

SCOURGE OF FLAWED PLANNING

In his US Master's thesis, urban planner and architect Tahir Noronha's reveals how recent and past TCP amendments benefited real estate firms over communities. His findings challenge Goa's planning processes. Now headed to UC Berkeley on a full scholarship, he proposes reforms to enhance public involvement in land use decisions.

KARSTEN MIRANDA speaks to Noronha to find out more about his observations on the state of public planning in Goa



Tahir Noronha conducts training workshops for administrators, lawyers and activists on issues related to heritage, land use, and transportation in Goa

Architect Tahir Noronha has unveiled critical insights into the complex dynamics of town and country planning in Goa. Noronha, the former convener of the Charles Correa Foundation (CCF), recently completed his Master's degree at the University of Michigan, focusing on Goa's land-use planning processes.

Noronha's research investigated public participation in eight plans of Goa, including the Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP), Pernem Zoning Plan, Regional Plan-21 (RP-21), and Calangute Outline Development Plan (ODP). The study aimed to understand the historic context of community involvement in planning decisions and recent policy shifts that have altered this landscape.

The genesis of Noronha's research can be traced back to his time at the CCF in Panjim, where he observed conflicts in the planning process. "I am aware that historically, Goan communities were actively involved in planning, and they significantly contributed to decision-making outcomes," Noronha said. However, he noted a concerning trend in recent years, where amendments to planning laws in Goa have sought to reduce what some term as "over-participation" by NGOs.

Noronha's study employed a multi-facet-

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the use of land without any public input.

This amendment was justified by the government as a way to correct errors in RP-21, prevent over-participation and promote sustainability and affordable housing.

However, Noronha's findings paint a different picture. "My study found that the amendment mainly benefited large real estate corporations, with 85% of the beneficiaries till February 2024 being from this sector," he revealed.

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proach of using law to combat participation.”

The implications of these findings are far-reaching, especially considering the lucrative nature of land conversion in Goa. Noronha's research uncovered that the average rate of return from buying agricultural land, conversion under Section 17(2), and selling it as settlement land is around 700%.

This staggering profit margin has led to a situation where "a few corporate firms and brokers are buying the land for dirt cheap from Goans, and reaping this reward", Noronha explained. This process, occurring over just a few months, often leaves end-buyers in a precarious position when courts stay the 17(2) or 39A changes.

Noronha strongly advises Goans against selling their land and cautions investors to be wary of what they purchase. "Right now, only the broker is benefitting," he warned.

Regarding the latest TCP amendments, Noronha expressed concern, stating they are "steps in the wrong direction". While acknowledging that over-participation may be an issue, he argues that "instead of curtailing participation, the government should provide more avenues for participation of underrepresented voices".

Looking forward, Noronha proposes three key policy changes to improve the planning process in Goa. He suggests establishing collaborative visioning, allowing communities to create draft plans themselves, which expert planners can then refine from scientific and environmental perspectives.

Additionally, he recommends sending final plans back to the public for validation. Lastly, Noronha advocates for a return to using maps to display land information instead of Gazettes, making it easier for people to understand proposed changes in their neighbourhoods.

Noronha has secured a full scholarship to pursue a PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. His doctoral research will delve deeper into the role of planners, activists and politicians in shaping Goa's land use laws, as well as the impact of climate change on the long-term sustainability of land in this coastal State.

"I look forward to sharing Goa's unique issues with a large international audience at one of the top 10 global universities," Noronha said, highlighting the potential for his research to influence planning practices beyond Goa's borders.

Even as he prepares for his doctoral studies, Noronha remains actively engaged in local issues in Goa. He continues to participate in agitations demanding accountability for projects like the Kala Academy's renovation.

Additionally, he conducts training workshops for members of the Goa Bachao Abhiyan on prevailing land use maps, equipping local activists with the knowledge to engage more effectively in planning processes.

Noronha's journey from participating in the Save Old Goa protests to conducting ground-breaking research on planning processes exemplifies the importance of local engagement in global issues.

His work not only sheds light on the complexities of Goa's planning landscape, but also offers valuable insights for other regions grappling with similar challenges in balancing development, sustainability and public participation.

A LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

What is productive participation? "In a seminal article published in 1969, Sherry Arnstein categorised the degree of participation in different plans, policies and projects as rungs on a ladder, with higher levels aligned with increased participation," says architect Tahir Noronha. He added that his research attempted to map historic plans on the ladder; pointing out examples where the planning is closer to citizen control (eg. Gram Panchayat Development Plans); consultation (eg Coastal Zone Management Plan); and non-participation (eg. Pernem Zoning Plan). "One point that we have to consider is how easily consultation can be turned into manipulation through hiding essential data," Noronha adds.

