

# Summit on the Global Agenda 2014

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For the last seven years, every November, around 800 thought leaders from around the world convene in the United Arab Emirates for the World Economic Forum's Summit on the Global Agenda. Knitted as a global knowledge network of around 80 Global Agenda Councils on a wide range of subjects, the event is widely recognized as the world's largest brainstorming event. A handful of us, Pakistanis, are also invited each year.

Typically every year, trends with regard to challenges and opportunities of the upcoming year come under discussion and are outlined in an accompanying report, the "Outlook on the Global Agenda". This year, the Outlook Report released at the event outlined 10 "global trends" or "key challenges" facing the world over the next 12-18 months. These challenges were compiled and ranked using the Delphi method.

The report ranked them in order of priority, but here I cluster them and reflect on their relevance to Pakistan.

I will club the economic challenges, "deepening income inequality" and "persistent jobless growth" into one cluster. These topped the list of global concerns in the report. Both are hard outcomes to gauge economic performance against, and as such, are deeply relevant to Pakistan. Our country has a large population of youth. With the current rate of population growth, we need around 3 million jobs a year. Paradoxically, however, the job market may be shrinking. Without economic opportunities, our youth is vulnerable to exploitation. Today, the roots of extremism, radicalization and mafia activity in the country can simply be traced back to the well-established patterns of exploitation of the unemployed youth. Therefore, the economic performance of governments should be gauged, not just in terms of monetary and fiscal targets, but also in relation to progress on job-relevant indicators.

In the second cluster, I will group three issues in the report, all of which relate to environmental degradation: rising pollution, increased occurrence of severe weather events and increasing water stress. Here again, Pakistan epitomizes serious risks. Air pollution levels are considerably high in urban areas. Particulate matter smaller than 10 micrometres (PM<sub>10</sub>) stands at 91.1 microgram/cubic meter in most major cities of Pakistan. This is way above the safe level of 15 microgram/cubic meter annually. The impact of severe weather events in Pakistan is unprecedented even by global standards. The 2010 deluge, the 2011 Sindh floods and flash floods every year since then, rainfall anomalies, and the recent drought in Thar are all manifestations of climate warming.

Pakistan's surface water availability is projected to decline drastically—from 5260 cubic meters per capita in 1951 to 1100 by 2035. Climate warming-induced changes in the mass balance of the Karakorum glaciers have reduced the flow of water down the River Indus, which is the backbone of Pakistan's agrarian economy. Beyond water security, water stress has manifold implications for human security—in particular food and energy security, and can compound our existing problems. We must invest in mitigation, early warning and disaster preparedness.

Climate change-triggered supply scarcity of water is likely to be compounded by demand pressures, in particular, the country's uncontrolled population. Water scarcity and its ensuing complications can stoke conflict at several levels such as rivalries between feudal families over availability of water for their crops, disagreements between Pakistan's landed vs. manufacturing sector elite over use of water for irrigation vs. hydroelectric power generation, and tensions between the provinces over control of water resources. We see beginnings of all this even now.

Lack of leadership is another global issue outlined in the report; 86% of the respondents in the survey on the Global Agenda agreed that we have a leadership crisis in the world today. 78% of Brazilian and 83% of the Indian respondents regarded dishonest leadership as a serious issue. This is a no-brainer in Pakistan's list of challenges.

In addition to challenges, the report also outlined transformational opportunities related to technology, science and innovation. Science and Technology features low on the Government of Pakistan's list of priorities. Absence of a long-term vision for national development and the recognition of its dependence on investments in Science and Technology has been one of the core impediments. We need to revamp the Government's stewardship agency for the S&T sector and link it with long-term planning to exploit this potential.

The current backlash against globalization and a retreat to nationalism and regionalism are two other issues flagged by the report. While the world is getting increasingly integrated economically, severing ties and political isolation creates risks in an interconnected world where complex interdependences characterize relationships. The interconnectedness factor in the light of the current Ebola crisis has also underscored the importance of the health sector in the economy. Emerging and reemerging infections do not need passports to cross borders. They can devastate economies and can be detrimental to human wellbeing. There is a long road ahead for Pakistan in terms of health systems strengthening. Our shortcomings in Polio eradication can be exemplified manifold if Ebola was to strike.

Finally, weakening of representative democracy was also one of the top 10 global challenge trends for 2015. The report stated that "mechanisms are in place for systems to be more democratic than ever. Yet there is disconnect between citizens and the officials that represent them". Those of us, Pakistanis, at the meeting could relate to this, but on a positive note, there are also some important developments in the country such as awakening of the societal political culture, an open media, and progress in constitutional separation of powers. This notwithstanding, we must understand that democracy is not just about 'majority rule'; it is also about institutional democratic practices, democratic values and individual practices of consensus-building, and that many attributes of democracy are deeply interlinked with principles of good governance. We must appreciate that democracy, as understood conventionally, may be a necessary condition for good government, but it is certainly not a sufficient condition.

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