

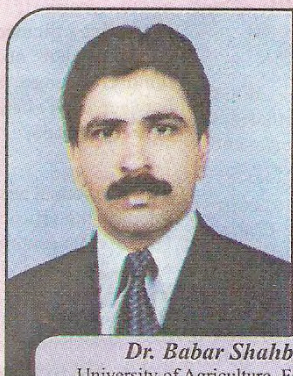
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Achieving Sustainable Development of Pakistan

PART 1

Sustainable Development & Natural Resource Management in Pakistan



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Contribution of forests in the economy, environment and, eventually, sustainable development of any country is no more a debatable issue. The forests cover about 30 percent of the total earth land area of which more than 90 percent are natural forests and remaining are forest plantations. In Pakistan, however, the forest area is less than 5% of the total land area which is considerably lower as compared to world average as well as other South Asian countries. The natural forests of Pakistan are distributed over the Hindukush, Korakoram and Himalayan mountains in North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Northern Areas and AJK, and contribute significantly towards the economy and sustainable development of country. These forests are vital for protection of land and water resources, particularly in prolonging the lives of dams, reservoirs and the irrigation network of canals in the lowlands. The forests are also a vital part of the daily lives of the rural people who live closer to the forested areas. The mountains of northern Pakistan are home to millions of rural poor and these people are heavily dependent on the forest

resources for their subsistence oriented livelihoods.

The disappearance of natural forests in Pakistan is a serious issue because it negatively affects the livelihoods of forest dependent people and sustainable development of country. Studies based on remote sensing showed that the rates of decline in forest cover in NWFP will lead to a complete disappearance of the forest from most areas within the next 2 decades. Though significant progress has been made in tree-planting, notably on farmland, it does not compensate the loss of natural forests. There are many causes of deforestation reported by the researchers, for example removal of forest tracts to grow crops, increase of urbanization, forest cuttings for roads construction, dependence of rural population on wood for fuel, population explosion, poverty, lack of awareness, over grazing of land by cattle. Nevertheless ineffective, unsustainable, top-down and non-participatory forest management practices by the state forest departments is one of the main reported causes of depletion of natural forests, which have focused more on economic than on environmental utility.

During the last few decades several initiatives had been launched to improve the management of natural forests in Pakistan in general and NWFP in particular. These include massive forest tree planting, participatory forest management initiatives etc. Numerous donor assisted participatory forest management project were also carried out in these areas but the rate of forest depletion remained very high in Pakistan. It is contrary to the countries like Nepal and India who have effectively controlled deforestation in their countries, with almost similar socio-economic setting when comparing with Pakistan. Disappointing outcome of most of the forest related interventions, projects and policies in meeting their objectives justifies searching out the fundamental causes of the ineffectiveness of such policies.

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Participatory forest management is considered as an effective strategy to combat deforestation, but such policies could not develop roots in Pakistan. Strong political will is essential for effective sustainable participatory forest management otherwise it would just reinforce the state control over resources.

In the NWFP case, the existing reality and research studies suggest that the Forest Department is unwilling to change its bureaucratic, colonial form of governance and top-down atti-



tude, and thus is not willing to allow local people more say in forestry-related issues. Field studies conducted by the National Center for Competence in Research (NCCR North-South) and Pakistani universities have revealed that the staff of the NWFP Forest Department resisted the new approach and they perceived that their authority is threatened.

Communication gap and mistrust between the official of the provincial forest department and the local stakeholders is also one of the main factors of the ineffectiveness of participatory forest management policies. Trust is a crucial prerequisite for sustainable forest management arrangements.

Although there have been some attempts to bridge the communication gap and improving trust between the state and local actors through the process of dialogues and roundtables, but such attempts could not achieve their goals. A careful analysis reveals at least two reasons behind this failure.

Firstly, these dialogues/roundtables were arranged and mediated either by the forest department itself (whose credibility and legitimacy is already challenged by the local stakeholders and civil society) or by the staff of the donor supported projects.

Second constraint is related to the types and range of stakeholders invited in these dialogues. In most of these attempts, the forest owners (right holders) and members of few NGOs were invited. But there is a broader range of stakeholders in the forestry sector; these include the non-owners, civil society, private sector, local government etc.

The NCCR Pakistan Research Group has launched a pilot project to initiate a stakeholder dialogue on forestry issues in the NWFP. The distinction of this project from the previous initiative is the moderation/mediation of the dialogue process by the researchers rather than the government officials.

At the same time another project is being undertaken to analyze the decision making process and power relations among various stakeholders in the forestry sector interventions. The involvement of a broader spectrum of stakeholders in the forest related projects and intervention is expected to positively contribute to the sustainability of such interventions and policies.

Over the past 20 years there have been many positive changes in forest policy issues through out the world and there is now better recognition of the contributions that forests make to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Forests remained high on the international agenda since last decade.

Under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), governments are required to develop national biodiversity strategies and action plans (for such sectors as forestry, agriculture, fisheries etc.), and to integrate these into broader national plans for environment and sustainable development. Sustainable development in this perspective means minimizing the factors that erode the natural resource base of country. Sustainable forest management has to be viewed as process, not as something static.