"For example, in Regional Plan (RP) 2021, individual applications for zone changes were heard by the State Level Committee (SLC). In 'The Great Goan Land Grab' (2023), Solano Da Silva mentions struggles in obtaining SLC minutes. I also tried to get a hold of these documents, only to be told that they are unavailable," says Noronha.

He further pointed out that this lack of transparency in planning by the SLC had caused a great deal of frustration to Goans. Noronha gave examples of how some people lost settlement land, seeing it downzoned to orchard; while others found lush green areas in their villages upzoned to settlement or industry.

He felt that perhaps there were legitimate planning reasons for doing so – but the repeated denial of that information under RTI and in the Assembly, shifted from what could have been a highly participative citizen-driven plan to one of manipulation.

"Arnstein's ladder continues to be incredibly important for research on democracy and

participation, but it has faced criticism for its oversimplification and failure to fully acknowledge social diversity and inequality. To account for this in my research I use additional frameworks from Fraser and Fung to give a deeper understanding," adds Noronha. For his data collection, Noronha focused on the public participation components in

Citizen Power	Citizen Control
	Delegated power
	Partnership
Tokenism	Placation
	Consultation
	Informing
Non Participation	Therapy
	Manipulation

various primary sources. These include the plan reports, legal documents arising from challenges to certain plans, and accompanying minutes and records of public participation that did not make it into the final plan documents.

"I refer to all the above documents as "plans", for clarity, even if some of the information is not published in the plan report, and is not in the public domain. I selected nine plans (see table) with visible, documented public participation, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of various planning aspects in Goa," Noronha concludes.

Sr. No.	Plan	Year	Typology	Level of Govt	Population
1.	The Regional Plan for Goa – 2021	2010	Land Use	State	1,141,000
2.	Pernem Zoning Plan	2023	Land Use	State	88,000
3.	Panaji Outline Development Plan	2021	Land Use	State with local input	71,700
4.	Calangute-Candolim Outline Development Plan	2018	Land Use	State with local input	44,200
5.	Goa Coastal Zone Management Plan	2020	Environment, Land Use	Central with state input	151,000
6.	Comprehensive Plan for Fishermen Community	2021	Environment	Central with state input	31,270
7.	Neura Village People's Biodiversity Register	2021	Environment	Local Government (Biodiversity Commission)	2,003
8.	Panaji City Development Plan	2015	Investment, Transportation and Housing	Local - for central grant	71,700
9.	Neura Village Gram Panchayat Development Plan	2023	Investment	Local Government (Village Development Commission)	2,003

Sources: Relevant plans

EMPIRICAL DATA

[A] INDICATORS OF THE CONSTRUCTION BOOM IN GOA

Architect Tahir Noronha referred to how Goans are quick to comment about the increased construction that one sees across villages.

"However, it's really hard to quantify the same. Every panchayat and municipality maintains construction licenses in silos; and it's difficult to aggregate the data. Meanwhile, the government denies any spike in the construction in and around Goa. My research indicates a massive spike in the number of construction license fees collected in the last year," says Noronha.

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Technical Clearance fees in INR	55.67 lakh	74.72 lakh	83.96 lakh	231.56 lakh

[B] INDICATORS OF POPULATION GROWTH

"In light of all the construction that is mushrooming across the state, I then see how our population is growing. The Regional Plan (RP-21) was made in 2011, looking at a horizon of 2021. At that time, the planners estimated the population of Goa in 2021 to be 18.07 lakh people," Noronha explains.

"Recent population data paints a different paper. In the Assembly, the Goa Government gave an estimated population of 15.83 lakh in 2021. If this is the case, then the settlement land opened up in RP-21 should have been adequate. I am worried as to whose benefit all the additional settlement lands across Goa are going to," Noronha elaborates further.

[C] HOUSING FOR WHOM?

"If construction is growing like crazy, and the population is not growing at the rate it's supposed to, then who is occupying the houses? Census 2011 has the answers," Noronha points out.

"It said that 22% of all houses in Goa are vacant. This surplus housing is contrary to the fact that most Goans cannot buy land and homes in our state anymore. It is this motivation that drives me to investigate the public participation of current residents in our land-use planning, to figure out the root of this discrepancy," Noronha concludes.

ed approach, including document analysis, plan evaluation, quantitative mapping and interviews with key stakeholders. His findings reveal a complex picture of participation in Goa's planning.

While NGOs and activists have been active participants, Noronha's research uncovered two other groups that also tend to dominate land use decisions -MLAs and real estate firms.

A significant focus of Noronha's study was the impact of introducing Section 17(2) into the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act, a 2023 policy that allows the TCP board to change

sustainability.

Noronha's research highlights a stark contrast between the historical high levels of public participation in Goa's planning processes and recent legislative moves to curtail such involvement.

This shift mirrors debates in the United States about "over-participation", particularly in areas facing acute housing shortages. However, Noronha points out a crucial difference: "While American planners attempt to address this through administrative measures, the TCP amendments in Goa represent a novel ap-

