**Too hot to live in**

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Pakistan has a long-standing history of migration – both within the country and out of it. The relevance of emigration in shaping the country’s economy can be recognised by the fact that Pakistan is one of the world’s top ten emigration countries.

The Labour Force Survey 2014-2015 says that the magnitude of internal migration in Pakistan is as high as four times the emigrant population. The incidence of internal migration usually occurs from rural to urban centres. Although economic factors provide the main motivation behind migration, other factors like partition, civil tension, wars, political and religious persecution, education, and marriages have been major force that continues to compel people to migrate. However, the existing data and surveys on migration have been silent on climate change-induced migration that is becoming a growing reality in the Global South, particularly in Pakistan.

The 21st century has marked the proliferation of mass internal migration flow around the world, driven by floods, droughts and water scarcity due to changing weather patterns. Pakistan is an important case to study as its contribution to greenhouse gases is less than one percent, but it ranks among the top five countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change and its hazards. This raises questions on the previous governments and the attitude of the authorities concerned towards the issue – all of whom were quick to point out that they were not contaminators and had always shied away from addressing the crises on time. The inefficient use of scarce resources, overpopulation, poor socio-economic conditions, and several natural disasters have triggered internal migration and displacement in South Asia.

According to the most recent estimates published by ActionAid – an international NGO – climate migrants in the region accounts for 18 million in 2020, and the numbers are expected to escalate up to 37 million by 2030 and further to 63 million by 2050 even if emissions are significantly reduced. The situation is even more worrisome for Pakistan as most of these climate-induced emigrants are from Pakistan. The estimates show that Pakistan alone is likely to face distress migration flow of almost two million people by 2050. These numbers are exclusive to the migration linked to the slow onset of the impacts of a rise in sea levels, water stress, crop-yield reductions, ecosystem loss, and droughts.

The 2010 floods were a conspicuous incident due to which Pakistan experienced massive climate migration flow with almost two million people fleeing from their houses to other cities. This was considered one of the largest climate-induced migrations in history. Around 70 percent of these climate migrants later permanently settled in these cities to earn a living.

The impacts of climate change throughout the country are widespread. Each region is exposed to climate change in one or the other way – from recurring droughts and an acute water shortage in Balochistan and parts of southeastern Sindh to sea intrusion, coastal floods near the Indus Delta and flash floods because of melting glaciers in the north. Global warming has become one of the main causes of displacement from rural areas to urban centres as high levels of poverty in rural areas make people more vulnerable to the deleterious effects of climate change.

According to the Labour Force Survey 2017-18, agriculture, livestock-rearing and fishery contribute to 39 percent of the total labour force of Pakistan. The increased intensity of extreme weather conditions has put these livelihood means at risk, particularly in dry rural and coastal belts. As a result, irregular rapid urbanisation has become a main concern for sustainable development and growth in the country. The UN population division recently predicted that by 2025, almost half of the country’s population would reside in urban cities, while currently 36.4 percent of the total population is living in urban areas.

While environmental concerns in Pakistan have been well documented, the institutionalisation and policy response required for environmental management has not evolved, particularly at the implementation level, until recently when the incumbent PTI government showed much interest to address the issue seriously.

The government has introduced many climate-related interventions such as the Ecosystem Restoration Fund, Protected Areas Initiative, Clean and Green Pakistan, the creation of green jobs, etc. The Covid-19 pandemic compounded the already widespread environmental challenges and one fears that the outbreak is likely to divert the attention of policymakers to gaining economic stability as a top priority once again.

It is true that climate change does not discriminate between the rich and the poor, but its impacts certainly do, making certain marginalised segments of society more vulnerable to it. In this fight against the existential crisis for the human race, the entire world is united. But the magnitude of consequences that we will face depends on one’s resilience to disasters. And Pakistan is lagging way behind in it.

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