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Characterization of Interannual and Seasonal Variability of Hydro-Climatic Trends in the Upper Indus Basin

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Abstract

A high resolution seasonal and annual precipitation climatology of the Upper Indus Basin was developed, based on 1995-2017 precipitation normals obtained from four different gridded datasets (Aphrodite, CHIRPS, PERSIANN-CDR and ERA5) and quality-controlled high and mid elevation ground observations. Monthly precipitation values were estimated through the anomaly method at the catchment scale and compared with runoff data (1975-2017) for verification and detection of changes in the hydrological cycle. The gridded dataset is then analysed using running trends and spectral analysis and the Mann–Kendall test was employed to detect significant trends. The nonparametric Pettitt test was also used to identify the change point in precipitation and runoff time series.

The results indicated that bias corrected CHIRPS precipitation dataset, followed by ERA5, performed better in terms of RMSE, MAE, MAPE and BIAS in simulating rain gauge-observed precipitation. The running trend analysis of annual precipitation exhibited a very slight increase whereas a more significant increase was found in the winter season (DJF). A runoff coefficient value greater than one, especially in glacierized catchments (Shigar, Shyok and Gilgit) indicate that precipitation was likely underestimated and glacial melt in a warming climate provides excess runoff volumes.

As far as the streamflow is concerned, variabilities are more pronounced at the seasonal rather than at the annual scale. At the annual scale, trend analysis of discharge shows slightly significant increasing trend for the Indus River at the downstream Kachura, Shyok and Gilgit stations. Seasonal flow analysis reveals more complex regimes and its comparison with the variability of precipitation favours a deeper understanding of precipitation, snow- and ice-melt runoff dynamics, addressing the hydroclimatic behaviour of the Karakoram region.

1 Introduction

The hydrological cycle change at the regional and global scale is a focus of current research, being the water cycle impacted by both climatic and anthropogenic factors not easy to identify. Precipitation is a key parameter to be monitored particularly in glacial and snow-fed catchments such as the Upper Indus River Basin (UIB), where high-altitude precipitation monitoring is not continuous, showing the time series of observations some gaps, nor it is completely understood (Archer and Fowler 2004a). For this reason, a combined study of both precipitation and runoff provides a better insight into the variability of the water cycle in high mountain areas.

The Upper Indus Basin (UIB) is characterized by the confluence of the Hindukush, Karakoram and Himalayans mountain ranges (HKH) that constitute one of largest cryosphere reserves outside the poles (Soncini et al. 2015). The UIB fulfills water demands of rapidly increasing population in South Asia and feeds one of the largest irrigation system in the world. Pakistan's economy is to a large extent dependent upon agriculture and water resources of the Upper Indus Basin (UIB) feed 16.5×10^6 hectares of irrigated crops. UIB just upstream of Tarbela dam (draining an area of $163,528 \text{ km}^2$) receives 70% of its annual flow from snow (26%) and glacial melt (44%) (Mukhopadhyay and Khan 2015).

Water demand in the UIB is though quite high and primary usage of water is for irrigation and hydropower production. As a matter of fact, the climate of lower Indus River basin is mainly arid and hyper-arid and the river flow mostly derives from the melt water generated in the UIB, while other South Asian basins are characterized by extensive summer monsoonal wet regimes. Immerzeel et al. (2015) marked the UIB as a climatic hotspot region, due to the wide variation in the climate anomalies, as well as to the significant rising water demand in downstream areas. The UIB is characterized by hydro-climatic regimes with changing patterns in different sub-basins and over time.

In view of assessing the hydro-climatic variability, Archer and Fowler (2004b) found rising rates in summer, winter and annual precipitation. Khattak et al. (2011) estimated mean monthly climatic trends in the UIB and found summer cooling (1967-2005) and winter warming but did not describe definite patterns of precipitation. Immerzeel and Bierkens (2012) noted the highest vulnerability of water scarcity conditions in the Indus River Basin among ten basins in Asia. They recognized that significant population increase, groundwater depletion, climate change, snowmelt and icemelt are key factors that affect the hydrological regimes of Indus. Bocchiola and Diolaiuti (2013) found a slight annual precipitation increase over northwest Karakoram and Chitral-Hindukush and a decreasing rate in the greater Himalayas side. They also observed summer cooling and winter warming which are prominent as compared to previous thoughts and can easily be checked at Bunji and Gilgit stations. Ali et al. (2015) examined current and future climatic and hydrological changes over the UIB. The results show that northern parts of the UIB experienced a larger increase in temperature and precipitation than southern parts. Projections of future changes show a consistent increase in temperature and precipitation. The rate of increase of river flow is greater in winter compared to summer season. They considered higher river flow possibly due to a larger increase in the air temperature and the consequent enhancement of the melting of the snow and ice cover. Latif et al. (2018) explored both seasonal and annual precipitation trends in the UIB using low and mid altitude stations operated by Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD). The results exhibited significant falling rate of annual precipitation in six stations, while three stations showed a rising rate of precipitation. Overall, the UIB experienced a downward trend in precipitation both spatially and temporally.

The studies mentioned above mainly used valley-based sparse and fragmented low and mid altitude stations operated by PMD. The estimates from these stations neither represent the climatology of high altitude areas, nor provide any quantifiable mechanism that draws logical inferences between low and high altitude precipitation (Hussain et al. 2017). As a great amount of the UIB streamflow originates from the active hydrological zone in the 2500-5500 m altitude range, data from low altitude stations (even if making up long time series of observations) are not representing reliable hydro-meteorological conditions over the frozen UIB water resources (SIHP,1997).

Moreover, the Indus River basin is a transboundary basin (see Fig. 1) and observed hydro-meteorological data are mostly scattered, discontinuous and not easily accessible. Hence, it is difficult to assess the spatial and temporal variability in high altitude mountainous regions using a sparse ground-based observation network, as it cannot depict horizontal and vertical precipitation variability effectively (Lutz et al. 2014). Various gridded datasets have been developed based on satellite-based data (Huffman and Bolvin 2013), interpolated observation (Yatagai et al. 2012) and reanalysis data (Baudouin et al. 2020; Li et al. 2020) to handle this issue. Most of past studies

concerning the UIB depend upon regional/global gridded datasets for mass balance and hydro-climatic studies (Baudouin et al. 2020; Dahri et al. 2016; Immerzeel et al. 2009; Iqbal et al. 2019; Krakauer et al. 2019; Lutz et al. 2014; Masood et al. 2019; Minallah and Ivanov 2019; Rizwan et al. 2019; Ullah et al. 2018).

Gridded datasets provide a better solution in terms of temporal and spatial coverage, even if they are affected by likely greater errors, in particular in high altitude areas where large bias and uncertainty may occur, especially in conditions of significant snowfall (Andermann et al. 2011) and in glacierised catchments (Wortmann et al. 2018). Uncertainties and biases in the gridded datasets are usually due to shortcomings of data sources and generation algorithms of these products (Sun et al. 2018). It is also noted that gridded datasets such as CHIRPS and Aphrodite mainly used World Meteorological Organization's Global Telecommunication System (GTS) gauge data in their production mechanism (Funk et al. 2015; Yatagai et al. 2012). WMO GTS collaborates with the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) for sharing observed meteorological data. In 1995, Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Pakistan collaborated with International Development Research Centre Canada to install automated weather stations known as data collection platforms (DCPs) in the UIB Pakistan. However, the data of these stations are neither publicly available, nor they are shared within WMO GTS database. Keeping in mind above issues, the primary objective of this study is to discuss biases and uncertainties in each available gridded dataset (CHIRPS, ERA5, PERSIANN-CDR and APHRODITE), before and after corrections performed using mid altitude and new high altitude WAPDA-DCPs stations. The second objective is to compare precipitation over the catchment to runoff data to identify possible sources of errors and climatic anomalies, as well as their changes over time and space.

Previous assessments on hydro-climatic trends at the annual or seasonal scale considered specific periods (Ahmad et al. 2018; Bolch et al. 2012; Fowler and Archer 2006; Janes and Bush 2012; Krakauer et al. 2019; Latif et al. 2018; Masood et al. 2019; Rahman et al. 2018; Sharif et al. 2013; Zaman et al. 2020), but they neither incorporated variations within specific temporal sub-periods, nor they described non-linear dynamics of hydro-climatic variability. In an agriculture-based country, with substantial climatic variation, it is difficult to understand the hydro-climatic phenomenology using conventional linear trend schemes. Building on the need of generating future scenarios of water sustainability, this study shows the results of a running trend analysis that covers the entire dataset period to assess hydro-climatic variability from decadal to interdecadal trends in the UIB at the sub-basin scale. More specifically, this study provides a comprehensive investigation of the detectable links of short-term (sub-decadal and decadal) and long-term (multi-decadal) precipitation and runoff variability at the seasonal and the annual scale. In this way, it supports a more detailed overview of precipitation and runoff regimes at the basin and the sub-basin level and improves the past analysis for examining hydro-climatic behaviour in a sensitive area of the earth.

Within this context, a precipitation climatology (1995-2017) for the UIB at the seasonal and the annual scale was built using the anomaly-method applied in (Crespi et al. 2018; Crespi et al. 2021). This method is briefly recalled in the second section of the paper after the description of the study area, of the collected precipitation and runoff data and of the implemented statistical analyses. In the third section, the hydro-climatic trends in each sub-basin of the UIB are examined, together with biases and uncertainties of the gridded precipitation data compared with the ground observations. A discussion of the results, also in comparison with those coming from the analysis of runoff data, follows in the fourth section.

2 Material and Methods

2.1 Description of the study area

The Upper Indus Basin (UIB), including part of western Himalayas, Karakoram, and northern Hindu Kush mountains, lies in the geographic domain with latitude 31–37° N and longitude 72–82°E and hosts 14085 small and large glaciers (according to RGI-Version 6.0), covering an area of 19338 km². The drainage area of the Indus Basin, measuring 163,528 km² at the section of Besham Qila (BQ) is shared by Pakistan, India and China with a percentage of 46% within Pakistan political boundaries (Hasson et al. 2017). The Indus River originates from Mount Kailash in the western Tibet at an elevation of 5486 m and has an overall length of 3180 km measured at the outlet into the Arabian Sea (Jain et al. 2007). The main stem flows initially through the Ladakh district in Jammu Kashmir and afterwards it enters northern Pakistan (Gilgit-Baltistan), between Himalayas and the Karakoram range. The catchment area and, consequently, the discharge of the Indus River become larger in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) when tributaries such as Shyok, Shigar, Hunza and Gilgit River in the Karakoram Mountains and Astore River in western Himalayas merge with the main river stem. Afterwards, it turns towards south from Nanga

Parbat (8126 m asl) and flows in three provinces of Pakistan, i.e. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Punjab, and Sindh, and finally flows into the Arabian sea. Additionally, Chitral, Swat and Kabul rivers that are originating from the Hindu Kush Mountains also join the mainstream of Indus river in the KPK province, whereas western Himalaya rivers Jehlum, Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej join main Indus river stem at Punjab in the Punjab province.

The basin highest elevation is set by the K2 peak, also known as “Godwin-Austen”, the second highest mountain in the world (8611 m asl), whereas the lowest altitude at BQ is 542 m a.s.l and the basin average altitude is 3750 m asl. It is also noted that 35% area of this basin is above 5000 m asl. The UIB can be subdivided into seven watersheds, i.e. Gilgit, Hunza, Astore, Shigar, Shyok, Shingo-Zanskar and Indus Downstream (Mukhopadhyay and Khan 2015). Shyok and Shigar basins feed the eastern and the central part of Karakoram. Almost one-third of Shigar basin area is covered with glaciers, including world largest glaciers and ice masses. The hydro-climatic characteristics of each sub-basin are quite different. Summer monsoon and westerlies are dominant sources of annual precipitation in UIB. However, the effect and contribution of both sources vary spatially, as well as temporally.

