

# 7th Karachi International Water Conference

## Water, People, Health – Coping with Floods

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### Opening remarks

By

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What is the world today except ecological disasters, dwindling biodiversity, boiling oceans, melting glaciers, polluted ground and surface water. We have unexpected and intense changes in water regimes and water cycles. Seasons are shifting, natural regions have been distorted, there's loss of ecosystems and major threats to rivers. The clarion call now is for returning to nature and to nature-based solutions, free-flowing rivers, breaking the status quo of the dominant capitalist systems that has finally been acknowledged is the principal cause of climate change in the Anthropocene age.

Perceptions about rivers are also changing. Rivers have had a profound influence on civilizational development. They have been invested with personality. They have prehistory, myths, and oral traditions, and we have come full circle that conservation groups are now talking about obtaining legal persona for rivers.

The language of water is changing from water pricing to value of water, from disputes to cooperation and coordination, from consumer goods to global common good, from competition to justice and equity, from transboundary to hydrological cycle. Governing the hydrological cycle as a global common good is now understood. Recognizing our interdependence through both blue and green water flows is now being talked about. People are talking about minimal water requirements of water for a dignified life, not just for production. And new water provision is first to those who are left behind. Redirecting today's massive subsidies that contribute to water's overuse in many sectors and environmental degradation is now being replaced by water saving solutions, protection and restoring freshwater ecosystems.

The recent devastating floods in Pakistan resulted in a loss of valuable lives, caused severe economic and social impact, and led to billions of dollars in damages. The disaster also destroyed infrastructure and led to widespread poverty and a health crisis.

Specifically, the floods caused:

Increased malnutrition.

Rampant spread of waterborne diseases.

The agricultural sector was hit hard, threatening food security.

Today, irresponsible behaviour of sections of people in Pakistan is deepening existing inequalities and propelling new ones. Mismanagement across different sectors, and rapid population growth has left Pakistan quite water-stressed. Adding to this are not merely ecological failures, but also

political failures that determine who gets water and access to water, and how decisions are made.

The urgency to address the interconnections between water, people and health has never been greater than it is now.

This 7th Karachi International Water Conference is designed as a platform for coming up with actionable solutions.

This conference will bring together leading thought leaders, experts, government representatives, private sector, NGOs and community voices on a joint platform of actionable solutions.

This conference focuses on:

Highlighting the less visible, yet deeply interlinking consequences of water on people's well-being and health, and on justice and equity.

Ensuring that the voices most affected and often unheard, are now actually heard.

Action begins with decolonizing our approaches to forge a future where local knowledge contributes to a globally transformative movement for people and water.

Dear friends, the lessons of development were always a one-way street. One learned from the West, now called the North, and brought home these learnings like obedient pupils. We became the implementers of the white man's burden. We loved going to smooth western capitals for learning how development is done, where everything worked, and where we were feted as black and brown people for rising above the superstition, corruption, and backwardness of our poor countries.

We had flawed relations with our neighbors, but our colonizers and their ilk remained our guiders, and their capitals remained our Mecca.

In the past, I too have been part of the glamour and pull of the West and then the North and their slogan, "Think Global, Act Local."

But please, no more. The time for Think Global, Act Local is long gone. We are replacing it with what should have been patently and intuitively obvious: Think Local, then make it the call for Global Action. Think Local, Act Global. And not from global to grassroots. This was my own way of thinking before, but from grassroots to global.

And this shift has been made possible by the thought leadership, debates, arguments, analysis, and sheer cussedness and brazenness with which Hisaar Foundation has worked for 22 years.

We started our interventions with and for communities, respecting and using the collective wisdom and carrying these voices into the corridors of discussions, debates, research, policy, action, and power. It has been absorbing wisdom and building thought leadership on this wisdom. Looking at individual ideas and building them up to collective expression.

Let me take you on Hisaar Foundation's journey, where we have moved from interventions to policy and strategy and now to a people's charter, a living charter on people and water.

On the way, Hisaar Foundation developed a think tank on rational use of water, innovative low-cost and nature-based solutions, a whole series of networks and water partnerships: the Karachi International Water Conference, the Panjwani Hisaar Water Institute which is a public-private partnership among the NED University, Hisaar Foundation, and Panjwani Charitable Foundation. Perhaps the most important part of thought leadership has to be changing the narrative in ways that will change the outcome. It's not sufficient to talk about the existing paradigm but to change the paradigm itself. That is what Hisaar Foundation has excelled in for the last 22 years. We have learned that while contacting the government, working with them, working with corporate sector, and working with institutions, academia, all of those are important, what has to underly all of this is a powerful people's voice and people's will that needs to be expressed. That is why this conference is dedicated to a living charter for water and people.

So, what's ahead for Hisaar Foundation? Currently, with International Water Management Institute, we are working on developing a global water panel on transformative futures. And to get there, we have chosen a route very different from IPCC, which was top-down. We have chosen a bottom-up approach, which means that the first National Water Panel on Transformative Futures has been established in Pakistan.

Its first inaugural meeting was already held in the last year. And this year, the full panel is going to meet during the Pakistan Water Week being organized by IWMI, in which Hisaar Foundation is also a co-host. These are the two next initiatives of Hisaar Foundation.