

# PROBLEM OF THAR AND KOHISTAN OF SINDH AND SOME SOLUTIONS

BY  
M.H. PAHWAR

1. There are at least two years of no rainfall in every decade when famine conditions occur in Thar and Kohistan.
2. There can also be two consecutive years of scanty rainfall in decade, which also can result into famine conditions.
3. The famine conditions affect about one million cattle and four million goat and sheep in Eastern Desert and Kohistan. Man moves out leaving cattle behind to die. Only those within 40 miles of the irrigated areas are rescued, if animals are not sick and starved. The economic loss is too great to be ignored, but we forget about it, once it rains and make a hue and cry when drought occurs again. We think in terms of people and their plight at social level, their food, clothing, shelter and employment. We do not think of economics of their only possession, the animals. The loss of animals is worth many billion rupees. We feed a few thousand people and think is a great service to mankind.
4. The animal herders move to irrigated areas for food and shelter. They are exploited as labourers at low wage rates and they get compelled to sell their animals at throw away prices. When they return home, they virtually mortgage themselves and their families to buy new animals off-springs, which the whole family grazes to maturity on scanty pasture. We do not realise that these poorest of poorest Sindhis are mortgaged for an amount and a rate of interest, which they can not pay during their lifetime and this becomes a burden of their children. This is worse than slavery.
5. We already know that in eastern desert due to lack of drinking water for animals, herdsmen pay well owners 25% of sale value of animals as their share for water. This is great social injustice and exploitation of poor and solution needs to be found. It is here that Sindh government should intervene and enact laws to help the herders.

6. In Australia, they have wind mill pumping water in galvanised iron sheet tanks and troughs for sheep. Wind mills for power generation are not economical, at wind velocities prevailing in Sindh, but for desert area, their social benefits outweigh economic considerations. It will be a terrible mistake to plan them for power or for that matter solar power. Some NGOs have fancy for these devices. These come under aid and free, but for the same amount of aid, we can ask donors for something better. After all these countries are committed to give certain amount as aid, so why not to spend it usefully, rather than import goods unconomical in their own countries and under experimental stage.
7. I am told that local made wind mills did not perform well in the desert areas. This may be true, but responsibility lies on the officers approving them and costs should not exceed CI and F value of imported ones. This is what WTO and Market Economy is aiming at. It has to be executed in letter and spirit
8. It has been mentioned that Post War reconstruction plans for Sindh in 1945, included railway from Nawabshah to Jaisalmer-Ajmeer and Delhi and another line from Choro to Chachro-Nagar Parker and Ahmedabad. Still another railway line from Dadu to Kamber via foot hills of Kohistan.
9. One of purposes of these railways, besides opening the country, was to shift animals from Thar and Kohistan to safety and provide supplies to desert people during emergency. This purpose had to be kept in view after partition of India and Pakistan. We did not make any alternative plans in fifty seven years.
10. Transport of animals from desert by trucks is neither practical nor economical. Railway wagon can carry up to 50 cattle or 250 sheep and goats at a time to irrigated areas, where feed is readily available. It would have been the cheapest mode of transport.
11. Some European companies were planning to raise alfalfa (lucerne) in Sindh on some 50,000-100,000 acres, harvesting and quickly drying it in sun for 2-3 days and pressing it into high density cubes to be used as animal feed. The project was given up due to political and social conditions existing in Sindh. This type of project needs to be launched for promotion of animal husbandry industry, as well to meet emergency needs of feed for desert area.
12. Besides Thar and Kohistan, we have desertification in 2.12 million acres of riverain area of Sindh, and vast coastal area outside command of Kotri Barrage measuring couple of million acres. The people from these areas are migrating to cities for

employment. They face identical problems as Tharis and Kohistanis do and their problems are no less than those of other two and even worse, as rains bring some relief to formers, but rains are no solution to riverain areas and cause serious problems of flooding, water logging and communications in coastal areas, in addition to malaria and other water borne diseases.

13. Government provides aid or relief to famine stricken people. This humanitarian act is necessary and must be provided. However as we are made to believe that famine conditions are bound to prevail twice in every decade, then thought should have been given it long ago to find permanent solutions. The amounts we spend on charity twice in a decade, can be directed to development of area against periodic drought
14. As a permanent solution the government created autonomous organisation SAZDA. I am not here to comment on what they did and whether were successes or failures, but I only want to say that this 3.7 billion project, did not start with socio-economic studies and much more needed geo-environmental studies. They straight away went in execution of schemes. Thus even if all schemes may be considered a success, they did leave gaps in geo-environmental as well as socio-economic studies and consequently people keep suffering. If any relief came, it was to a few, out of many hundred thousands people
15. When there are two droughts in every ten or eleven years, the need was to concentrate on the problems which recurrently happen.
16. Deserts can not be developed like the river irrigated valleys. They can only be developed by methods used in other deserts. Deserts are and were being tackled by former USSR, South Western States of USA, Western and Southern deserts in China, north African deserts first by French and now by local people with foreign assistance, Great Victoria Desert by Australians and so on. Even Peru, Chile, Argentina and South Africa have been handling their desert problems. Israel has aggressively handled desert problems by their own indigenous methods, as well as copying former USSR and U.S.A. The deserts occupy one third of the land mass of earth and lesson had to be learnt from other deserts and we still can under take this study very seriously, even if it is a some years basic work. Then alone we will be entitled to prepare schemes for execution and will in all probabilities succeed.
17. We cannot become over optimistic with desert. Deserts are living things full of fauna and flora. They will yield what potential they have and we cannot strain them beyond this. If we do, we will

simply kill them. Desert exploitation has to be within limits and improving desert environments and its health is a must, as it is alive.

18. Thar Desert was not always a desert, as it was green savannah only 4,000 years back, in which man domesticated and grazed his animals. When drought came, instead of maintaining it, we put and more animals and finally started destroying fragile vegetation causing present deserts on all sides of Sindh At no cost we should promote its further deterioration by wrong planning. All our plans must fit into environments, should protect them and save desert from final death.