**Community-building and grassroots change**

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Come winter, Lahore swaps its yellow-green hues for a decided, suffocating grey. Since 2018, smog has become characteristic of the city and its surroundings, and public life has slowly adapted to this looming reality.

The facts: Lahore has lost 70 percent of its tree cover over the last twenty years, its air quality is at least 40 times above the World Health Organization’s air quality guideline values, and the latest report by the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution notes that 128,000 lives have been lost to air quality-related diseases in Punjab.

But what does one do with the facts? Follow suit with the hazardous AQI symbol, invest in war-grade gas masks and hibernate for the season. Should civilians identify garbage burning as the primary cause and rally against it? How does one begin to talk about something larger than us, but which affects every minuscule aspect of life?

For the Lahore Biennale Foundation (LBF), the answer is empowerment. A significant part of the organisation’s public arts programming caters to public school students, engaging them in global cultural discourse through localised perspectives. This community of future changemakers presents the first participants for LBF’s Green School Certification Program.

[Elton John’s Glastonbury triumph attracts 7.3 million TV viewers](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jun-2023/elton-john-s-glastonbury-triumph-attracts-7-3-million-tv-viewers)

In partnership with the District Education Authority of Lahore, LUMS School of Education (SOE) and WWF Pakistan, LBF implemented a jointly developed curriculum within 10 public schools of Lahore to impart climate education contextualised to the students’ setting (Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, South Asia). SOE employed a teaching technique called Visible Thinking Routines in order to use art, images and community-centered eco-clubs to inculcate pro-environmental knowledge and practices in the student-participants. Environmental themes identified by WWF Pakistan are taught through VTR first in a workshop for school teachers and AEOs, and then, with their assistance, to students within their schools. Students are reacquainted with their campus; made aware of the abundance or lack of natural spaces within it and curious about their public and domestic surroundings.

Launched in September 2022, GSCP’s curriculum was introduced to the student-participants in the aftermath of the catastrophic superfloods in Pakistan. Understandably, they featured heavily during sessions, as students and teachers both embedded environmental themes within this reality, becoming activists for their homes and communities. An eighth-grade student took her learnings of water purification, putting phitkari (alum) in drinking water, to her village which had been affected by the floods, in order to ensure that her relatives had access to safe, clean drinking water. The participants introduced waste segregation within their homes, recycling reusable plastics to create makeshift waste-bins for their homes and classrooms as well.

[Mitsotakis’s conservatives clinch landslide Greece election win](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jun-2023/mitsotakis-s-conservatives-clinch-landslide-greece-election-win)

This circularity is carried forward through GSCP’s whole systems model. Parallel to the curriculum, waste collection partners LCI Pakistan Limited and Aabroo Foundation ensure that segregated waste bins are placed within these schools, their waste is regularly collected, and then upcycled or sold to further fund schooling for children within underserved communities. The program’s success is owing to individual partners lending their unique expertise to the climate problem, thereby facilitating community-based, grassroots change within localities and the school community.

Having completed its pilot phase, the Green School Certification Program presents a promising case study of effective public-private partnership to tackle knowledge sedimentation of climate change and pro-environmental behaviour. It is a model that can be replicated in other educational institutions and scaled up to include more public and private schools within the certified network. It encourages schools to redistribute their current resources and work towards baseline green campuses. The project’s most visible impact, however, is its encouragement of advocacy within the common man– teachers, students, their families, communities, neighbourhoods and even villages.

[Ukraine forces recapture new Russian-occupied settlement](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jun-2023/ukraine-forces-recapture-new-russian-occupied-settlement)

While climate change continues to be quite the juggernaut, meaningful knowledge and the opportunity to practice empowers individuals to engage in climate discourse. Initiatives such as GSCP contribute to a well-informed youth, in the hopes that they go from being recipients of climate change to climate activists, leaders and policymakers.