UPSCALED: A TREE FOR EVERYONE ON THE PLANET

In 2014, Imran Khan — who was building his reputation as a state politician in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — launched a programme called the 'Billion Tree Tsunami'. A roaring success, it created half a million jobs and even came in under budget. The programme, and he, soon evolved into something much bigger.

If you look closely, the hills of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have turned green. In the space of just three years, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government led a community-geared project to plant well over one billion trees across 350,000 hectares and unleash natural regeneration. The Billion Tree Afforestation Project (BTP) created half a million jobs, revived the forest biodiversity, engaged the local communities and energised the youth to become "custodians of a green future". And, just to show off, it came in under budget. WWF, which monitored the programme, heralded it as an environmental, economic and social success, with one of the highest tree survival rates ever recorded for a project of its size. The IUCN called it a "momentous milestone".

Last year, Khan, who has since become Pakistan's prime minister, decided to replicate the state programme's success nationwide, but this time, scaled up by an order of

magnitude. The Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Programme (TBTT) forms the backbone of Khan's broader five-year 'Green and Clean Pakistan' campaign. It's couldn't be more welcome.

The World Bank estimates only about 2% of Pakistan's total area is under forest cover, and of those forests, as much as 1.5% disappear every year. Between 1990 and 2010, Pakistan lost one-third of its trees. Unsustainable management practices, illegal logging and the high dependency of local communities on forests — including for timber, firewood, fodder for livestock and conversion of forests to agricultural land — have driven massive exploitation of indigenous forest. Forests have not been called green-gold by locals for nothing. But things are changing.

Armed with a new generation of better-educated Pakistanis, planting trees has become one of the rare things in Pakistan that is not considered divisive. Under the national TBTT, communities and businesses are incentivised to get planting. Individuals can collect free saplings from over 200 locations across the country. For Malik Amin Aslam, Khan's climate change advisor, the centrepiece of the programme is "job creation for common people through green initiatives".

The first BTP programme in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa boosted business for nursery owners and local farmers who received tree saplings for free. Hundreds of women were trained in modern techniques to prepare and propagate plants in order to sell saplings back to the provincial government's forest department for a profit. Thousands of others benefited from jobs as forest nigehbans, or community-assigned guards, who were charged with

protecting tree enclosures from grazing and fire, and illegal felling by landgrabbers. With diversified livelihood options and improved ecosystem services, the initiative set local development on a positive green path. Now it is TBTT's turn to deliver for Pakistan's people.

To ensure objective verification of TBTT's achievements, Pakistan's Ministry of Climate Change has asked IUCN to act as the lead agency to monitor the programme in partnership with other NGOs. IUCN will also assist with the application of the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM), a participatory planning approach that is used to identify Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) priorities at national and sub-national levels. It will be

needed: the TBTT is a much more complex endeavour than the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa programme, as it traverses diverse landscapes and forestry models across six diverse regions – from mangroves to plantation blocks to natural reserves and urban forestation. The use of ROAM will also enable local communities to play a greater role in restoration planning, ensuring that they can benefit from this pioneering environmental programme and enabling them to become the owners and supporters of this ambitious national initiative.

In July 2019, the Prime Minister's Advisor on Climate Change, Malik Amin Aslam, announced that 150 million trees had been planted within a year under the TBTT.

NATURE'S CLIMATE STATISTICS

Pakistan ranks 135th in terms of its contribution to global emissions. Yet, according to the 2018 Global Climate Risk Index, it is among the 10 countries that will be most affected by a warming world. Climate change-related extreme weather has already cost Pakistan an estimated $3.8 billion since 1998. For instance, the Indus Basin 'super flood' of 2010 killed 1,600 people, inundated an area of 38,600 square kilometers and caused damage estimated at $10 billion. The Karachi heat wave of 2015 led to the deaths of more than 1,200 people. This year, the temperature in the Pakistan city of Nawabshah soared to 50.2°C, the highest temperature ever measured on the planet during April.

Reinstating tree coverage in Pakistan can play an important role in regulating climate locally by cooling the surface,

due to the shade their canopies provide and through evapotranspiration from their leaves. Trees also help increase water infiltration and decrease runoff, thereby reducing the risks of floods.

The TBTT programme will support a new UNDP flood-adaptation initiative called GLOF: the $37 million project, funded by the Green Climate Fund, that will tackle the risks associated with flooding from melting glaciers in the north of the country.

TBTT is also expected to enhance Pakistan's biodiversity goals. Based on a biodiversity impact assessment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's BTAP, IUCN concluded that the precursor project to TBTT had resulted in significant biodiversity gains and contributed to Pakistan's efforts to meet its international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the SDGs and the Bonn Challenge.

KEY FIGURES

$46 MILLION
allocated to the programme so far this year.

Pakistan has dropped to below 5% forest cover.
In total, between 1990 and 2010, Pakistan

LOST ALMOST
33.2% OF IT'S FOREST COVER.

2018 — 2023

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa project cost

$169 MILLION,
employed
~500,000 PEOPLE,
increased forest cover by 6.3% in the region and has, purportedly, helped reduce 40 million tonnes of carbon.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In September 2018, Imran Khan became Prime Minister of Pakistan and immediately launched a 5-year, country-wide 10 billion tree afforestation drive.

SDGs

EXECUTING ENTITY

The TBTT is being executed by the Pakistan government in collaboration with the provincial and other administrative authorities.

LOCATION

Pakistan

FUNDING

Pakistan government: 7.5 billion rupees ($46 million) has been allocated for the programme so far this year.

VIDEOS & STORIES

https://youtu.be/dd34uCCu-6Q

https://youtu.be/wHXvg-wiLbg

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