

MEDIA COVERAGE

Seminar on The Thirst for Safety: Water Quality and Public Health in Pakistan



October 23, 2025

The News International

<https://e.thenews.com.pk/detail?id=440988>

Business Recorder

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40388790>

Islamabad Post

<https://islamabadpost.com.pk/pide-seminar-warns-only-47-of-pakistanis-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water/>

LeadPakistan

<https://leadpakistan.com.pk/news/pide-seminar-warns-only-47-of-pakistanis-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water/>

Urdu Point

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/business/speaker-at-seminar-call-for-adopting-nature-b-2068570.html>

'Only 47pc of Pakistanis have access to potable water'

Rasheed Khalid

Islamabad

Director General (Water Quality), Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) Dr Hifza Rasheed while presenting comprehensive national overview Pakistan's per-capita freshwater availability has revealed that it plummeted from 5,260 m³ in 1951 to below 1,000 m³ in 2024, officially placing the country in the "waterscarce" category.

Dr Hifza was speaking at a seminar on "The thirst for safety: water quality and public health in Pakistan" organised by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) here at Quaid-i-Azam University Campus.

Dr Hifza said that agriculture consumes about 93 percent of available freshwater, yet irrigation efficiency re-

mains only around 40 percent due to seepage and outdated systems. She added that over 1.3 million tubewells are operating in Punjab alone, with groundwater extraction now averaging 50 million acre-feet annually, causing severe depletion - depths reached 600 to 1,200 feet in parts of Baluchistan and Islamabad. She said that PCRWR monitoring shows that only 47 percent of Pakistan's population currently has access to safe drinking water, a modest rise from 39 percent in 2022, but still far from the SDG 6.1 goal of universal access by 2030.

She warned that unsafe water causes to an estimated 53,000 child deaths every year and contributes to Pakistan's high rates of stunting - nearly 44 percent of children nationwide. Industrial waste, pesticides, and untreated sewage are polluting surface and

groundwater, with arsenic levels dangerously high across southern Punjab and Sindh. Water quality in the Eastern Rivers (Ravi and Sutlej) sharply deteriorated due to transboundary pollution and unchecked industrial discharges. Only 38 percent of domestic wastewater in Pakistan is effectively treated and the country ranks among the top 10 nations globally with the largest population lacking access to safe water.

Dr Hifza also highlighted Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change noting that it ranks fifth among the world's most water-insecure countries and faces a projected 3-6 °C temperature rise by the end of the century.

The recent floods caused an estimated \$14.9 billion in damages and \$15.2 billion in economic losses, exacerbating water contamination and

disease outbreaks. PCRWR responded with mobile and solar-powered water-treatment units in flood-hit areas, contributing to cholera prevention and relief operations. She stressed that for every \$1 invested in water and sanitation, the return is \$4.3 through reduced health-care costs and improved productivity, while Pakistan currently loses \$93 billion annually due to unsafe water and inefficiencies in the water sector.

Despite incremental progress, Pakistan must accelerate efforts seven-fold to achieve the SDG targets for safe and affordable drinking water by 2030. Dr. Hifza attributed the slow pace to coordination challenges, fragmented policies, weak enforcement and a lack of financial sustainability in water-supply models.

PIDE Seminar Warns: Only 47% of Pakistanis Have Access to Safe Drinking Water

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) organized a seminar titled "The Thirst for Safety: Water Quality and Public Health in Pakistan" at the A. R. Kemal Hall, Islamabad. The event brought together experts, researchers, and students to deliberate on Pakistan's growing water-quality crisis and its alarming implications for public health and sustainable develop-

ment. The keynote speaker, Dr. Hifza Rasheed, Director General (Water Quality) at the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), presented detailed data and analysis on the state of Pakistan's water resources, while Dr. Shujaat Farooq, Dean (Research) at PIDE, moderated the discussion.

Dr. Shujaat Farooq opened the session by noting that access to safe and clean water is both a basic human right and a cornerstone of national productivity.

Despite Pakistan's extensive natural endowments, he said, the country faces significant challenges including contamination, over-extraction, and institutional weaknesses that make water insecurity one of the nation's gravest public-health challenges.

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She warned that unsafe water causes to an estimated 53,000 child deaths every year and contributes to Pakistan's high rates of stunting—nearly 44 percent of children nationwide. Industrial waste, pesticides, and untreated sewage are polluting surface and groundwater, with arsenic levels dangerously high across southern Punjab and Sindh. Water quality in the Eastern Rivers (Ravi and Sutlej) has sharply deteriorated due to transboundary pollu-

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IJAZ KAKAKHEL

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PIDE seminar warns: Only 47% of Pakistanis have access to safe drinking water

■ STAFF REPORTER
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Eastern Rivers (Ravi and Sutlej) has sharply deteriorated due to transboundary pollution and unchecked industrial discharges. Only 38 percent of domestic wastewater in Pakistan is effectively treated, and the country ranks among the top 10 nations globally with the largest population lacking access to safe water.

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economic losses, exacerbating water contamination and disease outbreaks. PCRWR responded with mobile and solar-powered water-treatment units in flood-hit areas, contributing to cholera prevention and relief operations. She stressed that for every USD 1 invested in water and sanitation, the return is USD 4.3 through reduced healthcare costs and improved productivity, while Pakistan currently loses PKR 93 billion annually due to unsafe water and inefficiencies in the water sector.

Despite incremental progress, Pakistan must accelerate efforts seven-fold to achieve the SDG targets for safe and affordable drinking water by 2030. Dr. Hifza attributed the slow pace to coordination challenges, fragmented policies, weak enforcement, and a lack of financial sustainability in water-supply models. However, she cited promising pilot projects such as community-managed filtration plants in Karachi and metered water-supply schemes in Sargodha, which recover up to 87 percent of operational costs and demonstrate scalable, sustainable solutions.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Shujaat Farooq, Dean (Research) at PIDE, reflected on Pakistan's paradox of abundance and scarcity, emphasizing that the country is blessed with glaciers, rivers, and rainfall, yet continues to face acute water shortages due to over-extraction, lack of pricing mechanisms, and insufficient groundwater recharge.

Only 47% of Pakistanis have access to safe drinking water

MAHNOOR ANSAR

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