The average annual precipitation measured at different stations within the basin ranges from 156 mm at Gilgit station to around 1514 mm in the Pir Chanasi valley. The mean annual discharge at Besham Qila is 2405 m³/s (Hussain et al. 2017). The Indus Basin receives 70% of its annual flow during June to September with a maximum value in July. October to March are distinguished as low flow months. UIB climate falls into the “cold desert” category (BWK) according to the Köppen-Geiger climate classification, i.e. an area with little precipitation and large daily temperature range. The relationship between station elevation and measured precipitation is represented in Fig.2, which shows that no significant altitudinal trend can be observed, although doubts arise about the reliability of precipitation data when snowfall occurs, as it will be discussed later.

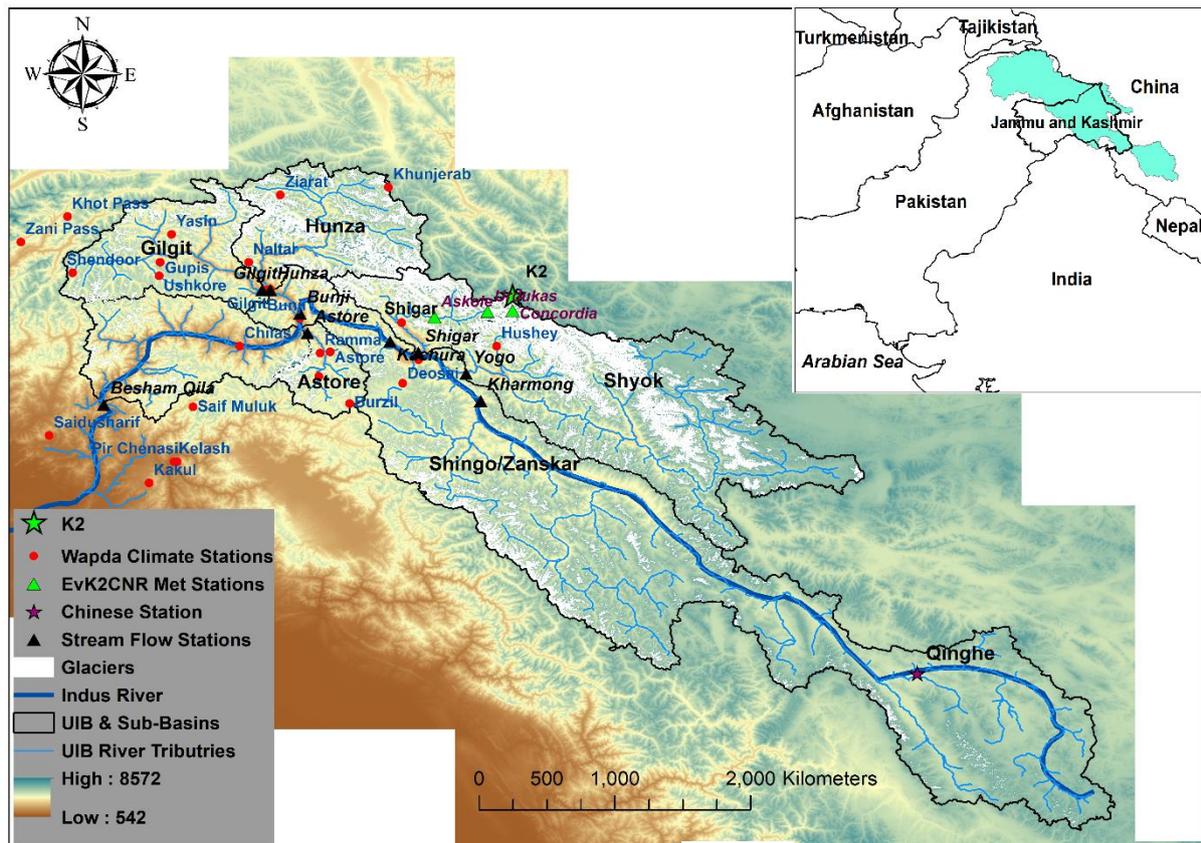


Fig. 1 The location of the Upper Indus River Basin (UIB - light blue in the inset) and of the Hydro-Meteorological Stations used for the analysis.

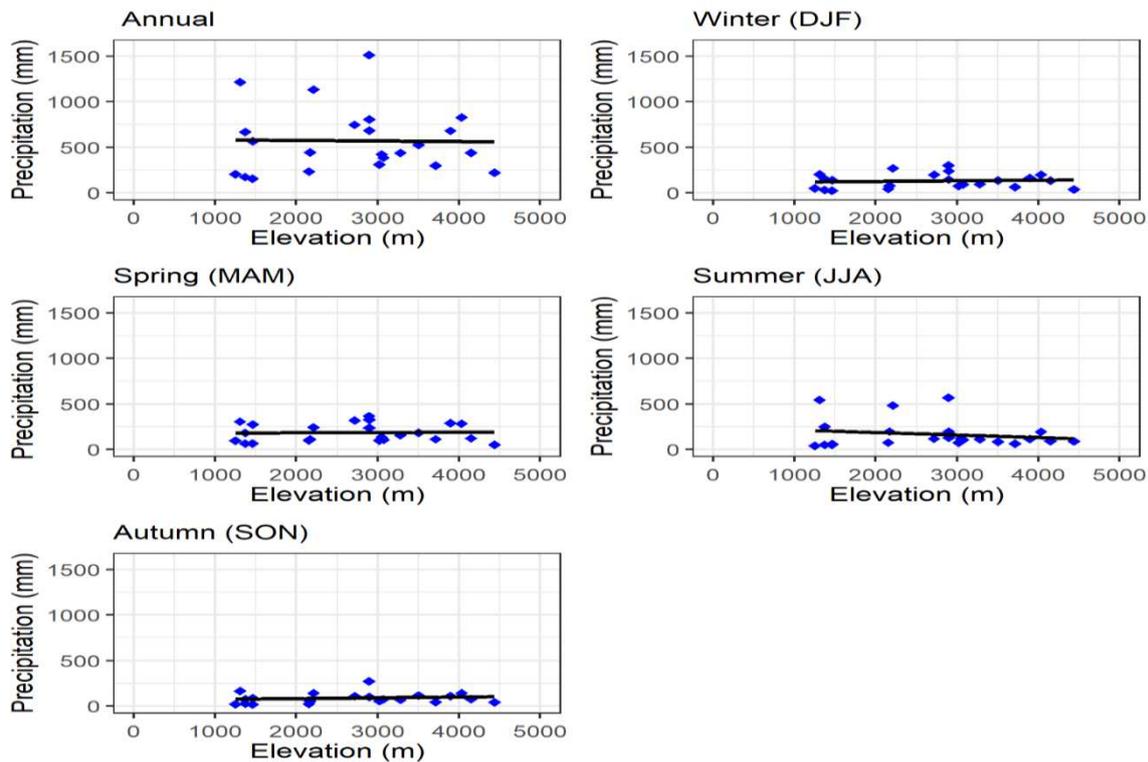


Fig.2 Relationship between gauge precipitation and elevation observed at the annual and seasonal scale in the UIB.

2.2 Hydroclimatology of the Upper Indus Basin

In the Upper Indus Basin hydrology, the precipitation regime features annual-round midlatitude western disturbances. Such disturbances sometimes carry solid form of moisture, mainly during winter and spring (Hewitt 2011; Ul Hasson et al. 2016). The rate of such unusual solid form of moisture is higher during the positive phase of the North Atlantic oscillation (NAO), when western disturbances affect Afghanistan and Iran due to low heat over the area, resulting in extra moisture input from the Arabian sea (Syed et al. 2006).

UIB faced long dry spells with little rainfall from October to March. Initially, water supply is generated by melting of snow starting from the mid of March to late June. The extent of water availability mainly depends upon the concurrent temperature and accumulated snow amount (Hasson et al. 2014; Lucarini et al. 2013). Afterwards, snowmelt runoff is merged with glacier melt runoff from late June to late August as a consequence of high air temperatures. The climate of UIB is classified by winter extra-tropical cyclonic/ anticyclonic circulations (westerlies) and South Asia summer monsoon atmosphere circulations. Both winter and summer have significant impact on the climatic patterns of UIB (Hewitt 2011). The westerlies enter UIB through northwest by the end of November or early in December. Initially, these westerlies are presented in distorted and diffuse state. Afterwards, they interact with already existing orographic trough with low pressure that allow them to recover their potency and frontal structure. The topographic blocking separates these westerlies into southern and northern sections around the western Tibetan Plateau and Karakorum (Pang et al. 2014). The relationship between topography, local climate and circulation system determines the net precipitation and distribution pattern in UIB. The differential heating between land and sea is the main reason for summer precipitation (Dahri et al. 2016). The summer monsoon carries moisture from the Arabian sea that move along the Indus valley towards western Himalayas. It also brings moisture from Bay of Bengal and moves northward to the eastern Himalayas, and from Indian ocean to the western Himalayas following the path along the Indus river valley (Ahmad et al. 2012; Pang et al. 2014).

It is generally believed that the precipitation rate is increasing with elevation. However, this might not happen in UIB where (Immerzeel and Bierkens 2012; Immerzeel et al. 2015; Winiger et al. 2005) found that precipitation is increasing up to a specific elevation, i.e. 5000 m, and shows downward trend above this elevation. Most of annual precipitation falls in the winter and spring and originates from the westerlies. Although summer carries occasional rain to trans-Himalayan areas, it accounts for only one third of total annual precipitation (Madhura et al. 2015). Some other glaciological studies mentioned significant increase of precipitation rates of 1500-2000 mm

at 5500 m (Soncini et al. 2015). At the high elevation zones, ice is the primary source of hydrological regimes, followed by snow melt, while the contribution of summer monsoon rainfall is small.

Table 1 Meteorological stations and their attributes

Basin	Stations	Period from	Period to	Agency	Latitude (°)	Longitude (°)	Elevation (m asl)	Precipitation (mm/year)
Gligat	Gilgit	1981	2017	PMD	35.92	74.33	1460	158
	Gupis	1981	2017	PMD	36.17	73.4	2156	234
	Ushkoor	1995	2017	WAPDA	36.05	73.39	3051	423
	Yasin	1995	2017	WAPDA	36.4	73.5	3280	439
	Shnedoor	1995	2017	WAPDA	36.09	72.55	3712	300
Hunza	Khunjerab	1995	2017	WAPDA	36.84	75.42	4440	224
	Ziarat	1995	2017	WAPDA	36.77	74.46	3020	310
	Naltar	1995	2017	WAPDA	36.17	74.18	2898	685
Astore	Astore	1981	2017	PMD	35.37	74.9	2168	444
	Ramma	1995	2017	WAPDA	35.36	74.81	3179	806
	Rattu	1995	2017	WAPDA	35.15	74.8	2718	750
	Burzil	1995	2017	WAPDA	34.91	75.09	4100	829
Shigar	Shigar	1996	2012	WAPDA	35.63	75.53	2367	348
	Askole	2005	2017	EVK2CNR	35.68	76.82	3051	535
	Urdukas	2011	2017	EVK2CNR	35.74	76.51	3926	283
	Concordia	2011	2017	EVK2CNR	35.73	76.29	4690	260
Shyok	Hushey	1995	2017	WAPDA	35.42	76.37	3075	386
	Skardu	1981	2017	PMD	35.3	75.68	2210	237
Shingo	Deosai	1995	2017	WAPDA	35.09	75.54	4149	440
	Qinghe	1995	2010	CMDC	32.5	80.08	4279	238.8
	Bunji	1981	2017	PMD	35.67	74.63	1372	174
Indus Down Stream	Chillas	1981	2017	PMD	35.42	74.1	1251	207
	Kakul	1981	2017	PMD	34.1	73.2	1308	1215
	Pir Chanasi	1995	2017	WAPDA	34.387	73.5477	2872	1514
	Saif Muluk	1995	2017	WAPDA	34.9	73.65	2362	830
	Saidu Sharif	1981	2017	PMD	34.7	72.4	949	1070

2.3 Meteorological data

Data availability is a big issue in HKH especially in UIB where stations are neither densely nor uniformly distributed. In this study, meteorological data from 26 stations were gathered from (PMD), (WAPDA) and China Meteorological Data Sharing Network (CMDSN). Out of these 26 stations, seven are operated and maintained by the Pakistan Meteorological Department. These are valley-based stations, which are located within the altitude range of 1200–2200 m asl. These stations provide climatic time series for the period 1981-2017. The second meteorological network is maintained by Snow and Ice Hydrology Project (SIHP) of the WAPDA, which is operating 12 automated weather stations known as data collection platforms (DCPs), located in the elevation range 1479-4440 m asl and providing observations since 1995.

