

Climate Reparations: Money Is Not Enough; Governance Must Change

LAST fall, the 27th Conference of the Parties to the Climate Convention agreed to establish a new loss and damage fund to compensate nations “particularly vulnerable” to the impacts of global warming. The need for such help is clear: according to researchers at the Basque Center for Climate Change, global warming-induced loss and damage in developing nations is already totaling well over \$100 billion annually and will rise up to as much as \$1 trillion per year by 2040.

Pakistan was much on the mind of negotiators at COP 27. Its 235 million people endured unprecedented heat and flooding from March through October 2022. Temperatures remained over 100 degrees Fahrenheit for extended periods of time in much of the country, reaching a record 124 degrees in Jacobabad, a city of over 300,000 inhabitants in the country’s south. Jacobabad suffered levels of heat and humidity above what human beings over the longer term can biologically survive.

Pakistan’s geography illuminates its climate vulnerability. The Karakorum mountains in the north contain the largest area of glaciers outside the polar regions. The mighty Indus River flows from these glaciers down through the entire country to the Arabian Gulf. Pakistan’s west is also ringed with mountains and hills, which feed torrential streams that run west to east across arid areas into the Indus.

The Indus and its tributaries supply the world’s largest contiguous irrigation system, providing subsistence lifelines for many of Pakistan’s people as well as for its agricultural exports. Last year’s extraordinary heat accelerated the melting of glaciers and flood discharge into the great river, as well as turbocharging monsoon rains all over the country.

Precipitation in many areas was five to eight times greater than average. One third of Pakistan’s land area was inundated. The livelihoods of 33 million people were undermined or destroyed. The floods obliterated 15 percent of the rice crop, 40 percent of the cotton harvest, 1.7 million houses, scores of bridges, and 3,200 miles of road.

Pakistan’s government asserted, correctly, that the extreme flooding was directly attributable to predicted climate impacts of global warming. Historically, Pakistan has had little role in greenhouse gas emissions, and today ranks 135th in annual global emissions—less than 1 percent of the world total.

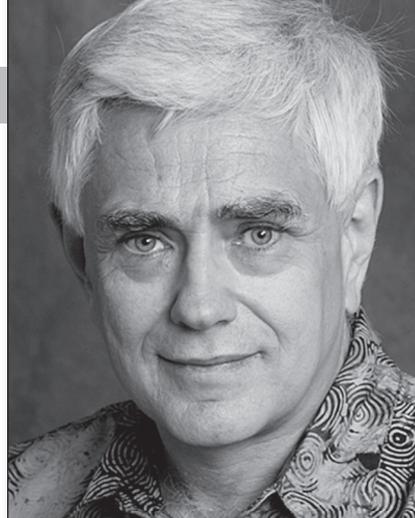
Pakistan’s losses were much on the mind of negotiators at the climate conference

Pakistani journalist Alizeh Kohari notes that the country is a case study of ecologically misguided irrigation approaches. The British in colonial times, and

later the Pakistani government with World Bank and Asian Development Bank finance, focused on increasing export agricultural production in the Indus basin, building north-south canals parallel to the Indus to irrigate areas west of the river.

Much of the infrastructure in this system impeded the path to the Indus of west-east flowing hill torrents. During the monsoon these streams are transformed into floods. Subsequent attempts to correct these problems could not overcome the initial design failures. For example in the case of the ADB-financed north-south Chashma Right Bank Canal, the ADB tried to correct the hill flooding by building channels, but siltation soon blocked the drains, and the streams often meander on their own. Last year the largest single area of flooding was on the west plain of the Indus, which included regions with these hill torrents.

Climate vulnerability is also linked



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to the effectiveness of governance. Corruption, gross mismanagement of resources, and environmentally negligent investment turn climate threats into catastrophes. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated last year, with “high confidence,” that climate change vulnerability depends not just on geography but on “patterns of intersecting socio-economic development,” “unsustainable land use,” and “historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism and governance.”

The London *Financial Times*, examining Pakistan’s recovery prospects in March, characterized its governance as corrupted by oligarchic land-owning and military elites. Pakistan rates 140th in perceived corruption on Transparency International’s list of 180 countries (1 being the least corrupt, 180 the most). The government has intermittently banned—supposedly for subversion—foreign organizations that in past crises provided effective grass roots relief, such as Action Aid, World Vision, and Save the Children. Last September, as the Pakistani government pleaded for billions in climate reparations, it finalized a deal with the United States for \$450 million in equipment and services for the country’s squadrons of F-16 fighter aircraft.

Pakistan’s flood recovery will be a test case of whether increased climate finance, especially the new loss and damage fund, can learn from the chronic failings that have undermined development effectiveness in the past.