[**Collapse of civilisations**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1711542/collapse-of-civilisations)

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The writer completed his doctorate in economics on a Fulbright scholarship.

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FLOODS are perhaps as old as time. They have always figured very largely in the human imagination primarily because of the sheer magnitude of the death and destruction they visit upon civilisations. The Bible and the Quran tell us about Noah (Nuh in Arabic) and the flood. Other cultural histories also speak of great floods including the ‘Great Flood of Gun-Yu’ in ancient China as well as Manu’s flood in ancient India.

However, rapid climate change brought about by the Global North’s insatiable appetite for more consumption and production is increasing the frequency and intensity of such climate catastrophes. The flood this year is of biblical proportions, indeed. If tangible steps are not taken to prevent future climate catastrophes, the next great flood may well lead to a collapse of civilisation in Pakistan.

**Editorial:** [*Amounts pledged and delivered to Pakistan for flood relief are 'peanuts'*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1711399/editorial-amounts-pledged-and-delivered-to-pakistan-for-flood-relief-are-peanuts)

This may be an evolving situation, but, as of mid-September, according to the situation report of the National Disaster Management Authority, these floods have wrought destruction of epic proportions. In addition to over 1,500 deaths, more than 33 million people — including 11m children — have been severely impacted. More than 375 bridges and almost 13,000 kilometres of roads have been washed away. Over 1.9m homes have been damaged, while 2.8m hectares (around 7m acres) of agricultural land in Sindh is submerged. At the same time, the floods have caused massive damage to livestock that serves as a primary asset for poor people, as almost a million animals have perished in the deluge.

Most worryingly, according to Save the Children, the floods have caused severe destruction to schools, especially in Sindh, where nearly 16,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed with another 5,500 being used to house families displaced by the floods. Disturbingly, there are many reports of large numbers of children succumbing to malaria, dengue, cholera as well as people suffering from various skin ailments, especially in those flood-hit areas where the water is yet to recede. It could take another three to six months for it to do so.

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People are still trapped and awaiting help as the government, the armed forces and various NGOs are trying their utmost to carry out relief operations. Many figures for the reconstruction cost are circulating, but a realistic estimate will only be possible once the water recedes and a proper damage and needs assessment can be carried out in the affected areas. If we extrapolate from the assessment after the floods in 2010, while also factoring in inflation in the last 12 years, reconstruction will cost anywhere between $28 billion and $37bn.

Reconstruction after the flood will require continuous public expenditure for years.

Reconstruction will require continuous public expenditure for years. Where such a huge fiscal outlay is going to bring Pakistan’s finances under severe stress, massive crop losses, especially cotton, will create additional pressures on the current account, exchange rate and fuel prices. If initial estimates that 40 per cent of the cotton crop has been lost this year are correct, then this translates to a gap of almost $7bn in exports under the ‘textile group’, according to data obtained from the State Bank. And, the longer it takes for the water to recede, the more delay this is going to cause for wheat sowing, creating a flour supply shock down the line. This is particularly concerning given how soaring bread prices will not only increase poverty but could also lead to extreme social unrest as in the case of the Arab Spring.

It appears that Pakistan is entering what Adam Tooze calls a ‘polycrisis’, with various overlapping crises — political, economic and climate-related — reinforcing each other, while pulling Pakistan deeper into disorder. Despite political and economic volatility, it appears that Pakistan’s toughest, perhaps existential, challenge is going to come from the ongoing climate crisis, especially as there is now evidence that points towards spatial and temporal changes in the monsoons.

A dystopian future, once the stuff of post-apocalyptic films like Mad Max, is increasingly becoming a reality due to global warming and climate change primarily driven by an ever-increasing use of fossil fuels for economic production. Even though Pakistan contributes less than 1pc of global greenhouse gases, it remains at the receiving end of extreme climate-related devastation. Though the field of attribution science is new, incorporating warmer temperatures has led scientists to conclude that “climate change had probably made this year’s flooding worse…”.

Given the connection between economic growth, fossil fuel energy consumption and climate change, Pakistan is a deserving candidate for international climate reparations that will have to be paid by nations of the Global North in order to advance the cause of climate justice. But, in the short term, Pakistan could be provided some breathing space from interest payments on its external debt — even if for five years — so that the country can divert these substantial funds towards providing relief and rehabilitation to its flood-affected citizens. Eventually, Pakistan will have to lead a global effort to form an international climate fund that will offer emergency financial support for natural disasters like this flood.

The Pakistan government should also pay internal reparations to those who have been badly hit by the flood. It would be a good idea to incorporate an additional criterion for climate-related devastation in the next NFC award. This would enable the federal government to provide more funds to Sindh — ground zero with respect to flood-related death and destruction. Additionally, the federal government should double the monthly BISP payout and write off electricity bills up to 500 units for the next six months in every flood-hit district.

Researchers have already made the connection with how climate change destroyed the Indus Valley Civilisation 4,000 years ago. Today, Pakistan is facing an existential crisis emanating from rapid climate change. The country must bring Global South nations together to ask for debt relief, while the international community must jointly assist countries facing climate catastrophes so as to place the world’s well-being ahead of fossil fuels and profit.

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