As Karakoram range hosts the largest snow ice reserves of the UIB, DCPs stations operated by WAPDA are particularly relevant for examining the hydro-meteorological conditions prevailing over the UIB cryosphere (Hasson et al. 2017). In addition there are also three high altitudes stations operated and maintained by EvK2-CNR (Italian based organization). The stations are Askole (3015 m asl.) and Urdukas (3926 m asl), providing values since 2005, and another one is located at Concordia (4690 m asl.) since 2011. All three stations are used to calculate standard meteorological parameters. However, data time series of these three stations show some gaps and are affected by uncertainties especially during the winter season due to sensor inefficiency in extreme weather conditions. The detailed information about climatic stations, their elevation, time period and mean precipitation are given in Table 1.

2.4 Streamflow Data

Upper Indus Basin is fed by three sources of streamflow i.e. glacier melt, especially in Shyok, Hunza and Shigar subbasins, followed by snow melt mainly in the Gilgit and Astore subbasins and rainfall runoff. The daily streamflow of nine hydrometric stations within the UIB have been taken from the Surface Water Hydrology Project (SWHP) of WAPDA, Pakistan from 1973-2017 for stations except Indus at Kharhong and Bunji station where data is available from 1983-2017 and 1973-2013 respectively. Discharge data of Astore at Doyian and Gilgit river at Gilgit are used in this study. Similarly, discharge of Hunza basin is collected at Dainyor station. Table 2 provides specific information about these streamflow stations and their outflow points.

Table 2 SWHP WAPDA stream flow gauges given in the downstream order along with their characteristics and the analyzed periods of record.

Serial. No	Gauge River	Discharge Gauging Point	Period from	Period to	Latitude (°)	Longitude (°)	Elevation (m asl)
1	Indus	Kharhong	1983	2017	34.93	76.21	2542
2	Shyok	Yogo	1973	2017	35.18	76.1	2469
3	Indus	Kachura	1973	2017	35.45	75.41	2341
4	Hunza	Dainyor	1973	2017	35.92	74.37	1370
5	Gilgit	Gilgit	1973	2017	35.92	74.3	1430
6	Indus	Bunji	1973	2013	35.73	74.62	1792
7	Astore	Doyian	1973	2017	35.54	74.7	1583
8	UIB	Besham Qila	1973	2017	34.92	72.88	542
9	Shigar	3-2-1	1983	2017	35.33	75.75	2438
10	UIB Pakistan	8-1					
11	UIB Pakistan	8-2-1					

2.5 Gridded observations

In the last decades, a great progress was made in developing analysed fields of precipitation over regional and global scale providing different gridded climatic products. These products are available at regional and global scale and are used in hydro-climatic assessment studies. Precipitation products can be divided into four major different categories: (1) climatic model reanalysis (2) satellite estimates (3) merged satellite and station observations (4) raingauge-based observations (Sun et al. 2018). In this study we used at least one product from each of these categories in order to check their accuracy for hydro-climatological studies based on precipitation estimates through these datasets. APHRODITE is based on station observations, CHIRPS is a combination of satellite and station observations, ERA5 is a reanalysis dataset and PERSIANN-CDR is based on remote sensing using Artificial Neural Network. The detail information about these products are given in Table 3. For instance, APHRODITE (V1101 and V1101EX_R1) is specifically developed for summer in the Asian region with spatial resolution $0.25^\circ \times 0.25^\circ$; the products are provided by the Data Integration and Analysis System (DIAS, Japan) that is based on an interpolation of 3500 to 8000 gauge observation (Dile and Srinivasan 2014).

Table 3 Gridded datasets used in this study for performance evaluation of climatology in Upper Indus Basin

Dataset	Resolution/frequency	Data Sources	Algorithm/Assimilation schemes	References
APHRODITE (Observed Values)	0.25°/daily	Data Integration and Analysis System (DIAS)	Interpolation with rain gauge grided precipitation	(Yatagai et al. 2012)
CHIRPS (Observed+ Satellite)	0.05°/daily	USGS, CHG	Smart Interpolation Tech	(Funk et al. 2015)
PERSIANN-CDR (Satellite)	0.25°/3,6 h and /daily	TRMM, NOAA, GridSat-B1 IR, Metsat-6, GOES 8, DMSP F13	Artificial Neural Networks	(Ashouri et al. 2015)
ERA5 land (Reanalysis)	0.25°/monthly/daily/hourly	ECMWF	4D-Var	(Saha et al. 2010; Tarek et al. 2019)

The second dataset is CHIRPS which was developed by the Climate Hazards Group (CHG) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS). It is available from 1981 to present with spatial resolution of 0.05° and temporal resolution at daily and monthly scale. It was developed by combination of ground based gauge information and cold cloud duration measurement by the synergistic use of satellite infrared radiometers. Passive microwave and GridSat-B1 satellite data were employed to update the PERSIANN algorithm to estimate daily precipitation. It is based on remotely sensed information combination with artificial neural network (Ashouri et al. 2015). The European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) launched the new reanalysis product ERA5 data. The analysis is developed using advanced 4Dvar assimilation scheme at temporal and spatial scale. It is available at 0.25 x 0.25 degrees and computes various atmospheric variables at 139 pressure levels for 1979-present time period at different temporal scale (Baudouin et al. 2020).

2.6 Anomaly Method: the interpolation scheme from rain-gauge network to regular grid

The precipitation ground observations in UIB are sparse and do not provide complete temporal and spatial coverage. Therefore, it is inappropriate to develop basin wide annual and seasonal precipitation climatology based on available observations directly. For this purpose, monthly precipitation records for four gridded datasets (CHIRPS, PERSIANN-CDR and ERA5 from 1995 to 2017 and for APHRODITE from 1995-2015) were selected, according to data availability. The gridded data were reconstructed over the study area by means of the anomaly method as described by Crespi et al. (2021). To develop the precipitation climatology on the seasonal and annual scale, monthly gridded and observed data were aggregated at the seasonal scale, i.e. winter (DJF), spring (MAM), summer (JJA), autumn (SON), and annual scale. In this scheme, the precipitation signal is reconstructed by superimposing the spatial fields of seasonal climatology to the spatio-temporal fields of relative anomaly i.e. deviations from the reference for a certain season. The ratio or multiplicative correction factor between referenced and gridded precipitation at each i -th specific station is computed as below:

$$P_{test\ m,i} = \frac{p_{test\ m}}{p_{reference,i}} \quad (1)$$

Here $p_{test\ m}$ and $p_{reference,i}$ are gridded and observed precipitation series at the specified time scale over the period of common data availability. It has to be pointed out that the rain gauge observations are here assumed to be ‘true’ reference precipitation values and the other precipitation products are adapted to them. $P_{test\ m,i}$ is the seasonal ratio anomaly or correction factor which is then interpolated as described in Crespi et al. (2018). Similarly, the interpolation method is also applied on gridded datasets on the same scale. These two fields are calculated individually and the season estimates are finally obtained by their product. The same procedure is applied on the annual scale. The anomaly-based climatology helps to develop fine-scale information provided by gridded datasets and incorporates the available records on a large area when the station distribution over the study domain does not provide complete coverage (Brunetti et al. 2012).

2.7 Evaluation Criteria

To evaluate the data quality of precipitation anomaly against observed precipitation for an overlapped period of 1995-2017 and 1995-2015 at seasonal and annual scale, four statistics i.e., bias (BIAS), mean absolute error (MAE), root mean square error (RMSE) and mean absolute percentage error (MAPE) were assessed in this study.

$$BIAS = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N (PS_i - PO_i)}{N} \quad (2)$$

$$MAE = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N (PS_i - PO_i) \quad (3)$$

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^N (PS_i - PO_i)^2}{N}} \quad (4)$$

$$MAPE = \frac{1}{N} \cdot \sum_{t=1}^N \frac{|PS_i - PO_i|}{PO_i} \cdot 100 \quad (5)$$

where PS_i is the value of gridded precipitation estimate for the i_{th} event, PO_i is the value of rain gauge observation for the i_{th} event, N is the number of precipitation events. Bias represents the average difference between the gridded precipitation, after the anomaly method correction, and gauge precipitation, as reference. A negative value of bias implies underestimation, while a positive value indicates overestimation of observed rainfall. The gridded precipitation datasets were also compared with observed streamflow and the runoff coefficients was computed as shown in Table 6 in order to assess the ability of runoff data to close the water balance in each sub-basin of UIB

and also to verify the reliability of raingaeue-based precipitation assessed at the catchment scale as pointed out, for instance, by Ranzi et al. (2021).

2.8 Precipitation and runoff trend analysis

The anomaly derived precipitation and streamflow discharges were used for the trend analysis in sub-basins of UIB at seasonal and annual timescales. Discharge period from 1973 to 2017 was selected for four rivers (Astore, Indus at Besham Qila, Indus at Shyok, Indus at Kachura), 1973-2013 and 1983 to 2017 were selected, respectively, for Indus at Bunji and Kharhong and Shigar due to the available data. The trend for this hydro-climatic time series were estimated using robust nonparametric regression techniques i.e. Mann–Kendall (MK) test (Kendall 1948; Mann 1945) in conjunction with Theil–Sen (Sen 1968; Theil 1950) slope method to determine the trend's slope. Mann–Kendall is a ranked based method that determines the presence of any trend irrespective of the type of sample data distribution and whether such trend is linear or nonlinear (Tabari and Talaei 2011). There are two reasons for using MK test for trend analysis. Firstly, it is not necessary for time series data to be normally distributed. Secondly, it is insensitive to missing values and data outliers and less sensitive to breaks caused by inhomogeneous time series (Bocchiola and Diolaiuti 2013). A running trend with a moving time window approach, a type of exploratory data analysis similar to that adopted by (Brunetti et al. 2012) is used to calculate and visualise trends for precipitation and discharge over different time windows and assess their significance using consecutive years of the datasets as starting point (x axis in Fig.4 and 6) and ending points (y axis in Fig.4 and 6). As trends in climate change studies are expected to be analysed after 20 years of monitoring, a minimum duration of 15 years was considered for precipitation trend analysis, due to limited availability of data time series, and 20 years for discharge. However, generally, running trend analysis does not require a fixed threshold on the length of time series and the threshold value can be altered according to study objectives, climatic parameters, data availability and local issues. Such analysis is not only helpful to detect non-linear hydro-climatic trends in UIB over the different temporal scales, but it also facilitates a comparison of these results with other studies which did not show overall climatic fluctuations in the study period.

