**Mainstreaming climate action**

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Earth Day, celebrated globally on April 22, is an opportunity to take stock of our commitments to protect our planet from the impacts of climate change and to re-align our priorities for sustainable climate action. For Pakistan, like other global and regional players, the ‘do-more and do-better’ approach towards climate change is the need of the time. It is alarming to see Pakistan in the list of top ten countries most vulnerable to climate change as per the Global Climate Risk Index 2020. More so, this vulnerability is not restricted to mere numbers—as the recent heatwave, the recurrence of smog every year in the country’s major metropolitans and the catastrophic dust-storm in Sindh last year under the influence of cyclonic storm Tauktae are only a few instances witnessed by this nation first-hand.
Pakistan led initiatives on the national and even provincial level are both ambitious and impressive. While the vision and the plan for action is welcome, there is a need for mainstreaming these climate-action interventions to the mass level. Unless these interventions and the behavioural change messaging is trickled down to the grass-roots level, not much success may be achieved holistically. The rural masses make up over 60 percent of the total population of Pakistan, and are more at risk of displacement, food insecurity and even loss of lives. The theme for this Earth Day, “invest in our planet’’ is a call for smart action and for Pakistan, it translates into taking an inclusive approach. To achieve that, stakeholders with a reach and network in the rural areas will need to be consulted and engaged. The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), with a network of over 130 partner organisations (POs) in 147 districts in Pakistan, has a history of leading climate action initiatives in the rural communities. The Balochistan Water Strategy piloted in 2020 by PPAF lays out smart water management practices and a shift toward drought and heat resistant crops, especially for small farmers in the poorest districts of the province. PPAF has also set up the Balochistan Climate Cluster, a coordination and policy advisory group, for the continuation of dialogue and innovation towards climate-friendly interventions in the rural districts of the province. To build disaster risk resilience in the rural communities and to support infrastructure like flood-resistance walls, PPAF is co-financing the “Building Resilience to Disasters and Climate Change (BRDCC)” programme in eight rural (and the most vulnerable) districts of Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, KP and even GB. The programme outcomes indicate that an investment in community level behavioural change goes a long way in saving lives and livelihoods.
PPAF is also implementing the KfW funded Hydropower and Renewable Energy (HRE) in six poorest districts in KP to install micro and mini solar power plants to improve living standards in the community while protecting the climate. To encourage small farmers to improve their livelihoods sustainably, PPAF is also funding initiatives like tunnel farming in districts Swabi and Torghar. Similarly, the Italian Agency for International Development (AICS) funded Poverty Reduction Programme (PPR) includes an olive value chain component which is a low-cost yet innovative solution for small farmers. Three Olive Oil processing plants being set up in Killa Saifullah, Zhob and Lower Dir, with each plant having the capacity of benefitting 2-3 adjacent villages have an added advantage for little to no water consumption required for the process. PPAF presents a model which could be replicated to reach a wider rural community. The way-forward to “invest in our planet” this Earth Day for Pakistan would be to engage with, do better and do more in the resilient rural districts and Union Councils in Pakistan. Only through investing in the rural communities in Pakistan can the distant dream of mainstreaming climate action could be truly achieved.