



**INSTITUTE OF
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

web: www.issi.org.pk
phone: +92-920-4423, 24
fax: +92-920-4658

Report – Public Talk

“Global Climate Change and its Implications for Pakistan”

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Rapporteur: Aamna Rafiq

Edited by: Najam Rafique

PICTURES OF THE EVENT



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a Public Talk titled, "Global Climate Change and its Implications for Pakistan" on May 8, 2019. Dr. Adil Najam, Dean, Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University was the guest speaker at the occasion.

Welcoming the speaker and guests, Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, said that it should no longer be a surprise to anyone anymore that Pakistan is one of the countries at greatest risk of the impacts of climate change. The people of Pakistan live this reality every day, and they are getting accustomed to nearly annual floods in the northern regions, droughts in Thar, deadly heat waves in Karachi and pollution fog in Lahore. An average Pakistani can well see how climate is impacting his/her life in real terms. According to long-term Climate Risk Index, Pakistan is the 8th most affected country by climate change from 1998 to 2017. In the last ten years, South Asia as a whole and Pakistan particularly, is in a constant procession of climatic crisis making the lives of the people miserable and insecure. Every time there is a flood or drought or disaster, it brings new challenges for the ordinary people and huge financial and law and order burden on the government. Thus, climate change is connected to the broader issue of human security. Pakistan's climate change concerns include increased variability of monsoons, the likely impact of receding Himalayan glaciers on the Indus River System, reduced hydro-power during drought years and decreased capacity of water reservoirs. Other potential impacts induced by climate change includes severe water stress, food insecurity due to decreasing agriculture and livestock production, degradation of ecosystems and so on.

For Pakistan, one particular potential impact arising out of climate change is worth singling out, and that is water scarcity. In Pakistan's context, water stress quickly becomes a food security issue. Ambassador Chaudhry emphasised that climate change should be regarded as a serious non-traditional security threat, and ignoring non-traditional dimensions of security is in fact making the country less secure. The threat of climate change is existential and no longer long-term. It may have implications much larger than an interstate threat Pakistan often face in its rather difficult neighbourhood. Climate change have both domestic and international security dimensions. Everyone agrees beyond this and especially on the question of what to do about it. Furthermore, much thought process has gone into addressing these challenges. What we need is urgent action. With global mitigation efforts moving as slowly as they are, Pakistan has no

choice but to find ways to harness the international resources to foster its own adaptation efforts. However, Pakistan should realize that an over-reliance on international resources alone is not the answer. Much of the cost of the adapting to the climatic effects will eventually fall on the poor people of Pakistan. Although climate negotiators continued to elevate hope over evidence, scientific data suggests that it will now be impossible to leave the Paris Agreement which restricts climate change below 1.5 degree Celsius. This means that the world has to redouble its efforts towards mitigation of the effects of climate change. The most vulnerable countries of which Pakistan is one, need better preparations for living in a world with climatic impacts. It is important because Pakistan may have to bear the burden of adaption by itself, since the international system can go thus far in providing resources for adaptation in developing countries.

Ambassador Chaudhry hoped that the intellectual endeavour by ISSI will encourage others in academia to address this important subject, and help in first creating awareness about the gigantic threat that we face, and then identifying the tangible solutions to overcome this real life menace which has already started affecting Pakistan over the past decade.

Dr. Adil Najam gave a comprehensive and thought-provoking power-point presentation on the topic. He said that most of the greatest challenges of our time cannot be resolved with traditional approaches of international affairs. There is a fundamental problem with the old proposition that every nation acting in its own self-interest will somehow combine their self-interest for the collective interest. Climate change is one of those areas where this proposition has been proved wronged. Dr. Najam`s presentation revolved around three main themes: What is adaptation? What does it mean to live in the age of adaptation for developing world, especially Pakistan? How age of adaptation has changed domestic policy and approach towards international climate change negotiations?

Talking about the first theme, he said that adaptation means when a problem happens what could be done to adjust to it, while mitigation on the other hand deals with the problem before it happens. He identified five failures that led to the age of adaptation. Earth is a divided, unsafe, badly governed and insecure planet in terms of food, water, human security and climate change. Between 1991 and 2012, 13950 scientific papers got published on global climate change, of

which only 24 in some way rejected the idea of humanly induced climate change. The first failure is that despite of this huge consensus, there is a constant debate as there is another side. The second failure is the failure of negotiations. The international negotiations for climate change follow the convention-protocol approach which makes it a self-perpetuated process and the only thing diplomats negotiate is where to conduct the next meeting. States waste their time in striking resolutions which have no legal binding. He termed vulnerability as the third failure. Vulnerability to climate change is inversely proportional to how much countries have contributed. Those developed countries who emitted the most are not the ones who are bearing the cost. This injustice to developing countries is going to be the fundamental issue of the future climate change negotiations. The international conversations should be about how to balance this. However, this has turned into a technocratic game as opposed to a moral and justice game. The last failure is the failure of politics. Developing countries failed in politically pushing the international treaty on climate change to a place where it could be beneficial for them.

