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THE BACKGROUND OF MY EXPERTISE IN “PAKISTAN”

French expertise in archaeology and heritage has distinguished itself in Pakistan for over half a century. It was on the initiative of the first Director General of Antiquities in the Government of Pakistan, the French Raoul Courriel, that a French archaeological mission (Mission Archéologique de l'Indus) under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, started its activities in Pakistan in 1958. Since then, archaeological cooperation has never been interrupted and has always constituted a privileged bridge between the two States. French specialists, often from the same team, have made major discoveries for Pakistani heritage, including a site inscribed on the Tentative List of World Heritage. French expertise was also illustrated in the implementation of the only and largest international exhibition on the Prehistory of Pakistan - *The Forgotten Cities of the Indus* - carried out in partnership with UNESCO and the German RWTH in 1988.

This long-standing operator evolved in 2012, becoming MAFBI (French Archaeological Mission in the Indus Basin) in order to strengthen the local partnership component in accordance with the new priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*L'archéologie française à l'étranger. Rapport du 26 juin 2012 du MEAE*) and also to adapt to changes in Pakistani heritage policy, which was transferring competencies to the provincial governments (18th Amendment, 2008)

The results of this "devolution" vary from one province to another. MAFBI (a team to which I have belonged since 2012 and of which I have been deputy director since 2015) has been able to adapt and is today, along with the Italian Archaeological Mission in Swat, the only one to operate with the authorisation of the federal government and that of the concerned province - international cooperation being a prerogative of the federal partner-.

In 2013, we signed the first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with a Pakistani university: Quaid-e-Azam University and CNRS, represented by MAFBI. This agreement offered young Pakistani students the opportunity to join and intership at our fieldwork school at the Chanhu-daro site in Sindh. This scheme was reinforced by a system of short-stay scholarships financed by the French Embassy in Islamabad, to which were added Hubert-Curien partnerships (Peridot Programme) and training and skills transfer activities in France and in Pakistan. These initiatives have not only allowed us to sustain our activities, but have also given us access to new thematic or geographical areas in Pakistan that **remain closed to specialists from other nations.**

As deputy director of MAFBI since 2015, I have been personally involved in several of these cooperation actions. In **France**, these activities are deployed with the support of JRU7041

ArScAn (CNRS/Universities of Paris 1/Paris-Nanterre/Ministry of Culture), the MNHN and its network, the EPHE, etc. In **Pakistan**, our educational and promotional activities and conferences were held in Sindh, Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad and Gilgit-Baltistan. In Balochistan, the research support for our Pakistani colleagues continued at through distance, but several young professionals from this province were able to participate in our activities in Sindh.

This Pakistani experience allowed me to expand my scope of activity to include training and expertise missions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit Baltistan from 2018. At the same time, I initiated a process of **skills transfer** with students who have since been recruited in Pakistan in provincial departments of culture or in universities and who are now key interlocutors in our cooperation. These actions, which follow the recommendations of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see: *Cartographie stratégique des Missions Archéologiques Françaises à l'étranger. État des lieux et propositions opérationnelles*, DGM, MEAE, 2019), enabled us to continue our activities during the pandemic with a field mission at the dawn of the lockdown and the following results:

- Signing of an MoU on environmental sciences with SBBUVAS (Veterinary School, Sindh) in February 2020
- Signature of an MoU for the development of digital humanities with LUMS (virtual meeting) in July 2020
- Signature of an MoU with the University of Balochistan in June 2021 (virtual meeting with attendance from the French Embassy in Islamabad)
- Redeployment to the field upon post-pandemic reopening in January 2022 with field/expertise missions in Sindh (January-March, then May).
- Expert mission to Islamabad, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan in May-June 2022 (in Partnership with EPHE-PSL)

During my time in the field, I witnessed the climatic hazards in the Indus Basin and my team foresaw the floods that occurred in the summer of 2022 without imagining the extent of the damage.

Over the course of a decade, I have been able to build **long-term connexions** with Pakistani cultural and heritage actors. The **transparency** of our work allows us today to benefit from the support of the embassies of both countries and the federal government in obtaining the necessary authorisations for my professional activities. The links forged at provincial level with the **local communities**, young professionals and provincial authorities allow us to enjoy a secure framework to carry out our activities without too many constraints, and this in areas traditionally closed to other stakeholders. French archaeology is thus the **key** to further **cooperation**, development and exchange between the two countries. The MAFBI is honoured to have become a **French brand of excellence** as a privileged vector of Franco-Pakistani cooperation.

