**Can Smog Disappear through Greenwashing?**

[Syed Asim Ali Bukhari](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/syed-asim-ali-bukhari/)

December 23, 2021

The green revolution has taken over almost all industries with the advent of green construction, sustainable fashion, green manufacturing, eco-tourism, green supply chain management and green banking. However, negating the eco-friendly claims of these industries is the globally escalating environmental degradation, natural resource degeneration and climate change. This contradiction between claims and reality can be explained by one term, i.e. greenwashing. This year the world leaders came together at the 2021 UN-Climate Change Summit, COP26, in Glasgow, to map out the future strategy for attaining global environmental sustainability. However, the world witnessed the phenomenon of greenwashing when the term “phase-out” of coal was watered down to “phase-down” at the last minute, at the behest of China and India. Struggling to survive the Smog season especially in Lahore, one cannot help but wonder if greenwashing is undermining the effectiveness of the various green initiatives taken under the ‘Clean and Green Pakistan’ vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Pakistan was blessed with four seasons but being an innovative nation that we decided to add a fifth season to our year, the Smog season. Each year, the eco-conscious policymakers in Pakistan launch a new strategic plan to combat Smog. Still, next year, smog returns with increased intensity neutralizing the green political manifesto of our government. According to Pakistan’s Ministry of Climate Change, The Ten Billion Tree Tsunami project would help remove 500 million tons of CO2 annually from the air in the next twenty years. However, each year the air pollution in Pakistan is topping the global charts. In 2019, stubble burning was identified as one of the leading causes of Smog in Punjab. Therefore, the Government of Punjab imposed a ban on stubble burning under section 144 of the code of criminal procedure and filed cases against hundreds of farmers involved in this agricultural practice. In the year 2020, the Smog season reappeared, but this time the focus of the policymakers shifted towards another source of air pollution, i.e. the brick kilns. Following the same strategic direction, traditional brick kilns were temporarily shut down in Punjab to eliminate smog. The conversion of thousands of brick kilns in Punjab to environmentally friendly or zig-zag technology was also heavily advertised. However, Smog has yet again descended on us and this year, vehicular pollution is on the top of the cause list. So, this year the long-term strategy in Punjab has shut down schools and offices on Monday to reduce vehicular pollution and thus Smog but this is not a long term solution to Smog.

“Clean and Green Pakistan” vision cannot be realized with greenwashing, just like the “Riyasat-e-Madina”ideology cannot be implemented through bluewashing.

It is high time; we understand the difference between eco-friendly initiatives and greenwashing. The continuously escalating natural environment and resource degeneration in Pakistan strengthen the presence of greenwashing instead of effective environmentally sustainable strategic planning on the part of the concerned stakeholders. Smog, suffocating our health and economic prosperity, cannot be eliminated through greenwashing. Temporarily closing down polluting industries or traffic is not a long term solution to this problem. Much like the rest of our problems, the answer to this Smog dilemma lies in the synergistic action of various stakeholders. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) of Pakistan and other stakeholders must implement long-term strategies for attaining environmental sustainability. The banking industry of Pakistan can play an essential role in crafting a long-term solution towards achieving environmental sustainability along with economic prosperity. The answer to Pakistan’s Smog predicament is green financing under the ideology of Green Banking. Instead of closing down polluting units during smog season, banks can provide green financing to restructure the business operations in line with international environmental standards eliminating the primary source of pollution and ultimately smog. Farmers can be provided green loans to shift towards the precision or smart agricultural practices reducing the harmful environmental impacts of traditional methods like stubble burning. The SBP may launch a green finance policy for eco-friendly manufacturing units so that instead of shutting down polluting industries, Pakistan can progress towards clean and green economic growth. Pakistan can earn carbon credits against the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami project, which can help cover the project’s cost and attainment of UN-SDGs 2030. In carbon trading, a carbon credit is issued for every ton of avoided greenhouse gases, and holders of the credits can then contribute the credits to their national environmental targets, or sell them back on the money market.

The need is to identify the cause of pollution and environmental degeneration in Pakistan and devise an economically sustainable solution. For example, the large number of barbecue shops in Lahore is a major source of air pollution. Most of these businesses do not have any proper ventilation system and emit hazardous smoke directly in heavily populated areas. Similarly, environmentally harmful business practices can be observed in the case of factories emitting air pollution and dumping waste into water bodies while advertising their greenwashing practices in annual reports and websites. The EPA and Ministry of Climate Change should work with concerned stakeholders/ factories to mandate various environmental standards such as ISO 14001. Green Banking is a two-pronged strategy focusing on minimizing sources of pollution and financing eco-friendly business ventures. Banks in Pakistan can finance various green initiatives to reduce Smog, such as constructing Smog towers in heavily polluted industrial areas or cities. Smog towers are large-scale air purifiers designed to reduce air pollution particles. However, such green initiatives under Green Finance scheme require long term strategic planning to ensure environmental and economic sustainability. Smog towers consume large amounts of electricity and have a high maintenance cost. Therefore, these can be powered through renewable energy projects financed under the SBP Renewable Energy Financing Scheme. The financing of renewable energy generation under the Green Banking concept can also power Pakistan’s electric vehicle revolution. Similarly, blue financing by the Pakistan banking industry can help minimize various sources of water pollution in the country’s marine environment.

Unfortunately, the escalating environmental challenges and eco-consciousness among the stakeholders have, in turn, increased greenwashing. It must be understood that the ‘Clean and Green Pakistan’ vision cannot be realized with greenwashing, just like the ‘Riyasat-e-Madina’ ideology cannot be implemented through bluewashing. To break the vicious Smog cycle, all stakeholders need to holistically work towards attaining sustainable development, i.e. development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The very essence of sustainable development negates the concept of greenwashing by ensuring continued environmental sustainability for future generations. Currently, Pakistan is struggling with the lack of proper implementation of environmental laws and regulations. Therefore, sincere and concrete efforts are required to steer Pakistan away from this Smog season.

*The writer works as a Chief Manager-Green Banking Officer at Bank AL Habib Limited. He can be contacted at aasimalibukhari@yahoo.com*