

CLIMATE CHANGE: AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO PAKISTAN

Outline

Thesis Statement:

Climate change is not merely an environmental problem for Pakistan; it is an existential threat that undermines the nation's economy, social stability, and ecological survival. By intensifying floods,

droughts, and resource insecurity, it is eroding the very foundations of Pakistan's statehood. However, with proactive adaptation, institutional reforms, and climate diplomacy, this existential crisis can still be averted.

1- Understanding The Existential Threat

- Meaning of "existential threat" — a danger to the survival of the state and its people
- Pakistan's high vulnerability due to geography, economy, and dependency on natural resources
- Climate change as a multiplier of existing weakness

2- Scientific and Environmental Evidence of Crisis

- NDMA 2024 data: increase in climate-induced disasters
- Rising temperatures, glacial melt, and erratic rainfall

c) Indus River system under stress - lifeline turning fragile

3- Economic Insecurity as the Core of Existential Threat

- a) Agriculture losses leading to food insecurity and rural poverty
- b) Infrastructure collapse, GDP decline, and trade imbalance
- c) Energy shortage and fiscal burden from recurring disasters

4- Social and Political Dimensions of the Threat

- a) Climate - induced displacement and urban migration
- b) Rising social inequality and regional tensions
- c) Strain on governance and public institutions

5- Environmental Degradation and Health Crisis

- a) Air and water pollution worsening living conditions
- b) Spread of diseases, malnutrition, and

health system collapse
c) Ecological imbalance undermining long-term survival

6- Counter-Argument and Rebuttal

a) Argument: Climate change is global, not Pakistan-specific

b) Rebuttal: Weak resilience, poor governance, and fragile economy make Pakistan's case exceptional

7- National and International Responses

a) National Climate Change Policy 2021, Green Pakistan Programme

b) Ten Billion Tree Tsunami, NDMA reforms, renewable energy initiatives

c) Diplomatic success: Loss and Damage Fund at COP28

8- Recommendations: Preventing The Existential Collapse

a) Strengthening adaptation through climate-resilient infrastructure

- b) Inland governance and agricultural reform
- c) Renewable energy transition and emission control
- d) Disaster management integration and public education
- e) Climate diplomacy and regional cooperation

9- Conclusion

- a) Reaffirming climate change as a test of Pakistan's survival
- b) Urging collective, immediate, and sustained action

Main Essay

Climate change has emerged as one of the gravest challenges confronting

Pakistan today. It is not only an environmental crisis but a direct assault on the survival of the nation's people, economy, and ecosystem. The phrase "existential threat" refers to a danger so severe that it endangers the very continuity of a state and society. In Pakistan's case, this threat is already unfolding. The floods of 2022, which displaced 33 million people and caused over \$30 billion in damages, demonstrated how vulnerable the country has become. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, glacial melt, and prolonged droughts are no longer sporadic events but recurring realities. Climate change is undermining agriculture, destabilizing communities, and deepening economic insecurity. It has moved beyond being a slow environmental process to becoming a national survival crisis.

Hence, addressing climate change is not a matter of environmental policy alone - it is a question of existence.

Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change stems from a combination of geographical exposure and economic fragility. Located at the crossroads of arid and glacial zones, the country depends heavily on the Indus River system for food, water, and energy. This dependence makes it extremely sensitive to temperature variations and rainfall patterns. The term "existential threat" thus becomes relevant because the changing climate is disrupting every essential element of Pakistan's survival - its water sources, agricultural productivity, and human security. Unlike nations with diversified economies and resilient institutions, Pakistan's survival hinges on its environment, which climate change is now destabilizing.

Scientific evidence reinforces the scale of this crisis. According to the National Disaster Management Authority's (NDMA) 2024 report, Pakistan has faced more than 350 climate-

involved disasters in the last five years, including floods, droughts, and heatwaves. The 2022 floods submerged one-third of the country, destroyed 2 million homes, and displaced millions. The Pakistan meteorological Department observed a 1.1°C temperature rise since 1960, with heatwaves doubling in frequency. The glaciers in Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are melting at alarming rates, increasing the risk of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs). This ecological disruption threatens the Indus River Basin, the lifeline that sustains agriculture, energy generation, and human consumption. When a country's rivers, farmlands, and settlements are all at risk, the term "existential threat" becomes not a rhetoric but a fact.

