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Abstract

Environmental degradation simply refers to the deterioration of an environment due to the depletion of resources that make our surroundings livable. The major factors behind environmental degradation involve humans who indulge in modern urbanization, industrialization, overpopulation growth, and deforestation. Nowadays, several kinds of human activities are the leading factors causing environmental degradation in Murree, Pakistan. Unplanned housing constructions threaten the existing environment and green spaces. This paper aims to address the neglect of environmental values and exceed the unplanned and growing residential and commercial buildings in rural areas. Moreover, all these things may become a big turn-off for most of the tourists. In order to achieve the long-term goal and bring about sustainable progress. Addressing this issue is crucial to preserving the natural beauty, greenery, and safety of Murree. The study offers recommendations for policy improvement and future research direction.

Key Words: Environmental Degradation, Tourism, Sustainable Development, Unplanned Construction, Murree

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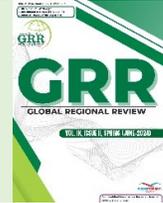
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Title

The Impact of Unplanned Housing Constructions on Environmental Degradation at Murree, Pakistan

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Abstract

Environmental degradation simply refers to the deterioration of an environment due to the depletion of resources that make our surroundings livable. The major factors behind environmental degradation involve humans who indulge in modern urbanization, industrialization, overpopulation growth, and deforestation. Nowadays, several kinds of human activities are the leading factors causing environmental degradation in Murree, Pakistan. Unplanned housing constructions threaten the existing environment and green spaces. This paper aims to address the neglect of environmental values and exceed the unplanned and growing residential and commercial buildings in rural areas. Moreover, all these things may become a big turn-off for most of the tourists. In order to achieve the long-term goal and bring about sustainable progress. Addressing this issue is crucial to preserving the natural beauty, greenery, and safety of Murree. The study offers recommendations for policy improvement and future research direction.

Keywords: [Environmental Degradation](#), [Tourism](#), [Sustainable Development](#), [Unplanned Construction](#), [Murree](#)

Introduction

Like many other developing countries, Pakistan has been frequently subject to a variety of natural hazards. A major part of the country is mountainous which is geographically active, *Murree* is one of them. It's the most accessible hilly station with a temperate type of climate. *Murree* has experienced cool and mild summers and cold dry winters which

attract the people most, not just in Pakistan but outside of the country. With mean maximum and minimum temperatures of 80F and 58F, respectively, June is the hottest month of the year. The two earliest months, January and February, have the lowest mean minimum and maximum temperatures, ranging from 31.1 to 43.4 degrees Fahrenheit. With an average of 66 inches of rain and



85 mean wet days per year, Murree receives the most rainfall of any place in Pakistan. It experiences 15 rainy days and receives 15 inches of rain on average this month, which is July, the wettest month of the year. The snowfall in this city is well-known, and it usually starts at the end of December and lasts until the end of February. It has been observed that due to natural conditions, this area attracts tourists from all over the world.

From the previous few years, it has been observed that the tourists purchase the land for housing in residential areas of *Murree* and they built tall and haphazard buildings over there. The formation of private housing societies contributes to a great extent to the development of unplanned housing in *Murree*. Private housing projects violate government laws as they officially fall off the radar of the official supervision of the authorities. Private investors and housing builders are not experts on urban developments. Due to their limited expertise proper building rules and regulations are severely compromised. Unplanned constructions also convert green spaces into residential areas that lead to environmental degradation such as natural landscapes, further exacerbating the region's vulnerability to natural disasters (Maurya et al., [2020](#)).

Almost thirty percent of the Earth's surface is covered in forests. In addition to being food sources and centers of ecological diversity, they also provide medicinal and economic value, help control the hydrological process, safely cover and protect the soil, and act as popular tourist destinations. Additionally, wood influences climate by generating electricity, transferring carbon dioxide, and removing some other air pollutants. Trees affect the global temperature and control the natural water sources. The main cause of deforestation is the mounting pressure of the population.

