[Mansoor Raza](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/mansoor-raza)

February 22, 2021

**Response to climate change**

The danger is clear and present. Pakistan ranked 153rd in a list of countries emitting greenhouse gas. According to some research, it is also the fifth most vulnerable country in the world to climate change.

The country continues to face floods, air quality deterioration, pollution of water sources, soil erosion, heatwaves etc. One can easily identify these effects of climate change in a city like Karachi. The enormous amount of greenhouse gas emissions causes a rise in temperature and we saw how the city faced heatwaves in the previous years. The response of the civil society, political actors, and academia to the threat will determine the future of Karachi.

The following lines as extracted from discussions conducted by NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi and Bristol University UK, are an attempt to highlight some salient points around the issue.

First is the response of the civil society. Though the civil society is generally designated as a third entity and outside of the government, philosophically it is a buffer between the oppressor and the oppressed. In terms of environment, its functions come in four domains. The first type of environmental CSOs work at the policy level may be semi-implementer (funding for the partners) and their primary framework is conservation for sustainability. The second type of environmental CSOs are rights-based and work for environmental justice. The community is the centerpiece in the working of those CSOs.

The third type of environmental CSOs work indirectly on environmental issues. For instance, in EQ 2005, rehabilitation was the key program by various local and global organizations, and sustainability was the overarching theme of their respective interventions. The fourth type manifests itself in the form of concerned individuals who mostly use the justice system and often opt for public interest litigation.

In Pakistan, the response of the civil society by and large is anthropocentric conservation and has very little to do with deep ecology. The way forward for Pakistani CSOs is to create a hybrid model for environmental sustainability and environmental justice.

For the political actors, there are many fronts to tackle. Several plans have been passed in the post-independence period and there was a sizable analysis done on various attributes including the environmental aspects. Unfortunately, the plans could not get legal cover and the recommendations and suggestions could not fulfill the rightful role as was expected out of them. The situation review of the city is that unplanned densification of inner-city areas, illegal land subdivisions are continuing without control and there is ribbon commercialization on the major corridors, paving the way for speculative real estate development.

Natural creeks and storm drains act as city sewers. City waste is informally managed as waste pickers and recycling industries are informally supporting a major chunk of urban waste. The informal sector arranges for public transport to a sizable extent.

So do we have a plan for the city and a climate change mitigation plan and other attributes? Second, do we take measures to protect vulnerable communities, their assets and livelihoods? Do we have such institutional arrangements in places that efficiently deal with recurring disasters? A very specific direction that needs to be taken is to watch the way development projects, especially to those who have a larger territorial and contextual impact, are formulated.

While much research is being conducted in Pakistan but missing is the critical mass of the philosophically robust pertinent knowledge base. Moreover, the vision formulation on the climate change issue requires critical thinking through which students and teachers can work on a paradigm shift. Unfortunately, academic institutions are unable to perform this required function. Climate change and adaptation require a new kind of contextual vocabulary and inter-disciplinary academic investigation.

The three sectors – civil society, political apparatus and academia – need to together handle the tall agenda of climate change. The sooner the better, as the fate of the people is hinged upon the actions of these three sectors. The first thing is to make policymakers and power structures understand climate change and its effects. As academia has the relevant data (whatsoever) with it, the civil society can easily work with politicians to maintain pressure for negotiations. One of the important areas where the civil society, academia and politicians can work together is a pro-people environment-friendly planning of the city.

The writer is a lecturer at in the Department of Architecture and Planning at NED, Karachi.

Email: mansooraza@gmail.com