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## Issue Brief

# Environment-Development Nexus in Pakistan

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**Introduction:**

Environment and Development are inextricably linked, as construction cannot take place without destroying something first.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan faces many challenges in its quest towards development and economic growth. Increased economic activity depends on larger inputs of material and energy, and in turn produces larger quantities of waste as by-products. The natural environment of the country is thus being harmed by accumulation of waste, concentration of pollution and extraction of natural sources for the purpose of economic development. Practically, the relationship between economic growth and environment depends upon a host of different factors. Among these are (1) the size of the economy, (2) the sectoral structure, (3) the technology, (4) the demand for environmental quality and (5) the level of environmental protection expenses.<sup>2</sup> Issues like limited land resources, energy shortfalls and depleting water resources pose a serious threat to the country's economy. Furthermore, deterioration of these resources is putting immense pressure on the pursuit of economic activity itself and placing Pakistan at risk eventually. The rapid industrial growth in the country has already worsened the precarious environmental problems in the country.

Some of the major environmental issues that the world and the developing countries including Pakistan are facing include the following: increased population pressure, unsustainable land use, air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, climate change (Global Warming), natural resource depletion, unsustainable and high energy consumption, loss of biological diversity, degradation of freshwater, deforestation and unsustainable use of forests.<sup>3</sup> Pakistan is an agrarian country with most of its population depend for their livelihood on agriculture related activities forming a rural economy. As this rural economy is closely related to climate sensitive sectors their thrust for development highly affects the environment negatively. As a result of high population growth and climate change water shortages is also becoming acute in many parts of the country coupled with devastating energy shortfalls, the rural economy is in a decline. Major impacts of climate change are potential of extreme weather, rising of sea level, and decreasing of agricultural productivity, which is currently happening in Pakistan.

**Pakistan and the Nexus:**

The oscillating relationship between environment and economic growth, whether negative or positive, is not fixed along a country's development trend; as it may change towards a positive nature as a country acquires a significant level of income and a cleaner environment over a period of time. In addition, to

continue with the current global pace of development and preserve the interest for the future generation sustainable development is essential for Pakistan. Though the world is acting quickly and creating global awareness in favour of environmental protection and has already been shown responsiveness for Global Environmental Governance through COP21, it is not sufficient.<sup>4</sup>

Sustainable development requires that economic activity in the country only uses natural resources at a rate at which they can be restored by environmental friendly methods. The government has realised that it is of utmost importance to develop and implement ways to use natural resources more efficiently and effectively in order to maintain the current level of economic growth. A more green-economy would improve human social equity and well-being, while significantly reducing ecological scarcities and environmental risks.

#### **Steps taken by the Government of Pakistan:**

Pakistan, being a developing country, is faced with fragile environmental conditions and has limited financial means and inadequate managerial and political resources to address the environmental degradation challenges. This threatens long-term development of the country, leading to a decrease in the quality of life and living standards. There has been a growing concern inside the Pakistan government to protect environment as well as to maintain the development. A focus on development from an environment-development nexus perspective should be the government's main priority, as it is central to achieving a green economy envisioned in Vision 2025 plan for sustainable socio-economic development in the country.<sup>5</sup> As there is a trade-off relationship between economic growth and environment, it creates challenges for the economists as well as policy makers to adopt policy to continue the economic growth by protecting the environment.

Sustainable development has rapidly become a popular concept in the country, as it is a triangle of purposeful interaction between economic sustainability, social sustainability and environmental sustainability. According to Vision 2025 policy of the government it is important to develop and implement ways to use natural resources more efficiently and effectively in order to maintain the current level of economic growth. Connection between Environment and economic development is significant for sustainable development. A greener economy improves human social equity and well-being, while significantly reducing ecological scarcities and environmental risks.

**Recommendations:**

Only taking some policy options by the government will not contribute much to the environmental development. More awareness of the general public as well as their involvement with private sectors is also necessary for this endeavour to succeed. Therefore, Pakistan needs to take fresh initiatives for a swift solution for the problematic issue of environmental degradation in the country along the following lines:

- Establishment of Environmental Monitoring System project of Pak-EPA (Environment Protection Agency), which is still a work in progress and needs to be completed soon.
- There has been an increase of only about PKR 300 Million in the budget allocation for environment for FY 2016-2017 from the previous FY 2015-2016. More budget allocation needs to go towards Research and Development (R&D) which falls under the purview of the Higher Education Commission (HEC). This can be done through increase in National Research Grants, Resource Development and creating international linkages between local and international universities. This will help to promote water saving and ecological friendly innovations.
- The government needs agenda focused on sustainable development; social justice, environmental stewardship and economic well-being by developing a national framework which caters to both international and national policies. This can be done by taking advantage of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>6</sup> and COP21 agreements to garner help from the international community by getting in technological and fiscal aid to prevent further environmental degradation.
- Emphasis should be given on empowering poor and marginalised groups in creating links between conservation and livelihood. The government needs to involve local communities as well as private sectors in protection of the environment by making them stakeholders in the process.
- Decision must be made to ensure sustainable development through stopping deforestation, as there is a positive trade-off between conserving the forest and human welfare. This can be done by ensuring fair enforcement of forest conservation laws of the government like the Forest Amendment Act of 2010.

- The quality and quantity of surface water, ground water, and coastal waters needs to be managed to balance the current and future needs of ecological systems, communities, agriculture, fisheries, industry and hydro-electric generation. This can be accomplished by: improved groundwater utilisation in high-recharge areas, effective drainage mechanisations to maximise crop production, efficient management of existing water resources, and timely and cost effective completion of new hydro-projects.
- Land resources have to be managed sustainably to maintain and enhance their quality, productivity and life-supporting capacity to protect their ability to support a variety of land-use options. This can be achieved through land resource assessment and monitoring, and by enacting policies to rehabilitate the land through increased forestation and other management policies.

It is ironical that much of the environmental degradation is primarily a by-product of economic activities. In addition, there exists a trade-off relation between economic development and environment. There is a need to develop a culture of managing resources from environment in a sustainable manner. Policy options should be taken in lieu of global environmental treaties to maintain the sustainability of the environment. The policy makers need to realise that nature and man must co-exist in harmony to build a world suitable for our next generation.

#### Notes and References:

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  - <sup>4</sup> Monica Araya, "No Time to Rest: After the Paris Climate Agreement, What Next?" *Stanley Foundation*, May 5, 2015, <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/articles.cfm?id=819>
  - <sup>5</sup> ISSRA, "A Roadmap to Vision 2025," *National Defence University (NDU) Workshop Report*, 2014, 37.
  - <sup>6</sup> Sophie Robinson, "Sustainable Development Goals," Institute of Development Studies, <http://www.ids.ac.uk/idsresearch/sustainable-development-goals>