

Sindh facing rapid environmental degradation
By Mohammad Hussain Khan
Dawn Friday, 05 Jun, 2009 | 05:44 AM PST

HYDERABAD, June 4: Sindh wails over environmental degradation since last several years despite the fact that 2009 was officially declared 'the national year of environment'.

The theme of the World Environment Day 2009 is 'your planet needs you: unite to combat climate change.'

Though environment remains a priority but solution to land degradation, water shortage, Indus eco system, fast depleting forest cover, solid waste management, air pollution and industrial and municipal waste remains a far cry.

The increasing water-logging and salinity, water shortage and forest extinction are adversely affecting food productivity while poor management and injudicious water distribution remain unresolved. Farmers prefer conventional methods rather than switching over to sprinkler and drip irrigation.

Growers in Sindh believe that 40 per cent reduction in per acre yield is due to land degradation. They bring 100 per cent land under cultivation against the requirement of 27 per cent in summers and 54 per cent in winters. They harvest high-delta crops in the absence of proper drainage system and increasing water shortage.

Farmers avoid planting fir trees which check salinity and maintain fertility.

There rarely are any plantations on inspection paths of canals in Sindh while in Punjab there rarely are without any.

The Sindh Abadgar Board chief Abdul Majeed Nizamani feels the rotation of crops by precision land-levelling, lining of watercourses, revival of forests, deep pillowing and tube-well installation along with change in seed and sowing method would be beneficial to farmers. Farmers should avoid sowing high-delta crops even in non-perennial command areas, he added.

Projects like LBOD failed because of faulty design and reservations on correct alignment on RBOD.

Water shortage causes land desertification which hits productivity and riverine forests.

Manchhar Lake is being contaminated because of reduced Indus in-flows and continuous discharge of affluent while fisheries and livestock resources are also depleting. The absence of trees is affecting rains. The river forests spread on 4,634 hectares in 1986 were merely 877 hectares in 2001-02.

Sindh's rich natural resources face environmental issues as forests occupy only 2.5 per

cent land with trees fast decreasing because of overgrazing while sea intrusion devoured 1.2 million acres according to 2001 survey.

The pace of climatic change has accelerated because of global warming and increased industrialisation, say environmentalists.

Indus river flow will be affected by 27 per cent by 2050 due to melting of snow and absence of mangroves. Sindh has lost considerable mangroves because of official neglect.

According to Nasir Panwhar of WWF, Indus Eco-region is on top priority as it covers 65 per cent of Sindh.

River Indus is the only freshwater source and its off-taking canals at Guddu, Sukkur and Kotri barrages stretch from one corner to the other. Kalri Baghar feeder provides water to Karachi, Keenjhar and Haleji lake and Ramsar site. Keenjhar will become another Manchhar if RBOD was delayed.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is yet to take action against violation of Pakistan Environmental Protection Act (PEAP) 1997. It lacks equipments, trained staff and other related infrastructure. The EPA officials merely issue notices to violators of environmental laws.