It is in this environment that I have been trained and that I operate, in France, in Central Asia and especially in Pakistan. It is through this network of well-established contacts that I am **regularly invited provide my expertise**. Therefore, I wish to put at the **service** of

the UNESCO Islamabad office all my skills and networks in France and in Pakistan, to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of UNESCO, the Government of Pakistan and our French cooperation programmes in conjunction with the French Embassy in Islamabad.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN PAKISTAN

Through my capabilities, I am able to provide **technical assistance** to the Government of Pakistan. In a post-disaster context, the focus must be on **heritage management**. There is a need to assess the situation and develop an emergency strategy to minimise the risks before the summer of 2023.

Mapping is the core element of any **territorial management** plan. The initiatives in Pakistan are unbalanced. Each department has its own map, but the data is not indexed as a whole, nor is it **interoperable**. The official initiatives mostly include sites listed in the provincial Antiquities Act. Other directories are not very precise or have not been verified or ground-truthed.

At the **national level**, the government of the former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, had launched the listing of 1,000 representative archaeological sites in Pakistan, without any consensus on the selection criteria or taking into account the recommendations of international standards on documentation (in the framework of ICOMOS or CIDOC, for example). This work carried out by the Department of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM, Islamabad) is nevertheless the only source of (accessible?) information on the state of certain sites before the floods of summer 2022. In September 2022, ICOMOS Pakistan is in the process of assessing the post-disaster state of Pakistan's heritage. But the ICOMOS network is still mostly "private" and it is difficult, if not impossible, to feed back information from provincial governments that do not have the human resources to be deployed on the ground.

If Sindh could count on the support of ICCROM (which was on the spot to initiate a pilot programme on the whole Makli necropolis, a World Heritage site since 1981), the main difficulty would remain the transfer of competences to the local administrations.

Sindh is the province most affected by the recent floods and the management of its archaeological heritage is bound up with agricultural and water management policies. The damage to the emblematic site of **Mohenjo-daro** testifies to both the severity of the disaster and the difficulty of implementing **first response** actions related to heritage. Most of the local investment in heritage focuses on **renewal**, rather than on the restoration of monuments that embody a certain historical pride and identity claim of the region. The city of Karachi has been able to develop under a semi-private banner in some areas, but public policies favouring outward urban growth have allowed the condition of historic buildings, often linked to the colonial past, to deteriorate. This phenomenon has become very difficult to handle as the management of the estate hides financial conflicts of interest. The city could emulate the **regeneration projects** in Lahore and Peshawar.

The **Balochistan** province, a key territory for French cooperation in archaeology, is beginning to develop a policy for the management of its heritage. On the **advice** of MAFBI, the Secretary of Culture created **30 heritage related positions** within the Department of Archaeology. A cooperation agreement with the CNRS, pending signature, should provide a framework for a transfer of skills operated by our network of specialists. However, the reservations of our umbrella organisations about allowing us to go to the region have resulted in a contract worth more than 300 million rupees, intended for the development of sites excavated by the French team, ending up in the hands of a private operator who does not have the necessary elements to carry out the task. For instance, one of the major prehistoric sites in South Asia, Mehrgarh (on the World Heritage tentative list), where our teams worked until 2000, has been largely **swallowed up and destroyed** by the latest floods.

In **Punjab**, the situation is not much better than in Sindh in the flooded countryside. The main part of the heritage initiatives are concentrated on the city of Lahore with exceptional results made possible by an AFD credit an efficient public authority (WCLA) and an excellent private operator, the AKTC, which has, however, limited the transfer of competences to public actors in order to preserve its business model.

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa is, on the whole, the province that best manages its heritage. The provincial DOAM has been able to take advantage of the legacy of the **Gandhara** arts, particularly illustrated by the Taxila and Takht-i-bahi archaeological complexes (World Heritage sites since 1980). The province has attracted financial contributions from countries concerned with Buddhism, such as Japan, Korea and Malaysia. Where heritage is part of China's softpower strategy, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa has taken advantage of it to also initiate the **urban regeneration** of the historical centre of Peshawar. In the rural areas, it has taken advantage of the technification and **professionalisation** of the workers trained by the Italian Mission in Swat. Issues of land ownership or the lack of a professionalization policy make this task difficult in other provinces.

