

Challenge of Climate Change: Pakistan's carbon emissions continue to grow at an increasing rate

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PAKISTAN produces more than 30 million metric tons of carbon emissions. This is about 0.4 per cent of global emissions. But, this has increased almost four-fold from nine million in 1980.

A heavy emphasis on industrialisation in Pakistan means that the rate of increase in emissions is going up. The energy sector contributes the most to emissions: 53 per cent.

At the same time, Pakistan's decreasing forest cover is suffering from among the world's worst deforestation rates, primarily from the large logging industry. Forest cover declined to 2.5 per cent in 2005 from 3.3 per cent in the late 1990s.

Some of the 11 climatic zones in the country are under threat of extinction, while the coastline of 990km is considered vulnerable to the rise in ocean levels. The agricultural sector is the most vulnerable to climate change, and changes in cropping and productivity are already affecting livelihoods.

Agriculture is the single largest sector in Pakistan's economy, contributing 21 per cent to the GDP and employing 43 per cent of the workforce. Thus, the rural poor are the most vulnerable to any decline in the sector. The poor in general are especially vulnerable to any shifts in production and price patterns; conservative estimates count about 38 million people out of a population of 160 million as below the national poverty line. They, of course, are the first to suffer. However, there is no comprehensive mapping of comparative or absolute vulnerabilities to climate change in Pakistan.

The response to this alarming situation in Pakistan is mixed. On the one hand, the government of Pakistan has made international commitments to climate change mitigation by ratifying the Framework Convention, the Kyoto Protocol, the Montreal Protocol and the Desertification Convention. It has also made numerous bilateral commitments to donor countries. A climate change cell has been formed in the federal ministry of environment, and a national committee is chaired by the prime minister. The government has also formulated a clean development mechanism strategy.

Pakistan's emissions continue to grow at an increasing rate, deforestation continues to reduce carbon sinks, national capacities remain abysmally low at all levels to mitigate climate change, and there is not even a sound vulnerability analysis to work around.

The country has the capacity to address the issue, and international cooperation and civil society's response (including one from the private sector) are all available — but all in isolation. There are no platforms to bring together multiple stakeholders to combat climate change. Enough financial aid is flowing to a system that is not responsible, transparent or responsive to the citizenry.

Pakistan needs an 'approach to development' to mitigate climate change. Single steps will be useless. In other words, the problem does not lie so much in the decisions being made but the way in which they are being made.

The more traditional take on development involves the devising and implementation of technocratic solutions. Such solutions have failed to improve social/environmental indicators. Instead, they have resulted in deepening inequality and deprivations.

Inequality continues to increase despite the massive influx of development assistance now being received by the government — the average Pakistani receives twice as much aid on paper as any other South Asian citizen. Just one donor, DFID, increased its aid seven-fold from £15m annually in 2000 to £106m in 2007. Just between 2000 and 2005, Pakistan received over £4.5bn in aid overall.

The problem is not of procuring more money. It lies more in the way in which decisions are made rather than the decisions themselves. The grounds needed for any successful action do not exist. What is lacking are democratic norms in the decision-making system. The state does not involve the relevant stakeholders while taking decisions. At the same time, the formal democratic system is in a shambles, with no effective representation whatsoever.

Likewise, although democratic systems exist at the local level, these are entirely inactive on issues such as climate change mitigation or capacity-building. So, any macro solution imposed at any level just falls through the cracks of client-patronage, nepotism, resource-grabbing and profiteering.

Consequently, there is a huge policy disconnect, especially on issues that seem peripheral to the state, such as climate change. Not only are present policy instruments flawed, they are low on the priority agenda and thus remain unimplemented in letter and spirit. Likewise, there is no coordination amongst various policies, each championed by separate interests that are constantly in conflict. From an environmental governance perspective, climate change mitigation should be an outcome or focus within a larger framework of socio-environmental uplift. But in actuality, climate change policy instruments (such as ratified conventions) remain in silos, with no linkage to social policies like education, public health, water and sanitation and fisheries, or to macro-economic policies such as infrastructure development, agriculture and industrialisation. In this scenario, capacity-building efforts remain limited.

The state also does not have either the credibility or the wherewithal to pull together the relevant stakeholders on climate change. There is, thus, no evidence-based decision-making that engages the private sector — especially large corporations — along with grassroots representatives and academic input. There is a desperate need for issue-oriented, nonpartisan platforms to collate and coordinate actions on and around climate change.

Pakistan's participation in global climate change negotiations is a case in point. Although these may be fundamentally flawed, the Pakistani interaction renders them completely futile for the citizenry. There is absolutely no participation or even effort towards sharing information and positions. Our western friends talk about the difficulty in convincing their legislators and negotiators of positions to take. But we envy them for we cannot even reach ours, and even if we do and even if they agree, it makes not the slightest difference to citizens on the ground.

The dilemma is very clear. On the one hand, urgent multi-dimensional action is needed, such as analysis, capacity-building, implementing warning and response systems, controlling emissions, etc. On the other hand, any steps taken are pre-destined to fail because of the ground situation of governance. Options for civil society actors are limited. While development assistance has increased over seven-fold in seven years, less and less of

this is going to independent, non-partisan organisations that can link grassroots voices to policymaking. Rather, the bulk of aid goes to the state, which simply cannot utilise it in the larger public interest.

The dilemma in Pakistan, therefore, is how to proceed on both fronts — individual measures and creating an enabling environment to make those steps work towards impacting on climate change. The underlying problem, of course, is one of social justice. This has remained a historically challenging issue. The writer heads LEAD (Leadership for Environment and Development) Pakistan.