

Role of International Law in Addressing Cross-Border Environmental Harm Affecting Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The problem of cross-border environmental degradation is increasingly becoming a complicated issue to Pakistan especially when it is explained in the environment of shared rivers, cross-border air pollution, disaster due to climate change and the upstream development of the neighboring states. Transnational sources of environmental degradation are becoming more influential on the water security of Pakistan, agricultural sustainability, health of the people, and ecology but the remedies are meager, in the form of law. To fill the gap, this article explores the application of international law to resolve the issue of cross-border environmental damage to Pakistan by considering the relevant concepts of the international environmental law, state responsibility, and dispute resolution procedures. It postulates that although international law has a well-established normative system, which is based on such principles as no-harm, due diligence, equitable and reasonable utilization, and cooperation, the effectiveness of this normative system is limited due to the ineffective enforcement mechanisms, political sensitivities and power asymmetries among states. The article also shows how Pakistan has remained more of a reactive and diplomatic player in the international environmental law as opposed to maintaining a juridical approach, which is based on bilateral negotiations and political processes as opposed to legal responsibility. Investigating the practice of the state, international jurisprudence and regional environmental issues, the paper reveals instances of the potential and shortcomings of the international law in defending Pakistan against the transboundary environmental damages. It finds that to apply a legal and institutional capacity of Pakistan to invoke the international environmental law, coupled with active regional cooperation and integration of international norms into domestic policy becomes critical in solving the issue of cross-border environmental problem in a legal sustainable way.

Keywords: Cross-Border Environmental Harm; International Environmental Law; Pakistan; No-Harm Principle; Transboundary Watercourses; State Responsibility; Environmental Cooperation; Climate Change; Dispute Settlement; Environmental Governance.

Introduction

Environmental pollution is becoming more and more global, and the perceived sovereignty of individual countries is being challenged, and necessary answers to this problem should be sought by international cooperation and international law. In the case of Pakistan, cross-border environmental damages are becoming a very serious problem that impacts the water security, food security, human health, and ecological sustainability. The existence of shared river systems, trans-boundary air pollution, upstream infrastructure projects and effects of climate on the environment beyond the borders of Pakistan have increased the vulnerability of the environment and raised urgent legal and diplomatic issues. These difficulties underline the necessity to explore the ways of mobilizing international law to prevent, mitigate and remedy cross-boundary and disproportionately negative environmental damage which impacts downstream and environmentally vulnerable states like Pakistan.¹

The geographical positioning of Pakistan has exposed it to several transboundary environmental risks as the recipient. Pakistan shares the Indus River system with the neighboring states, which forms the backbone of the economy and existence of the country as it sustains the agricultural sector, energy generation, and domestic water supply. The implications of upstream activities such as the construction of dams, water diversion, and pollution on downstream flow, water quality, and the health of the ecosystem have considerable implications. On the same note, transboundary air pollution, industrial emissions and phenomena affecting climate like melt of glaciers and flooding do not obey political boundaries but their effects are felt sorely within Pakistan. These facts demonstrate the inefficiency of the domestic regulation of the environment and the need to enter into the international legal arena.²

It is the cross-border challenges of this nature that the international environmental law offers a normative framework that seeks to address. The avoidance of transboundary harm, the duty of due diligence, and justifiable and fair use of common natural resources, preceding notice, as well as partnership, are all the principles that support the legal regulation in the sphere. These principles have been expressed in treaties, customary international law and judicial rulings and there has been an increasing appreciation that environmental protection is a common good. In the case of Pakistan, such norms can provide possible legal means of asserting rights, cooperation, and holding states responsible of environmental degradation within the borders of the

¹ Mushtaq, S. A., Akhtar, R., & Shahab, S. Private International Law and Environmental Challenges in Pakistan: Assessing Legislative Measures, Promoting Sustainable Development Goals, and Ensuring Social Rehabilitation. *Journal of Law & Social Studies (JLSS)*, 5(3), 409-431.

