**Urban forestation**

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ADAPTING to climate change finds high priority with the PTI. Its flagship enterprise in this respect comprises the billion-tree tsunami and the recently initiated Miyawaki forestation projects. This is commendable. However, unless addressed, certain factors can limit their benefits. For instance, there is a lack of a larger vision, and a narrow focus on `projects`. Then there is the federal-provincial disconnect that inhibits integrated action.  
  
Unfortunately, we invest in a `projectsbased` approach. Electric cars are imported without any overarching vision or strategy to transition to renewables. We have orange, green and red lines in the absence of a holistic, sustainable urban mobility vision.  
  
Miyawaki forests are popping up but there`s no nationwide strategy of integrating urban forestation in the larger urban planning.  
  
This isolated focus means projects remain in limbo and ultimately crash. Projects are concluding points in an organic development web, preceded by a long-term vision, strategy, targets, enabled human resources and technical and financial architecture.  
  
But for us, the `project`is the beginning and the end.  
  
In Karachi, the disconnect with the federal government makes matters worse. Will a patchwork of a few so-called urban forests, however well-intentioned, resolve the issue? Where is the larger vision of having an integrated `urban forestation master plan` that avails the provisioning, regulating and cultural values of `urban green spaces`? Green cover can serve as carbon sinks, and help reduce climate change. It acts as a wildlife habitat. Green open spaces help reduce the harmful impact of urban flooding and extreme heat events. The scale of flooding in Karachi`s streets and neighbourhoods following last year`s heavy rains could have been far less had we invested in more green cover that would have served as a natural drainage basin.Instead,concretised spaces increased the scale of flooding.  
  
So how do we leverage the larger benefits of urban forestation? First, determine what to grow, when to grow, how to grow, where to grow, how to nurture and sustain. In the past, we suffered the consequences of illplanned plantation efforts (eg cornucopia and eucalyptus). But where do we get guidance from? Let`s first prepare our knowledge base. Document plant species that adapt best to our local climatic and soil conditions. Know where to plant what roadside, parks, households/ rooftops, institutions, vertical farming etc. Can we go for bio-saline agriculture? Similarly, we need to educate ourselves on the benefits of edible farming, kitchen gardening with associated waste-composting dividends and therapeuti-cally designed gardens. Implementation will have to be data-driven, starting with GIS mapping. Follow implementation with monitoring. Document the social, economic and environmental benefits.  
  
Karachi is a unique treasure among Pakistani cities owing to its coastal ecology.  
  
Amazing innovations can happen here, starting with preserving what we are fast losing the mangrove forests. There is so much to discover in urban forestation vocabulary once you broaden your horizon ofthoughtandacdon.  
  
Next comes the phase of testing ideas.  
  
Select sample sites for implementing `pilot projects` that may include coastal land, parks, roadside/ kerb spaces for parklets, walls for vertical farming, neighbourhoods, public spaces such as bazars, commercial districts, institutions such as schools, etc.  
  
The knowledge acquired through pilot projects can be upscaled to the city level.  
  
Rather than focusing solely on parks, focus on roadside plantation together with encour-aging home gardening where each household becomes part of a national vision.  
  
We need academies for training and capacity building. Engage and harness the knowledge of our academics.  
  
Set an ambitious target and create public enthusiasm over ques-tions like `when will we see our city`s first botanical garden?` The time for action is now. But who will do all this? Ideally, it is the city government that should play the guardian`s role, enabling a space for all stakeholders to contribute to. In Sindh, unfortunately, functions that are best performed at the grassroots level are sourced at the provincial level.  
  
Forestation strategies are also being developed at the provincial level, restricting chances of viable implementation at the grassroots, particularly on an urban scale.  
  
The father of sociology, Ibn-i-Khaldun, linked human morality and behaviour to the climate and the physical geography people inhabited, while the father of landscape architecture, Fredrick Law Olmsted, following the philosophy of `environmental determinism`, felt that green spaces, representing beauty and harmony result in social ills being swept away, inculcating in citizens civic loyalty, ethics and moral rectitude. So, a greener city can mean a happier, more peaceful city.  The writer is an urban planner and CEO, Urban Collaborative.