Unfortunately, the unplanned development of societies is the major cause of deforestation. The rising tendency of deforestation has resulted in a harmful influence on forest productivity and the lifestyle of people. A number of trees and green hills are disappearing at an alarming rate due to

unlawful implementations. Deforestation enhances the hazard of landslides and the destruction of soil at *Murree*.

Due to forest exploitation resulting in the earthquake quack in 2005, there was more risk of mudslides and sediment drifts in Kashmir. If we remember rightly, Pakistan was enduring the worst flood in its history between the years 2010 and 2022. Murree is considered the deadliest slide-affected place in Pakistan's mountainous region. Natural disasters like landslides have been repeated in Pakistan. Thus, the Murree landslip threat has been of concern in connection with human life, property, and road infrastructure protection for a long period.

Unplanned housing development in Murree contributes a great deal to soil erosion and degradation of the land. As time went on, the rate of land destruction continued; the same was the case with trees. Unplanned development of societies and commercial zones is more prone to soil erosion and soil degradation.

In 2013, the master plan of *Murree* was prepared but has not been notified. Similarly, the model building bylaws need to be adapted to the specific conditions. There's a need to revise the boundaries. There is also a need for to conservation of forests and preservation of heritage. However, people built multiple-story buildings in recent years. Many of these constructions violate local building regulations and pose significant risks. *Murree* is prone to landslides and land erosion, it's definitely unsuitable for heavy constructions without safety. These illegal buildings often have inadequate safety measures and increase the risks to residents and tourists. The more recent Earthquake in 2019, underscored the persistent seismic risks, with several buildings in Murree suffering damage. These buildings pose a direct threat to human lives. Murree's popularity as a tourist destination could suffer due to safety concerns. It affects the local businesses reliant on tourism. Murree City is continuously developing without any proper baseline development plan (Hussain et al., [2017](#)).

Figure 1



Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the environmental problem in unplanned residential areas of *Murree*.
2. To highlight the unplanned building construction cause the major deforestation.
3. To preserve *Murree's* lush hills and natural resources.

Review of Literature

Global threats to the environment include pollution, biodiversity loss, animal extinction, deforestation, and global warming, amongst many others. Brown et al. (1987) and Tian et al. (2004) defined depilation of resources as all the biotic and abiotic elements that make our surroundings like water, air, soil, plants, animals, and all other living and nonliving elements on Earth.

The major factor of environmental degradation is "humans". Various types of recent human activities are the prime causes of environmental degradation. Unplanned buildings, construction errors, unauthorized industrial factories, and businesses, and noncompliance of residents and house owners all of this support to build new disasters (Maurya et al., 2020).

According to Vrushali and Muhammad Arif, 2021, planning and building in hill areas is a difficult task because of difficult terrain, harsh climate conditions, and proneness to natural

hazards. Many multi-storied buildings with modern materials and these techniques badly affect the well-being of residents and cause severe damage to the fragile environment in and around hill settlements.

It becomes very difficult to manage garbage in a hilly terrain when people don't know how to dispose of it. In addition, additional causes that lead to environmental problems include water pollution and deforestation. Because they supply construction materials for companies, home to a variety of animals, birds, and other microorganisms, forests are considered the wealthiest land in any country. In exchange, the soil is shielded from the direct contact of raindrops by fine, rich, fertile soils that contain a high proportion of organic matter. This is achieved by binding the soil via the network of roots. Deforestation increases the frequency of droughts and floods, increases the amount of sediment in rivers and reservoirs, intensifies the effects of greenhouse gases, and increases the destructive power of atmospheric storms, among other issues that lead to environmental degradation (Choudhary et al., 2015).

The major consequence of deforestation is land degradation. The most significant effects of land degradation are on freshwater supplies and productive agricultural soils, which have an adverse effect on biodiversity and food production. There are numerous factors that contribute to land degradation. Urbanization, which includes the

building of housing developments and the expansion of transportation infrastructure, is typically cited as a major factor.

Moreover, another critical cause of land degradation is due to the mismanagement of soil and water resources. These factors have resulted in various types of hazards in soils across different scenarios in biophysical and socio-economic variables. For instance, ESDAC has identified and mapped eleven soil hazards in the present urban environments as a part of the project known as RECARE: Remediation and Prevention of Soil Degradation in Europe through Land Care.