2.9 Change Point Analysis

The nonparametric Pettitt test is also employed in this study to observe change point in hydro-climatic time series (Palaniswami and Muthiah 2018; Zhang et al. 2015). It supposes a time series X_t with $t = 1, 2, \dots, N$ has a change point at time step T . The values of X_t for $t=1, 2, \dots, T$ have CDF $F_1(x)$ and $t=T+1, T+2, \dots, N$ have CDF $F_2(x)$ and $F_1(x) \neq F_2(x)$. Like other statistical measures, the null hypothesis (H_0) depicts the absence of change point against the alternative hypothesis (H_1 : change point present). Given the random variable $k(T)$ defined as:

$$k(T) = \sum_i^T \sum_j^N \text{sgn}(X_i - X_j) \quad , \quad (6)$$

the Pettitt statistics K is written as,

$$K = \max_{0 \leq T \leq N} |k(T)| \quad (7)$$

And time at which change occurs in time series is determined by

$$T = \arg(\max_{0 \leq T \leq N} |k(T)|) \quad (8)$$

p -values of the two-tailed Pettitt test is computed by as,

$$p \approx 2 \exp\left(-\frac{6K^2}{N^3 + N^2}\right) \quad (9)$$

The null hypothesis (H_0) would be rejected for $p < \alpha$, where α is the significance level. In our study, we keep significance level at 5%

3 Results

3.1 Climatology, anomalies and precipitation records

The annual and seasonal precipitation climatology for the study basin is shown in Fig.3. The mean annual bias corrected CHIRPS precipitation for the study domain was estimated as 536 mm yr⁻¹ which is closer to the results obtained by (Cheema and Bastiaanssen 2012; Reggiani and Rientjes 2015; Rizwan et al. 2019; Shafeeque et al. 2019) who suggested corrected precipitation 523, 675±100, 550 and 593 mm yr⁻¹ respectively in UIB using

various methods. The driest area is located over the South-Western part of the study domain along the Shingo and Zanskar basins followed by the upper part of Hunza, Shigar and the central part of Gilgit, while the highest precipitation values occur over the central part of Indus downstream, Astore, Shingo, and the upper part of Shyok. Other wet conditions are also observed over the border of Gilgit/ Indus downstream Besham Qila and Astore/Shingo basin. On a seasonal scale, the driest conditions occur during the autumn season with less than 100 mm season⁻¹ over wider portion of the basin. In summer slightly wetter conditions occur, followed by the monsoon season which receives the major portion of rainfall. Considering the mean seasonal precipitation over the whole study basin, the precipitation rate is 96 mm in winter (DJF), 150 mm in spring (MAM), 220 mm in summer (JJA) and 70 mm in autumn (SON). It is generally believed that the precipitation rate is getting higher with elevation until an *orographic optimum*. However, the observation of this phenomenon is quite uncertain in UIB where higher precipitation values are measured at lower altitudes or no significant increase with altitude is observed (see Fig. 2). There can be two main possible reasons: the first one is related to the fact that the majority of meteorological stations are located in low lying areas and so there are significant chances of under catch snow precipitation, a common problem in windy and snow dominated areas like UIB (Petäjä et al. 2016). The second is related to the representation of precipitation with gridded datasets which are often lacking sufficient as well as reliable gauge observations.

Table 4 Comparison of LWLR Interpolated Precipitation with previous studies

Sub-Basins	PPT mm/yr ⁻¹	Dataset used	Reference period
Indus-Besham Qila	536	This Study (CHIRPS)	1995-2017
	594	This Study (ERA5)	1995-2017
	671	APHRODITE * 1.17	1998-2007 (Lutz et al. 2014)
	482	Station data + KED interpolation	1998-2012 (Dahri et al. 2016)
	675	ERA-Interim, NCEP/NCAR	1998-2009 (Reggiani and Rientjes 2015)
Gilgit	289	This Study (CHIRPS)	1995-2017
	402	This Study (ERA5)	1995-2017
	326	APHRODITE * 1.17	1998-2007 (Lutz et al., 2014)
	162	Station Observations	1998-2007 (Akhtar et al. 2008)
	575	Station data + KED interpolation	1998-2012 (Dahri et al. 2016)
Hunza	574	This Study (CHIRPS)	1995-2017
	372	This Study (ERA5)	1995-2017
	205	APHRODITE * 1.17	1998-2007 (Lutz et al. 2014)
	582	India-WRIS	1971-2004 CWC and NRSC, 2014
	455	Observed + SRM	2000-2013 (Hayat et al. 2019)
Shyok	245	This Study (ERA5)	1995-2017
	395	This Study (CHIRPS)	1995-2017
	175	APHRODITE * 1.17	1998-2007 (Lutz et al. 2014)
	342	Station data + KED interpolation	1998-2012 (Dahri et al. 2016)
Shigar	654	This Study (ERA5)	1995-2017
	576	This Study (CHIRPS)	1995-2017
	917	Station data + KED interpolation	1998-2012 (Dahri et al., 2016)
	550	Model	1980-2009 (Bocchiola et al. 2011)
Astore	649	This Study (ERA5)	1995-2017
	868	This Study (CHIRPS)	1995-2017
	904	Station data + KED interpolation	1998-2012 (Dahri et al. 2016)
	431	APHRODITE * 1.17	1998-2007 (Lutz et al. 2014)
	541	Observed+ SRM	2000-2013(Hayat et al. 2019)
Shingo/Zanskar	383	This Study (ERA5)	1995-2017
	302	This Study (CHIRPS)	1995-2017
	277	Station data + KED interpolation	1998-2012 (Dahri et al. 2016)
	161	APHRODITE * 1.17	1998-2007(Lutz et al. 2014)

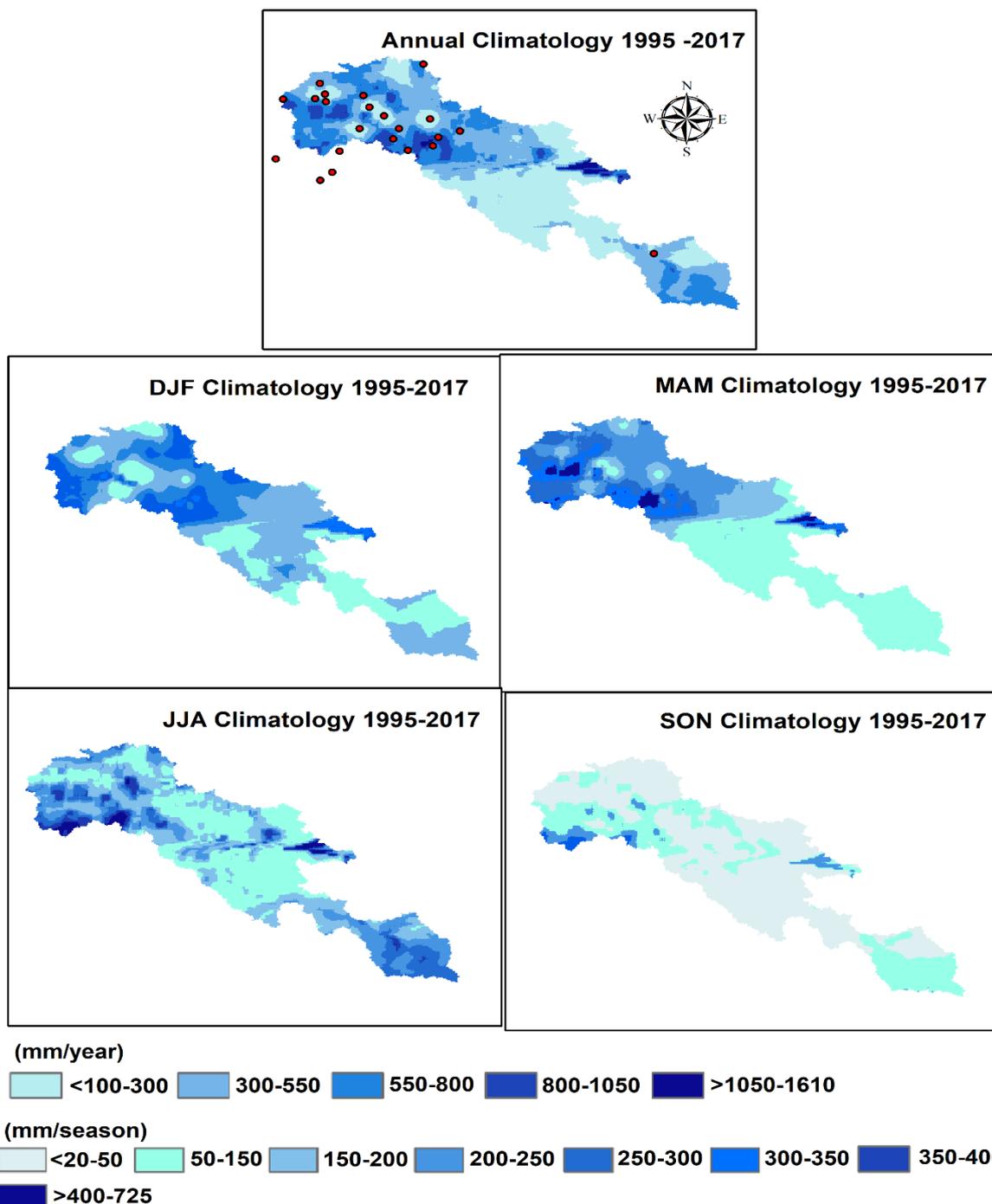


Fig.3 Annual and seasonal precipitation climatology based on Chirps gridded datasets corrected using observed data.

The values of error statistics (2) to (5) computed with the leave-one-out method over the grid points with gauge observations are presented in Table 5. The bias corrected CHIRPS precipitation had the best performance at annual and seasonal scale followed by ERA5 whereas PERSIAN-CDR had the worst performance at both scales. The summary performance of selected gridded datasets is as follows: CHIRPS datasets is slightly underestimated before correction while ERA5 is highly overestimated before correction. However, after correction the statistical results of ERA5 are closer to CHIRPS gridded datasets. The higher values of MAE, BIAS and RMSE for ERA5 before correction due to incorporating liquid and frozen water, consisting rain and snow that falls on the earth surface. Secondly, reanalysis datasets mostly rely on coupled numerical models, ocean and atmospheric data and do not dependent upon the ground-based observations (Copernicus Climate Change Service, 2017).

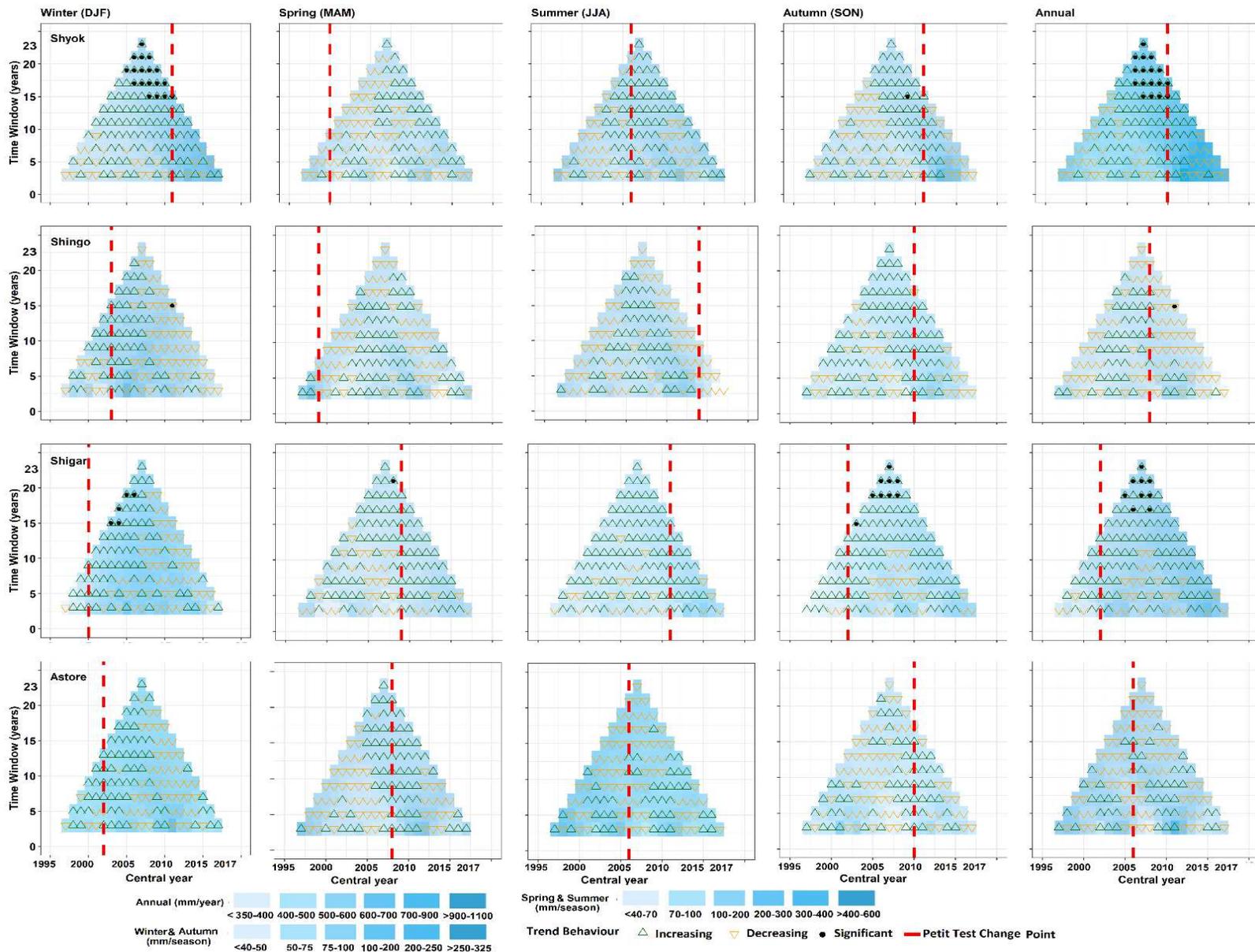
The performance of Aphrodite dataset is found to be inferior to ERA5 especially at annual scale. A great variation of PERSIANN-CDR with observed values might be associated to bias-adjustment, which is based on GPCC dataset with coarse resolution of 2.5° resolution (Fallah et al. 2019). The reliability of CHIRPS and ERA5 were also cross checked by comparing with some previous studies as shown in Table. 4. The results show reliable agreement for developing precipitation climatology using observed and gridded data series extended in space and time in UIB. The discrepancies with other studies are due to varied coverage of study area, time period and number of meteorological stations applied in the analysis.

