Pakistan, such as the mandatory ESG compliance frameworks of mega-projects, the binding stakeholder engagement mechanisms of mega-projects legislated by law, the integrated inter-agency coordination structures, and transparent land acquisition processes administrated by an independent body. Although the study is restricted by secondary data and one-case research, it represents the initial ESG-based analysis of BTK using a comparative international perspective that offers a theoretical background of vibrant stakeholder salience in the context of private urban development. Further studies in this area should include primary data gathering of the affected population, longitudinal differences in ESG compliance, and comparative study of various urban projects in Pakistan so that context-specific ESG indicators and governance can be established to align economic growth with environmental conservation and social equity in emerging economies.

Funding. This research received no external funding

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest

Data availability. Not applicable

AI Use Declaration. The authors not use AI-assisted

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