Land degradation has become a serious environmental issue. The contemporary urban region holds a lot of threats to soils: water erosion, wind erosion, loss of organic matter in peat soils, Organic matter losses in mineral soils, soil compaction, sealing of the soil, soil contamination, soil salinization, desertification, flooding, landslides, and decline in biodiversity. Soil sealing is considered the process of covering soils with buildings, constructions, transportation infrastructure, and a layer of impermeable artificial material. Soil sealing activities are getting much more intense in Europe and other regions because of urbanization, urban sprawl, and increased demand for land from the different sectors of the economy (Oliveria, 2018).

Many lucrative and attractive infrastructures have been constructed alongside the other cities of Bangladesh, but all these are being carried out in a haphazard, erratic way. Its infrastructures do not develop with proper planning techniques. This, created various problems in Pabna Municipality and brought great suffering in public life. The social infrastructure is very weak and negligible than required, which has always affected our children and adolescents from flourishing in their mental development (Bapari et al., 2016).

The link between human behavior and the environment, according to Lewin's theory.

Lewin outlined the three fundamental components of the theory that demonstrate how human behavior and the environment are related. He equated the significance of both humans and the environment, making behavior, people, and the environment the three fundamental components. Behavior is a product of the complementarity

between the environment and the individuals (Hussein, 2019).

Excessive destruction and exploitation of forests and pastures, inadequate cultivation patterns, land degradation due to population growth, and lack of proper management of natural environments have endangered nature and destructed habitats. Planning in this respect demands a clear understanding of how the land should be used and the type of activity done in each part of it in order to obtain accurate information about different communities and terrestrial phenomena (Jafareiyen & Karami, 2022).

Due to deforestation, soil erosion is a common problem and a growing weakness of the municipality and development plans. Also, soil pollution spoiled the productivity of any land in the municipal area (Bapari et al., 2016).

Methodology

The section deals with the methodology used for the conduct of the research and analyzing the problem regarding unplanned building construction and development on environmental degradation. The study was conducted in June-July, 2024 at Murree. The study consists of not only primary but also consisting of secondary data. Whereas, the primary data has been collected through semi-structured interviews and observational methods. The sample collection was done randomly from the local people and tourists who make their own houses and guest houses in Murree. The researcher used a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. The qualitative method of research basically provides us with an in-depth understanding and exploration of social phenomena, experiences, and perspectives. Its main purpose is to explore "Why" and "How" behind every action instead of "what" only. The researcher used thematic analysis to conduct the results and discussion.

Result and Discussion

Environmental dreadful conditions are one of the biggest and present-day environmental problems. Depending upon the damages, some environments may never recover soon. All the creatures except human beings that inhabited these places will be lost forever. One of the major causes of environmental degradation in Murree amongst several is unplanned building construction. The

researcher observed that the unplanned construction of housing projects frequently violates government laws as they build a number of stories that are not suitable for hilly areas of Murree. They often fall off the radar of official supervision by the authorities. Private developers often also construct buildings without sufficient financial resources or a proper timeline of completion. The problem is the investors and housing society members are not experts on urban development.

Data collected through semistructured interview and observation methods, the respondents stated that the unplanned and illegal constructions lead to a number of problems and environmental degradation such as:

Deforestation and Loss of Green Spaces

One of the most immediate consequences of unplanned building construction is deforestation. In Murree Unplanned housing construction has been developed for the past few years. Due to unplanned construction deforestation has been started continuously. It ruined the habitat of many birds, animals, and other creatures. Biodiversity is very important in ensuring an ecological balance in fighting pollution, conserving water resources, and climate stabilization. Some major causes of loss of biodiversity are deforestation, global warming, overpopulation, and pollution. Without green spaces, excessive heat might affect the region, thus escalating climate change.

Soil Erosion and Land Slidings

Soils form a critical factor in climate change and yet are probably the least understood. Models of soil organic matter decomposition predict increased rates with increased temperature, yet field measurements seem to contradict model results.

