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Managing Water Abundance and it's Scarcity through the Concept of Valuing Water - The Case for Pakistan

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Short Communication

An international buzzword, no longer is climate change an unfamiliar expression [1] for Pakistan. The country remains vulnerable to the negative impact of climate change, henceforth susceptible to changing weather patterns, leading to strategic challenges [2]. With melting of glaciers in the north, because of rising temperature and unusual weather, the monsoon of 2022 proved to be a mayhem for the country. The Secretary General of United Nations, Antonio Guterres described the situation as "the unrelenting effects of epochal levels of rains and flooding [3]." Because of the developing situation, the country is likely to have food and water shortages, having serious considerations for human security. In the words of Finance Minister, Mr. Miftah Ismail, "Pakistan is dealing with the worst effects of climate change which has caused over US $30 billion loss to Pakistan's economy and displacing 33 million people" [4]. According to the United Nations reports, six months post-flooding, greater than 10 million people did not have accessibility to clean drinking water in those areas damaged by the floods [5]. The current monsoon floods of 2024 were no different, because they significantly devastated regions across the country, particularly those in Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan. Heavy rains lead to extensive flooding, damage to the infrastructure and landsliding. As of 29th August, 2024, above-average rainfall was witnessed in the country. Exacerbated by accelerated snowmelt in upper KP, Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir, in accordance with the report issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the recorded death toll was 461 injured people, with 182 being children. Floods damaged 4,889 houses including transportation infrastructure.

Likewise, is the case for water scarcity. Considered as a serious threat, water scarcity in Pakistan continues to impact its economic growth and sustainable development. Moreover, surface and groundwater resources which are the last resort of water supply for the country remain overdrawn, by large for supplying water needed in irrigation. If circumstances stay unchanged by 2025, Pakistan might see an increase in its level of water scarcity [6].

Given the above mentioned background, with reference to managing water abundance and scarcity in Pakistan, it is imperative that the country recognizes how to value our water resources. By valuing water, one recognizes decision-making on the subject of water by people's plural value for water. Being formally endorsed by many national and international organizations [7-10] ***the concept of valuing water can be considered as prioritizing water i.e. proposing a call for action, making decisions which affect water under circumstances in which communities, economic activities and nature make conflicting claims.***

However, while valuing water brings together different groups of researchers and policymakers who have conflictual and complementary agenda's [11], the risk remains that if the concept is practiced as a discursive tool, it will not achieve the genuine change required for water policy management [12]. Built on the Value Landscape Approach (VLA), the theoretical framework [13,14] presents before us a structured approach through which we are able to understand the how, why and what of how decisions regarding water are made. Analyzed through a) assigned water values concentrated on outcomes regarding water (what) (Seymour et al. 2010) [15], b) governmental values through which

decision on water ought to be taken (how) [16,17]; and abstract fundamental values which inform attitudes and actions of people across life (why) [18,19] - the three layer framework comes together to structure value landscapes regarding values endorsed by people and what shapes their decision-making and perspective regarding water governance [13,14,20]. Many organizations adopted this framework, with one milestone being the acceptance of the United Nations "Five Valuing Water Principles," and the 2017 Water Panel led by the World Bank calling for "recognizing" & "embracing water's multiple values to different groups and interests in all decisions affecting water." Similarly, during 2019, through the World Economic Forum, the Netherlands Government also remained active in launching the "Valuing Water Initiative." It aimed to "bring systemic change in the way water is valued in policy, practice, finance and behavior" [7].

For Pakistan, valuing water would mean introducing something similar. One initiative could be the "Climate Leadership Forum" launched by the Government of Pakistan. Built on the principles of inclusiveness, diversity, discussion, dialogue, engagement and considerable feedback, the convention would aim to identify and recruit individuals who can contribute towards developing a blueprint for addressing climate change in context of the country's problem of water abundance and its scarcity.

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