**A green plan**

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The important climate change conference in Glasgow and the current momentum for tree plantation in Pakistan present an opportune moment for Sindh to contribute significantly.

What is proposed is a holistic plan linking environmental development with transformational educational, research and social changes. Such a medium-scale plan has not been tried before in Pakistan at least. If implemented judiciously, it has the potential to metamorphose the landscape of all campuses in Sindh initially and then in the country. The key to this change is long-term institutional commitment involving all those affiliated with the institution, with nominal internal financial inputs, supplemented, when needed, by governmental, societal or business funding.

In the 60-odd years of the Jamshoro campus of Sindh University the barrenness of the terrain has not changed significantly. This despite the initial outlay of significant funds for plantation. The activity relied largely on the whim of successive vice-chancellors, with little thought given to formulating an overall plan for the sustainability of saplings that were put into expensively dug holes filled with sweet soil trucked in from elsewhere. Watering of plants spread over an unwarranted sprawling campus was by a few bowsers, which naturally couldn’t succeed.

The suggested plan will overcome this past failing. It will involve everyone who works on or lives on campus through hands-on activity described later. This level of involvement will be mandated as a requirement in return for the privilege of being associated with the university. For its success, consultation with representatives of all stakeholders on campus is essential.

In addition to the required physical labour, the faculty will work to transform their existing curriculum and books by linking the work done with hands to the overarching requirements of showing linkages between subjects. The close understanding of practical life and the theoretical and experimental under-pinning of knowledge being an essential component of sustainable living.

Sindh University has the advantage of a major canal of the Indus nearby. While pumping water is still expensive, even with the help of solar panels, there are clever, simple ways of using water efficiently, including rainwater harvesting, land contouring for water preservation and basic recycling of wastewater, which is plentiful.

Judicious choice of native trees and bushes is needed as is the efficient channeling of grey water for their healthy growth. This is a technical problem which is relatively easily solved. The more difficult – nay almost revolutionary – task would be to ensure that everyone on campus, including the vice-chancellor perhaps, becomes involved in this activity. This would require that students, faculty and all other staff on campus spend 1-2 hours weekly getting their hands dirty with planting and taking care of the greenery.

The subject of ecology and environmental science by its nature is holistic and intimately linked to biological, physical and social sciences, and of course with the humanities. The faculty should be tasked to complement or modify the curriculum being taught presently – largely as stand-alone subjects – into showing fruitful linkages between different subjects. Such an exercise – by pushing academics sitting in their intellectual silos to interact closely with colleagues in, wrong perceived, alien fields – could transform the academic culture of the university.

The effect of this would be wide-ranging, not least in producing graduates able to link their studies with the concerns of society at large. At a practical level they will be better trained for the job market.

To set the ball rolling, the chief minister of Sindh may ask a committee of 5-7 experts from academia, forestry, NGOs and business to produce a plan for Sindh University within three months – allowing a launch in the coming spring. If successfully implemented, the plan can be replicated with improvement on the neighboring campuses of Mehran and Liaquat Medical universities. Then onto other campuses in Sindh and Pakistan.

I write this based on my experience of hands-on plantation work at Sindh University for five years in the early 1980s. Unfortunately, not much has changed since; I rarely visit but am updated by friends who live there. With judicious planning and proper implementation, encouraged by the chief minister’s office, one should see the start of a big change by early 2022.

Finally, I leave you with some stark statistics from Israel, which shows how a focus on knowledge and hard work has turned it into an agricultural powerhouse. Despite being a largely desert area of just over 22 thousand square kilometers, its earning from export of agricultural produce is $2 billion annually. Pakistan with over 40 times its area, blessed with five rivers and excellent soil, has less than three times the earnings from export of primary agricultural commodities.

The proposed plan is an example of the kind of ideas and actions that can make us at least as successful as the country established less than a year after Partition.

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