Table 5 Monthly leave-one-out reconstruction errors of the 1995–2017 normal for the 5 testing stations (Astore, Chilas, Deosai, Gilgit and Ziarat) included in the study domain.

Datasets	Seasons	MAE (mm)	MAPE [%]	BIAS (mm)	RMSE (mm)
CHIRPS	Uncorrected Annual	69.7	20.5	-2.6	93.4
	Annual	50.0	14.0	21.1	56.9
	DJF	19.7	27.0	13.9	23
	MAM	27.1	26.3	15.2	28.4
	JJA	23.0	25.7	10.6	34.4
	SON	17.3	36.2	-10.2	20.9
ERA5	Uncorrected Annual	516.6	64.8	516.6	563.8
	Annual	53.7	15.4	27.7	61.6
	DJF	36.7	35.4	32.6	41.4
	MAM	20.5	15.7	14.5	23.3
	JJA	25.6	33.2	14.3	40.3
	SON	17.4	33.1	5.0	22.1
APHRODITE	Uncorrected Annual	111.4	30.7	36.1	118.4
	Annual	68.4	19.1	28.2	75.3
	DJF	30.1	31.3	26.9	34.9
	MAM	36.4	30.8	12.5	40.1
	JJA	36.1	39.9	-5.0	42.1
	SON	15.9	26.2	-6.2	18.3
PERSIANN-CDR	Uncorrected Annual	155.6	28.9	155.7	195.5
	Annual	78.5	23.5	36.1	85.3
	DJF	40.4	38.1	28.1	43.2
	MAM	38.5	29.4	31.8	36.5
	JJA	49.4	33.7	-15.7	53.7
	SON	26.6	53.9	-9.6	30.8
Mean (mm)					
Observed Rain gauge	Annual				358.9
	DJF				86.6
	MAM				131.6
	JJA				86.8
	SON				53.9

3.2 Variability and trends of the precipitation in Upper Indus Basin

The 1995-2017 annual and seasonal precipitation records for the study domain were evaluated for short and long term trends by using the Theil-Sen slope test (Theil 1950) while the trend significance was evaluated by MK test (Mann 1945). By assuming a confidence interval (C.I) 0.05 (95%), the variability of precipitation on a finer time scale was calculated using running-trend analysis or moving average window approach on the 1995-2017 records.



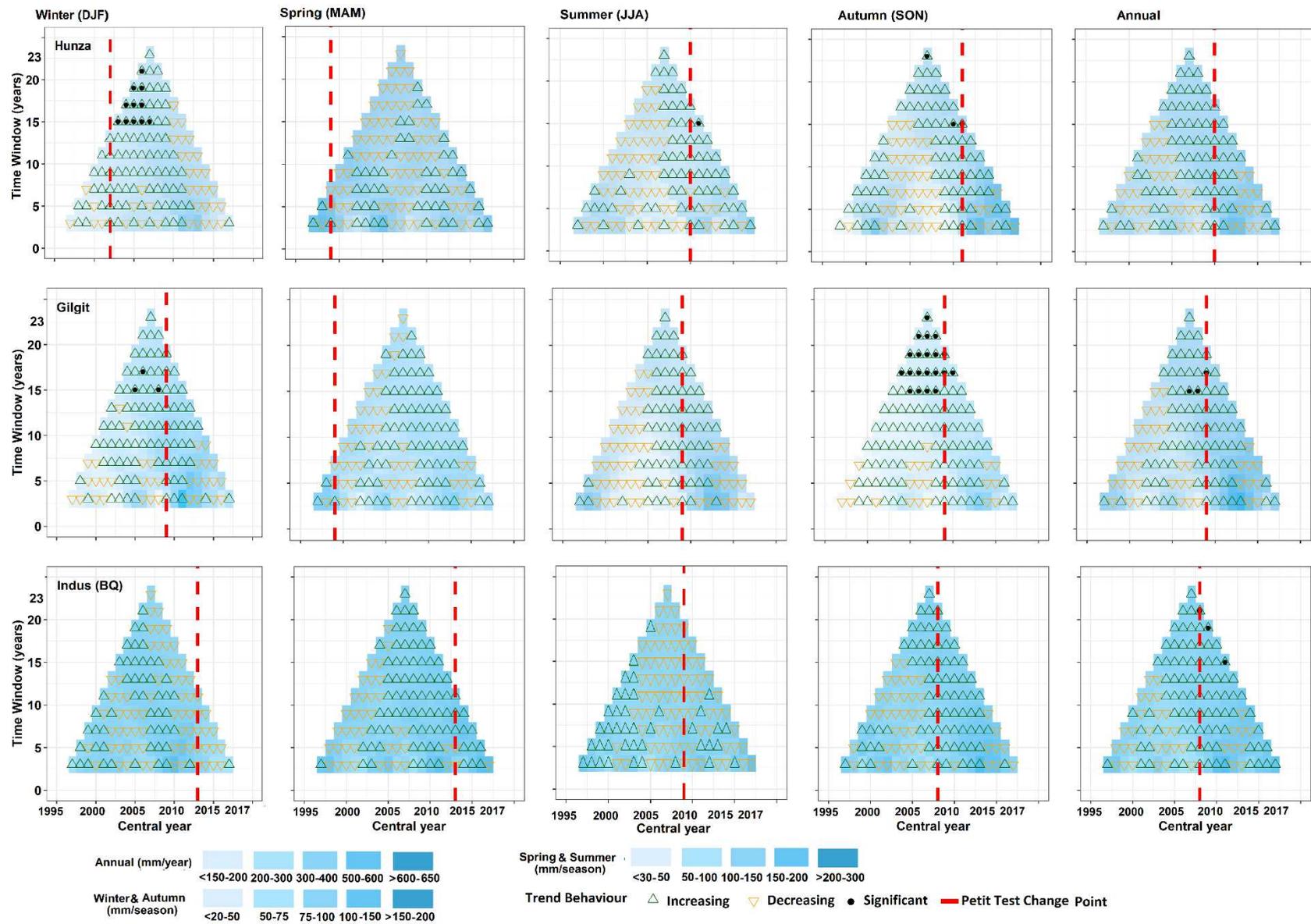


Fig.4 Running trend of annual and seasonal precipitation series. Average Precipitation values are divided into various classes (white to dark blue). Trend values are showed by upward (green) and downward triangles (yellow) while trend significance is described by filled circles (significant with at least 15 data) with Mann-Kendall p-values < 0.05). Red vertical line expresses ‘change point’ year (Petit Test) in the entire time series. The x axis is the starting year (central year), while the y axis is the moving window.

Moreover, change point analysis of precipitation at annual and seasonal time series was also investigated using the Pettit test as shown in Fig 4, Table.S2 and Fig S1. The value of MK-Test significance is estimated on window of increasing width from 15 years up to entire period spanned by series and running from the start to the end of the record. The long-term annual precipitation series exhibited varying interdecadal rising and falling trends. For annual scale, the trend analysis revealed significant increase of precipitation for Shyok, Shigar, UIB Kharmong basins and slightly significant for Indus Downstream and Gilgit basins. Although, Hunza and overall flow at Besham Qila also depicts increasing rate of precipitation but nonsignificant whereas Astore exhibited non-significance falling rate in precipitation. The annual change point (pettit test) or sudden change in precipitation trend (drying to wetting phase) were found during 2004 year for Indus Downstream, UIB Kharmong-Shyok and Shingo basins, 2005 for UIB Kharmong. In case of Hunza Gilgit and Shyok basins, change point has been observed during 2009 and 2012, respectively. In nutshell, precipitation is increasing but non significantly and nonuniformly. It is also noted that Hunza and Shyok basins only exhibited significant change point year by Pettit Test while, all other basins depicted nonsignificant change point year. UIB is characterized by various climatic regimes like westerly disturbances and monsoonal effect orographic disturbance from Tibetan Plateu that make climatology of this region complex, nonuniform distribution and result in inconsistency in precipitation anomaly (Anjum et al. 2018).

On seasonal scale, trend analysis indicated significant increasing trend for Hunza, Shyok, UIB Kharmong, UIB Kharmong-Shyok and slightly significant rising trend of precipitation for (Gilgit, Shigar) during winter season. Astore and Indus at Besham Qila expressed non-significance increasing trend until 2008-09 followed by declining rate of precipitation. The 2003 years marked as a change point (drying to wetting phase) for Astore, Hunza (significant), Shingo, UIB Kharmong basins. Years 2009 and 2011 are noted as 5%-significant change points for Gilgit and Shyok basins. Although, Indus BQ exhibited change point for 2013 year but followed inverse phenomena i.e., wetting to drying phase. For spring season, UIB Kharmong, Astore, Shyok, Shigar and Indus BQ exhibited non-significant upward trend while, Shingo, Hunza and UIB Kharmong depicted nonsignificant decreasing trend. The change point line mainly found around the year 2003 for Gilgit, Hunza, Shingo, UIB Kharmong-Shyok and Shyok basins, 2009 for Shigar and Shyok basins. The increasing rate of precipitation during winter and falling rate during spring is possibly align with alteration in westerly precipitation regimes under climate change. The results of winter wetting also consistent with some previous studies (Cannon et al. 2015; Hasson et al. 2017; Ridley et al. 2013) who also supported rising rate in winter precipitation and drying days during spring season under climate change is mostly linked with incursion of westerly precipitation regimes and northward transfer of rainstorm trajectories in UIB.

For summer season, nonsignificant declining trend in precipitation is observed in Shingo/Zankar, Indus Besham Qila Astore and UIB Kharmong-Shyok basins. Such fragile monsoon impacts in lower side of basins is possible cause of dryness in summer season. Although, precipitation trends are increasing gradually in remaining basins, they were non-significant. Gilgit and Hunza, also experienced dryness from 1995-2010 that support the findings (Hasson et al. 2017) regarding precipitation decreased between 1995-2012. The change point (drying to wetting phase) varies from 2005 to 2014 for all basins except Shingo that follows in inverse direction. For autumn season, Shigar and Gilgit basins revealed significant upward trend in precipitation. Similarly, Hunza, Shyok and UIB-Kharmong also shows slightly significant rising trend. Although, Indus BQ and Shingo also reveal rising trend in precipitation, they were nonsignificant. Pettit Test found significant change point year for Shyok, Shigar, Gilgit and Hunza basins while rest of basins behaved nonsignificant.

