

MEDIA COVERAGE



PIDE Seminar on Ground Water Emergency

October 30, 2025

Express Tribune

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2574813/groundwater-levels-in-freefall-across-pakistan>

Business Recorder

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40390003/pide-calls-for-urgent-reforms-to-avert-looming-water-crisis>

App Pakistan

<https://www.app.com.pk/business/groundwater-emergency-pide-unveils-roadmap-to-avert-pakistans-looming-water-challenges/>

Islamabad Post

<https://islamabadpost.com.pk/groundwater-emergency-pide-unveils-roadmap-to-avert-pakistans-looming-water-collapse/>

LeadPakistan

<https://leadpakistan.com.pk/news/groundwater-emergency-pide-unveils-roadmap-to-avert-pakistans-looming-water-challenges/>

The PenPK

<https://thepenpk.com/pakistans-groundwater-lifeline-is-running-dry-pide-warns/>

PIDE unveils roadmap to avert looming water challenges

He said groundwater governance must be treated not merely as an environmental concern but as a pillar of national stability and security

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), in collaboration with the Planning Commission's RASTA initiative, Wednesday organized a seminar titled "Pakistan's Groundwater Crisis: Policy Lessons and a Framework for Sustainable Resource Use", unveiling a comprehensive roadmap to address the country's mounting groundwater challenges. The seminar featured Nazam Maqbool, Social Scientist and Project Manager at RASTA, as the keynote speaker, while Dr Muhammad Faisal Ali, Research Fellow at PIDE, moderated the session, a news release said. Opening the discussion, Dr Faisal highlighted Pakistan's alarming transition from a water-stressed to a water-scarce nation, noting that per-capita water availability had declined from over 5,000 cu-

bic meters in 1947 to less than 1,000 cubic meters at present. He stressed that while surface water scarcity and climate change dominate public discourse, the depletion of groundwater – the country's silent lifeline – remains dangerously neglected.

In his presentation, Nazam Maqbool said Pakistan, one of the most arid countries in the world, receives an average annual rainfall of only 494 millimeters. The Indus River system, he added, contributes about 96 percent of the country's total water supply, with nearly 78 percent originating outside Pakistan's borders. Pakistan, he said, possesses the world's fourth-largest aquifer and ranks fourth globally in groundwater use, extracting around 65 cubic kilometers annually against a recharge rate of only 55 cubic kilometers. He revealed that around 70 percent of Pakistan's urban population and over 80 percent of its rural population de-

pend on unsafe drinking water sources, with about 60 million people exposed to arsenic contamination.

Over 4.5 million hectares of land have been affected by waterlogging and salinity, while cities such as Lahore are losing up to three feet of groundwater annually. Nazam Maqbool identified the absence of a binding national groundwater law, overlapping institutional responsibilities, and weak inter-provincial coordination as major governance challenges. Electricity subsidies, he noted, have encouraged over-pumping, while tariff recovery covers only 24 percent of operational costs. Punjab's average water tariff of US\$0.12 per cubic meter, he said, remains far below the global average of US\$2.36.

To tackle these issues, Nazam Maqbool proposed a seven-pillar framework for sustainable groundwater management. The plan includes the establishment of a National Groundwater Council, provin-

cial licensing and metering reforms, comprehensive aquifer mapping, real-time data systems, and integrated water management strategies.

He further called for shifting from water-intensive crops like sugarcane and rice to less water-demanding, high-yield alternatives such as pulses and oilseeds, alongside promoting drip and sprinkler irrigation. Citing global practices, he said Israel now meets 25 percent of its water demand through reuse of 90 percent of treated wastewater, while several U.S. cities have successfully halved urban water consumption through efficiency reforms. Concluding the session, Dr Faisal Ali emphasized that Pakistan's groundwater challenge could not be solved in isolation but required systemic reforms in governance, technology, and behavioral change. He said groundwater governance must be treated not merely as an environmental concern but as a pillar of national stability and security.

October 30, 2025

PIDE calls for urgent reforms to avert looming water crisis

ABDUL RASHID AZAD ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has called for urgent national reforms to avert a looming water crisis through policy interventions. It urged the government to declare a groundwater emergency, calling it "the need of the hour."

At a seminar titled "Pakistan's Groundwater Crisis: Policy Lessons and a Framework for Sustainable Resource Use" organised by the PIDE in collaboration with the Planning Commission's RASTA initiative, the institute warned that 1.5 million unregulated tube-wells are draining Pakistan's lifeline. It further said that 70 percent of Pakistan's urban water is unsafe and urges the relevant quarters for a groundwater governance overhaul.

The session featured Nazam Maqbool, Social Scientist and Project Manager at RASTA, as the keynote speaker. Dr Muhammad Faisal Ali,

Research Fellow at the PIDE, moderated the session.

