

### **Conference debates coming to grips with water crisis**

Pakistan must concentrate on small dams as large dams can become a wasteful proposition on account of phenomena like silting.

These views were expressed by noted town planner and social activist Arif Hassan while inaugurating the water conference sponsored by the Irtiqa Institute of Social Sciences (IISS) at the Federal Urdu University of Science and Technology on Saturday morning.

The conference was themed, “Political economy and issues in water management”.

He informed the participants that 40 percent of the Tarbela Dam had silted up in as many years which implied a decreased water supply for agriculture and loss of water for other uses.

Hassan said even the aquifers were depleting rapidly.

Social activist Azra Talat Sayeed, in her paper themed, “Understanding water dynamics in the era of globalization”, said 700 million people spread over 43 countries were without safe water.

Among other things adding to the water crisis, she said, was the phenomenon of climate change. She said that one of the reasons for the phenomenon of global warming was the glacial melt. Glaciers, she said, were melting at a rapid pace, and this resulted in rising sea levels with the result that many isles and atolls could be lost under water for ever.

She blamed the changing lifestyles as also technological advances especially in the field of transport which had heated up the atmosphere, as she put it.

She was dead against the private ownership of water distribution.

She said that it must be solely in the public sector. She cited the case of Karachi where private ownership like the tankers mafia had created so many problems for the populace.

Mashkoo Raza of the NED University of Engineering and Technology dwelt specifically on the water scenario of Karachi. He said that the average human demand was 54 gallons daily. He cited Karachi’s population at 15.05 million and said 65 percent of the water was stolen in Karachi. The water tariff, he said, was irrational.

“The non-payment of bills culture is the order of the day and only 25 percent of bills are paid by subscribers,” he said.

“Water tankers have become a commercial venture, all to the detriment of subscribers who are not very well placed financially or socially,” he said.

Abrar Qazi, a water expert and political figure, said that actually there was no shortage of water in the country; the problem was that water management by the agencies concerned was very tardy.

Former provincial secretary and water expert Idrees Rajput said climate change was the biggest challenge to the water issue today, and the result was a rise in the ocean levels, glacial retreat, temperature increases, floods, droughts and monsoon variability.

He said what was called for was reducing greenhouse gases and afforestation.

He said China was the biggest producer of greenhouse gases, whose world share being 19.4 percent, followed closely by the US with 18 percent.

Taking a dig at the US, he said President Trump had withdrawn from the Paris Accord on environment saying that this climate change was just a routine phenomenon and nothing to be preoccupied with.

It was former president Barrack Obama who had made the US a signatory to the Paris Accord but Trump just bulldozed that.

Rajput said the major reason for the water shortage was burgeoning population.

Later, a documentary was screened depicting the population of the areas in the vicinity of the River Indus migrating to other places because of their land having been gobbled by the intrusion of the sea as a result of the disappearance of the Indus delta.

Poetess Sehr Imdad read out her poems both in Urdu and Sindhi, bemoaning the slow death of the Indus (Sindhu Darya as she called it) and recalling the times when the Indus was a force to reckon with.

Anil Datta