² Latif, S., & Khan, A. B. (2025). Focus on the Responsibility of States under International Law for Environmental Damages that Cross Borders. *Review of Education, Administration & Law*, 8(2), 207-218.

country.³

Although international legal standards are at their disposal, they are challenging to convey into their practical protection. International environmental law has relatively weak mechanisms of enforcing their rules, which are based on the consent of the states, diplomacy and political goodwill. Asymmetries of power between states, regional geopolitical tensions, and the technicalities of environmental degradation make legal redress even more complicated. By way of example, in the case of Pakistan, the interaction with the international law on the environment has tended to be cautious and reactive and has been based on bilateral negotiations and political agreements as opposed to technical legal claims or adjudication. Such a pragmatic approach poses questions on whether Pakistan is indeed exploring all the legal means that it has under the international law to defend its environmental interests.⁴

Pakistan will also be influenced by the domestic legal and institutional environment in its capacity to react to the cross-border environmental damage. Invocation of international law needs the good home capacity to measure the environment, gather and assess data, and coordinate the actions of diplomacy. The poor institutional capacity, divided governance, and lack of integration of international environmental standards into the domestic policy restrict the capacity of Pakistan to express and seek legal claims in the international arena. Consequently, the environmental damage to Pakistan can be discussed as a political or technical problem, but not as a legal one.⁵

To explore how international law can help to resolve the problem of cross-border environmental damage to Pakistan, the paper studies the substantive principles of the international environmental law, existing state practice, and existing dispute resolution methods. It attempts to evaluate the extent to which the current international legal frameworks offer substantial protection to Pakistan and what the legal, institutional, and political issues are that restrict their use. Placing the environmental issues of Pakistan within the wider framework of international environmental law, the article tries to show that transboundary environmental harm can never be solved solely through international law, but it plays a vital role in the overarching solution of legal responsibility, regional collaboration and national capacity building efforts. The sections below will review the available scholarly literature, describe a methodological approach to this study, examine the most prominent types of cross-border environmental damage to Pakistan through the prism of international law, and suggest reforms to enhance Pakistan to become more involved in the international environmental law.

³ Mardan, A., Ahmed, A., Keerio, M., & Ali, F. (2024). Role of International Law in Addressing Transnational Threats: A Case Study of Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(04), 3153-3167.

⁴ Khan, M. I., & Xu, Q. (2021). An assessment of environmental policy implications under the China-Pakistan economic corridor: A perspective of environmental laws and sustainable development. *Sustainability*, 13(20), 11223.

⁵ Bibi, C., Tabassum, S., & Roussel, Y. (2024). International environmental law: Challenges and opportunities for biodiversity conservation. *Journal of Energy and Environmental Policy Options*, 7(2), 28-35.

Literature Review

Literature and cross-border environmental harm and international law offer a normative and analytical framework that is well developed to comprehend legal responsibilities of states since their activities contribute to environmental harm outside their territorial limits. The background of scholarship places the problem of transboundary environmental harm within the context of the historical development of the international environmental law as a system of sovereignty to the system of shared responsibility and environmental custodianship. Philippe Sands and Jacqueline Peel claim that the development of concepts like prevention, due diligence, and cooperation is an indication of the international community that the protection of the environment is impossible in unilateral action. These are especially applicable to downstream and vulnerable states like Pakistan which are environmentally vulnerable. One of the key themes of the literature is the principle of no-harm that requires states to take measures to make sure that their actions in the jurisdiction do not imply any severe harm to the environment of other states. Patricia Birnie, Alan Boyle, and Catherine Redgwell term this principle as a pillar of customary international environmental law, with the interpretation of that principle emerging through international case law, including the Trail Smelter Arbitration, and then codified in international texts. Scholars have stressed that the no-harm principle is not strict liability but demands states to take due diligence which is also context-specific and is a matter of available scientific knowledge and capability. In the case of Pakistan, this principle is commonly referred to when subjecting upstream water management and industrial pollution of common ecosystems.⁶