He asserted that Pakistan's groundwater crisis cannot be solved in isolation but demands systemic reform encompassing governance, science, technology, and behaviour. He urged the government to immediately establish a National Groundwater Council, implement monitoring and recharge programs, and improve irrigation efficiency and pricing mechanisms. In the long run, he said, Pakistan must pursue inclusive, climate-resilient, and evidence-based water governance to ensure a secure future. PIDE reiterated that the country must prioritize pricing, efficiency, recharge, and transport reforms in water management, viewing groundwater governance not merely as a resource issue but as a pillar of national stability and security.

Opening the seminar, Dr Faisal emphasized Pakistan's alarming shift from a water-

stressed to a water-scarce nation, noting that per-capita water availability has dropped from over 5,000 cubic meters in 1947 to less than 1,000 today. He observed that while surface water scarcity and climate change dominate public debate, the depletion of groundwater—Pakistan's silent lifeline—remains dangerously neglected. Water, he stressed, forms the foundation of civilization and food security, and its mismanagement threatens both human and economic survival.

Maqbool explained that Pakistan is among the most arid countries in the world, receiving only 494 millimeters of average annual rainfall. The Indus River system accounts for nearly 96 percent of the country's total water supply, with 78 percent originating outside Pakistan's borders. He highlighted that Pakistan possesses the world's fourth-largest aquifer and is the fourth-largest user of groundwater globally. The Indus

Plain alone contains around 88,000 square kilometres of freshwater storage, equivalent to nearly 400 million acre-feet—about eighty times the capacity of all large dams combined. However, the country's extraction of 65 cubic kilometres of groundwater annually far exceeds its recharge rate of 55 cubic kilometres, creating a growing water deficit.

Maqbool traced the historical evolution of groundwater use in Pakistan, explaining how colonial-era canal construction between 1870 and 1930 led to widespread water logging and salinity, prompting the 1960s Salinity Control and Reclamation Project, under which thousands of tube-wells were installed. The subsequent decades saw electricity subsidies and drought-driven policies fueling a massive expansion in tube-well installation—reaching over 1.5 million unregulated tube-wells today, with no effective legal controls on extraction.

Highlighting the scale of the problem, he revealed that 70 percent of Pakistan's urban and more than 80 percent of its rural populations rely on unsafe drinking water sources, with nearly 60 million people exposed to arsenic contamination. Over 4.5 million hectares of land have been affected by salinity and water logging, particularly in Punjab and Sindh, while industrial and agricultural pollution continue to degrade groundwater quality. He further pointed out that Pakistan ranks second globally in groundwater stress within the Indus Basin, with Lahore alone losing three feet of groundwater annually.

Maqbool identified the lack of a binding national groundwater law, overlapping institutional mandates, weak enforcement after the 18th Amendment, and severely under-funded utilities as core governance failures. He noted that electricity subsidies encourage over-pumping while only 24 percent of operational costs are recovered through existing tariffs. Despite tariff hikes after decades of stagnation, Punjab's water price of just USD10.12 per cubic meter remains far below the global average of USD236.14, hindering systems, poor data gathering systems, poor data collection, and minimal investment in drainage and recharge infrastructure have further foreshadowed evidence-based planning and water governance.

To address these challenges, Maqbool proposed a seven-pillar action-oriented framework for sustainable groundwater management. His plan called for the establishment of a National Groundwater Council to coordinate policy across provinces, the introduction of groundwater levies, indexing, and pricing reforms, comprehensive auditor-imposed, real-time data portals, and integrated water resource management strategies. He advocated for agricultural efficiency through the replacement of input subsidies with performance-based incentives and the promotion of drip and sprinkler irrigation systems.

October 30, 2025

Groundwater Emergency

PIDE Unveils Roadmap to Avert Pakistan's Looming Water Collapse

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), in collaboration with the Planning Commission's RASTA initiative, organized a seminar titled "Pakistan's Groundwater Crisis: Policy Lessons and a Framework for Sustainable Resource Use" at PIDE. The session featured Mr. Nazam Maqbool, Social Scientist and Project Manager at RASTA, as the keynote speaker, and was moderated by Dr. Muhammad Faisal Ali, Research Fellow at PIDE.

Opening the seminar, Dr. Faisal emphasized Pakistan's alarming shift from a water-stressed to a water-scarce



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In his presentation, Mr. Maqbool explained that Pakistan is among the most arid

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Concluding his address, Mr. Maqbool asserted that Pakistan's groundwater crisis cannot be solved in isolation but demands systemic reform encompassing governance, science, technology, and behavior. He urged the government to immediately establish a National Groundwater Council, implement monitoring and recharge programs, and improve irrigation efficiency and pricing mechanisms. In the long run, he said, Pakistan must pursue inclusive, climate-resilient, and evidence-based water governance to ensure a secure future. Summarizing the discussion, Dr. Faisal Ali reiterated that the country must prioritize pricing, efficiency, recharge, and transport reforms in water management, viewing groundwater governance not merely as a resource issue but as a pillar of national stability and security.