**Migrating for water**

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As a result of the climate change process, the dry regions are becoming drier, and the damper areas are becoming damper in the country. Natural catastrophes are becoming more frequent, jeopardizing food security and compelling people to leave their homes. This causes unsafety among people regarding poverty, hunger, and conflict.

The majority of poor people depend on agriculture, and climate change-induced water scarcity has created a grave situation for these poor. This forces people to leave their homes. In many areas, people have started seasonal migrations. They return home when they feel the climate and water is feasible for crop production in their respective areas.

People have made this seasonal migration a way of life. Due to its dry and arid land pattern, and since most of its population is dependent on the agriculture sector, Pakistan is not an exception to this dilemma.

Shortage of water disturbs the social and economic spheres of communities, leading to food, health, and economic insecurities. This also makes people feel insecure, compels them to become part of conflicts over scarce natural resources, and forces them to migrate from their native regions.

If we take a look at the major dry provinces of Pakistan – Balochistan and Sindh – we see that lengthy, drier spells have forced them to migrate to the barrage areas for economic gains to help their families earn bread and butter and overcome water scarcity for their families and livestock back in their respective regions.

From childhood, I have been seeing the changing pattern of the climate change process; the length of droughts is rising in the drier areas, while the length of rain is increasing in the wetter regions. This phenomenon has impacted the country on a vast scale. Moderate to severe droughts are continuously observed in many areas of southwest Balochistan, southeast Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and various regions of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The condition is critical in Balochistan, which is frequently affected by major droughts. The highlands and plateaus in the province are the most affected areas, receiving none or very little summer rain which then results in low water reservoirs, dried-up tube wells, and springs, which tends to diminish the level of underground table water to new minimums. The shrinkages in the underground table water pose serious threats to the low-lying surfaces in severe water scarcity.

As per the drought assessment report (Chagai, Noshki, Kharan, Washuk, and Quetta) of Islamic Relief Pakistan (IRP), the major problems in Balochistan are droughts, and lack of and different scale spells of rain that have led to high-gauge droughts. According to IRP-2019, this situation has become more complex after 2013 since these regions have observed a 74 per cent decline in rainfalls, posing threats to water management, agriculture, livestock, food, and livelihood. This has led to the migration of 33 per cent of the population of these districts as per the Pakistan Meteorological Department. The water level in Quetta is diminishing by three and a half feet annually, the worst to happen to a city with a rising population and water drilling wells. If the situation remains the same in the country, Badin and Thatta will be submerged into the sea by 2050, and Karachi will be the next victim around 2060.

The threat of water scarcity in the province has led to intercity and inter-province migration in Balochistan. For example, 70 per cent of the Kulanch Ambi village of Gwadar and other rural areas like Pasni have migrated due to these reasons. The IRP report further states that water-induced droughts forced 33 percent of people to migrate in search of water, food, and fodder for their livestock in Washuk and Chagai Kharan and Noshki. The study reported that its intensity is higher in Washuk and Chagai than in Kharan and Noshki. As per the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development-2016 (IBRD), droughts become more frequent with rising water insecurities induced by climate variability. The regions that have not experienced drought before will absorb a decline in their resource potential in the coming 35 years.

Despite the grave situation in the province, the problem has not caught the federal government’s attention or mainstream media to bring this issue to discussion and bring broad ideas to reduce the problem for economic and livelihood survival.

Specialists in water security argue that dams are the solution to manage the growing threat of water insecurity. Out of 10.693 cubic meters, 8.57 cubic meters are wasted due to the inability to store water. There are some solutions to water scarcity and avoiding inter-provincial migrations. First, improving the efficiency of water usage in the agriculture sector will enable storing the water for a long time. Reducing water waste during agricultural production will sufficiently raise the water-saving phenomenon among the inhabitants. Despite global and national water security programmes, local-level campaigns should be encouraged on water security.

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