Transboundary watercourses are an important area of the literature especially in regard towards fair and fair use. Stephen McCaffrey emphasizes that international water law aims at striking a balance between the rights and demands of the riparian states through cooperation, sharing information, and advance notification of the intended actions that might have transboundary effects. The researchers, who study South Asian water conflicts, have observed that besides the presence of treaties on water like the Indus Waters Treaty, which governance systems are very significant, there are other general customary norms that are applicable regardless of treaties. Salman M. A. Salman holds that the international water law provides legal mechanism in dealing with new environmental issues not entirely envisaged in the older agreements such as the variability occasioned by climate and cumulative environmental damage.⁷

The other significant line of research looks into the state responsibility and liability in transboundary environmental damage. James Crawford underlines that the violation of the international environmental obligations may involve the responsibility of states and create the duty of elimination, compensation, and non-recycling guarantees. Nevertheless, researchers also refer to the pragmatic challenges of defining causation, harm, and estimating environmental degradation especially in intricate ecological

⁶ Birnie, P., Boyle, A., & Redgwell, C. (2009). *International law and the environment* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁷ McCaffrey, S. C. (2019). *The law of international watercourses* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

connections. The access to transboundary environmental information and technical skills, which are limited in the Pakistani context, adds to those issues, undermining the foundation of legal claims.⁸

The second area of the literature is on the use of international dispute settlement mechanisms to resolve the cross-border environmental disputes. Research by Cesare Romano and Laurence Boisson de Chazournes notes that even as the international courts and tribunals have taken on the transboundary environmental harm cases in the recent past, states have generally been unwilling to litigate over the same because of the political sensibilities and fears of sitting on precedent. Scholars opine that such unwillingness has resulted in preference of solutions that are diplomatic and based on treaties, which, though flexible, lack enforceability. The practice on transboundary environmental matters in Pakistan is no different and is in accordance with this larger trend where settlement of disputes through adjudication is not popular and instead, it views settlement through negotiation and technical interaction.⁹

Global warming has brought in novel aspects to the cross-border environmental damages literature. Daniel Bodansky and Lavanya Rajamani point out that the effects of climate like melting of glaciers, floods, and air pollution are determining unusual causal and attribution. In the case of some countries such as Pakistan which contribute very little to the global emissions, but are disproportionately affected by the global climatic effects, the scholars believe that the international law should be adapted to present questions of climate justice, shared yet differentiated responsibilities, and transboundary harm caused by global environmental processes.¹⁰

The literature within the framework of Regional and Global South highlights power imbalance and gaps in implementation. According to some scholars, including Sumudu Atapattu, even though international environmental law offers normative protections to the international community, the power of the law to apply in the case of the developing state is constrained by ineffective enforcement procedures and unequal bargaining power. This criticism finds a lot of resonance within the Pakistani state in which legal rights on paper are hard to put into practice because of geopolitical factors and capacity of institutions.¹¹

On the whole, the literature leads to the conclusion that the international law provides a strong normative tool to overcome cross-border environmental damage, yet it is highly effective only under the influence of political will, institutional capacity, and strategic involvement in the legal domain. In the case of Pakistan, scholars indicate that the limited usage of the international legal mechanisms, coupled with the low extent of the internalization of the international environmental norms, has limited the protective aspect of the international law. This literature forms the analytical basis of the methodological strategy to be followed in the following section which involves the analysis of cross-border environmental damage to Pakistan via systematic

⁸ Crawford, J. (2013). *State responsibility: The general part*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Boisson de Chazournes, L. (2013). The International Court of Justice and the dispute settlement mechanisms of international environmental law. *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 26(3), 595–615.

¹⁰ Bodansky, D. (2010). *The art and craft of international environmental law*. Harvard University Press.

¹¹ Atapattu, S. (2018). *Human rights approaches to climate change: Challenges and opportunities*. Routledge.

approach to the international law principles, state practice and enforcement of the same.