The territories of **Kashmir (AJK)** and **Gilgit-Baltistan** are the paragon of complex areas. These territories have a special status with the federal government. In both cases, there is no governmental section dedicated to archaeology. The cultural sector is **subordinate** to the Department of Tourism. Due to their complexity, these regions have remained inaccessible to foreign archaeologists for decades. Although heritage, especially in the Hunza Valley, has long been used as a vector for development with a strong tourism component, mainly initiated by private or external initiatives and through the AKTC. The latter has started a map on the archaeological heritage of the region. A similar compilation was recently used in a tourist signpost plan that revealed to the general public the location of previously preserved sites, paving the way for the **looting** of some monuments.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FRENCH EXPERTISE FOR UNESCO PAKISTAN

Axis 1: Technical assistance to the Government of Pakistan in risk management and mitigation

The first step is to define the **workflow** between the various actors of the Federal Government and those of the provincial entities. Not all provinces have fully developed heritage regulations, in which case they follow the federal regulations dating from 1975. However, the DOAM in Islamabad, which holds the prerogative in the framework of international cooperation, often changes its ministerial authority. Our current counterparts, who are close to retirement, do not have a clear vision of the future of their portfolio.

A clear vision on the **processes** to follow and the associated stakeholders is necessary, as it is essential to establish channels of communication between the different cultural and heritage actors, but also between the development management authorities (WAPDA, GBDMA, etc...) and those managing **domestic security**.

It is important to introduce the notion of "**archaeological impact**" in the same way as that of "**environmental impact**", which makes sense both in a sustainable spatial planning policy and within the 1972 UNESCO Convention.

As a case in point, the construction of the **Basha and Diamer dams** has placed the management of the affected archaeological heritage under the direct responsibility of the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA). There is no complete archaeological monitoring, despite calls from the international community to save the more than 3,500 rock art sites that are about to be submerged or have already been affected by the associated infrastructure development. Several local and/or international preservation initiatives are taking place without coordination. We have contributed to these in 2018 and 2019. The issue is similar for the renewal of the Karakorum Highway as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) or the construction of the TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran) pipeline.

Axis 2: Providing advice to the Country Director of UNESCO Islamabad

The field office is in a situation to position itself as a hub of **local expertise**, which exists but is little known, exclusive or unprofessionalized. With the UNESCO initiative, it is necessary to take note of the human resources and technical means available. The use of **local resources** must allow for budget optimisation and **international expertise** must be oriented towards a **transfer of competences**.

In the disaster context, it is necessary to provide elements of immediate response, but it is also necessary to launch initiatives aimed at sustaining the investments, by integrating them into the daily management policy of local organisations.

There is a tendency for training policies (cooperation in education or higher education) to forget about the number of staff within departments. There is a need to:

- Implement training for public officials (civil servants), with priority given to young professionals. Capacity building can be carried out locally, abroad or in **intermediate points**.
- **Professionalise** the current workforce and a large part of the craft industry, whose know-how is necessary for the implementation of targeted actions, but whose knowledge is not valued because it is not included in the educational curricula. In most cases, skilled workers remain the monopoly of private contractors.
- Define policies for the preservation of **traditional knowledge** as part of **intangible heritage**. Its preservation and professionalisation is necessary because it is associated with a set of infrastructures (anti-seismic architecture, irrigation...) and applications considered to be **environmentally resilient** and/or more ecological in a region that has to rebuild in an alternative way.
- Supporting the transformation of Pakistani museums. While ICOM adopted a new definition of the museum in August 2022, emphasising the role of these institutions as actors of **diversity and inclusion**, in the public arena, there is evidence that some Pakistani museums are turning inwards.
- Support museums in modernising their facilities and bringing their storerooms or storage areas up to the required standards
- Initiate and support the creation of site museums and the "musealisation" of certain public spaces
- Conservation policies must be integrated into museum management and directors, curators, and their teams (mediation, etc.) must be trained

Axis 3: Comprehensive strategy for interpretation, enhancement and protection

Under the patronage of UNESCO, a "Culture and Heritage" conference could be developed in Pakistan, bringing together public and private actors of Pakistani heritage. It would be a restricted meeting aiming at exchanging between governmental and heritage actors on the needs and the means at disposal:

- **To stimulate provincial exchanges** of knowledge and human resources in order to strengthen local capacities and contribute to the transfer of skills. MAFBI's fieldwork is a specific case in point, as it integrates young professionals from different regions and sectors of the country into its activities
- **Encourage staff exchanges to share training and experience related to museum or heritage management.** In an ideal context, it would be desirable for Pakistani heritage actors to visit some site museums and smaller museums in France. Although some museums are globally representative of French excellence, their prominence and strength are not necessarily a proportionate response to local realities. The French and European regions are rich in a museum network linked to the territory and the community. The European archaeological centre of Bibracte (58) is an example, but there are others that can inspire professionalization activities for **Pakistani students and young professionals**. Through our networks (MAFBI,

