

NBC News

Pakistan plans to plant 10 billion trees to fight climate change

The violence-plagued country is one of the most vulnerable in the world to climate change



Northwestern Pakistan has already seen hundreds of millions of trees planted to fight deforestation.
PHOTO: Farooq Naeem / AFP/Getty Images

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By Alastair Jamieson

Pakistan is one of the world's most dangerous countries, grappling with terror attacks, poverty, religious extremism and crumbling public services.

But its new government is aiming to tackle a different problem by planting 10 billion trees within five years to fight the effects of global warming by restoring the country's depleted forests.

As well as releasing more oxygen into the atmosphere, trees can protect Pakistan's fast-eroding landscape by reducing the risk of floods from melting glaciers in its mountainous north.

Former cricket star **Imran Khan** won last month's violence-plagued election with a high-profile, anti-corruption crusade and a promise to transform a political scene long dominated by entrenched family dynasties. (He also pledged to improve ties with the U.S. but was scathing about Washington's drone campaign against militants along the Afghan border.)

While the environment was not a major election issue, Pakistan is the seventh most vulnerable country to climate change, according to the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, a Pakistani public policy think tank — even while it is among the least polluting, contributing only 0.2 percent of global emissions.

Khan's PTI party noted that the impact of rising temperatures, major flooding, prolonged droughts and unpredictable rainfall has already costing the country \$6 billion to \$14 billion in relief aid and economic recovery.

"It is now imperative to tackle climate change and reverse environmental degradation as Pakistan's situation will only worsen as the economy grows," the party said in its manifesto.

Khan's plan is an extension of his earlier "Billion Tree" reforestation project in which around 865,000 acres of trees were planted in the PTI-controlled Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province from 2014 to 2017.

Pakistan also holds the Guinness World Record for most trees planted in 24 hours, set by the Sindh Forest Department in Thatta in June 2013 when a team of 300 volunteers planted 847,275 trees.

"We have been consumed for so long by so many other challenges such as the war on terror that has engulfed our cities, suicide bombings, public health, that kind of thing," said Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, founder and CEO of LEAD Pakistan, an environmental think tank. "But it is extremely important also that we ensure we have enough fresh water and that our development does not destroy our own coastline. We have one of the largest deltas in the world, but it is dying because of climate change."

He added: "Irrespective of the number of trees planted, it is important for our country, which has so many other challenges, to have the lungs to support our environment. We welcome Khan's promise and we looking forward to holding him to account."

Some 1,260 Pakistani civilians and soldiers were killed by terrorism in 2017, a figure down from 11,704 in 2009.



Guards walk in a tree plantation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, northwest Pakistan.
Farooq Naem / AFP/Getty Images file

But dozens also die every year from ever-more-extreme heat waves and monsoon floods. The number of heat wave days per year has increased nearly fivefold in the last 30 years, and the sea level along the Karachi coast has risen 4 inches in the past century, according to a recent report by climate technology expert Qamar-Uz-Zaman Chaudhry.

In addition, its 5,000 glaciers — many of them in the Himalayas — are retreating faster than in any other part of the world, causing yet more floods and placing huge strain on rivers and fields.

It has also seen rapid deforestation, with trees cleared to make way for urban development and widespread illegal logging.

A Critical Analysis of Forest Policies of Pakistan: Implications for Sustainable Livelihoods

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Babar Shahbaz

University of Agriculture Faisalabad

Tanvir Ali

Abid Qaiyum Suleri
Sustainable Development Policy Institute

Abstract

Pakistan has very low forest cover, but these forests are very diverse in nature and of significant importance for the livelihood security of millions of rural people who live in and around these forests. Policies, institutions and processes form the context within which individuals and households construct and adapt livelihood strategies, on the other hand these institutionally shaped livelihood strategies may have an impact on the sustainability of natural resource use.

The present paper aims to critically analyse the forest policies of Pakistan. Implications for sustainable forest management and livelihood security of forest dependent people are also given.

The first forest policy of Pakistan was announced in 1955 followed by the forest policies of 1962, 1975, 1980, 1988 as part of the National Agricultural Policy, 1991, and the latest in 2001. Most of the forest policies were associated with the change of government.

There was much rhetoric in some recent policies regarding the concept of “participation” and “sustainable livelihoods” but in practice these policies are also replica of the previously top-down, autocratic and non-participatory forest policies.

Pakistan needs to develop a sustainable, workable, research-based, and people-friendly forest policy enable to catering to the changing needs of stakeholders including government.

Forests for Green Pakistan: Forest Policy Note

(English)

Abstract

As a forest poor country, Pakistan has witnessed a drastic decrease in its forest resources over the last few decades, as well as serious soil erosion, frequent floods and other deforestation related disasters.

Reduced and degraded forest resources have also affected negatively its forest-based rural livelihood and economic activities. As part of the global forest discourse, the Government of Pakistan has gradually recognized the importance of its forest resources and developed in the last five years few afforestation schemes to protect and restore its forest resources.

Under this context, this policy note is prepared to help the World Bank identify ways to support the country's afforestation efforts.

This policy note aims to provide an overview of Pakistan's forest sector based on latest data that are publicly available. It first presents the baseline and developmental trends of Pakistan's forest resources. It then provides reported social and economic benefits of forest resources of Pakistan.

After this, the note summarizes existing regulatory and institutional systems for forest management in the country and highlights the known challenges of these systems in promoting sound forest management in the country.

To help identify areas of engagements for the World Bank, the note also summarizes lessons learned from previous forest engagements of the World Bank and other donors.

Finally, the note recommends three areas of support the World Bank may consider in its future forest engagement:

- (1) policy interventions to improve the overall forest governance in the country,
- (2) capacity building to ensure that sound forest management practices are accepted and practiced by key forest institutions, and
- (3) forest investments to demonstrate concrete environmental, social and economic benefits at key landscapes and forest dependent communities.