**Ambiguity on dams**

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The recent disaster unleashed by torrential monsoon rains and flash floods has triggered a debate among politicians, policymakers, and the masses about the role of dams in averting or mitigating crises created by abnormal rains and flash floods in the future.

The public has become more vocal after the recent disaster in their demand for the construction of dams-small and large, to mitigate the effects of deluge and store water for lean times. Some have advocated the construction of large dams such as the Kalabagh dam to avert future floods in the country. The public is lamenting the irreparable loss of life and property, and also the loss of freshwater worth billions of dollars to sea.

However, certain political circles have singled out the demand for the construction of the Kalabagh dam as ignorance of facts on part of the masses. Political circles and their proponents point out that torrential rains hit Sindh, Balochistan, and the Siraki belt most severely; and thus question how Kalabagh dam would have prevented Sindh and Balochistan from being flooded when the floods were triggered by the rains in these provinces. Further, political circles buttress claims that this year’s rains devastation was further aggravated by dams bursting, citing several small and large dams collapsed in Balochistan and Sindh. Thus, through a convoluted logic, the efficacy of dams is questioned, and instead clearing off the pre-existing natural courses of rivers and tributaries is recommended. Thus, they are implying to let all the freshwater worth billions of dollars flow into the sea.

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Unfortunately, the above arguments fail to mention that dams-whether small or large, are reservoirs of water used for irrigation, raising local water table level, power generation, and a continuous source of fresh water for the local populace. Pakistan’s population is exploding and it desperately needs food and water for sustenance. Given Pakistan’s poor record in constructing water reservoirs over the last seventy years, Pakistan is listed among the world’s top countries which will soon be facing water scarcity if it does not take drastic steps for water management. Thus, it is not fathomable how such simplistic conclusions are drawn against dams.

Moreover, the general argument is based on the Kalabagh dam, without explaining why dams proposed/recommended in Balochistan, Sindh, and the Seraiki belt were not built in the last seven decades. It is indeed a tragedy that people in the 21st century living in hilly areas have to search for every drop of water. Further, the dams in hilly areas collapsed because on hills dams are built in cascading manner to break the water flow intensity. Hence, logically, if only a few dams are built on hills, they will be swept away by the torrential waters flowing from hilltops. And to make things worse, the faulty infrastructure of dams did not help the cause also.

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Recently, it has been reported that within about three months of devastating floods, the canal water shortage has returned thanks to a chronic lack of water reservoirs. Thus, for the lack of water reservoirs, it is hard to digest that provinces have already started bickering over their water share and we will be facing water shortages for crop sowing. Had we been able to store a major portion of flood waters in reservoirs, we would have sufficient water to see through some lean period down the line. Thus, it’s upon policymakers to take practical steps for the construction of small and large dams which have been identified in all the provinces of Pakistan, if we are not to end up even fighting for drinking water in the next couple of decades. Unfortunately, seventy years after independence we are still arguing while India has multiplied the number of dams it had since its independence.