- CNRS, EPHE), we have, for example, set up training activities including courses at the MNHN, the INP or short internships at the archaeological site of Tautavel
- There is a need to **identify the available infrastructure**, including other scientific fields, that can be used for **heritage conservation**. Pakistani heritage management needs to build its interdisciplinary character. The operators of heritage projects in Pakistan are often from private structures such as the IAC or the NCA, strong in architectural knowledge, but without training in archaeology or conservation. On the contrary, institutions that train archaeologists try to take a more object-oriented approach. Some initiatives remain exclusive. For example, the Gandhara preservation centre developed by the Korea Foundation at DOAM Islamabad could become a training centre for heritage documentation, just as the very recent archaeometry laboratory at Hazara University in Mansehra could implement a conservation component with the support of French institutions such as the INP or the C2RMF.
 - The development of a heritage management and protection system can be implemented with the support of the French regional archaeological services (SRA) or the LRI HumaNum. It is essential to carry out a transfer of skills, while initiating the development of the infrastructure necessary to put the knowledge into practice in the field. The **Mohenjo-daro** site needs a **GIS** to be implemented to monitor damage and conservation actions in real time in order to optimise efforts on urgent needs and to allow continuous monitoring to reduce risks or limit their impact. On the same site, it is necessary to identify areas where exposed architecture needs invasive structural reinforcements and to accompany this with **preventive archaeology interventions**.
 - - At the regulatory level, framework agreements for cultural cooperation exist between France and Pakistan (at the federal level), but these should be strengthened at the provincial level in order to **harmonise** the implementation of cooperation activities. Researchers and other French specialists deployed in the Central and South Asia region are part of structures in France or internationally that are linked to different and varied supervisory bodies. Their knowledge of the field problems can constitute a vector of communication allowing to better identify the French specialists who can act for **targeted actions in favour of Pakistani heritage**.
 - Training in mainland France can be costly and should be optimised. However, from a geographical point of view, Pakistan can benefit from the proximity of the United Arab Emirates or structures such as the Paris-Sorbonne University-Abu Dhabi (PSUAD), which can be **training relays**. In the same way, the archaeological mission system can facilitate the training of Pakistani students and young professionals in the field (in Pakistan and Central Asia). MAFBI already hosted more than thirty students and young professionals. Pakistani researchers have participated in international excavations in Nepal. Pakistani institutions participate in actions led by the International Institute for Central Asian Studies (ICAS) in Samarkand where no less than 3 French cooperation projects in archaeology currently exist and are able to offer training actions combining French (Louvre, CNRS) and international partners.

Axis 4: Contribute to heritage management, monitoring and risk mitigation. Advisory services to local authorities

Mediation work is fundamental in order to raise awareness among all the actors concerned, which goes beyond the traditional perimeter of the Directors of Archaeology. Capacity building also involves effective action in the field, in agreement with administrators, security forces, public infrastructure development authorities and NGOs claiming to be heritage mediators

The floods in the summer of 2022 show, in the case of Mohenjo-daro, that it is impossible to limit the damage of a climatic disaster if there is no coordination between land-use policies and those responsible for archaeology and heritage. In Sindh and Punjab, irrigation for agriculture is mainly done by flooding. Rethinking this strategy means confronting the complex issue of land ownership and water rights, which is already a central concern in the different provinces. It would then be necessary to support rapid response initiatives at the local level, while seeking to encourage provincial and federal dialogues to establish a national strategy where heritage has a place in the preservation and management of environmental resources.

In the north of the country, the **acceleration of glacier melt** which increases flooding is providing new territories, where new archaeological sites are emerging, without any associated management policy. Monitoring them using **remote sensing and machine learning** was the objective behind a Hubert-Curien partnership between MAFBI and the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) established in 2020. This initiative combining algorithms developed in Pakistan and French expertise in archaeology and remote sensing was unfortunately nipped in the bud by the pandemic. But the foundations are there for a multi-scalar approach ranging **from monitoring archaeological sites to tracking the trafficking of antiquities.**

