

## **Deforestation – its adverse impact on the economy**

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In December 2015, governments from around the world came together to sign the Paris Agreement, agreeing to tackle climate change and keep global warming under two degrees centigrade.

They committed to spend US\$100 billion annually by 2020 to help developing countries reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and protect themselves against the potentially devastating effects of climate change.

Meanwhile, experts in Pakistan have warned that the country would run out of forests within the next 50 years if deforestation continues at the current rate.

This process of deforestation is likely to have an adverse impact on greenhouse gas emissions, which in turn will have potentially devastating effects of climate change.

Pakistan loses 42,000 hectares or 2.1 percent of its forests every year. Experts believe that a forestation is the only way to mitigate the impacts of the global warming. In their opinion, there was no doubt that the water is the element essential for life and that deforestation deprives us of this basic necessity with each passing day.

Some of the world's most unique trees, including oak, juniper, chilghoza pine and deodar in Ziarat and Chitral areas, have been reduced drastically. The large part of natural forest areas lies in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

According to the United Nations, countries must have a forest cover of at least 25 percent of their total land while also stressing that cities must have a forest cover of 10 percent.

The natural forest cover which lies in the country's northern part has decreased mostly because people living there have no other way to meet their energy needs; many areas declared to be forests before Partition have now been eliminated.

Forests are the most biologically-diverse ecosystems on land, home to more than 80% of terrestrial animals and plants. Forests also provide shelter, jobs, and security for forest-dependent communities.

Jalo Park area and Kot Lakhpat in Lahore were natural forests but with the passage of time can no longer see any sign that these ever existed.

Forest departments seemed to be reluctant to do anything about deforestation issues but the KP's program and Punjab government's initiative like South Punjab Forest Company can help mitigate the global warming situation currently being faced by Pakistan.

KP's project is regarded as the best example in Pakistan which would not just help increase forest cover, but it would also provide jobs to many. Such initiatives can be helpful not just to mitigate climate but also to help in coping with the energy crisis.

As part of the United Nations collaborative planning on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD), a new mechanism has been initiated that involves paying cash credit to developing countries that protect forests and the carbon stored within them.

This way, Pakistan can earn between \$400 million to \$4 billion per year by conserving forests. Pakistan should take advantage of this support because no amount of economic prosperity will save us from ecological loss and any efforts to remediate ecological loss will cost much more than any economic gain.

According to some estimates, the rate of deforestation is estimated to be 27,000 hectares per year at the national level and mainly occurs in private and community-owned natural forests. The reasons are increase in population, demand for firewood, grazing pressure, land conversion for agriculture purposes and illegal logging.

The forests are undoubtedly under pressure from various threats but the ongoing policy changes and afforestation and reforestation drives offer a ray of hope that Pakistan will be able to regain its lost forest cover, build resilience to climate change, create green jobs and foster sustainable development.

The National Forest Policy has already been approved by the Council of Common Interests and experts believe that once enacted into law, the policy will help establish a national forest monitoring mechanism, halt deforestation and assess the amount of carbon stored in trees.

The government of Punjab, in order to reduce dependence on natural forests for fuel wood and other purposes, has established South Punjab Forest Company - a subsidiary of the Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Department. The aim is to promote sustainable forestry investments over 134,995 acres across six districts of South Punjab - Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffargarh and Bahawalnagar.

The company will lease forest land for 15 years, which can be further extended to another 15 years, to raise plantations that can fulfil the needs of the wood-based industry and as a result, create green jobs, reduce import bills and halt logging pressure on the natural forests in Punjab.

Decades of felling and natural disasters have drastically reduced Pakistan's forests, according to Rosamond Hutt (Pakistan has just planted over a billion trees - published on July 6, 2018 in the Agenda Weekly of World Economic Forum).

Pakistan is also among the six countries that will be most affected by global warming, she adds.

KP itself has lost large areas of forest to felling, which increased the likelihood of flooding and landslides. In 2016, flash floods hit the province, killing dozens of people.

Bryson Ogden writing in the same publication of WEF (To end deforestation, we must protect community land rights) says, ending deforestation is crucial to achieving a host of global goals, including preventing a climate crisis, sustaining rural livelihoods and preserving natural biodiversity.

To this end, according to Ogden, companies, investors, governments, civil society and communities have made ambitious commitments to reduce deforestation by 2020.

These include the New York Declaration on Forests' goal to halve natural forest loss, the Bonn Challenge to restore 150 million hectares of degraded forest, and the Consumer Goods Forum's commitment to net zero deforestation in palm oil, soy, beef, and paper supply chains.

Pakistan hit its billion-tree goal in August 2017. Now, the hills of the country's northwestern province of KP are alive with newly planted saplings.

The massive reforestation project - named the Billion Tree Tsunami - added 350,000 hectares of trees both by planting and natural regeneration, in an effort to restore the province's depleted forests and fight the effects of climate change.

As well as benefiting the environment, the project has established a network of private tree nurseries, which have boosted local incomes and generated green jobs, including for unemployed young people and

women in the province.

It also meant the KP government surpassed its 348,400 hectares commitment to the Bonn Challenge, claims Rosamond Hutt.

"This aims to restore 150 million hectares of degraded and deforested land worldwide by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030. It was the first Bonn Challenge pledge to reach its restoration goal.

Inger Andersen, head of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the NGO in charge of administering the Bonn Challenge, described it as a true conservation success story.

"Experts at World Wildlife Fund-Pakistan, which monitored and conducted an independent audit of the reforestation drive, say the project has been an environmental, economic and social success.

"Its popularity is said to have prompted Pakistan's federal government to launch its own Green Pakistan programme, which aims to plant 100 million trees in five years across the country."

But companies world- wide, in the opinion of Ogden, are finding that pervasive insecurity of community land rights in the global south is making implementation of the Bonn Challenge to restore 150 million hectares of degraded forest by 2020 difficult.

He says if they are to succeed, companies must prioritize respecting the land rights of indigenous peoples, local communities and rural women affected by their operations. This reduces deforestation, protects their bottom lines and benefits local peoples.

Because communities have long protected the world's natural resources, inadequate recognition of their rights puts at risk the forests and waters we all depend on for global environmental sustainability. Without secure rights, conflict and deforestation are often said to follow.

Meanwhile Charlotte Edmond in her piece (These drones plant 100,000 trees a day) for the Agenda Weekly of WEF published on June 29, 2018 claims that drones can plant 100,000 trees a day.

The world is chopping down about 15 billion trees a year and planting about 9 billion. So there's a net loss of 6 billion trees a year.

Hand planting trees, she says, is slow and expensive. To keep pace with the tractors and bulldozers clearing vast areas of land, we need an industrial-scale solution.

For example, a drone that can plant up to 100,000 trees a day, she contends.

"BioCarbon Engineering, a UK-based company backed by drone manufacturer Parrot, has come up with a method of planting trees quickly and cheaply. Not only that, trees can also be planted in areas that are difficult to access or otherwise unviable."

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