Methodology

The research methodology used in this article is doctrinal and analytical research aimed at studying the part of the role of international law in solving cross-border environmental damage to Pakistan. The methodological rationale is that the transboundary environmental evil is regulated by a complicated combination of substantive international legal factors, state practice, and institutional execution apparatuses as opposed to single treaty or adjudicative procedure. In this respect, the paper combines both the doctrinal legal analysis and contextual analysis of the environmental governance to assess the normative quality as well as the practical satisfactoriness of the international law in safeguarding the interests of environment in Pakistan.

The original element of the methodology is the doctrinal analysis of international environmental law. This entails a methodical review of the fundamental principles that are applicable to cross-border environmental damages such as the no-harm principle, due diligence, equitable and reasonable exploitation of common natural resources, antecedent notification, cooperation and environmental impact evaluation in transboundary context. These are the principles that are examined using primary sources of law like treaties, customary international law and authoritative interpretations by the international courts and tribunals. This element sets the legal norms upon which the state actions that influence Pakistan are measured.

The second aspect of the methodology concentrates on the responsibility and assigning blame on the state in environmental degradation. This element of the paper will study the conceptualization of international law on the responsibility of transboundary environmental harm to include the elements of causation, foreseeability, and violation of an international obligation. The discussion is based on the Articles on Responsibility of States to Internationally Wrongful Acts and the international jurisprudence in general to determine the legal criteria that need to be satisfied before responsibility is invoked. Specific focus is made on the evidentiary and technical issues that are linked with proving environmental damage across borders, and which are of particular importance in the Pakistani setting.

The third element of the methodology is the state practice and institutional involvement of Pakistan in the international environmental law. This involves examination of how Pakistan has participated in international environmental treaties, bilateral and regional treaties, diplomatic correspondence and how it has taken a position on transboundary environmental matters. The paper assesses the proactive, reactive and predominantly political and technical approaches that have been applied in the past in Pakistan to invoke international legal principles. This element contributes to the recognition of tendencies of law involvement and the lack of international law use.

As per the methodology embraced in this entire range of articles, systematic analytical instruments are integrated in order to improve coherence and strictness. In future, comparative tables can be added in order to classify the sorts of cross-border environmental damage that affect Pakistan such as transboundary water conflicts, air

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pollution, and climate-related consequences and index them to the relevant international legal standards and solutions. The working of no-harm principle and due diligence requirements in a transboundary environment can also be explained using conceptual drawings. Such instruments assist in maintaining the systematization of analysis and retain legal subtlety.

International environmental law is also limited in its comparative approach as the methodology considers the application of international environmental law by other downstream or otherwise environmentally vulnerable states in the event of cross-boundary harm. It is a comparative analysis that is applied to define the best practices in legal strategy, institutional coordination, and dispute resolution without any supposition of universal applicability in the various political and ecological settings. Through such comparisons, it would be possible to understand how Pakistan could be in a better position to legally be situated within the prevailing international frameworks.

Lastly, the assessing model used in this study conceptualizes effectiveness substantively, and not formally. International law is evaluated based on the role of international law in preventing harm, reducing environmental damage, holding responsible states accountable, and protecting those who suffer. This strategy acknowledges the fact that the international law exists within political limitations but points to the possibility of it being used as a normative and strategic instrument in case of domestic capability and regional follow-up. These foundations of the methodology used herein are the basis on which the next section will present research findings on how international law can be applied and used in curbing the issue of cross-border environmental harm in the case of Pakistan.

