**Climate change and Pakistan**

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The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is unequivocal on climate change; it is real, and it is happening. Climate change refers to the long-term changes in weather patterns and temperature. Humans, like other species, had very little impact on the weather and over all temperature till the 17th century. The quest for development led to industrialisation which poured greenhouse gases into the air, increasing global temperatures. Some experts call climate change a negative externality, which is caused by a few, but the consequences are shared by all. It is a global phenomenon whose impacts are ubiquitous, but disproportionately more on the poor, be it a country or an individual.

Pakistan contributes less than 1 percent towards greenhouse gases yet, the country is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. The German Climate Watch report placed Pakistan in the top 10 for the most vulnerable countries to climate change. This is scaringly true, and the diverse geography and the swelling population make the case even stronger. Recently, the Climate Risk Country profile shared by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB) estimated that Pakistan is facing up to $3.8 billion in annual economic losses due to climate change. The report has some damning revelations regarding the impact of climate change. According to the report, the average increase in temperatures for Pakistan is above global averages.

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According to UN reports, Pakistan is the sixth most vulnerable country to climate change. The immediate impacts of climate change are visible in the country in different manifestations; water scarcity, low agricultural yield, pest invasion, floods, desertification, variability in monsoons, flash floods, receding glaciers, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF), food security and others. Considering the yearly loss to the economy, different climate adaptation measures are underway in different areas to help communities adapt to the changing climate. One of the major impacts of increasing temperatures is the creation of glacial lakes which in turn result in GLOF events damaging infrastructures and impacting human lives. The United Nations Development Programme with the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Gilgit Baltistan is working on building resilient communities against GLOF events and infrastructures to save communities from the disaster they bring. Climate adaptation measures are very crucial to build resilient infrastructure and communities to face the menace of climate change.

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Pakistan is now working arduously to regreen the country to combat the climate crisis. The Billion Tree Tsunami Afforestation Project (BTTAP), started by the Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf’s government under the leadership of Imran Khan in 2013 in KP was one of the first initiatives by any provincial or federal government to combat the issue. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the country has forests on 5 percent of the land as compared to the global average of 30 percent and the UN recommends coverage of 10 percent. The BTTAP was successful in stimulating the establishment of nurseries and labour opportunities. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) evaluated the project as a third-party evaluator and concluded that the project was a success. Under BTTAP, 872.3 million seedlings were planted, out of which 774.13 million were successful, making an average survival rate of 88.75 percent. These samplings were planted through the establishment of closures in degraded forest areas, block plantations and sowings on private, communal and state lands.

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Following the success of the BTTAP, after coming to power at the centre, the PTI government, under the leadership of Imran Khan has initiated another project, the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Afforestation Project (TBTTAP) to augment the deteriorating forest cover across the country. The project started in 2019 and will be completed in 2023 with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Global experts and commentators have lauded the efforts stating that we have to act against climate change and Pakistan is leading the effort.

The United Nations has dedicated the decade from 2021 through 2030 as the UN decade on ecosystem restoration. Pakistan hosted this year’s World Environment Day 2021 with the theme of “ecosystem restoration” which is fully aligned with Imran Khan’s vision. The World Economic Forum has called the BTTAP a momentous milestone with hopes that this will fuel similar drives across the globe. For a country like Pakistan which is grappling with a stagnant economy and political volatility, projects like BTTAP and TBTTAP bring positive light to the country.

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Afforestation initiatives are positive steps towards tackling climate change and more concerted efforts are required to steer the country to be more environmentally friendly. As mentioned, Pakistan hardly contributes 1 percent towards global greenhouse gases yet it is one of the most vulnerable countries. Afforestation projects should be complemented with carbon sequestration and renewable energy productions along with climate adaptation measures. However, as a developing country, Pakistan heavily relies on fossil fuels to run its daily affairs and industries. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21, the energy mix of the country is mostly skewed towards thermal power which generates 59.42 percent of the electricity followed by hydel at 30.52 percent and renewable at a meagre 2.23 percent, which is much lower than previous years.

Renewable energy sources are required to be kickstarted by a heavy capital investment and later require trained human resources to maintain them. Pakistan ventured into renewable energy initiatives like the Jhimpir windmills and the Quaid I Azam Solar Park, but a lack of judicious investment stalled further development. Renewable energy development are usually big investment projects, but unfortunately Pakistan has not been able to attract handsome Foreign Direct Investments in this sector. Without external support, Pakistan will not be able to harness the huge wind and hydel potential. Pakistan is also investing in public transportation projects like Metro and Orange lines to reduce the demand for personal cars along with the introduction of Electric Vehicles to reduce reliance on fossil fuel.

[Prince Harry, Meghan Markle taping their NYC trip for Netflix](https://nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2021/prince-harry-meghan-markle-taping-their-nyc-trip-for-netflix)

Pakistan’s cries of trade deficits are legitimate, but a step deeper analysis clarifies that a majority of our imports are petroleum products which are then utilised for thermal electricity production. The country aims to have 60 percent of its energy from clean resources by 2030 which is a timely step. Shifting from thermal to hydel and renewable energy will save the country a lot on imports. Then again, huge investments are required to set up hydel or renewable energy sources which a country like Pakistan cannot pull off. Already mired in debt payments and IMF obligations, Pakistan has little fiscal space to invest on green initiatives on her own, however the little she has invested in the past have been a success.

On the global stage, Pakistan is and must be a vociferous voice for climate friendly policies and the coming COP26 in Glasgow and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) must be utilised to highlight the green achievements of Pakistan and urge the international community to pay full attention to the issue of climate change. Instead of pledges, concrete actions are required to fight climate change as the climate change ball is already rolling. Pakistan is certainly on the right trajectory to build resilience against the adverse effects of climate change; however, more focus needs to be on adaptation measures as climate change effects are already visible in different ways. In addition, Pakistan must spearhead a global south alliance against climate change and be the voice for countries struggling with climate change issues.