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## From Global Protests to Local Action: AJK's Path to Climate Resilience:



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Climate change stands as one of the most pressing challenges of our time, affecting regions, countries, and communities in profoundly different ways. Despite global advancements in technology and international agreements, the world struggles to address its escalating impacts. In

Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), the effects are particularly severe, driven by the region's unique geography and vulnerability to both natural and human-made disasters. AJK's mountainous terrain and seismic fault lines make it prone to earthquakes, floods, landslides, and extreme weather, all intensified by climate change. In addition, rural communities face acute water shortages, while urban areas grapple with heat waves and droughts, straining resources and infrastructure. Human-made issues, such as on-going conflicts and cross-border skirmishes, further complicate the situation, disrupting lives, damaging infrastructure, and hindering sustainable development. Together, these challenges lead to displacement, economic instability, sprawling migration, and threats to human security, posing an existential crisis for the people of AJK.

The severity of climate change in AJK stems from multiple factors. Overconsumption of fossil fuels drives greenhouse gas emissions, fuelling global warming and extreme weather patterns.

Deforestation is one of the major causes of climate change in Azad Jammu & Kashmir, driven by urbanisation and resource exploitation, reduces carbon absorption and destabilises ecosystems, increasing risks of landslides and floods. In addition, pollution and unplanned urban sprawl have worsened environmental degradation, intensifying heat waves and air quality issues in AJK.

Overpopulation and urbanisation strains resources like water and arable land, amplifying

climate-induced shortages. Limited public awareness and education about climate change exacerbate the situation and hinder community actions, while insufficient cross-sectorial collaboration and a lack of sustainable, localised solutions leave AJK exposed to escalating risks. Advocacy is a powerful tool to combat these challenges. Cross-sectorial collaboration, uniting governments, NGOs, private sectors, and communities, can pool resources to address shortcomings effectively. Community engagement and public awareness campaigns empower individuals to adopt sustainable practices and demand accountability from policymakers. A powerful example of advocacy is the global youth movement Fridays for Future, started by 15-year-old Greta Thunberg in August 2018. Thunberg began skipping school to protest outside the Swedish parliament, demanding urgent climate action to reduce carbon emissions. Her solo act sparked a global movement, growing to include students in over 90 countries, with hundreds of thousands participating in protests across Europe, Australia, and the US. As a result, Thunberg faced significant backlash, including mockery from world leaders like U.S. President Donald Trump, who tweeted she needed to work on her “anger management problem,” and Russian President Vladimir Putin, who called her a “poorly informed teenager.” Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro labeled her a “brat.” Online criticism often targeted her appearance, personality, or mental health rather than her arguments, which she dismissed as a sign of her critics’ lack of

substance.

Moreover, her activism led to arrests in Sweden, the UK, Norway, and Germany for protests, including blocking government buildings and opposing fossil fuel projects. In 2023, she was detained in London for a public order offense and in Germany for protesting a coal mine expansion. In June 2025, she was detained and deported by Israel while on an aid ship to Gaza, highlighting her broader activism on humanitarian issues.

Despite these challenges, Thunberg's activism led to global movements, inspired books and a documentary (*I Am Greta*, 2020), and earned her Nobel Peace Prize nominations from 2019 to 2023. She authored *The Climate Book* (2023), advocating systemic changes like reducing emissions and protecting ecosystems. Her work with figures like David Attenborough and campaigns like Natural Climate Solutions highlight her influence, though she emphasizes that solutions require collective action and policy shifts, not just individual efforts.

Fridays for Future has raised awareness through social media campaigns and demonstrations, emphasizing that climate change disproportionately affects young people and future generations, while advocating for equitable access to education, food, and jobs. In AJK, youth can lead similar initiatives, using local campaigns and social media to push for sustainable development tailored to the region's needs. Nonetheless, government and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) AJK

should and must pay heed to this existential crisis.

Education is equally critical in addressing climate change. Integrating climate education into school curricula from an early age can foster environmental consciousness and equip future generations with the knowledge to tackle the crisis. In AJK, where literacy and access to education face challenges, targeted programs like workshops on water conservation and reforestation, alongside youth empowerment initiatives, can bridge this gap. Governments must act decisively, allocating funds for climate adaptation projects like flood-resistant infrastructure, solid waste management and renewable energy. Strict policies to curb deforestation, reduce emissions, and promote sustainable urban planning are essential. Journalists and media outlets can play a vital role in amplifying these issues, holding governments accountable, and raising public awareness. The time to act is now. Climate change threatens the survival of vulnerable regions such as AJK, still through collective action—combining advocacy, education, youth leadership inspired by figures like Greta Thunberg, and robust policies—solutions are within reach. By mobilising resources and fostering collaboration, we can mitigate the impacts of climate change and build a resilient future for AJK and beyond, ensuring a sustainable planet for future generations.

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