Research Findings

According to the results of the research, the international law provides differentiated and consistent normative framework of addressing cross-border environmental harm to Pakistan, but the practical impact of international law is still not clear owing to legal, institutional, and political limitations. Among the most notable findings is that, although the core principles of international environmental law, which include the no-harm rule, due diligence and equitable and reasonable utilization are generally accepted as customary international law, these principles have seldom been applied in a formal or a juridical sense by Pakistan to resolve transboundary environmental damage. In its place, the reaction has mostly been based on diplomatic interactions and bilateral negotiations, which, despite its significance, is not the binding force and accountability measures of the legal process.¹²

One of the conclusions is the transboundary harm of the environment related to water. The low location of Pakistan in the common river systems exposes it to environmental risks caused by the upstream activities that may include dam construction, water diversion, and pollution. International water law provides some legal means to solve such risks, especially with the use of cooperation obligations, information exchange, and notifying the planned actions in advance. Nevertheless, the results show that the

¹² Zaman, S. T. (2021). Legal protection for the cross-border climate-induced population movement in south asia: exploring a durable solution. *J. Env'tl. L. & Litig.*, 36, 187.

participation of Pakistan in these norms has been limited through resorting to the current treaty frameworks and political negotiation but not by direct appeal to larger customary principles. This strategy restricts the capacity of Pakistan to deal with cumulative and environmental effects that have not been directly defined in older agreements.¹³

Another important result is associated with the evidences and technical issues that are connected to the proving of cross-border environmental damage. To determine causation, attribution and the importance of harm, scientific data and technical experience is required. The results indicate that the domestic capacity of Pakistan in carrying out environmental monitoring and transboundary data collection is weak, which undermines its capacity in establishing legal claims in the international law. Without substantial evidence, the international law remedies are hard to take since it strengthens a tendency to look into the political resolution rather than legal responsibility.¹⁴

Table 1: Cross-Border Environmental Harm Affecting Pakistan and Applicable International Legal Principles

Type of Harm	Source	Relevant International Legal Principles
Transboundary water alteration	Upstream infrastructure	Equitable utilization, no-harm, cooperation
Transboundary water pollution	Industrial/agricultural runoff	Due diligence, prevention, EIA
Air pollution	Cross-border emissions	No-harm, prevention
Climate-induced impacts	Global emissions	Due diligence, climate justice, cooperation

The results also show that Pakistan has not been utilizing international dispute settlement mechanisms in the environmental scenarios. Even though international courts and tribunals have been more involved in environmental matters, Pakistan has not resorted to adjudication or arbitration in matters of transboundary environmental degradation. Such reluctance is associated with fears of political sensitivity, power imbalances, and inability to predict the results. Consequently, the international law is rather a diplomatic point of reference than a legal tool in environmental relations in Pakistan.

The institutional fragmentation in Pakistan also comes out as an important finding. The proper contribution of the international environmental law involves alignment of environmental agencies, foreign affairs institutions, legal specialists, and scientific organizations. The results show that coordination of this type is usually inadequate, and results in inconsistencies in the articulation of legal positions, as well as a weak

¹³ Murphy, S. D. (2009). The international legality of US military cross-border operations from Afghanistan into Pakistan. *International Law Studies (US Naval War College)*, 84.

¹⁴ Farrukh, T. THE CHALLENGES OF PRESERVING NATURE AND ENSURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT UNDER ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS OF PAKISTAN.

following through of international commitments. This is the institutional weakness of Pakistan that is incapable of translating international legal norms into strategic action.¹⁵

The effect of climate change further complicates the transnational environmental damage. The results indicate that the current system of international legal frameworks can hardly deal with diffuse and cumulative environmental effects that go beyond bilateral causation models. Although the international climate law focuses on cooperation and delegation of roles, there are not many mechanisms used to enforce it. This presents a protection gap to international law that has not been completely filled so far, but in the context of Pakistan, which is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate but has the least contribution to global emissions.¹⁶

Overall, the research results indicate that the international law has great normative potential to respond to the problems of the cross-border environmental harm to Pakistan, but the practical effectiveness of the international law is limited by the lack of evidence, the functioning of the institution, and political impacts. There are international legal principles that exist but are not fully employed and they largely rely on the domestic capability and strategic involvement. It is on the basis of these findings that the following discussion is presented that is aimed at looking at the interaction of legal norms, state practice and power dynamics to formulate the role of international law in safeguarding the environmental interests of Pakistan.

