

Media Update

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UNESCO

PRESS RELEASE

Sustainable Natural Resource Management is important to prevent pandemics in future, say experts

Islamabad, 21 July 2020 – The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in partnership with World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-Pakistan) hosted a webinar on COVID-19 and its relationship with nature – Build Back Better. More than 130 participants including experts, members from industry, academia and students attended the event. It highlighted the challenges and criticality in sustainable natural resource management. The webinar also discussed the opportunities and way forward for effective, sustainable development in Pakistan.

Speaking on the occasion, Patricia McPhillips, UNESCO Representative to Pakistan said that scientists have warned of the link between the mismanagement of biodiversity and ecosystems and the risks of transmission of infectious diseases to humans, including the risk of a pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates this in a dramatic way. Voices at the global level are calling for transformations and alternatives to current environmental practices that are destroying the living fabric of the planet, creating unacceptable inequalities, and threatening our common future. She also said that during lock down in the last few months, it is observed that Co2 levels significantly decreased. However, it was temporary. As businesses and industries are now functional again, we need to strategize and implement how we can keep the carbon emissions as low as possible.

Hammad Naqi Khan, Director General, WWF-Pakistan said that the COVID-19 pandemic is causing huge loss of life and increasing untold suffering of families due the global economic shock that is destroying jobs and livelihoods. The longer the crisis continues, the greater the threat will be to global peace, security and stability. The COVID-19 health crisis reconfirms how people and nature are interlinked, and how our negative impact on the natural world

increases the risk of future pandemics. He was of the view that we must urgently recognize the links between the destruction of nature and human health, or we will soon see the next pandemic. We must curb the high risk trade and consumption of wildlife, halt deforestation and land conversion as well as manage food production sustainably. All these actions will help prevent the spillover of pathogens to humans, and also address other global risks to our society like biodiversity loss and climate change.

The panelists emphasized on the importance of natural resource management for sustainable development. Whenever natural ecosystems and biodiversity are disturbed, it creates problems. Due to population pressure and rapid unplanned urbanization, the natural resources are under immense stress. Many epidemics started when natural ecology was disturbed by humans. Humans have to change their behavior while interacting with natural resources. Youth can play an important role and they are the next generation of conservationists. Government should be giving incentives to the construction companies on green and eco-friendly initiatives. We should be careful when dealing with scientific information as misinformation and infodemic during the last few months proved to be very misleading for the general public. Community participation in conservation with economic benefits for sustainable livelihood has proven to be a reliable and successful model. As businesses and industries are opening again, they need to focus on reducing their carbon footprint and minimize the damage to ecology. From grass root to policy level, a build back better strategy should be adopted.

Dr. Ejaz Ahmed, Director ECO Logical Ltd., Dr. Bilquees Gul, Director, Institute of Sustainable Halophyte Utilization, University of Karachi, Prof. Zabta Shinwari, Vice Chair, World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) and Dr. Babar Khan, Director (Wildlife) WWF Pakistan were panelists who spoke on the importance of sustainable environmental management. The event was moderated by Ms. Nazifa Butt, Manager Climate and Energy Program, WWF-Pakistan.

There were many questions from a highly active and interested group of online participants. From the discussion, action areas for partners' future interventions were identified.

For additional information, please contact Hamza Swati at h.swati@unesco.org or +92 (51) 260 0242

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