

Our travel footprint

Naeem Sadiq

The News April 5, 2016

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/110366-Our-travel-footprint>

Pakistan may be a minor defaulter in creating the crisis of 'climate change'. Of the 32100 million tonnes of deadly Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emitted globally every year, we can only be blamed for some 200 million tonnes. While these numbers provide some consolation, they fail to suggest the fact that Pakistan is and will be one of the worst affected recipients of the 'climate change'. There is therefore an urgent need to rethink and redesign the way we live, work, travel and develop our infrastructure.

Carbon Dioxide emissions account for more than 80% of the infamous heat-trapping greenhouse gases. About 44% of all the emitted CO₂ gets accumulated in the atmosphere, 26% in the ocean, and 30% on land. With forests covering only 2% of Pakistan's land area, the CO₂ emissions are constrained to remain suspended, rather than being absorbed by the trees. Pakistan's combat against 'climate change' must therefore begin by hugely investing in preservation of old and development of new forests. A 10 year program to match the world average of 30% forest area should be aimed at. To curb our obsession for building housing estates for the rich, the law should mandate growing a forest on an equivalent area for every housing estate.

Factors that cause long-term 'climate change' and those that generate more immediate local pollution are deeply related. Energy generation, industrial processes, transportation and household activities are the principal contributors in both cases. While Pakistan needs to work on each of these issues this, article will primarily focus on reducing our transportation related carbon footprint.

As of March 2016, Pakistan had approximately 7.5 million four-wheel and 14 million two-wheel registered vehicles. This translates into roughly 39 million tonnes of carbon emissions per year, which is 19.5% of Pakistan's total CO₂ emissions. These can be reduced by as much as 10-15 % if our elite and our bureaucracy can be convinced to undertake the following actions.

Every day, Pakistani citizens make millions of completely avoidable visits to government offices for receipt or payment of dues, submission or collection of documents or availing various certificates and services. Often these relate to passports, CNIC, vehicle registration, property, utilities, licenses, taxes, complaints,

approvals etc. In Karachi alone, 4.7 million vehicle owners make 2-4 visits every year to pay their annual motor vehicle tax. Some 8 million senior citizens make 96 million visits each year to the National Saving Centres for collection of profit on their investments. Likewise, 2.6 million pensioners queue up before various national banks and post offices to collect their dues every month. Many organisations hire staff whose full time job is to visit government departments for exchange of routine information, documents or payments.

To hold on to such archaic bureaucratic processes is ludicrous. The technology to receive or make any payment or exchange any document without leaving one's home has been around for a long time. There are at least half a dozen mobile phone money transfer systems that the government could use to receive and deliver all payments. Visiting government offices is a colonial practice that ought to be questioned and eliminated wherever possible. Simplifying transactions and eliminating unnecessary visits could easily result in an annual saving of approximately 3-4 million tonnes of travel related carbon emission – and much more in terms of cruelty to customers.

Carbon-emitting, coughing and choking vehicles define the new smoggy appearance of our roads and cities. We could cordon off and declare many areas in every city (such as the Saddar and I.I Chundrigar Road in Karachi) as exclusive to 'Pedestrians and Cyclists' only. This requires large parking lots outside each 'vehicle-free' zone, and services like 'cycles for rent' and shuttle buses to support intra-zone travel. Most UK towns provide excellent 'park and ride' facilities. Our elite is only too happy to avail these facilities in foreign lands but unwilling to adopt the same concepts at home.

The government ought to enforce compliance of vehicle emission standards. Cars above 1500 cc should be banned in a country that is short on fuel and high on pollution. The government ought to focus on developing efficient public transport to enable all citizens to travel with dignity. Such policies will not just help in reducing carbon emissions but also in creating equity in society.

Citizens could think of yet other ways of cutting down on carbon emissions. Twice a day, our roads get choked because of thousands of cars carrying a single child to or from a school. The schools can insist on a system of car pooling, where at least 3 to

4 kids of the same location share their cars on rotation. The environmental initiative of sharing some 'goodies' and giving up on others could best come from the class that has the most to spare.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/110366-Our-travel-footprint>