Discussion

This research paper has demonstrated that international law has taken a queer role in responding to the cross-border environmental abuse in Pakistan: it is normatively but operationally weak. The discussion has shown that the main difficulty does not lie in the lack of legal principles but in the difference between the legal avenue and the actual application. The international environmental law has developed to appreciate that the transnational environmental harm has obligations of prevention, cooperation, and due diligence to the states. In the situation in Pakistan, however, these commitments have not been routinely transformed into legal strategy, institutional practice, and enforceable claims.¹⁷

One of the key questions that arise as a result of the discussion is that Pakistan does not rely on legal responsibility to safeguard its interests but rather political and diplomatic systems. The bilateral negotiations and the dialogue through the treaties have been the favorite way of participation in the transboundary environmental issues especially on the issue of shared watercourses. Although flexibility and the lack of political confrontation are the advantages of such approaches, environmental

¹⁵ Khan, S. H., Zakir, M. H., Tayyab, A., & Ibrahim, S. (2024). The role of international law in addressing transnational organized crime. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(1), 283-294.

¹⁶ Hui, Z., Haider, A., & Khan, A. (2025). International trade and plastic waste in oceans: legal and policy challenges. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 12, 1627829.

¹⁷ Alhuniyeti, Y., Lasasmeh, M., & Sharif, M. A. (2025). International responsibility arising from environmental pollution. In *Intelligence-Driven Circular Economy: Regeneration Towards Sustainability and Social Responsibility—Volume 1* (pp. 581-594). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

obligations also become harder to enforce. International law is therefore applied as a background normative reference tool and not as a right-asserting tool. This is a strategy that undermines deterrence over environmentally destructive behavior and limited the capacity of Pakistan to respond to the cumulative and long-term environmental destruction.¹⁸

The conversation also indicates the structural weakness of the international environmental law, itself. When compared to other parts of the international law, environmental obligations do not have well-rounded enforcement systems and rely excessively on cooperation and consent of states. This weakness is compounded by power asymmetries among states because environmentally vulnerable or downstream states might be unwilling to find a legal solution to the problem against their more powerful neighbors. The interests of geopolitics and regional sensitivities have contributed to the caution in the application of international adjudicatory mechanisms in Pakistan, where international principles are in support of claims of risk or injury.¹⁹

Complexity of evidence is also decisive in restraining the efficacy of international law. The setting up of transboundary environmental damage demands advanced scientific information, protracted tracking and causal examination. The debate highlights the fact that it is hard to operationalize the International law principles without well-established domestic environmental institutions that in turn can create credible evidence. This uncertainty transfers the environmental conflicts into the political arena rather than the legal aspect wherein environmental protection can be sacrificed in the wider strategic interests.²⁰

Climate change creates another layer to the discussion as it reveals the shortcomings of the conventional models of transboundary harm. The impacts caused by climate on Pakistan, which include melting of glaciers, floods, and air pollution, are not caused by any specific bilateral behavior but are caused by combined global emission. The international climate law is based on the principle of cooperation and shared responsibility, but there are few avenues of responsibility or redress. This depicts an increasing discrepancy between the extent of environmental damage and the ability of the international law to counter it using the available responsibilities doctrines.

In general, it can be concluded that international law has not failed Pakistan not because of doctrinal inability but because of lack of use and structural limitations. The safety of the international environmental law lies in the strategic involvement of the law, institutional capability, and regional collaboration. In the absence of these aspects, international law will be overly aspirational and not transformative in dealing with cross-border environmental damage.

¹⁸ Rathore, M. P. K., Mahesar, M. A., & Rathore, M. H. (2024). Pakistan and global economy. *AI-NASR*, 79-98.

¹⁹ Zhang, R., Andam, F., & Shi, G. (2017). Environmental and social risk evaluation of overseas investment under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. *Environmental monitoring and assessment*, 189(6), 253.

²⁰ Martin, S., Weerasinghe, S., & Taylor, A. (2013). Crisis migration. *Brown J. World Aff.*, 20, 123.

