**Decarbonised future for Pakistan**

BY S H A M S H A D A K H T A R A N D W A R D A H Z A M A N 2022-02-18

THE `code red for humanity` issued in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report should have been a wake-up call to shake even the most languid out of slumber, but outcomes from COP26 Glasgow suggest we have not moved past promises to action. The IPCC has stated that the world is likely to cross the 1.5 degrees Celsius mark of average temperature rise beyond pre-industrial levels this century, if not the 2°C mark as well. The world has started to already see the impacts of climate disasters, and the global focus now shifts towards damage control by reducing global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

In this climate crisis, few nations stand to lose as much as Pakistan. Latest data from 2018 shows Pakistan`s per capita carbon emissions at 1.0 ton per person far below the global average of 4.5, or even the South Asian average of 1.5. Such statistics seem to have fed into a perception of climate change being a problem for the Western world. It is of vital importance for the nation to not be lulled into this false sense of security.

Pakistan may be a minor carbon emitter in the larger context, but has simultaneously been ranked among the top 10 most vulnerable countries in the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index. The report released by Germanwatch posits that Pakistan has lost almost 10,000 lives and $3.8 billion in economic losses between 1999 and 2018. Data from multiple government sources reveals that average annual temperatures in the country have increased by 0.47 to 0.6°C between 1960 and 2010. The impending crisis will spell disaster for our agricultural production, economy, energy requirements, national security, and much more.

Since ratifying the Paris Agreement, Pakistan has adopted a strong agenda on climate change and environmental issues. As part of its revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), Pakistan commits to halving GHG emissions by 2030. We are already taking steps towards this agenda through initiatives that have gained worldwide recognition, such as the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme and the Protected Areas Initiative. But on other fronts we have only seen high priority pledges, such as transitioning to 60 per cent renewable energy and 30pc electric vehicles by the end of this decade. More work is required to trans-late those pledges into actions.

This leads us to one urgent conclusion: all hands must be on deck if we are to stand any chance of meeting these ambitious and transformative targets.

The urgency for the private sector to respond to the crisis, hence, is clear. Climate change has posed a significant challenge to businesses around the world because of the uncertain path of global warming and its effect on business activities. Global corporations have been facing growing pressure to accelerate climate action and several initiatives have been launched globally to coordinate sustainability efforts.

Pakistan`s private sector, unfortunately, is lagging on this agenda that calls for bold reform. Our leadingcompanies particularly those in export-oriented sectors such as textiles are facing increasing calls from buyers, regulators and suppliers to enhance their sustainability agenda, and they will have no option but to respond if they are to remain competitive in local and international markets.

However, it is not the companies that are entirely at fault for this slow response to a global crisis. Even businesses that do want to decarbonise their operations lack the required support from the public sector to undertake such initiatives. Currently, 65pc of the country`s energy comes from fossil fuels, contributing to a large portion of our emissions. Pakistan doesn`t have a reliable power infrastructure to enable a rapid renewable energy transition, while reducing emissions in other areas such as transport also requires frameworks that are not yet available in the country.

Meanwhile, regional export competitors are beginning to take coordinated action Vietnam`snew public-private partnership laws have been successful in delaying major coal-powered plants to keep their exports competitive with the use of clean energy for its products.

In response to the climate crisis, there is a promise for an economic win-win situation for everyone. On one hand, decarbonised operations are profitable investments for companies. Renewable energy from solar and wind is fast becoming the cheapest option available. Energy efficiency measures also cut down on overall costs for companies, while branding company operations as low-carbon and sustainable.

Additionally, Pakistan`s export competitiveness will face a boost as international buyers are increasingly sourcing products that have a more positive impact on the environment.

On the other hand, decarbonisation will also create significant value for the economy. The groundbreaking New Climate Economy report from 2018 found that bold climate action could deliver over $26 trillion in economic benefits through 2030, with the capacity to generate more than 65 million new lowcarbon jobs globally in 2030 more than the size of Pakistan`s entire workforce. Investment in low-carbon technologies in Pakistan will create thousands of jobs, help achieve nationwide electricity access, and stimulate economic growth through the creation of new industries. Estimates by the Pakistan Environment Trust, for example, suggest that meeting Pakistan`s emission reduction ambition could create a carbon offset industry worth over $200m per year.

With the lukewarm response shown by other countries at COP26, there is no better time for Pakistan to rise as a global leader and spearhead the race to halving emissions by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2050.

Economic prosperity is an offer available to Pakistan if it is on board and the time to act is now.  Dr Shamshad Akhtar is a Trustee for the Pakistan Environment Trust and serves as chairperson for the Pakistan Stock Exchange and Karandaaz She is a former State Bank governor and former under-secretary general of the United Nations. Wardah Zaman works as a programme associate at the Pakistan Environment Trust, and is a climate change expert on topics related to net zero emissions and carbon markets.