Threats to Corals in Pakistan

By Hoorain Yousaf

The Coral Reef is a structure consisting of coral secreted calcium carbonate. It is a beautiful nature work that takes many years to create a habitat for millions of species living in water. So many ecosystems i.e. water bodies, underground water banks and now even Coral Reefs.

Most Corals are attached to the seabed, and many people believe that they are plants or rocks. But in fact, corals are the animals responsible for constructing the Reef. In Pakistan at nine locations along the coast, 29 different species of coral were found the most famous once being the Churna and Astola Islands.

Coral reefs are essential for many different reasons. Coral Reef provides a tremendous amount of biodiversity as they are home to 25 % of all marine creatures. Coral reefs have great value for the conservation of ecosystem services, tourism, fisheries and coastlines. Protect coastlines from harmful effects of wave action and tropical storms. Corals provide nitrogen and other important nutrients for marine food chains, fixing carbon and nitrogen and help with the recycling of nutrients.

It takes 100 years for a Coral to grow an inch. Like all natural resources, Corals are a permanent natural resource. If once destroyed, they can't be recovered again. Coral Reef provides a large proportion of oxygen to the ecosystem and to protect our environment we should keep a safe eye on its losses and damage. Corals are in fact filter feeder species that filter rock fragments around themselves and get enough calcium from water to secrete its calcium carbonate shell. The Corals living organism is called a Polyp. Millions of Polyp reunite to form a huge structure known as Coral Reef. Hundreds of years have passed, and dead corals are collecting in the water and creating this incredible natural environment that has supported life for centuries.

Unfortunately, however water pollution, plastic pollution and losses to water bodies by evaporation due to extreme temperatures these delicate beautiful creatures are destroying. Perhaps the most intimidating threat to coral reefs throughout the world is climate change. Bleaching can also be caused by large temperature changes due to climatic phenomena such as El Nino, combined with the steady warming brought by global climate change. In addition to coral bleaching, coral mining, coral trampling, anchoring on the reef, herbivorous fishing and poor water quality are other stresses on corals.It is predicted that almost all of the world's Coral Reef will be destroyed after about 25 years.

Corals are endangered in Pakistan to be sold for aquarium trade in Karachi by intensive gillnetting and small scale coral mining. Coral areas are considered to be rich in fish, so fishermen are lying their nets get destroyed and the corals get dislodged at the same time and loose corals cannot survive so they are dying. In addition, contaminants such as urban and industrial waste, agrochemicals and oil can poison coral and hence prevent its formation.

Coral aquaculture or coral farming is method that counteracts the decline of coral reefs. The coral aquaculture system which is a great tool to restore coral reefs, bypasses coral growth stages when they are at the greatest risk of dying.In general coral seeds are harvested from nurseries and then replanted on the real reef. Coral farmers obviously live near the Reefs and farm either for conservation purposes or simply for income.

Pakistan is one of the luckiest coastal countries in the world. The Astola island has been reported as an island in Balochistan as an amazing place to visit and has unharmed and safe Coral Reef. Coastal countries are using Corals commercially as herbal medicines and for other purposes but people in Pakistan are unaware of the beauty and value of corals. Another reason to be secure on that island is that it is largely unpopulated and has very little tourism. As tourism has a major impact on the Coral Reef.

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