**Reforestation is a global challenge**

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On June 5, Pakistan, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), hosted World Environment Day under the banner of ‘Ecosystem Restoration’. This annual event has a four-decade long tradition involving more than 100 countries. That Pakistan was asked to play host signals acknowledgement of the country’s progress in ecosystem restoration – particularly, reforestation.

Pakistan has made much of its Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme (TBTTP). The five-year project (2019-2023) aims to restore and enhance over 1 million hectares of forest across the country. Some 3.2 billion trees are to be planted or regenerated nationwide during the first phase. Already, some 350 million trees were planted during FY 2021 July-March with 814.6 million plants being planted or regenerated over the last two years; according to the recently released Economic Survey 2021-22.

The Ten Billion Tsunami project will enable the country to to revive its forest and wildlife resources. While also contributing to the preservation of atmospheric health, lowering cases of random floods, and reducing rain, greenhouse gas effects and flooding in general. In addition to climate change impact, it is projected that the TBTTP will have other benefits such as creating an estimated 1.5 million jobs, stimulating community projects and development, and generating eco-tourism.

Pakistan has other pro-environment polices, including bringing the share of clean energy in its electricity mix to 65 percent by 2030. Similarly. It is also committed to ensuring that 30 percent of vehicles are electric by the same year.

Pakistan, like many developing countries, does not have sufficient resources or the technological capabilities to deal with its environmental problems and implement its ecosystem restoration efforts. Therefore, the developed world must step in to combat climate change

Yet in spite of the progress and plans — there is still much that needs to be done for environmental and ecosystem restoration in Pakistan, including: cutting carbon emission from coal power plants, installing proper waste management, and water conservation.

Among the prevailing issues: sprawling housing projects that, along with rising poverty, lead to uncontrolled logging. Poor quality public transport and use of wood and coal for fuel in rural areas represent big sources of carbon emission. Winter smog — caused by toxic fumes that are emitted from thousands of brick kilns in the Punjab — smothers the provincial capital Lahore as well as other major cities every year, negatively affecting the daily lives and health of citizens

Another environmental degradation factor is the absence of proper systems to fight forest fires and controlled use of pesticide for agricultural needs. The Economic Survey reports: “All these issues threaten the survival of species, people’s livelihoods and undermine the vital services that forests provide.”

To sum it up, Pakistan has many opportunities and challenges in restoring its ecosystem. Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government recognises this and has been focusing on addressing environmental problem areas.

Among other things, it has introduced “zig-zag” methods of kiln production to lower smoke levels. Back in September 2020, Muhammad Ijaz, a senior official at Pakistan’s Environmental Agency, explained the situation to Deutsche Welle in an interview: “There are 359 industrial units contributing to pollution in Lahore that are being monitored now. The zig-zag technology was introduced for brick kilns some years ago and 33 percent of the brick kilns have already been converted to the technology.”

Unfortunately, Pakistan, like many developing countries, does not have sufficient resources or the technological capabilities to deal with its environmental problems and implement its ecosystem restoration efforts. Therefore, assistance is needed from the developed world to help combat climate change.

This is one of the points that PM Khan made when speaking on World Environment Day, saying: “Pakistan’s contribution to global warming and climate change is minimal. Rich countries, which contribute significantly more, have a greater responsibility to provide funds to ones like ours so that we can fight climate change.”

In my opinion, he is correct. Potential relief for the developing nations could take many forms, such as:

n Provision of green finance to support establishing the foundation of ecosystem restoration and initiating projects for environmental protection;

n Transfer of technology to help alleviate pollution and carbon emission, control solid and industrial waste management, and enhance eco-friendly energy sources;

n Capacity building of officials, departments, communities and individuals, working for environmental protection.

We must be reminded of the old adage about not being able to see the forest for the trees. Here, in the 21st century, as climate change continues unabated and trees disappear — there may soon be no forests. If this happens, there will be no planet earth, or world, as we know it.

In short, this is a fight that we must all be in together. US President Joe Biden understands the magnitude of the challenge. Indeed, he hosted the international Earth Day Summit back in April towards this end. This is a time to plant trees collectively and individually, too. And, to ask of others who do not join in this battle: what trees do you plant? These are the actions and questions that are necessary to ensure a sustainable global ecosystem for Pakistan and beyond.

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