



Forests *and* Sustainability of Life

On need on combating deforestation and enhancing afforestation

Changing weather patterns and altering durations, reduction in rain spells but increasing rainfall intensity, soaring temperatures, intermittent draughts, engulfing fogs and, of late, the menace of smog have started hitting Pakistan. Moreover, another biggest reason behind the big climate challenges our country is faced with at present include—but certainly are not limited to—air and water pollution, desertification, decline of biodiversity, soil erosion and alluvium (soil or sediment deposited by a river or other running water), is an acute scarcity of forests coupled with the menace of deforestation that still goes on unchecked. The pace we are depriving Pakistan of its forests can be gauged from the “Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015” published by the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) which says that Pakistan is one of the countries where forest area has actually decreased between 1990 and 2015. During this period, on an

“The geography of Pakistan along with weak social and economic sectors has pushed the country a place up on the list of countries most affected by environmental and socio-economic impacts of climate change.” This finding, which was reported in the “Global Climate Risk Index” of the Bonn-based NGO Germanwatch, succinctly points out that Pakistan is fast forwarding toward an environmental disaster. The pace at which we are deforesting our land dictates the pace at which we are moving toward environmental degradation; the consequences of which are right in front of us in the form of extreme climatic events.

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average, an area of 42,200 hectares was deforested annually at the rate of 2.1 percent per annum. Pakistan was 8th on the list of unfortunate countries being deforested fast. Forests, which are often called the “Lungs of the Earth,” bring a lot of benefits to humans; they provide raw material for sports and furniture industries, give herbs and seeds to pharmaceutical industry, offer recreational facilities of camping and tourism, give fuelwood, reduce flood intensity and normalize water flow, add to soil fertility, open a window for creation of employment opportunities, cause rains, prevent soil erosion, improve soil fertility, provide fodder for animals, effect increase in groundwater, help control temperatures, make habitats for wildlife, maintain biodiversity, prevent land sliding in mountains,

cut pollution from air to provide fresh oxygen, limit noise pollution and decrease wind intensity, but despite all these advantages, they are still axed and sawed mercilessly; thus proving the idiom “To kill the goose

that laid the golden eggs" true.

An already grave problem of deforestation is getting further aggravated in Pakistan with paced cutting of forests. Official figures claim this pace to be 0.2–0.4 percent per annum whereas FAO figures tell another story; they put this at 0.75 percent in natural forests and 3.86 percent in case of farmlands, in 2007. Moreover, the Eleventh Five-Year Plan of Pakistan suggests that every year forested area of nearly 27,000 ha is deforested; principal reasons behind this ongoing practice include the difference between demand and supply of wood, droughts, wildfires, floods and, last but not least, reclamation of land for agricultural purposes. As per "Pakistan Forestry Outlook Study," a Working Paper by FAO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, in 2007, the demand for wood in Pakistan was 43.7 million m³ out of which fuelwood accounted for 32 million m³ and timber for other purposes was 12 million m³. Against this burgeoning demand, the sustainable supplies (annual growth rate) were only 14.4 million m³. Thus, the

demand–supply gap was 29.3 million m³ that was being met largely by overexploiting the forest resources and partly through import of paper products and timber.

Similarly, as per the data provide by Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS), the consumption of wood in Pakistan during the year 2015 was recorded at 7,73,62,000 m³ as compared with 3,16,49,000 m³ in 2005. In other words, it effected an increase of a whopping 144 percent during the past decade only. But, the area under forests decreased by nearly 23 percent. FAO reports that total forested area in Pakistan was 19,02,000 ha, which decreased to 14,72,000 hectares in 2015.

During the year 2015, 93 percent of total wood consumption in Pakistan was as fuelwood. And, why it won't be so when a vast majority of households i.e. 51 percent, use wood as fuel for cooking in overall Pakistan? As per the figures reported in Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (2014–15), this percentage was higher in rural areas with 73 percent as compared to only 13 percent in urban centres. The Survey



South Punjab Forest Company (SPFC)

South Punjab Forest Company (SPFC) is a not-for-profit public sector company incorporated in September 2015, under section 42 of the Companies Ordinance, 1984 established by Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Department, Government of the Punjab, with a mandate to seek private investment on profit sharing basis for raising tree plantation on blank forest land of the Government of the Punjab in the Civil Divisions of South Punjab. Company have been allotted 134,995 acres of forest land across six districts of South Punjab, which includes Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rahim Yar Khan, Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur and Dera Ghazi Khan.

With Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) informing that Pakistan has been experiencing deforestation at an annual average rate of 2.1% from 1990 to 2015 due to population explosion, increasing demand for firewood, agriculture expansion and timber mafia, SPFC aspires to promote sustainable forest management through Public Private Partnership. The initiative is a unique example of combining forest conservation with sustainable economic development.

SPFC's business philosophy has three thematic pillars: social and environmental sustainability; a balanced portfolio of wood fiber end-uses; and cost and quality competitive projects. It aims to feed the wood-based industry and subsequently help in reducing pressure on existing forests.

The establishment of SPFC will also help to address the needs of institutional investors seeking attractive returns and equitable risk in the long run.

There was a need to establish SPFC because since the private investor tries to stay away from bureaucratic hurdles and red tapism, therefore, SPFC is established to create a conducive environment, so that they can be facilitated in no time. SPFC is a unique model where private sector has to be engaged. The training of forest department does not allow them to implement it properly.