3.3 Long Term Temperature Trends

The trends of long term annual and seasonal minimum, maximum, average temperature and diurnal temperature range (DTR) (T_{min} , T_{max} , T_{avg} and $T_{max} - T_{min}$) were observed in order to understand precipitation and streamflow behavior. The MK test and Theil–Sen slope were used to check the significance of trends and their slope. Table.6 shows the annual and seasonal slope values at different stations with bold values indicating trend’s significance. The overall main features of minimum temperature consisted of warming during winter and spring while

significant cooling was observed during summer season. The autumn and annual periods experienced a mixed response.

In case of maximum temperature, an overall significant increasing rate of temperature was noted for winter, spring and annual season while a significant cooling was noted for the summer season. Maximum and minimum winter temperature presented more warming trends than annual time series. Similarly, average temperature also followed a significant warming during winter, spring and annual season while a significant cooling is observed in the summer season. The high agreement of an upward trend for maximum and average temperature is also associated with the increasing streamflow for all stations during winter and spring season as shown in Fig.5. DTR also generally displays a significant increasing rate of temperature both for seasonal and annual scale except for the Chilas station.

Table 6 Long-term temperature trends ($^{\circ}\text{C century}^{-1}$) at seasonal to annual scale

Variable	Stations	DJF	MAM	JJA	SON	ANN
T_{\min}	Astore	1.2	3.7	-1.0	0.2	0.9
	Bunj	0.5	0.9	-2.8	-2.6	-1.1
	Chilas	3.7	1.0	-1.8	0.6	0.9
	Gilgit	1.3	1.0	-1.9	-1.8	-0.4
	Gupis	-1.3	-1.5	-4.9	-3.4	-2.7
	Skardu	0.4	-0.8	-3.4	-3.1	-1.5
T_{\max}	Astore	3.2	5.0	0.0	1.5	1.7
	Bunji	3.4	2.7	-2.9	-1.2	0.4
	Chilas	0.4	1.4	-3.2	1.1	0.6
	Gilgit	4.2	4.2	-2.0	1.2	1.9
	Gupis	5.2	4.6	-2.6	1.7	2.6
	Skardu	4.8	4.8	-0.2	2.2	3.9
T_{avg}	Astore	2.4	4.8	-0.6	0.9	1.6
	Bunji	2.1	1.7	-2.6	-1.8	-0.4
	Chilas	2.0	0.6	-2.7	-0.4	0.1
	Gilgit	2.8	3.2	-2.7	0.2	1.1
	Gupis	1.8	1.7	-3.7	-1.0	0.0
	Skardu	2.6	1.7	-1.8	-0.5	0.5
T_{DTR}	Astore	1.4	1.2	0.9	1.5	1.3
	Bunji	2.7	2.5	-0.2	1.6	1.5
	Chilas	-2.9	0.9	-0.8	-1.8	-1.4
	Gilgit	3.2	3.3	1.2	3.8	2.9
	Gupis	6.9	5.6	2.6	5.3	5.5
	Skardu	4.5	4.9	3.6	5.9	5.0

3.4 Variability and trends of the discharge in Upper Indus Basin

The variability and trends of the river discharge were evaluated in different sub-basins as shown in Fig.5, Table S1 and Fig.S2. The annual streamflow trends expressed strong significant increasing trend at Indus Kachura and slightly significant at Shyok and Astore stations. Although streamflow is also rising for Indus (Besham Qila), Bunji and UIB-Kharmong stations, the rates of increase were not statistically significant. In contrast, streamflow followed non-significant downward trends for Indus at Kharmong, BQ and Yogo stations. Change point analysis with Pettitt test was also studied for respective streamflow stations. The results marked year 2004 for Indus at Besham Qila, UIB at Kharmong, UIB at Kharmong and Shyok, and year 1988 and 1994, respectively, as change

point (drying to wetting phase) for Kachura and Shyok stations. The Pettit test also depicted a 5%-significant change point in streamflow for Indus (Kachura and Bunji), Astore and Shyok stations.

In winter season, most of subbasins showed a significant increase in streamflow. Although Shyok and Kharhong stations also followed positive trends in streamflow they were not statistically significant. The increasing streamflow trends in winter season is consistent with the increase of winter precipitation observed in most catchments, being significant in Shyok, Hunza and Shigar and also with earlier studies (Khattak et al. 2011; You et al. 2017) that reported climate warming causing early snow melt. Our analysis of temperature also reported similar results as shown in Table 6. Similarly, the change point analysis also confirms a 5%-significance change at Besham Qila, Kachura, Shyok, Bunji and Astore in Table S1.

In case of the spring season (MAM) streamflow overall shows an increasing trend in line with the winter season and this can be explained with temperature warming and resulting earlier and more intense snow- and ice-melt. Indus at Bunji and Astore revealed statistically significant increase in streamflow. The slightly rising trend in streamflow were also observed in Indus Downstream at Besham Qila, Kachura, Shyok, UIB-Kharhong and UIB-Kharhong and Yogo. Moreover, change point analysis exhibited significant changes in streamflow for Besham Qila, Astore and Bunji shown in Fig 6.

For the summer season (JJA), the trend analysis shows a 5%-significance increase in streamflow for Indus at Kachura. The change point analysis also confirm significant variability in streamflow at Kachura. Similarly, slightly significant upward trends were also seen at Astore station. In contrast a significant decrease of streamflow were observed at Kharhong station. Although Indus at Behsam Qila and Bunji and Shyok also uncovered declining trend in streamflow, these were not significant. Such long term decrease in discharge behaviors are consistent with some previous studies for Indus at Besham Qila and Kharhong by (Arfan et al. 2019; Yaseen et al. 2020) and Indus at Kachura by (Farhan et al. 2015). Similarly trend behavior for Hunza and Shyok sub basins are also in agreement with (Mukhopadhyay and Khan 2015). The decrease of flow during the summer season can also be associated with declining temperature.

These finding demands a serious attention from policy makers and other stake holder agencies because variability of summer runoff significantly affects water availability in downstream areas in Indus Basin. In fact, about 70-75% of the Indus flow is generated during the summer season. Such changes in flow trends result in a significant reduction in water availability expected in the coming years. As a major share of this water is being used in the agricultural sector during the summer and winter season in Pakistan, if this trend of flow continues gradually in the long term, the reservoirs, farming and other water resources management operations must also be implemented and need to adapt accordingly.

In the autumn season (SON), streamflow exhibited a slightly significant rising trend for Indus at Kachura, Shyok, Astore, Bunji and Besham Qila stations. Similarly, Kharhong station showed non-significant rising trend in streamflow whereas BQ-Kharhong and BQ-Kharhong-Yogo depicted a slightly significant declining trend in streamflow. The change point analysis marked significant variation in streamflow for Bunji and Astore river. The finding of this study is also consistent with a recent study (Yaseen et al. 2020).

Table 7 Comprehensive Explanation of Basin Characteristics of UIB-Sub-Basins

Sub Basins	Gauge Location	Area	Elevation Range	Glacier area	Glacier Area	Q runoff	P Chirps	P ERA5	Annual_RF_C Chirps	Annual_RF_C ERA5
		(km ²)	m	(km ²)	%	(mm yr ⁻¹)	(mm yr ⁻¹)	(mm yr ⁻¹)	(-)	(-)
UIB Down Stream	Besham Qila	163528	542–8572	19338	11.83	470	536	594	0.87	0.79
Gilgit	Gilgit	12761	1415-7104	1169	9.16	693	289	402	2.39	1.7
Hunza	Dainyor	13734	1420–7809	4285	31.20	369	574	372	0.642	0.98
Shyok	Yogo	33041	2389–7673	7388	22.36	368	395	302	0.931	1.22
Shigar	Kachura-Yogo-Kharmong	10639	2189–8448	2991	28.11	927	576	654	1.633	1.42
Astore	Shital Bridge/Doyian	3903	1504–8069	258	6.61	1146	876	1089	1.30	1.05
Shingo-Zanskar	Kharmong	69355	2250–7027	2763	3.98	205	302	383	0.68	0.53
UIB_Pakistan	QUIB-QKhar-QShyok	61132	569-8572	9187	15.03	824	664	877	1.24	0.93
UIB_Pakistan	QUIB-QKhar	94173	569-8572	16575	17.60	664	570	656	1.16	1.01

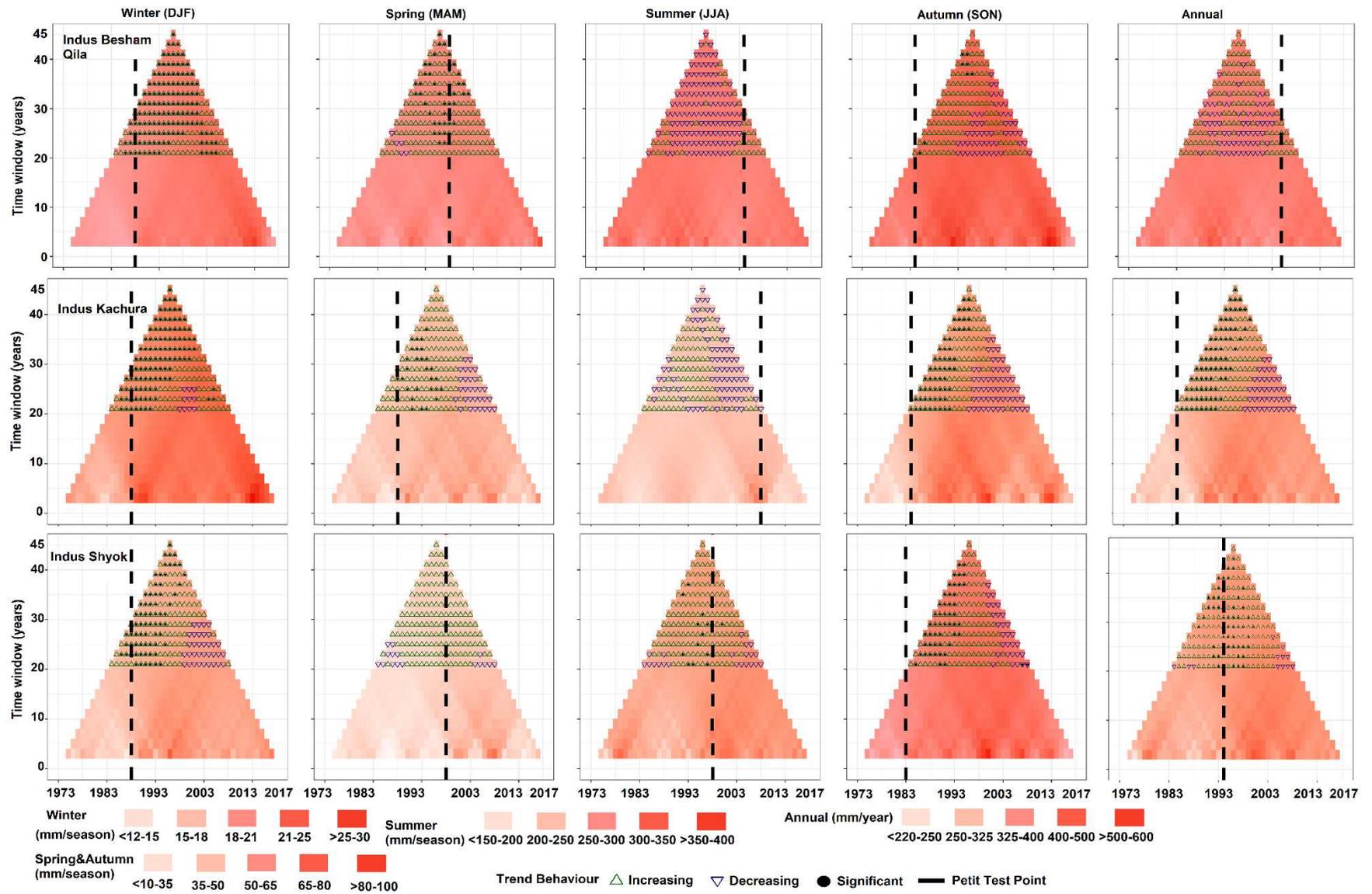


Figure.5 Running trend of annual and seasonal discharge series. Average discharge values are divided into various classes (white to red). Trend values are showed by upward (green) and downward triangles (blue) while trend significance is described by filled circles (significant with at least 20 data and Mann-Kendall p-values < 0.05). Black vertical line expresses 'change point' year (Petit Test) in the entire time series. The x axis is the starting year (central year), while the y axis is the moving window (a minimum assessment duration of 10 year is selected).

