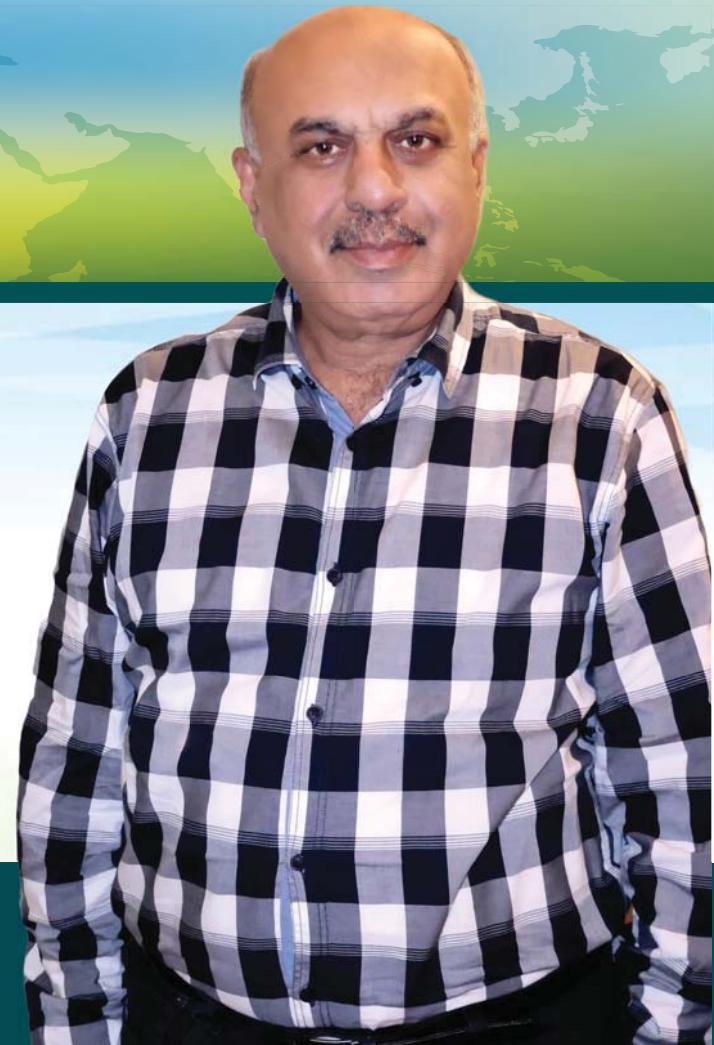


EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

“ With severe resource constraints, multi-stakeholder strategic partnerships are of immense significance. The government should take a leading role by creating spaces to forge such partnerships. Pakistan can generate resources through new avenues of green businesses and funds by developing impactful projects via effective partnerships ”

Mr. Naseer Ahmed Memon

Renowned Development Professional and Expert on Climate Change, Disaster Resilience & Public Policy



ICMA: From your work in flood rehabilitation programs, what lessons should guide Pakistan's flood management strategies?

Naseer Memon: Pakistan should take several measures to improve flood management. First, natural waterways must be cleared to let floods flow unhindered. All river beds should be freed from encroachments, including illegal settlements. Natural waterways occupied under villages, agriculture fields, roads, etc., should be mapped, and bypass flow channels should be constructed along with adequate cross drainage structures to allow rain and flood water to flow freely.

Second, District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) should be empowered, equipped, and strengthened through trained and experienced full-time human resources.

Third, community-level flood response should be strengthened through a package of resilient communities. Finally, public and private infrastructure, such as roads, houses, and public utility buildings, should be constructed as climate-resilient structures, and retrofitting of vulnerable structures should be planned and executed.

ICMA: What is the most critical gap in Pakistan's disaster preparedness, and how can it be addressed?

Naseer Memon: Local level leadership is crucial as it can plan flood management and take precautionary measures and response actions on the ground. Ideally, Union Council level flood management plans should be developed to align with the local context, for example, sociology, geography, and other relevant factors.

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ICMA: Hard embankments often fail. What nature-based solutions could better protect communities?

Naseer Memon: Flood vulnerability of different communities varies with their location. Earthen embankments, tree plantations, and proper drainage can reduce the vulnerability of communities. Flood-prone villages should be provided with earthen ring bunds, with tree plantations at their bases. Some local natural materials, such as leaves and trunks, can also be used to reinforce the soil bunds.

ICMA: Working with rural communities, which climate adaptation practices have the greatest impact for farmers?

Naseer Memon: Farming practices should be adjusted to new realities, such as selecting appropriate crops and varieties, adjusting sowing times according to changing climate, increasing water efficiency, constructing elevated granaries, and establishing seed banks. These could be some of the important adaptation measures.

ICMA: Human activities like deforestation worsen climate disasters. What policy changes are most urgent?

Naseer Memon: Deforestation has caused significant damage in mountainous and riverine areas. It has increased flood intensity by accelerating flow velocity and soil erosion. Arresting deforestation does not require new policies but strict enforcement of existing ones. However, since very powerful actors are behind this destructive activity, laws and policies often become ineffective.

ICMA: Water scarcity is a pressing challenge. What immediate steps can secure water for communities and farmers?

Naseer Memon: Pakistan ought to focus on increasing water efficiency and water productivity. Our age-old infrastructure and farming practices waste huge quantities of irrigation water. The country needs to reduce the acreage of water-thirsty crops. Groundwater is being recklessly pumped during surface water shortages. Groundwater monitoring and regulation are essential before we deplete our rapidly dwindling aquifers.

Due to largely non-recoverable heavy seepage losses, the productivity of major crops is much lower than in neighboring countries such as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Turkiye. Pakistan could increase crop production by 50 to 100 percent using the same amount of land and water. This would help avoid inter-provincial conflicts and promote harmony among the people of Pakistan.

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It is high time that private sector regulators ensure the implementation of national ESG standards
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ICMA: From your experience in global forums like HCT and WHS, which best practices can improve disaster response in Pakistan?

Naseer Memon: Pakistan should allow humanitarian organizations to operate smoothly in the country by providing an enabling environment while maintaining necessary regulation. These organizations possess international experience and knowledge that can help Pakistan develop its systems and resources to manage disasters. All preparedness plans and related actions should be exercised during peacetime to mitigate the impact of disasters.

ICMA: Corporate Pakistan is increasingly adopting ESG. What practical steps can make these initiatives impactful?

Naseer Memon: The private sector in Pakistan is still taking baby steps due to weak regulation. Whatever positive developments are occurring happen mainly because of pressure from international customers. It is high time that private sector regulators ensure the implementation of national ESG standards. Strict monitoring and appropriate incentives will encourage the private sector to dedicate attention and resources to this front.

ICMA: Partnerships are essential. How can government, private sector, and civil society work together to accelerate Pakistan's green transformation?

Naseer Memon: With severe resource constraints, multi-stakeholder strategic partnerships are of immense significance. The government should take a leading role by creating spaces to forge such partnerships. Pakistan can generate resources through new avenues of green businesses and funds by developing impactful projects via effective partnerships. Policies, incentives, and opportunities can encourage different actors to work together to promote green transformation across various sectors.

The Editorial Board thanks Mr. Naseer Ahmed Memon, Renowned Development Professional and Expert on Climate Change, Disaster Resilience & Public Policy for sparing his precious time to give an exclusive interview for Chartered Management Accountant Journal.