

OPINION

Pledge for ecosystem restoration

BEING host of World Environment Day (WED) 2021 observance, Pakistan has received big applauses from global community for arranging great celebrations with a series of activities spread over weeks, and showcasing the country's own initiatives and its role in global efforts. Today, our nation has cheerful moments as Pakistan is now among global leaders along with an extra edge over other developing nations for a very serious transnational cause of environmental security. This is very delightful for me as the World Environment Day 2021 celebrations have raised my stature in international community and I am feeling proud to be a Pakistani. Investments in nature-based solutions have paid back in the form of a very good international image of the country, as witnessed on the occasion of WED 2021.

Although Pakistan is successful in first stroke for ecosystem restoration with a massive plantation drive with the slogan of 'One Billion Tree Tsunami', the actual response strategy and course of actions for country's Green Pledge towards a wide variety of ecosystems are still in infancy. It needs continuation of existing policies and creating further enabling way of doing things with enhanced coordination mechanism between the federal and provincial line government departments. The current achievement of Pakistan is an outcome of a dedicated initiative by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which was successfully completed a few years ago. Subsequently, the Federal Government extended the concept of massive plantation to the entire Pakistan for covering the alpine to maritime ecosystems, with the slogan of 'Ten Billion Tree Tsunami'.

This initiative was not only successful in getting recognized that Pakistan is well prepared to lead the way in ecosystem restoration but also it was instrumental in securing the status of host for World Environment Day 2021 for the theme 'Ecosystem Restoration' to focus on resetting our relation with the nature. The celebration of World Environment Day is unique this year as it will also mark the formal launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030. There is a global consensus that the Ecosystem Restoration can help in poverty alleviation, combating climate change and preventing mass extinction of species, which are major transnational environmental challenges of the 21st century.

It is a bitter reality that ecosystems continue to erode yet, which already affects the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people worldwide. We can reverse this negative trend by putting in place the right policy measures and implementing action-oriented strategies with active engagement of local populations by seeking their support towards it. If we set a global target to restore 15% of the degraded lands then it could likely prevent 60% of projected species extinctions. Restoring through agro forestry alone has the potential to increase food security for 1.3 billion people. Restoring coral reefs could deliver further in ecosystem service benefits and moving forward with blue economy endeavours. It is a very good portent that the ecosystem restoration is at the core of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, which will be adopted more likely this year and under the umbrella of Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It will serve as an excellent backdrop and principle vehicle to the expected actions under the UN decade on Ecosystem Restoration. There is a need to create its synergy with other Conventions, which would optimize the multiple benefits for ecosystem restoration.

In the overall context of ecosystem restoration and the case of Pakistan, it is anticipated that Pakistan's 10 Billion Tree Tsunami would likely help in restoring the 1 million hectares of degraded forests and wetland ecosystem. This initiative is being linked up with livelihood generation through export oriented honey production project for the forest dependent communities. Pakistan has introduced the 'Green Bond' scheme, which is anticipated to help in setting and achieving the targets for Country's Green Pledge with an outcome based approach in order to restore a wide variety of ecosystems through a number of tangible things. The activities will include the proliferation of renewables, promotion of electric vehicles, projects for local livelihood solutions, creation of green jobs, pollution abatement, waste management and introduction of other initiatives etc.

Pakistan's Green Pledge for ecosystem restoration has also a proposal to expand protected areas with the inclusion of additional 15% of land area and 10% of marine area by the year 2023. If comes true, it will be a clear and tangible demonstration of being part of the solution strategy for nature. These initiatives will not only restore and protect nature, but they will also ensure environmental security i.e. food security, energy security and water security, and limit the pollution problem by providing ecosystem services. Marine pollution is a matter of serious concern in Pakistan for which response measures can not only be sufficient at level of Federal Government but it also needs due attention by the provincial governments of Sindh and Balochistan. In a nutshell, success stories from Pakistan's Green Pledge, alike massive plantation, will serve as an inspiration for other countries to emulate and adapt. Together, let us dedicate ourselves to complement towards Country's Green Pledge and efforts for preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of all ecosystems i.e. from alpine to maritime areas.

—The writer, based in Islamabad, occasionally contributes to national press.

VIEW



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