The economic repercussions of climate change amplify this existential danger. Agriculture, which employs 40% of the population and contributes significantly to GDP,

is highly sensitive to climate fluctuations. Floods and droughts alternately destroy crops and erode fertile soil. The Asian Development Bank warns that Pakistan's GDP could decline by nearly 9% by 2050 if adaptation remains slow. The 2022 floods alone wiped out over 4 million acres of farmland and reduced key crop yields such as cotton and wheat by nearly half. This agriculture decline causes food shortages and price inflation, ~~and~~ eroding household incomes. Infrastructure losses further drain national finances, as each disaster forces diversion of funds from development to relief. Power stations, roads, and irrigation system collapse under extreme weather, aggravating the energy crisis. This cycle

of destruction and reconstruction traps Pakistan in perpetual economic instability, weakening its capacity to survive and progress.

Climate change also threatens Pakistan's social and political fabric. As natural resources shrink, people are forced to migrate from rural to urban areas in search of livelihood. The NDMA estimates that nearly 8 million Pakistanis were displaced in 2022 alone. This mass migration strains urban infrastructure, increases unemployment, and triggers housing crises. Cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad are already overburdened; further migration heightens resource competition and social tension. In Sindh and Balochistan, disputes over water distribution and agricultural land have already led to local conflicts. The resulting instability extends beyond society to governance, as institutions struggle to respond to

simultaneous humanitarian, economic, and political crises. In this sense, climate change is not just a natural phenomenon - it is a force that destabilizes the foundations of state authority and public order.

Environmental degradation and health hazards deepen this existential challenge. Air pollution in urban centers has reached hazardous levels, worsened by rising temperatures and deforestation. Water scarcity and contamination have reduced access to clean drinking water for millions. Stagnant floodwaters and rising humidity have led to the spread of vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria. The World Health Organization declared Pakistan's post-flood health emergency one of the most severe in South Asia. Malnutrition, displacement, and loss of livelihoods collectively strain the healthcare system and weaken human

capital. A nation battling disease, poverty, and ecological decline simultaneously cannot sustain long-term survival — making climate change an existential threat in every sense.

Some argue that climate change is a global phenomenon and that Pakistan, contributing less than 1% to global greenhouse emissions, is a victim rather than a cause. While this argument is partially true, it ignores Pakistan's exceptional vulnerability. Developed nations, despite facing the same climatic changes, have greater adaptive capacity through technology, infrastructure, and resources. Pakistan's fragile economy, poor governance, and lack of preparedness magnify the impact of every disaster. This means that while climate change may be global in nature, its consequences are disproportionately

existential for Pakistan due to internal weaknesses.

Nevertheless, Pakistan has made progress in acknowledging and addressing the crisis. The National Climate Change Policy (2021) outlines key strategies for mitigation and adaptation. The Green Pakistan Programme and Ten Billion Tree Tsunami have contributed to reforestation and soil conservation. NDMA's disaster management reforms and the establishment of early-warning system have enhanced preparedness. Internationally, Pakistan's strong diplomatic advocacy at COP28 led to the creation of the Loss and Damage Fund, securing financial support for climate-affected developing nations. These initiatives reflect growing awareness and

partial progress. However, their effectiveness depends on sustained political will, transparent implementation, and long-term planning - areas where Pakistan has historically faltered.

To avert this existential crisis, Pakistan must undertake structural reforms that move from reaction to resilience. First, adaptation infrastructure must be prioritized. Building flood-resistant roads, drainage systems, and embankments will prevent repeated damage. Water governance reforms are vital: reservoirs, dams, and modern irrigation must regulate water flow and prevent both floods and droughts. Second, agricultural transformation through climate-smart techniques, such as drought-resistant seeds and drip irrigation, can protect food security. Third, the renewable energy transition is crucial. Solar, wind, and hydropower investments can reduce

emissions, cut fuel imports, and stabilize energy supply.

Fourth, education and awareness are key to creating a climate-conscious society. Incorporating environmental studies into school curricula and promoting local resilience programs will empower communities to adapt independently. Fifth, institutional coordination between federal and provincial governments must improve to ensure efficient policy execution. Climate diplomacy should remain a central pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy, advocating for financial and technological support from developed nations under the principle of climate justice.

In conclusion, climate change represents an existential threat to Pakistan not because of its geography alone but

because it strikes at the core of national survival - its economy, ecology, and people. Each flood, drought, and heatwaves exposes how fragile the systems sustaining the country have become. Yet within this crisis lies an opportunity. By aligning national development with environmental sustainability, strengthening resilience, and fostering public awareness, Pakistan can convert vulnerability into strength. The time for incremental measures has passed; decisive action is now essential. Climate change may be a global challenge, but for Pakistan, it is a matter of existence versus extinction.