

Water crisis and national unity

NO amount of urban development can compensate for the absence of water; people won't settle in a city without it. This is also true for a country and a region. A continuous water supply is vital for a nation's survival. Conflicts over water resources arise from water crises, undermining national unity. Addressing water scarcity is crucial for national unity. Pakistan is severely challenged by its water crisis. Erratic weather, reduced rainfall and glacial melt stemming from climate change heavily impact Pakistan. Pakistan's Indus River, reliant on glacial meltwater, faces water shortages due to shrinking glaciers. The World Bank recently reported that rising temperatures in Pakistan could shrink the Indus Basin's glacial mass by as much as 35% before 2050, thus exacerbating water scarcity.

The problem is made worse by inefficient water use and inadequate infrastructure. Specifically, obsolete irrigation systems contribute to major water waste. According to a 2023 report by the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), the country loses approximately 29 million acre-feet (MAF) of water annually due to poor storage and management systems. Moreover, the rising population of Pakistan



Pakistan's water crisis threatens national unity, agriculture and health; addressing it through strategic planning, efficient resource management and innovative solutions is vital for the country's survival and progress."

is straining water resources. Pakistan's water availability has drastically decreased from 5,260 cubic meters per capita in 1951 to about 900 cubic meters in 2023, resulting in a severe water shortage.

This is coupled with the rapid growth of urban areas and industries, which increases water demand and puts a further strain on limited supplies. The Indus Water Treaty signed with India in 1960 governs water-sharing between the two countries. However, disagreements and distrust have stemmed from issues surrounding the project's implementation, especially water flow and dam construction. New reports indicate that the construction of new dams on western rivers in India is a potential threat to Pakistan's water security.

The consequences of water shortages are severe. This crisis intensifies the problem of food insecurity. Food shortages are a direct threat to human survival.

VIEW



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Pakistan's water shortage triggers tensions between provinces vying for agricultural water resources. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that water shortages in Pakistan have already reduced crop yields by 20% over the past decade. A critical concern for the state is ensuring sufficient food to maintain peace and unity.

The lack of access to safe drinking water has reached crisis levels. This crisis is best exemplified by Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan. Citizens face lengthy queues for fresh water, resulting in health issues from unsafe drinking water. Unsafe drinking water causes widespread cholera, typhoid and diarrhoea, devastating citizens' health. Waterborne diseases adversely impact close to 53,000 children in Pakistan every year, says UNICEF. Furthermore, provincial pressure on the federal government for water resources intensifies inter-provincial conflicts.

Pakistan's success as a federation depends on resolving its water crisis to foster harmony between provinces. This water crisis presents a significant challenge for the federal government. The federation's structural integrity is threatened by internal conflict caused by competing provincial needs. National stability and progress are jeopardized by disagreements over water distribution within the federation. Recent inter-provincial disputes over water have highlighted the increasing lack of trust between provinces on water issues.

A multi-pronged approach is vital for Pakistan to address its water crisis and build national unity. Large and small dams can be built to store excess water during the monsoon season. The Diamer-Bhasha and Mohmand Dam projects are moving in the right direction; however, their timely completion is necessary.

Upon completion, the Diamer-Bhasha Dam is projected to add 6.4 MAF of storage and 4,500 MW of electricity generation, according to official figures. It's crucial to promote efficient water use across agriculture, industry and households. Techniques such as drip irrigation and laser land levelling can significantly reduce water wastage. The PCRWR suggests that employing modern irrigation techniques could conserve as much as 40% of agricultural water usage. Additionally, we need to develop a system for monitoring groundwater to prevent overuse in both rural and urban areas. Coastal regions, such as Karachi, can ease their water crisis through wastewater recycling and desalination plant implementation. Pakistan could emulate the successful desalination technologies used in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. It is also crucial to firmly enforce regulations to prevent water theft and illegal connections. The 2018 National Water Policy's success hinges on effective implementation, despite its merits.

Water conservation awareness programs can inspire collective action to save water. These campaigns can greatly benefit from the involvement of schools, media and community organizations. Specifically, awareness programs in rural Sindh have effectively reduced water wastage. Water-sharing disputes with India necessitate a prioritization of diplomatic solutions. To ensure fair treaty implementation, a neutral third-party mechanism could be created. The World Bank and similar international organizations can help resolve outstanding problems. The international community must pressure India to end its water manipulation of Pakistan.

Advanced technologies like remote sensing and GIS can help in better water resource monitoring and allocation. Furthermore, real-time weather and water data delivered by mobile apps to farmers improve water-use efficiency. A nation's stability and progress hinge on unity and water access is key to achieving it. Pakistan faces a critical water crisis impacting agriculture, drinking water access and its federal system. Sustainable solutions and addressing the root causes of Pakistan's water crisis can help the country overcome this challenge and foster national unity. The time to act is now; the survival of the nation depends on it. Pakistan's water security and national unity can be bolstered through strategic planning, technological innovation and collaboration.

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