

Climate change: Human interference blamed for increasing temperatures in Karakoram national park

Greater agricultural activity and urbanisation posing threat to ecosystem.

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Published: June 8, 2012

ISLAMABAD: The Central Karakoram National Park (CKNP) in Gilgit-Baltistan is getting warmer due to increased rainfall and changing snow patterns.

This was the crux of a study conducted by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Italian government. The study was unveiled on Thursday at a seminar on “Consultation on Climate Change and Ecosystem Assessment of the CKNP Region”.

It explores the options available to inhabitants for adapting to climate change and to develop pilot projects in the near future. The study highlights drastic changes in the region’s climate, exacerbated by a shift in land use patterns with greater focus on agriculture and increased urbanisation have the trend.

The fauna and flora of the park are also under threat, with disappearing plant species, endangered wildlife and lower fruit production, mainly due to human interference and deforestation.

Dr Vaqar Ahmad, research fellow at SDPI, said an integrated study to explore issues and remedies through a social, economic and environmental appraisal for the CKNP region should be carried out.

He said environmental appraisal of projects must be made a pre-requisite — no such study has been carried out for Diamer-Bhasha Dam, Bungi Dam or public sector development programmes in the region. Dr Ahmad said the focus on the socio-economic impact of climate change must go beyond poverty and address dimensions of food security.

China is investing \$100 billion in neighbouring XinJiang province over the next five years for development and Pakistan must assess the environmental costs associated with it, he added.

Haruko Okusu, Programme Officer at UNEP, said that CKNP region is highly vulnerable to impact of climate change and efforts must be made to improve the local communities’ quality of life. Conservation of environment, architectural and cultural heritage of the region is also essential.

She said it is important to enhance the capacity of local communities and institutions to adapt to climate change for sustainable development in the area.

Shafqat Kakakhel, former United Nations assistant secretary general, said the impact of climate change is likely to accelerate in the region and we must act fast to cope with challenges and conserve the environment and preserve culture and biodiversity of CKNP region which is of global importance.

At the end of the session, speakers recommended establishing a steering committee under the purview of the ministry of climate change to protect biodiversity and the region’s ecosystem.

Published In The Express Tribune, June 8th, 2012.

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