We have observed on several occasions that Pakistan territory plays a pivotal role in the trafficking of antiquities linking European and South Asian networks. The city of Peshawar is a fundamental spot for antiquities coming from **Afghanistan** and the ports or airports of Karachi and Islamabad cannot be neglected. It is therefore necessary to set up awareness-raising and training actions for the **Pakistani customs services** (FIA) where French expertise already exist in connection with the management of migratory flows. The Gendarmerie Nationale and INRAP also have expertise that can be exported to Pakistan. During our last field mission in May-June 2022, we noted certain aspects linked to the trafficking of antiquities by identifying relay points with South-East Asia, while noting the fundamental role that universities in northern Pakistan (Peshawar, Hazara, Quaid-e-Azam) continue to play in the training and reception of students or young professionals in Afghan archaeology. For example, Mr Noor Agha Noori, the former Director of Afghan Institute of Archaeology who is currently a refugee in Germany, is an alumnus of Hazara University, and the current manager in Kabul studied at the QAU, Islamabad.

Within the framework of MAFBI, we have conducted, since 2015, various and varied **training activities** in France and in Pakistan. In Pakistan, lectures on archaeology and heritage are regularly given, taking advantage of local events, of our university partners and of the Alliance Française network. We have also improvised interventions to respond to last minute requests from our partners, in the form of university conferences or for the wide audience, or business meetings, whenever we are invited by government representatives.

Pakistan - often absent from other forums on the reduction of risks linked to climate change and other "green" initiatives in which its neighbouring country (India) has played a leading role in recent years - has much to gain by counting on French expertise for support in the construction of its heritage management system. The IGN and the CNRS, the IRD and the BRGM are all institutions that have been confirmed as centres of expertise that can be deployed in the field or at a distance

From an environmental point of view, this work cannot be carried out without taking into account the Indus River Basin, whose **management upstream** (Gilgit-Baltistan and KP) directly affects the whole country. Along its course, **reforestation** of its banks would also have a role to play in reducing flood damage

Axis 5: Provide advice to the authorities on the updating of the inventory of natural and cultural sites. Potential for World Heritage nomination

The first step in updating an inventory is to take an assessment of the existing information. Several initiatives mapping heritage and natural resources have been carried out and others have emerged following the floods of summer 2022, all without consultation. It would be useful to implement Open Data principles today (e.g. FAIR, or inspired by the European Horizon programme), but a basic infrastructure needs to be developed in Pakistan first. The necessary components exist, but they are not made available to archaeology, either because of disciplinary or security restrictions; this would have to be negotiated. Similarly, several international initiatives exist to inventory the heritage of South Asia: the various actors must be encouraged to share their data by promoting interoperability and avoiding the disclosure of new discoveries in order to reduce the threat of **archaeological looting**.

Other sites in Pakistan are on the World Heritage Tentative List, but require monitoring to meet the specifications.

At the Mehrgarh site, the floods of the Bolan River are one of the factors preventing the museumisation of the site, but there are also others. A more accessible case is the site of Banbhore in the **Indus delta**, whose preservation must also take into account the natural preservation of the delta itself

Traditional water management systems, such as karez and gabarands in **Balochistan** or narrow cultivated terraces in the north of the country (Kohistan, Upper Indus) are infrastructures that need to be restored or preserved. But behind their materiality, there is also a **wealth of knowledge** associated with them. French expertise is illustrated by the historical **professionalisation of skills** considered elsewhere as minor crafts and Pakistan can benefit from its knowledge and experience. Dry stone and timber architecture, which emerged as an **adapted and resilient response to the seismicity** of the Himalayas, faces problems of preservation, including know-how, as there has been no **generational transmission** and traditional higher education has relegated them to the status of a tourist and ethnological curiosity. There are certainly examples of exceptional preservation in the Hunza Valley (Altit, Baltit), but this knowledge needs to be **democratised** and made attractive again.

Pakistan thus has a **tangible and intangible heritage** that can be preserved, but which should be managed by local organisations, reducing dependence on external interventions

It is also time to raise awareness in Pakistan on the subject of **urban development** within the framework of the Creative Cities Network (CCN), perhaps building on positive competition with neighbouring India.

Axis 6: Needs analysis and implementation of financial requests to the World Heritage Fund

The establishment of a monitoring system for interventions on Pakistan's World Heritage sites can be considered as a basic criterion for possible future financial submissions. Likewise, consultation between the federal and provincial authorities should be aimed at beforehand for the preparation of the dossier.

In view of the current exceptional floods, which **could become a constant** in Pakistan, UNESCO has released a fund of US\$ 350,000 to assist its World Heritage sites. The implementation of projects and the monitoring of the use of funds will nevertheless remain a complex matter as long as the administration itself functions in a complex manner. Transparency should be encouraged and the workflow should be detailed in the application files, listing all the public and private operators involved.

