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**Contextualizing climate change**

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In climate change research and practice, Pakistan lags behind other states in the region, despite the fact that it is one of the most adversely affected countries of South Asia due to calamities related to climate change.

While the economy is shrinking, Pakistan’s ability to fund the risk reduction and mitigation action plans against climate change has also been reduced significantly. Much to the disappointment of many of us, public policy in Pakistan does not find climate change as a priority area despite the fact that during the last two decades natural disasters have played havoc in the country.

Pakistan has incurred more than Rs5 trillion in losses due to climate-induced disasters during the last one decade; the country continues to face the challenge without being fully prepared to cope with it. The institutional mechanism for tackling climate change has really been weak while the institutions that exist face serious governance issues and resource constraints. The National Disaster Management Authority has been executing disaster response functions for the most part while the preparedness and adaptation measures have not been fully developed to address the intensity and scale of the recurring disasters in the country.

It is obvious that Pakistan lacks the requisite professional expertise and institutional strength to deal with the emerging threats of climate change. While fragile geo-ecological conditions result in the multiplying of the vulnerabilities of people in the country, successive governments did not invest adequately to develop the required human capital and institutional mechanism to build local resilience against climate change. Not only that; climate change has been the least focused area of national policy. There is also an overlapping of roles between the center and the provinces which obfuscates the matter further vis-a-vis climate change mitigation action plans. In case of sensitive ecosystems like the regions of Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK, Chitral and coastal Sindh the share of climate change investment has really been much less than the national average despite their ecological significance to the country.

In order to tackle the emerging threats of climate change it is critically important that Pakistan must have enough climate change scientists, modelers, technologists and experts who can help the government devise a workable roadmap to cope with the threats of climate change. Apart from the general challenges of climate change outlined in the National Climate Change Policy, each ecological zone has context-specific threats with far-reaching national and regional impacts.

There are serious governance and structural issues which impede the execution of climate change mitigation plans effectively. Our current institutional arrangement of treating climate change as a provincial subject needs rethinking to decentralize it further to make it a subject of a particular ecological zone.

Each ecological zone has its significance as a distinct geography in terms of climate change impact; hence, there is the need for ecology-spatial strategies and action plans. For instance, the rapid melting of glaciers due to rise of temperature has far-reaching impacts for Pakistan and South Asia. In the absence of credible institutions and policy think-tanks it would be an uphill task for the government to initiate a process of regional engagement for collective action against the impending threats of climate change. Similarly, there is a lack of credible institutions in Pakistan to deal with comprehensive climate change issues.

There are also some other context specific threats like GLOFs which continue to pose serious threats to lives and livelihoods in AJK, Gilgit-Baltistan, Chitral and northern regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Likewise, the receding of the Indus delta and the sea intrusion pose serious threats to biodiversity and the livelihood of the coastal communities. These particular ecological zones transcend the administrative boundaries of a province which is why we need geo-spatial climate change strategies by enhancing inter-province coordination.

Provincial governments can appoint/notify climate change focus persons with defined ToRs in each provincial ministry; they should be responsible for mainstreaming climate change as a key ingredient of development planning in a geo-ecological sense. It is also sensible to establish autonomous policy think-tanks for technical backstopping, and provincial climate change commissions to coordinate climate change activities at the inter-provincial, national and regional levels. There should be a robust monitoring, reporting and verification regime in place for assessing emission reductions, GLOF threats, cryosphere depletion, sea intrusion and changes in hydrological flows.

This calls for developing the local institutional capacity for undertaking tasks related to the implementation of national commitments on climate change and to address the context-specific challenges. In addition to this, an integrated framework is needed to connect climate change and development planning, and priorities for the long-term socioeconomic transformation of those vulnerable people who bear the brunt of climate change. The integrated framework will help knit together the action plans of agriculture, water, forest, energy, GLOF and other DRR-related climate-induced vulnerabilities, and make them part of all relevant policy documents. The federal government should work closely with provinces to build a critical mass of climate change champions with dedicated responsibility to engage policymakers for the integration of climate change and context-specific development priorities.

Campaigns of community engagement and public education are instrumental to create awareness regarding climate change issues and its impact on life, livelihood and nature. These campaigns can be carried out through community-based organizations, social networks, social media platforms, radio and local newspapers so that the public becomes aware of it and is well prepared to cope with the potential threats of disasters. Through its autonomous policy think-tank, the Ministry of Climate Change in collaboration with provincial ministries and think tanks can develop geo-spatial awareness raising plans with the help of national and international entities like UN agencies IUCN and WWF etc. The government can then commission advocacy and mass awareness services regarding the importance of water and energy conservation, the impact of climate change on various sectors including forest ecosystems, biodiversity and so on.

The government can arrange climate change sensitization workshops for local policymakers including secretaries, ministers and media persons who can then become the eyes and ears of the federal and provincial governments to further the goal of climate change action. The sensitization must also include the awareness of green alternatives like the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), local resilience and coping strategies.

Climate change is essentially a global phenomenon; the local manifestation of its adverse impacts can be seen in particular on poor countries with low financial, human and institutional capacity. The capacity of the poor countries of the Global South to address the negative impacts of climate change is restricted by their immediate concerns of funding socioeconomic development. It is, therefore, vital that these countries work together through trans-boundary arrangements to evolve a mutually benefiting mechanism to reduce the risks of potential disasters. To begin with, Pakistan can initiate the process of engaging vigorously with China, India and Afghanistan – the neighboring states that share the Upper Indus Basin.

This can be a pioneering initiative of engaging the international community to find solutions and help the world towards a new era of regional cooperation on climate change.

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