3.5 Rainfall-runoff relationship in the Upper Indus Basin

The rainfall-runoff relationship and runoff coefficients are first order representation of under- or overestimation of precipitation in the watershed. The annual and monthly runoff coefficients at sub-basins scale were developed as shown in Table.7 and Fig.S3. The results show that both precipitation datasets (Chirps and ERA5) including observed values are not able to close the water balance because runoff coefficients (Q/P) higher than one have been calculated in the majority of sub-basins. Higher values of runoff coefficient for Gilgit, Shigar, and Shyok basins depict negative mass balance in these basins. Similarly, Astore, Hunza and Besham Qila exhibited higher precipitation values than river discharge except in summer season, because of snow and glacial melt and have natural to negative balance at monthly scale. The Indus Downstream with outlet point at Besham Qila which merges drainage of all upstream sub basins experiences positive to slight negative mass balance during summer season. These results need to search for possible explanations.

Overall, ERA5 performed better compared to Chirps precipitation dataset for closing the water balance. Although, Chirps dataset have good agreement with observed precipitation values, it is still unable to close the water balance in the majority of basins. Immerzeel et al. (2015) suggested that reanalysis products based on ECMWF IFS forecast model such as ERA5 can be used to validate atmospheric convergence. ERA5 incorporated fully coupled components of atmosphere, land surface and ocean waves that are useful for closing atmospheric water balance. Gao and Liu (2013) argued that mountain regions exhibited higher values of runoff coefficient due to greater magnitude of surface runoff, shallow soils, steep slope, permafrost and glaciers. In case of UIB, previous studies in this region and neighborhood glacierized catchments also indicated runoff coefficient values greater than one (Adnan et al. 2017; Dahri et al. 2016; Immerzeel et al. 2015; Wortmann et al. 2018). Siddique and Hashmi (2012) found 10%, 25% and 65% contribution of rainfall, snowmelt and glacier in the annual flows of Indus River at Tarbela outlet. The results of these studies about higher values of runoff coefficient also support our results. However, values are slightly changed from current study due to use of different gridded datasets, size and location of study area and in any case values higher than one are hardly acceptable.

Generally, it is believed that higher values of runoff coefficient indicate glaciers retreat and alteration of catchment hydrology. However, it is not only the single possible reason for negative mass balance. There are some other factors such as under catch observed precipitation as well as production mechanism of various gridded precipitation as reported in UIB (Immerzeel et al. 2015; Käab et al. 2012) and it is also evident in our results as shown in Table.4 and Fig.S3. The discharge values greater than precipitation in Shigar, Shyok and Gilgit basins might also be associated with under catch precipitation due to non-availability of observed gauge stations at high elevation in UIB, where the orographic effect on enhancing precipitation could be relevant and because of possible systematic errors in measuring solid precipitation (Eccel et al. 2012). Similarly, some other mass balance studies (Brun et al. 2017; Gao and Liu 2013) also reinforce our conclusion that glacier retreat is only a partial reason for the missing water volumes in UIB for closing the water balance.

4. Discussion

The diverse climatic signals and contrasting hydrological regimes observed in the UIB are the main sources of the uncertainties affecting the assessment of the key components of the hydrological balance, as precipitation, snow and ice accumulation and melt and runoff. A clear example of such an inconsistent behavior is the difference between accumulation patterns based on various remote sensing data acquisition techniques and the geodetic mass balance as reported in multiple studies (Immerzeel et al. 2015; Krakauer et al. 2019; Lutz et al. 2016b).

Based on the results of the analysis, it is concluded that CHIRPS dataset performs well with respect to observed gauge precipitation with lowest BIAS, MAPE and RMSE at annual and seasonal scale, followed by ERA5. The basin wide corrected monthly precipitation values from Chirps and ERA5 and their corresponding runoff coefficient values from each sub basin are illustrated in **Fig.S3**. The results of rainfall runoff, based on novel combination of gridded datasets and comprehensive ground observations, are in good agreement with some previous studies (Dahri et al. 2016; Käab et al. 2015). The higher values of runoff in Gilgit, Shigar, Shyok imply

a significant contribution of glacier retreat and snow melt, as well as undercatch precipitation. It is also concluded that ERA5 precipitation proved to be a better dataset in-terms of closure of the water balance.

In the second part of this study, varying positive and negative trends for both precipitation and runoff at seasonal and annual scale in all sub-basins are reported. Previous knowledge about hydro-climatic trend is mainly confined up to linear trend analysis or with specific time interval, not explaining non-stationary precipitation and discharge variability within decadal to interdecadal time scale. The reliable knowledge about hydro-climatic variability over the UIB is very challenging for effective management and precise usage of available water resources in downstream areas (Böhner and Lucarini 2015). In summary, precipitation exhibited greater seasonal than annual variations. Although, precipitation is increased annually, but its behavior non-significant except Shyok and Shigar basins. Pettit test indicates that change points (drying to wetting phase) mostly lie annually from 2005 to 2010 in the majority of the basins.

An overall increasing trend of winter precipitation are found in all sub-basins. Such a rising rate of precipitation can be due to a significant contribution of winter westerlies regimes and a transfer of rainstorm trajectories in UIB. The results of higher rates in winter precipitation also consensus with previous studies (Krakauer et al. 2019; Latif et al. 2018; Yaseen et al. 2020). In spring the majority of glacierized catchments show a downward trend in precipitation. On the other hand, Indus Besham Qila, Astore, UIB Kharmonj indicate increasing rate of precipitation, but they are statically not significant. Change point analysis also did not record well any transition phase (drying to wetting) in all sub-basins. In summary, spring is drying, as it is also reported in some recent studies (Hasson et al. 2017; Yaseen et al. 2020).

In summer the basin is not showing any significant trend in the precipitation amount. On the other hand, some basins (Shyok, Gilgit, Hunza and Shigar) show a rising rate of precipitation, but none of them is statistically significant. The results showing a decreasing rate of summer precipitation align with previous studies (Cannon et al. 2015; Hasson et al. 2017; Latif et al. 2018; Rizwan et al. 2019). Lutz et al. (2016a) found a clear shift of the summer long-term rising precipitation trends to drying, revealing a transition towards weaker monsoonal influence at lower levels. In order to crosscheck this hypothesis, it would be better to analyse seasonality in precipitation and streamflow by modeling melt water runoff in the selected area under different climatic conditions. It will be discussed in future perspective of this study. The Indus Downstream with outlet point at Besham Qila usually receives 70% of the annual rainfall in the summer season. This water is stored in two major reservoirs, Tarbela and Mangla, for next cropping season, known as Kharif and Rabi season, when rice and wheat is cultivated in major downstream areas of the UIB. If the same downfall trend of precipitation continues in the future, it will reduce the water availability, ultimately putting further stress on already dwindling water reserves of Pakistan.

Concerning streamflow, variabilities are more pronounced seasonally than annually. Results indicate that winter and spring streamflow discharge significantly or slightly significantly increased in all sub-basins, whereas it decreased in summer. Yaseen et al. (2020) suggested that a rising trend of winter discharge is mainly linked with westerly precipitation regimes, because a major portion of UIB hydrology is dominated by westerly disturbances rather than monsoon offshoots. There are also different significant interpretations about these flow dynamics. One reason could be found in the significant warming in winter and spring, as shown in Table 6, whereas summer cooling caused early snow melt during spring and less flow available during summer (i.e., decreasing trends in summer discharge show lower melting rates in summer, resulting in potential stability of glaciers and consequently positive basin storage).

5. Conclusions

The study presents a comprehensive hydro-climatic trend and precipitation anomaly analysis for the UIB at the sub-basin scale. The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the performance of four gridded precipitation datasets for developing a precipitation climatology and check its reliability for the UIB. The datasets were examined for an overlapping period spanning from 1995 to 2017 at the seasonal and at the annual scale. Based on results, it is found that the performance of CHIRPS dataset is good to describe the distribution of observed precipitation with lowest BIAS, MAE, RMSE and MAPE, followed by ERA5. The mean annual corrected precipitation was calculated as 536 mm yr⁻¹ in the UIB gauged at Besham Qila. The precipitation climatology exhibited a higher rate of precipitation in the lower part of the basin for both the annual and the seasonal scale. The runoff coefficient for CHIRPS and ERA5 is though greater than one in some basins, making the water balance unrealistic. There can be two main reasons: 1) underestimate of precipitation, as most of the monitoring stations in the UIB are valley-based and do not represent the true basin hydrology in the high elevation bands 2) glacier

retreat and early snow melt due to global warming and elevation-dependent warming. However, there are small chances for glacier retreat because most glaciers, especially in Karakorum, have been advancing or in stable conditions in the last decade (2008-2016) (Berthier and Brun 2019). Meanwhile, precipitation rate declines with elevation annually, rises during winter and spring season but decreases during summer season. These issues demand further investigation, as they are affecting the contribution of glacier and snow melt in total flow from each sub-basin. The findings of this study would be helpful to understand the discrepancies between the observed and the gridded precipitation datasets referring to the UIB and may have substantial impact on studies related to the designing, planning, modeling and management of the water resources under climate change. The results of the study also recommend that gridded precipitation is corrected before its usage in hydrological modeling studies, especially in those involving glacierized catchments. The anomaly method proved to be worthwhile for assessing precipitation climatology, especially in data scarce regions with a sparse monitoring network.

In the second part of this study, annual and seasonal precipitation revealed significant variability seasonally rather than annually. Summer is drying while winter is wetting. The increasing rate of precipitation was also seen during spring in some basins, but they were not statistically significant. Similarly, trend analysis of observed streamflow at various gauge stations in the UIB facilitates understanding about comprehensive water balance for the region. Like precipitation variability, streamflow one is more pronounced seasonally rather than annually. At the annual scale, trend analysis of discharge shows slightly significant increasing trend at the Indus River Kachura, Shyok and Gilgat stations, while nonsignificant decreasing trends at Kharhong stations, BQ-Kharhong and BQ-Kharhong-Shyok stations are found. Seasonal flow analysis reveals more complex regime: winter (December-February) and spring (March-May) exhibit a rising trend in streamflow, while summer (June- August) shows a declining trend. The seasonal analysis also shows an increasing rate of warming in spring and early seasonal melt discharge from most of the sub-basins, whereas field significant low flow/drying was observed during summer.

The findings of this hydro-climatic analysis are expected to support future sustainable development projects in the study area. For instance, it would be helpful to assist engineers, the government and its organizations, as well as other stakeholder agencies to set up structural and non-structural measures to handle extreme flood and other natural hazard events, such as building dams and other control structures, lining canals and water course and adopt precision agricultural techniques (drip and sprinkler irrigation). It would also be viable to bridge the gap in terms of water availability and supplies especially in the lower area of the basin, where a major share of this water is being used for growing crops. These results would facilitate farmers and other stakeholder agencies to set cropping pattern according to water availability under prevailing climatic conditions.

