[**Ladder of climate ambition**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1666939/ladder-of-climate-ambition)

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INSTEAD of committing to long-term net-zero emissions as almost 70 countries have done, Pakistan has underlined the critical importance of immediate actions to mitigate climate risks. Citing examples of some major projects initiated in recent years and the commitments made in 2021 through the Nationally Determined Contributions, Pakistan has presented itself to the world as a model to follow. The NDC commits to almost 200 actions. A significant number of them have specific targets and many also have timelines, requiring immediate, perhaps urgent, actions. This year, 2022, will perhaps be the most important year to set the direction and momentum for Pakistan’s climate actions.

The NDC has committed that the Climate Change Act passed by parliament in 2017 will be operationalised during this year. It has three components: the Climate Change Council, Climate Change Authority and Climate Change Fund. Concurrently, the NDC has also committed to revising this year its climate change policy and its implementation framework that have been under execution since 2012-13. Finally, in 2023, Pakistan will also develop its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) that will serve as the framework for mainstreaming climate change concerns into sectoral policies, strategies and programmes.

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Without NAP, Pakistan’s investments in adaptation cannot be measured or prioritised. It is critical for a coordinated approach between different tiers of government, requiring deeper reflections and collaborative actions between national and provincial stakeholders. These actions will set the stage for the provinces to develop provincial climate change policies and action plans in 2024, according to NDC. This is a tall order for any country to spearhead — and the countdown has begun. Pakistan has no option but to adopt a whole-of-government approach to deliver on its commitments.

The NDC has also committed that the Ministry of Planning and Special Initiatives (MoPSI) and the provincial planning and development departments (P&DDs) will, from 2024, climate-proof risk assessment for new public-/private-sector finance projects, and undertake a climate screening appraisal mechanism for public-sector funded projects. The NDC has further committed to climate-proof development schemes upward of $22 million per annum, according to estimates by the NDC Adaptation Committee to ensure that adaptation considerations are adhered to by 2024.

This barely gives Pakistan two years to reset its direction for climate-resilient and low-carbon development. While the Ministry of Climate Change (MoCC) and MoPSI still have to work out the details, the latter has begun to support the former through a preliminary process of climate-proofing PC-1s in order to ensure that climate risks and benefits, particularly co-benefits, are woven into PSDP projects from the next fiscal year. MoPSI has also determined that all public-sector projects will be expected to have an environmental impact assessment prior to their submission to the Central Development Working Party (CDWP).

The process of reviewing the capacity of the federal Environment Protection Agency and provincial environment protection departments has begun and now the challenge is to see how the centre and provinces coordinate climate actions. It is challenging, particularly since climate actions under our Constitution are rooted primarily at the provincial level. While the MoCC in Islamabad is hyperactive, it lacks counterpart departments in the provinces and therefore many of the decisions do not always find implementation mechanisms on the ground. The provincial local government laws, where the municipal services intersect with environmental and climate services, do not define their role in mitigating climate risks and disasters. This is a serious lacuna, one that the revised national and provincial climate policies and action plans, particularly NAP, will need to address head-on. The local governments by their very nature are the first line of defence against climate-induced disasters.

Mainstreaming climate change, therefore, continues to be a challenge as it still needs to find a place in the country’s policy planning and resource allocation mechanisms. MoPSI or P&DDs still do not have dedicated senior-level experts on their boards, nor do city governments in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and other cities for climate-smart urban planning. The MoCC has to systematically engage with Ecnec, PSDP and CDWP, the apex forums that approve public-sector projects. For the range of issues covered in the NDC, it is necessary that the MoCC is represented on cabinet committees especially on energy, CPEC and food security. After all, the nexus between sustainable development, environment and climate change is defined at that level and not in the corridors of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Pakistan’s claim to a leadership position will expose it to reputational risks unless some immediate climate actions are taken. This will require quick actions to embed and mainstream climate change in several ministries and departments nationally and provincially as no single ministry can climb such a long ladder of climate ambition. The MoCC has already initiated collaborative work with several ministries during the development of the NDC. This collaboration needs to be augmented now particularly with the energy ministry/Petroleum Division and its subsidiary bodies to operationalise the targets given on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and promotion of RE and EVs for reduced emissions.

One example of adopting a ‘whole-of-government’ approach in RE is: Pakistan has committed toincreasing energy efficiency with combined sectoral targets of 1.5pc annual improvement in energy efficiency. But the sectoral and sub-sectoral targets and their yearly progression still need to be set to measure progress. Likewise, the NDC has committed to increasing grid efficiency and expanding the transmission infrastructure, mechanisms for grid flexibility and greater integration of RE, improvement in coal efficiency and exploration of green coal technologies, but specific targets and their timelines still need to be negotiated with the concerned ministries and reflected in their revised policies. Finally, the Alternative and Renewable Policy of 2019 was superseded by the Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Policy in 2021. Both policies need official notification as they provide the basis for the NDC.

The year ahead provides an opportunity for Pakistan to develop an implementation plan, initiate recording of progress on NDC targets, and submit an updated version before the next climate conference in Egypt. Nothing will validate our moral claim better than actions in the year ahead. Actions will speak louder than words.

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