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Economic Development at the Expense of Environment: Pakistan's Future in the Wake of Climate Change

Published on 22 February, 2017

There is an inextricable link between economic development and environment. In today's world, economic growth hinges on the addition of truckload of energy, water, and raw materials which in turn leads to the production of wasteful by-products. And if these waste materials have low biodegradability then they will

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remain in the environment for ages. *Plastics*, for instance, have a lifespan of 1000 years. So, is it really worth the development if it is marring the very air we breathe, impairing the water we drink and blemishing the land we live on?

Such a deep-rooted conundrum demands nothing but our scrupulous attention. Unfortunately, for a country like Pakistan where the focus is on ostensive infrastructure and apparently gigantic projects, the environment is deteriorating with every passing day due to neglect. According to the German watch's Global Climate Risk Index 2016 Pakistan has been ranked amongst the ten most affected countries due to Climate Change while our government watches in dismay. Irregular precipitation patterns with extreme events like floods and droughts have been a bane for Pakistan's economy which vociferously calls for adaptive measures.

Legal Perspective

Pakistan is one of those countries where it is legally binding to protect the environment. Environmental protection law of Pakistan dates back to 1983 with the introduction of Environmental Protection Ordinance. It was a federal law that applied to the entire country. Later on, this ordinance was supplanted with the provision of Pakistan Environmental Protection Act (PEPA) 1997 which then became the stepping stone of environmental law in Pakistan. The governmental body

associated with the implementation of this law is Pakistan Environmental Protection Council. This law was not only aimed at protecting, conserving, rehabilitating, and improving the environment but also at preventing pollution and promoting development that is sustainable. In Pakistan, every province has its own Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which is given the mandate to administer and implement the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act 1997. Furthermore, the Federal and Provincial EPAs are authorized to arrest individuals found guilty of committing an offense with respect to PEPA 1997. Whoever contravenes the law can be incarcerated for up to 5 years or can be subjected to the penalty of Rs. 1,000,000 under section 20 of PEPA 1997.

Under the umbrella of PEPA 1997, several rules and regulations have been formulated, and their compliance is the responsibility of federal and provincial EPAs. Among the various rules that are established, *National Environmental Quality Standards* (NEQS) are the most significant. Such standards provide the benchmark for parameters such as ambient air quality, water quality, and noise. These standards are developed keeping in mind the World Health Organization (WHO) standards. However, standards exist for the paperwork; their on-field implementation is still missing.

In conjunction, Environmental Protection Agency Regulations of 2000 has been devised to subsume Sustainable Development in the economic growth of the

country by setting out legal procedures for carrying out Initial Environmental Examination (IEE) or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the projects. IEE is required for the projects that are less likely to cause substantial environmental damage. List of all such projects are mentioned in the Schedule I of the regulation. On the contrary, a proponent of all those projects which are likely to have adverse environmental and social impacts are required to file an EIA. The regulation provides a thorough list of projects in the schedule II that require EIA.

Despite having such meticulous environmental laws, their implementation is at abysmal low level due to fragile nature of the legal institutions. More than often loopholes in the system allow escape from the EIA and IEE leading the nation to an environmental fiasco.

Cost of Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is the leading cause of poverty in Pakistan. Pecuniary losses incurred as a direct consequence of Climate-Change-induced Catastrophes amount to 365 billion Rupees annually, constituting 6% of the GDP. Not to mention,

it is the impoverished populace which is the most vulnerable. In accordance with the Ministry of Finance, almost half of the total damage cost is associated with degraded air quality and exposures to lead and other heavy metals which result in disease occurrence and eventually death. From a holistic point of view, Pakistan has the highest rate of child mortality in the entire South Asia, and the reasons are attributed to environmental related factors. Around 30% of all the environmental costs are due to endemic diseases namely; Typhoid, Cholera, and Diarrhoea. Also, problems like waterlogging, salinity and soil erosion cripple agricultural productivity which constitutes the rest of the 20% of the total environmental damage.

The extent of climate change induced calamities can be visualized by scrutinizing the monsoon rains in 2014 that resulted in a massive flood claiming 367 lives, impairing the living standards of 2.5 million people and destroying approximately 130,000 houses and more than a million acres of agricultural land. A recent article in *Dawn News* presented a much bleak picture of climate change vulnerability in Pakistan. It has been mentioned that losses due to climate change have skyrocketed to 20 billion US dollar in the year 2015. To add fuel to the fire, it has been estimated

that the years following 2030 till 2050 can take as much as 250,000 lives in the wake of climate change.

Way Forward

Policy option alone, will not suffice environmental protection in Pakistan. The private sector needs to assist our public sector in knowledge sharing and awareness campaigns to educate the general public. Some of the suggestive measures that can be taken to curb the losses incurred due to climate change are mentioned below:

a. To bring Pakistan on the track of Sustainable Development, there is a need for Public-Private partnerships with regard to green technologies and better utilization of natural resources.
b. One of the major obstacles to environment sector in Pakistan is the lack of budget allocation. Therefore, there is a need to allocate more budget to Research and Development which in turn will result in better strategies to counter the negative impacts of climate change in the context of Pakistan's socioeconomic conditions.
c. Federal and provincial EPAs should effectively enforce and monitor compliance with environmental laws.

d. The importance of Public hearing as a part of the process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) needs to be highlighted. Pakistan faces an exigent need to engage public by disseminating awareness so that the public pressure can be positively used.

e. Incompetencies at the institutional level is the biggest hurdle blocking the effective implementation of environmental laws. A change in the policy is the need of the day since it is the way forward to bring institutional changes.

f. Pakistan needs to follow the lead of India where political parties have placed climate change on top of their political manifestos.

g. The government of Pakistan should devise methods to divert public attention on the use of alternate energy sources as a mean to prevent pollution. In this regard, the potential of renewable energy sources like the use of solar energy and wind energy should be explored.

h. Particular focus needs to be placed on climate-adaptive measures such as the early drought – warning systems which will enhance the people's ability to cope with the climate-induced catastrophes.

i. To remain abreast with the international focus on Sustainable Development Goals, Pakistan needs to devise an implementation plan while collaborating actively with national institutes, non-governmental institutes and NGOs alike.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that we were not majorly involved in the lethal playoff that led to Climate Change, we are facing dire repercussions regarding monetary and human

losses. If we are to enhance Pakistan's climate-change resilience, we need to focus on the frailest areas where environmental laws are inadequately practiced if not totally absent. Areas such as cleaner production methods and environmental audits, paying of penalties if found guilty of breaking environmental laws as well as rewarding those institutions which succeed in achieving their goals in environmentally friendly manner needs to be highlighted. The irony in Pakistan is that the greatest environmental deterioration is essentially linked with economic development. There is no second opinion on the fact that trade-off relation exists between environmental sustainability and economic activities. All these environmental degradations call for a change of habits starting from the individual level. There is an urgency to promote such values that would lead to management of our resources in a sustainable manner. What we need today is the economic development that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

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