


 A photograph showing a woman in a blue headscarf and patterned dress carrying a young child on her back. They are wading through deep floodwaters that reach up to the woman's chest. The background shows more floodwaters and some distant figures, suggesting a rural or semi-rural area affected by flooding.

PAKISTAN'S FLOODS FIASCO

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Pakistan's recent floods fiasco has been turned into substantial losses to human lives, properties, infrastructure, and agricultural crops. Amidst its static havoc, it has engendered dynamic vulnerabilities in terms of shelter, food security, health, crimes, and educational crises. In its broadest sense, it has exposed our vulnerabilities to climate-led shocks, on one hand, and our negligence to such shocks, on the other. These weaknesses notwithstanding, a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy has to be adopted to provide relief to the affectees, on one hand, and reinstate the damaged infrastructure, on the other. In addition, a complete revamping of the existing coping strategies is need of the hour to enhance our resilience to such climate-led catastrophes in future.

Overall, this year, the country has experienced 375.4 mm of rainfall – 2.87 times higher than the national 30-year average of 130.8 mm, turning it into deadly floods. With respect to human losses, as of October 03, around 33 million people have been affected, with a death toll of near to 1600 people and injuries of more than 12000. Likewise, 81 districts out of 160 districts have been affected. Likewise, around 1,921,622 houses are damaged, with 765,162 houses are fully destroyed, and 1,135,829 are partially damaged. Thus, it has turned a sizeable fraction of the affectees shelter less, with most of them being faced with lack of clean drinking water and sanitation facilities, implying higher health hazards. In particular, the presence of stagnant water is expected to increase the number of patients of water-borne diseases like dengue, malaria, diarrhea, skin infections, cholera,

and hepatitis. This risk is further exacerbated by the damage to around 14,000 health facilities which has made it extremely challenging to access to the health-care services. Similar is the case with education as nearly 19,000 schools have been damaged, leaving millions of children out of schools.

With regard to food, the situation is not very different as floods have severely shrunk the existing food supply, amid the pre-existing inflationary pressures. For instance, floods have destroyed the storages of wheat, sugar, fruits, vegetables etc., along with a severe damage to the livestock. Besides reduction in current stocks, dents on the supply of food items would continue in the coming months as around 3.6 million of acres of crops have been damaged, including 65 percent of Pakistan's main food crops and 70 percent of its rice crops. Likewise, around 45 percent of the agricultural land has been spoiled, with waters still existing in the fields. This combined with damages to the storages of fertilizers would retard the sowing of kharif crops, specifically wheat as the planting season of wheat is expected to start in October. The disruptions to food supply have been further augmented by the damages to more than 375 bridges and about 12,735 kilometers of roads. All these would boost food inflation further which was around 26 percent before floods, owing largely to Covid-19 pandemic, Russia-Ukraine war, domestic economic crisis, and rapid depreciation of the Rupee. In case of vegetables, we have already seen the evidence in terms of voracious hike in the prices of tomatoes,

onions, and other vegetables in the domestic market. Further, shrinking domestic food supplies could boost Pakistan's need for imports of food products, leaving adverse impacts on our current account deficit, value of the Rupee, and inflationary pressures. To sum up, this scenario combined with shrinking incomes due to floods has left more people food insecure.

In addition to societal hurdles, floods have dampened the growth prospects of the economy along with creating stern consequences for poverty levels in the country. For instance, according to a preliminary assessment report, which has been prepared by the World Bank with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Union, poverty rate could increase in the range of 4.5 percent to 7 percent, which will drag 9.9 million to 15.4 million more Pakistanis into poverty. Moreover, the government's primary budget deficit may widen up to 2.8 percent of GDP, with economic growth's projection of 1.4 percent to 2.4 percent, against the target of 5 percent, in the current fiscal year. The reduction in economic growth is expected to be mainly driven by the projected reduction in growth of agriculture to a range of negative 1 percent to negative 2.6 percent, against the previous year growth of 4.4 percent. These losses combined with the total static losses sum up to around \$28 billion, as is estimated by the Planning Commission of Pakistan.

Given this huge economic havoc, it is extremely essential to ponder over the causes of floods in Pakistan. Floods in Pakistan are caused by three factors, i.e. climate change, recurrent deforestation, and encroachment in waterways, especially on banks and shoulders of the rivers. Climate change has been occurring persistently across the globe, with its usual effects are global warming, droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events. According to Climate Risk Index (CRI), Pakistan has been among the top ten countries which have been the most affected by the climate-related catastrophes from 2000 to 2019.

During this period, Pakistan has been exposed to 173 extreme weather events, with the number of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants has been 0.30. Likewise, with a rank of 8th, Pakistan's economic losses stands at \$3.77 billion from 2000 to 2019 which constitute roughly 0.52 per unit of GDP in percentage terms. In other words, we are vulnerable to climate-led catastrophes. Deforestation or tree cover loss in watershed areas and flood plains is another factor which has been exacerbating the impact of floods. In Pakistan, from 2001 to 2021, we have lost 9.75 thousands of hectares (kha) of tree cover, equivalent to a 1% decrease in tree cover since 2000, and 3.56Mt of CO₂ emissions, as is estimated by the Global Forest Watch (GFW). Most of this loss has been caused by fires, with 5.46kha of tree cover loss is caused by fires compared to 4.29kha loss by all other drivers.



Clogging the passages of monsoon waters along with encroachments on banks and shoulders of the rivers is the third reason for floods in Pakistan. In fact, waterways or banks of the rivers are legally “Shamilat Deh” or “villages’ community land” in Pakistan. Individuals have the incentives to seize such areas and utilize it without considering its worst static and dynamic consequences. Alternatively, in Pakistan, there is “Tragedy of the Commons”, a famous economic problem, with respect to “Shamilat Deh”, in general, or waterways and banks of the rivers, in particular. The monsoon waters are only reclaiming their right of ways which, in turn, results in human and economic losses.

A three-fold strategy is needed in order to combat the current situation as well as to prevent such calamities in future. First, relief to the affectees is of upmost importance by providing them with the food, shelter, and social protection. Second, as a medium-term strategy, we have to restrict encroachments in river waterways by enforcing the River Act and making necessary legislation with regard to “Shamilat Deh” in the country. Finally, as a long-term strategy, we need to adapt ourselves to climate change and control deforestation. Only these measures could enhance our resilience to climate-led catastrophes and could be productive in reducing the losses to the public and private properties and precious human lives from the likely floods in future.

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