

# Framing Pakistan's Agenda for COP22

by Aisha Khan



Climate change discourse has gained prominence in recent years. This increase in momentum is in direct proportion to the warming of the planet. The year 2016 has been recorded as the hottest ever in historical record and the 40th consecutive year that annual temperatures have been above the 20th century average. Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have crossed 400 parts per million and are unlikely to drop below this level in the foreseeable future. These changes are not figments of imagination or alarmist propaganda, but based on scientific research that makes a clear connection between human activity and global warming.

Physical manifestations of climate change worldwide have forced countries to pay serious attention to the causes of global warming and seek solutions acceptable to all for reducing emissions so that temperatures remain well below 2 degrees Celsius pre industrial level. Steps like global stocktaking, ratification of the Paris Treaty in record time, commitments to reduce emissions by the United States and China, and the Kigali Agreement to phase out the use of Hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs), are all signs that climate change has moved from the periphery to center stage.

Pakistan is the eighth most vulnerable country to climate change. These changes are happening at a rapid pace and require accelerated action to develop strategies that can help people cope effectively with its impacts.

The geography of Pakistan contains within it many ecosystems. This includes mountain, coastal and desert ecologies inhabited by populations with varying degrees of socio-economic indicators and coping capacities, as well as cultural barriers and other social constraints that prevent women from playing a meaningful role in decision-making.

Pakistan, like all other countries faced with such challenges, is also in the process of developing two separate approaches to address the multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional impacts of climate change. One is at the temporal level that looks at the immediate issues and how it is going to affect the lives of the people in the immediate future. The solution for near-term issues has to be found at the local level through climate friendly policies, citizen participation, and diligent implementation. The second falls in the realm of spatial approaches. Here, the perspective is long-term, based on deterministic projections of how climate change will affect us in

30-50 years. To face this challenge the actions of one country alone at the local level are not enough. Here, nations big or small, rich or poor, low or high emitters have to work together to agree on modalities on how to keep global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius. This communication has to be undertaken at a global level involving lengthy negotiations to reach agreement acceptable to all.

The Conference of Parties (COP) is the highest negotiating platform under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The key issues on which negotiations take place revolve around who will do what, when and how. The developed countries and developing countries debate over roles and responsibilities and through negotiations try to build consensus on contentious issues. In order to develop more clarity on the way forward, it was agreed that each country would prepare and submit an intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC). The INDC would be a country narrative in which nations would share concerns and constraints faced by them and make commitments to reduce emissions, support adaptation, calculate abatement cost, highlight capacity and technology issues and project financial cost for transition to low carbon pathways among other things.

In 2015, Pakistan was unable to submit its INDC on time, and when it did submit it, the document drew a lot of criticism for its inadequate content.

On 12 December 2015, Pakistan joined the consensus in Paris on the Paris Agreement proclaiming global commitments on climate change. Pakistan has been participating in COPs since 1995. By and large, it seeks to harmonize its positions with the developing countries through platforms such as G77 since most developing countries share common concerns. The Paris Agreement achieved new global consensus on a range of global issues, breaking the deadlock in negotiations, after the failed 2009 COP held in Copenhagen. It consolidated key elements of the Copenhagen Accord and the outcomes of COPs since COP15, and established a system of globally declared national commitments by all member states to reduce GHG emissions and to regularly enhance the level of ambition in terms of quantitative reductions of carbon dioxide releases into the atmosphere. This document was called the Intended Nationally Declared Commitment (INDC)

The INDC is an important document as it reflects the country's stance on adaptation and mitigation. It is therefore important that the commitments made in the INDC have ownership from all stakeholders. This year the government held a series of consultative dialogues to receive input from civil society for preparing the INDC. Subsequently the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change (CSCCC) organized an event in collaboration with

the Ministry of Climate Change and the French Embassy, which brought together public sector and civil society actors from diverse fields including the media, researchers and academia to debate on key elements of the INDC. The event was supported by civil society organizations (Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund & Heinrich Boll Stiftung), and private sector (Jaffer Brothers & Serena Hotel). The objective was to collect a set of recommendations from civil society representing provinces and regions to highlight place based and people centric concerns creating a link between temporal and spatial issues to strengthen Pakistan's stance at the COP22 negotiations in Marrakech.

The interactive dialogue between the public sector and civil society was in line with the Lima-Paris Accord and served the purpose of bringing stakeholders together to discuss and debate issues. Some of the key takeaways include the following recommendations:

- Mainstreaming the National Climate Change policy into all the development plans of the country
- Improve coordination on adaptation and mitigation between federal and provincial institutions with clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Involving private sector as a key stakeholder
- Directing planning and resources towards renewable energy
- Creating a separate ministry for water
- Equating environmental security with national security
- Including experts in COP delegations
- Shifting from reactive to proactive approach
- Developing strategy for reforestation and protecting existing forest cover to prevent recurring floods
- Educating farmers and public at large on climate change causes and impacts
- Showing political will to mobilize media focus on climate change

The different thematic sessions moderated by experts covered important topics and generated a healthy debate. The dialogue played a role in framing Pakistan's agenda at COP22 and building convergence of views on way forward. If maintained, this spirit of cooperation can yield great dividends and pave the way for coordinated action and beneficial outcomes. The recent decision of the government to establish a Climate Change Authority will also provide a platform for discussion and exchange of ideas between stakeholders to develop approaches for building resilience. However, all these initiatives will be useful only if outcomes and recommendations are used to feed policy, take action and show results. Only time will tell if the momentum achieved will be maintained, accelerated or lose speed altogether. □