The removal of green spaces and alteration of land surfaces for construction purposes can result in significant soil erosion. Without trees and plants to anchor the soil, erosion can lead to the risk of landslides (Sax et al.,[2003](#)).

Tourism and Economic Impact

Environmental degradation can result in a huge economic impact in terms of the restoration of green covers, land cleanup, and protection of endangered species. The economic impact may also be in terms of loss from tourism. Murree is an important hub of

tourism, and the economic lifestyle of the majority of the people depends on tourism. There are many things that have the potential to impact the environment. Unless we are careful, we can be contributing to global degradation that is underway. Otherwise, we can work towards preventing it and sustain the green areas that attract tourists and give the local population a livelihood.

Trees and green spaces are cleared to make way for new buildings without considering the ecological balance. Residential and commercial buildings are constructed with the collaboration of local people but these all are not in favor of an acceptable environment. All these can be a big turn-off for most of the tourists.

Impact on Culture and Lifestyle

There exist two types of cultural situations in Murree. One is the local people's culture; the other is the culture of the migrated people. Day by day, there is an increase in separation regarding culture, which has a negative impact on the native culture and results in bad traditions. This can result in the homogenization of culture, where unique local traditions and practices are replaced by a more generic, globalized lifestyle. Such as traditional festivals, language, and crafts may diminish as the younger generation may adopt new cultural norms.

Displacement of Local People

Unplanned construction impacts the native culture and traditions. This frequently leads to displacement and migration of local people except those who depend on local businesses. Respondents said that the majority of people just left the region because of cultural and social norms.

Social Fragmentation

The rapid and unplanned growth of new buildings and culture in this area leads the social fragmentation. The new buildings attract different socio-economic groups, and the gap between the wealthy and the poor widens and leads to social tensions and conflict. New residential and commercial buildings bring new lifestyles and consumption patterns. Few respondents stated that there are some social and economic conflicts between visitors and local people on the land and traditional norms.

Recommendation

Implementing Strict Zoning Laws

Government and local authorities must implement and enforce strict zoning laws to control unplanned constructions. These laws should designate specific areas for residential and commercial activities to minimize environmental impact. Effective zoning should preserve and protect green spaces and hills from being converted into urban areas.

Prompting Sustainable Building Practices

Adopting sustainable building practices crucial to mitigate the environmental impact of construction. Eco-friendly materials, incorporating energy-efficient designs, and proper waste management systems should be practiced in these areas.

Community Involvement in Planning

Local communities should be engaged in the planning and development process so that with the preservation of green hills cultural heritage can be preserved. Participatory planning methods allow residents to have a say in how their neighborhoods are developed, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the environment. This can also help to mitigate social fragmentation in the communities.

Restoration and Conservation Efforts

To address the damages of unplanned constructions, restoration and conservation efforts are necessary. Reforestation projects should be started with the collaboration of national and

international NGOs. And local communities. Additionally, historical buildings and cultural sites should be preserved.

Conclusion

Certainly, we don't have the right to exploit and destroy green spaces and trees without thinking about the after generation of humans and animals who will be hereafter us and without knowing the future consequences. People must follow sustainable development goals and the practices of conservation of the environment for the survival of all creatures. There are numerous strategies that can help to reduce the deterioration of our surroundings. The best strategies for many of them is to control the unplanned building constructions and control through a legal framework. There are certain deficiencies in the present law that implicitly encourage wrongdoing. Thus the government must increase filling the gap in the legal system to prevent illegal constructions. Since overexploitation is the main cause of biodiversity loss, the laws regarding the exploitation of natural resources must be amended. Although there have been only a few, if any, concrete implementations of it, the government has long been fashioning its social and economic approaches to alleviate its problem with pollution.

Involvement of authority at all levels in policy making and implementation, with a view to supervising progress towards the attainment of long-term targets for sustainable development, is a necessary step. The government should make use of some economic rewards to encourage forestation and a punishment system for deforestation. Addressing this issue is crucial to preserving the natural beauty, greenery, and safety of Murree.

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