These cases, in accordance with Article 21 of the World Heritage Convention, must be examined by experts. It becomes desirable for the Bureau to monitor and advise on possible conflicts of interest.

It would also be necessary to ensure the relay of information and to accompany the local and international interlocutors before the constitution of the concerned file.

Axis 7: Proposing initiatives and project set-ups

The approach must be multi-scalar and collaborative. UNESCO is concerned with inclusion, and heritage is a vehicle for the development of local communities. Initiatives to include communities in the management of their heritage must be harvested and government policies must be strengthened in this direction. Initiatives following these criteria will be proposed with a global perspective by **promoting and strengthening existing structures**

SCOPE OF THE EXPERT FUNCTION AND RELATED ISSUES

The role of the expert is, in my opinion, to act as a mediator for the development of the above-mentioned axes, ensuring good communication with his/her superior at the local UNESCO office and the French Embassy in Islamabad. The expert must identify the necessary interlocutors for the development of the established objectives. He/she should be the link between the office director and the right local interlocutors. He/she should also be able to anticipate points of conflict between the different actors in order to plan buffer strategies upstream or find negotiation paths during the planning or development of a project. It is indeed essential to adapt to local circumstances, which can change rapidly according to political or security circumstances, but also climatic ones. In order to respond, the expert must also be able to identify the human resources available locally and internationally, giving priority to French and then European expertise, while optimising any operational costs.

The realities on the ground may lead to changes. The objectives must therefore be clearly established from the outset, ensuring that the response of local actors will be proportional, while keeping alternatives open if the compromise reached is not binding

In Pakistan, securing heritage is one of the major challenges, not only for the preservation of the environment, but also for regional stability, where France is destined to play a major role in accordance with its strategy for the Indo-Pacific region. In this sense, the sixty years cooperation projects in archaeology and heritage make French expertise a strong pillar of its cultural diplomacy.

As a historical crossroads of civilisations, Pakistan is now central to the Sino-American strategy for the Indopacific and these strategies are in direct competition with French interests in the region (see: La stratégie de la France dans l'Indopacifique, MEAE, February 2022). At the last UN General Assembly, the French government pledged to help rebuild Pakistan after the climate disaster and heritage is a useful way to do this. With more than 7000 glaciers on its territory, Pakistan has a fundamental reserve of fresh water for the planet. Under ideal conditions, these reserves and the monsoon can support one of the world's top 5 producers of wheat, rice and cotton. The fight against global warming has concrete and global impacts in Pakistan

The preservation of natural and cultural heritage is here, more than anywhere else in the current circumstances, a factor of food and regional security. In the aftermath of the disaster, the Pakistani government wants to rebuild a greener and more resilient Pakistan in the face of climate change. The country can draw on its tangible and intangible cultural heritage to support this. The traditional semi-nomadic architecture of the Thar Desert could have helped the 33 million climate-displaced, but the practice of this art is not professionalized. Similarly, the restoration of certain karez or gabarbands in Balochistan can help preserve or recover cultivable land. By the end of 2021, food shortages had been a source of local conflict in Balochistan, compounded by fires in the Loralai forests and the drought of spring-summer 2022.

In the north of the country, the deforestation of the mountainsides and the retreat of the glaciers has contributed to the fragility of the soil. Seismic activity and rainfall produce constant landslides that make daily life difficult for the population. Here again, the creation of terraces on slopes inaccessible to industrialised agriculture is the only response that can accompany any reforestation. In most cases, the lack of transmission of local knowledge has led to a loss of know-how and a proliferation of ill-adapted construction strategies: the great floods of the Indus tributaries that preceded the floods in the plain took away buildings and lives, recalling the tragedy of the 2005 earthquake. Here too, French civil engineering can contribute its expertise, thus placing itself in strong competition with the Chinese giant, which has little support from the local communities

As one can read, a heritage management policy in Pakistan is closely linked to the sustainable development objectives and to the new reconstruction strategy, in which France wants to position itself as a driving force. It should not be forgotten that culture and heritage often offer tangible results in the short term and are a very useful diplomatic tool, as shown by the development programmes under the Al-Ula Fund in Saudi Arabia or the Aliph Fund for endangered heritage.

The contribution of French expertise can undoubtedly offer a return on investment in terms of new strategic partnerships, AFD credits and direct investment in Pakistan (FDI).

David Sarmiento Castillo
September 28th 2022