Recommendations

To empower the use of international law in solving cross border environmental damage to Pakistan, a multidimensional approach on reforms need to be adopted by incorporating legal, institutional and diplomatic approaches. The creation of proactive international environmental legal strategy is one of the most significant suggestions. Pakistan must go beyond the reactive diplomacy and methodically seek out zones where the international law principles can be applied to address its concerns of the environment by applying the principles of not harming, due diligence and fair use. This need not always involve the frequent litigation but entails preparation of the law and tactical expression of rights and duties.

The international environmental law requires institutional capacity building to make it operational. Pakistan ought to boost its domestic environmental surveillance, scientific data gathering as well as legal skills to assist with evidentiary needs in transboundary environmental claims. There should be the creation of specialized inter-agency teams consisting of legal, technical and diplomatic skills to help in coordination and to assure coherent participation in the international environmental processes. The domestic strength would also enhance the credibility and bargaining ability of Pakistan in the regional and global levels.

The mechanisms of regional cooperation need to be strengthened with the help of legally informed frameworks. Even though bilateral treaties will always play a crucial role, they must be supplemented with wider regional environmental cooperation arrangements that will integrate modern international legal principles, such as the impact assessment of the environment and resilience to climatic conditions. The introduction of international legal norms in regional arrangements would make them more predictable and accountable without losing diplomatic flexibility.

Pakistan also need to think of increased involvement in international dispute settlement and advisory mechanisms. Advisory opinion, third-party mediation, or supporting international environmental adjudication may help elucidate the legal standards and enforce normative expectations and can enhance the level of dispute without necessarily increasing the stakes. This kind of involvement would be an indication of adhering to the rule-based environmental governance and would help in the gradual strengthening of international environmental law.

Another area of reform is incorporation of International environmental law into the domestic policy and legislation. The national laws and practice of environmental regulations could be aligned with the international principles to help the national environmental regulations to add to the internal compliance as well as to the external legal claims. Transboundary environmental standards incorporated domestically would also help with judicial participation and accountability on the part of the populace.

Lastly, Pakistan must participate actively in the various processes of environmental governance globally especially concerning climate change and transboundary damages. Promoting the better inclusion of the vulnerability, climate justice, and differentiation of responsibility would put the international standards more in line with the environmental circumstances in Pakistan and enhance action on shared responsibility in terms of responding to cross-border environmental problems.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how international law can be relevant to the issue of cross-border environmental damages to Pakistan and the strengths and weaknesses of the law in terms of its normative and practical aspects. The international environmental law offers a holistic approach based on the principles of no-harm, due diligence, cooperation, and fair use, which are all directly applicable to the environmental problems of Pakistan. Nonetheless, performance of these principles is subject to invocation, institutionalization, and enforcement, where there still exist a considerable loophole in these spheres.

The key finding of this research is that the international law provides Pakistan with useful instruments to deal with transboundary environmental damage, yet, these instruments are not applied to the fullest extent because of the weaknesses in institutions, the lack of evidence, and political restrictions. The interaction between Pakistan and the international environmental law has been tentative and more so diplomatic and deprives it of a chance to hold anyone accountable and ensure a sustainable environmental protection. This is an understandable approach in the context of a complex geopolitical situation, but it diminishes international law to a normative benchmark, as opposed to a protectionist mechanism.

The article also shows that the problems of Pakistan are not isolated but represent the structural shortcomings of the international environmental law especially the developing and environmental susceptible states. However, strategic legal involvement, capacity building and regional collaboration can help a great deal towards the power of international law to combat the cross border environmental damage.

To sum up, the transboundary environmental issues facing Pakistan need to be tackled by not only implementing reactive diplomacy but also legal and institutional proactive involvement in the international environmental law. Through capacity building, legal claims formulated based on international norms, and involvement in regional and global environmental governance, Pakistan is in a position to protect its interest in the international environment more effectively and help develop the international law regarding cross-border environmental damages.

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