Dr. Najam further identified four issues in the mitigation area. First, the focus is essentially on the management of carbon emission which is directly connected to the management of energy. Due to this, unfortunately all mitigation plans are reduced to energy management. Climate is no longer a future issue, it is a current issue where simply management of the carbon will not work. For example, one of the major impacts of climate change is the fast adaptation of nature. Due to facilitation of climate change, many vector borne diseases like Ebola and Dengue are moving from tropics towards the north. Thus, it is essentially an issue of health policy, not a carbon management issue. Second, the frontline issues related to climate change are mostly about water like floods, heavy rainfall, and drought. Water is to adaptation what carbon is to mitigation. The issue is not the reducing amount of water, but it's about how, where, and at what price people are using it. Water issue is not a quantity issue, it is a justice and distribution issue. Third issue is the increasing normalisation of the impacts of climate change. Many are unable to recognise and understand the scale of the issue. Pakistan is in the 10th consecutive year of floods, 6th consecutive year of drought, 4th consecutive year of massive heat wave all at the same time. On the other hand, India is in the 6th consecutive year of heat wave. Lastly, the mobility question is a Tesla question. The manufacturing of the electric cars will only contribute to the carbon issue, but in South Asia it's not only the emission problem, but also about providing cheap and reliable

transport. There is an uncontrolled population growth in the region and billions of people have to move from place to place to get the proper avenues of life.

Regarding life in the age of adaptation for developing world, especially Pakistan, Dr. Najam said that there is need to add value to the infrastructure to reduce wastage of energy resources. Climate induced migration is a major issue, but there is a fundamental difference between climate and war refugees. He gave the example of Sundarband in Bangladesh where a micro-millimetre change in the salt content of the coastal waters forced the entire community of fishermen to migrate to Chittagong, Dhaka and other areas of India. It's essentially economic livelihood that pushes people out. Similarly, migration of civil war refugees from Sierra Leone to Guinea resulted in deforestation in its Parrot's Beak Area. Future wars, he said, will be climatic induced. The current civil war in Rwanda and South Sudan is the beginning of this future.

He presented the security model from the his edited book titled *Environment, Development and Human Security: Perspectives from South Asia*. According to this model, the question of security arises when there is insecurity. Dr. Najam said there are essentially two major dimensions of insecurity. First dimension is the axis of violence which, in one respect, is a direct attack, or in other way it's like creating such conditions that bring violence to individual's life. The second dimension is an axis of level from state to society. When direct violence interacts with insecurity at state level, it manifests in form of interstate war. When direct violence interacts with insecurity at societal level, it manifests itself as a civil war. When indirect violence interacts with insecurity at state level, it manifests as institutional failures. Social disruption at societal level expresses itself as human security.

In the last 60 years of Pakistan-India conflict, total number of deaths in India are less than only the children who will die in one year because of dirty water in New Delhi alone. Exactly the same number is true for Karachi. As a policy scholar, Dr. Najam expressed his concern that a child could die at the wrong end of the gun or at the wrong end of a tap. However, experts, journalists and diplomats will talk about one death as a national calamity, and the other as if it's a development status. This, he said, is the security dilemma in the South Asia region. He said that he does not know about the solution of conflict, but he do know that the cost of saving one life through water is US\$18. He further stated that Pakistan is a country totally defined by its

climate and water. He showed historical graphs depicting the rising temperatures of major cities in Pakistan, as well as South Asia. Another major example of climate change is the emergence of Attabad Lake. But, instead of highlighting the issue, the people of Pakistan are celebrating this loss of territory to climate change.

Talking about the impacts on the domestic policy and international climate change negotiations, he highlighted three differences between the age of mitigation and age of adaptation. First, the shift from the principle of additionality to loss and damages. Additionality is a situation where individuals and institutions will only work if provided with additional money. Unfortunately, climate change negotiations are dominated by the loss and damage terminology. Second, the shift from development as a problem, to development as a solution. Good adaptation leads to good development. Lastly, discussion is moving from international justice to global justice. In the age of adaptation, it is not relevant which country is emitting how much, because climate change does not affect the country uniformly. Poor people pay the cost more than the rich people even within the country.

In his concluding remarks, Chairman BOG, ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood stated that awareness about the challenge of climate change exists in society, and some tentative normative steps have also been taken regarding mitigation and adaptation. However, the changing life styles have inflicted a lot of distress on nature. A recent UN report on the state of nature says that “nature is at death’s door”. The concept of common but differentiated responsibility was agreed internationally. In December 2015, there was a major achievement in the form of Paris Agreement given the diverse approaches and priorities of 190 states. Pakistan has also adopted certain measures at institutional level to cope with this problem. Yet, domestic challenges like incapacity, inadequate infrastructure and lack of infrastructure are still there. The Chairman said that after the 18th constitutional amendment, climate change became a provincial subject in Pakistan which is creating a problem of coordination. The insecurity induced by climate change is expanding where adaptation and mitigation steps are not enough. Full transformation of economies is needed in accordance with sustainable development goals. Climate change needs to be factored in all human endeavours. The UN Secretary General has planned a summit in September 2019 to discuss the future plan of action. He concluded by saying that climate change

is a defining issue today and, it is also a defining moment to take action because one should remember that the losses we inflict on nature will, in return, be inflicted upon us.