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Declarations

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Author's Contribution: L, M.U., R.R., formal analysis, methodology, investigations, and validation. L, M.U data handling in software. L, M.U examined results, writing—original draft preparation. Ul., S.H. and G.G., visualization, verify results and contributed to writing and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Figures

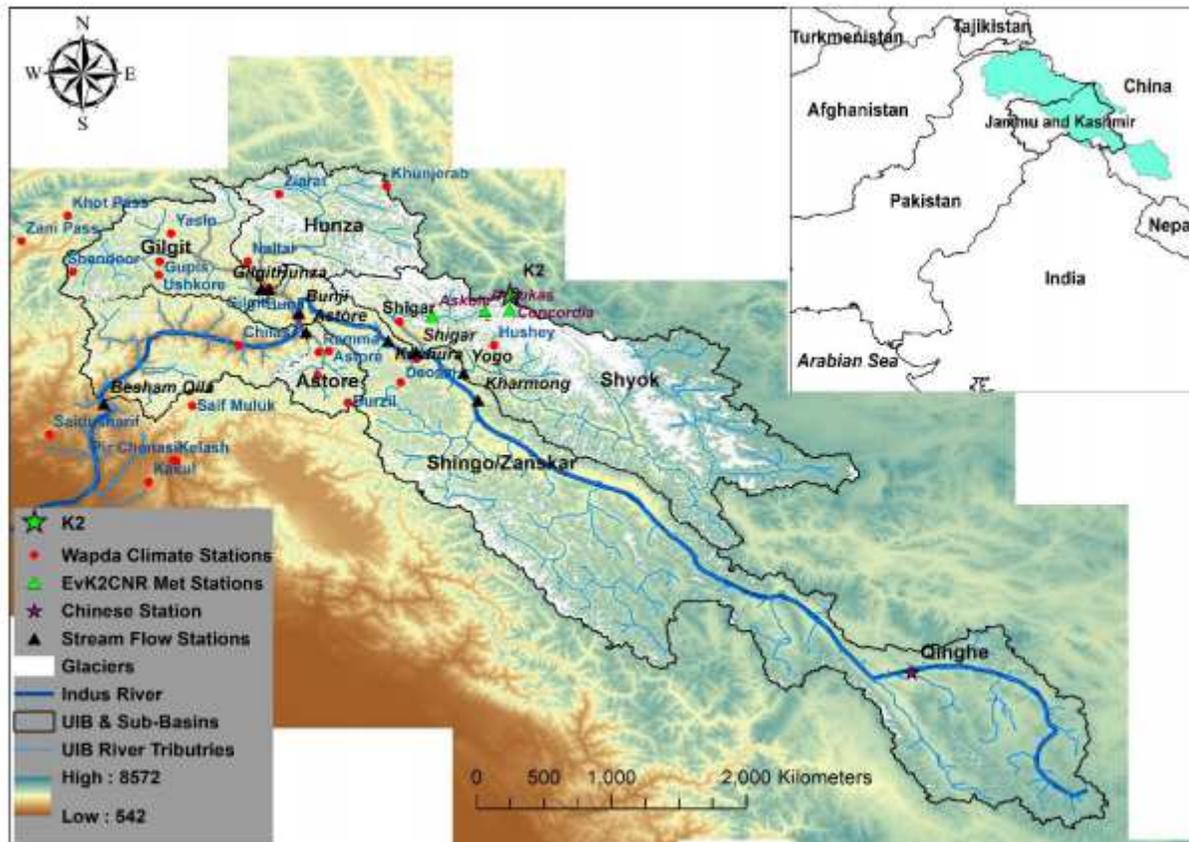


Figure 1

The location of the Upper Indus River Basin (UIB - light blue in the inset) and of the Hydro-Meteorological Stations used for the analysis. Note: The designations employed and the presentation of the material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of Research Square concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. This map has been provided by the authors.

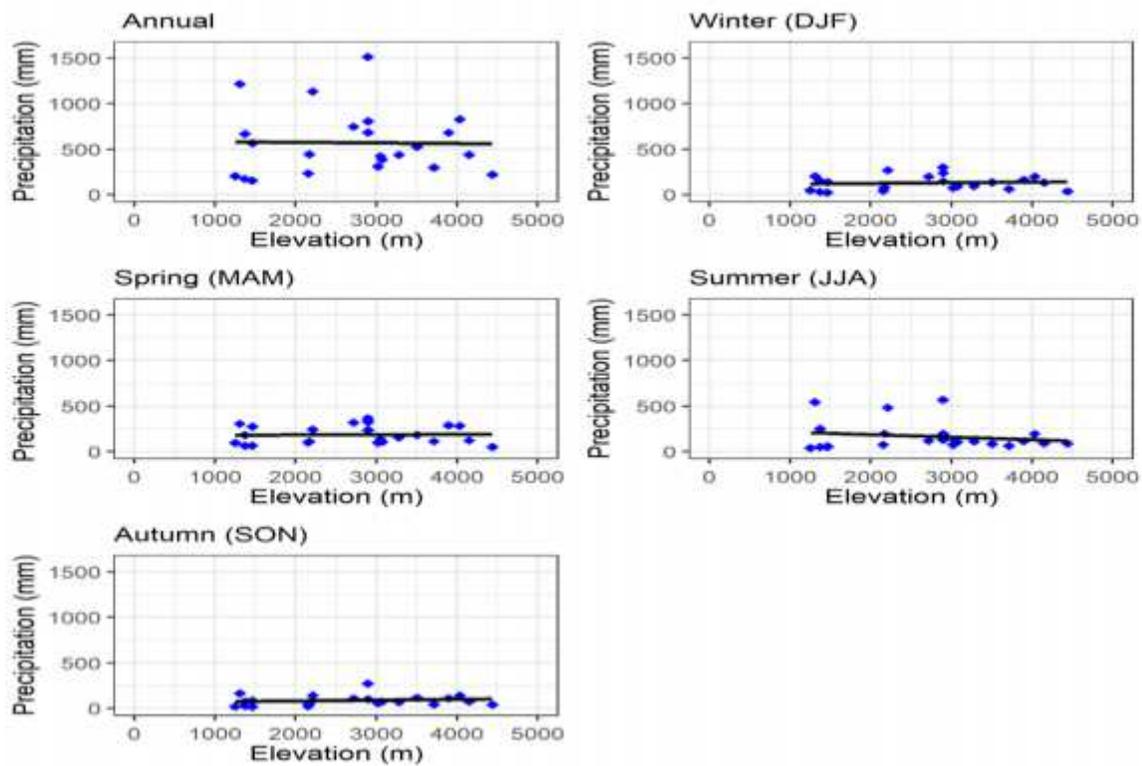


Figure 2

Relationship between gauge precipitation and elevation observed at the annual and seasonal scale in the UIB.

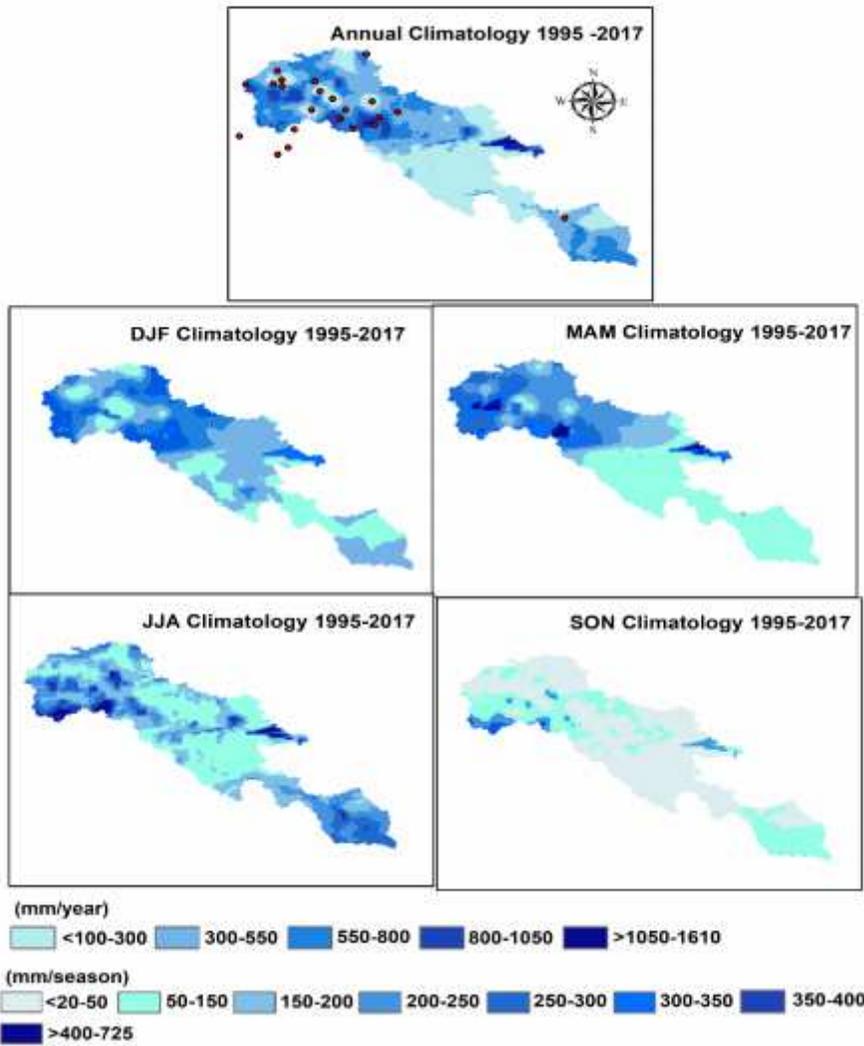


Figure 3

Annual and seasonal precipitation climatology based on Chirps gridded datasets corrected using observed data.

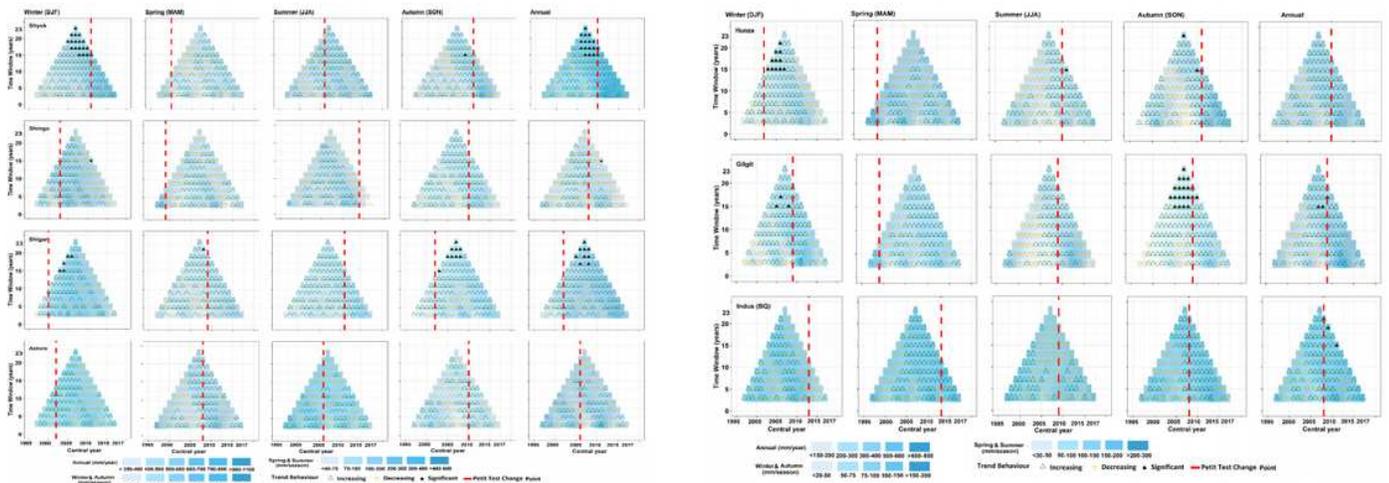


Figure 4

Running trend of annual and seasonal precipitation series. Average Precipitation values are divided into various classes (white to dark blue). Trend values are showed by upward (green) and downward triangles (yellow) while trend significance is described by filled circles (significant with at least 15 data) with Mann-Kendall p-values < 0.05). Red vertical line expresses 'change point' year (Petit Test) in the entire time series. The x axis is the starting year (central year), while the y axis is the moving window.

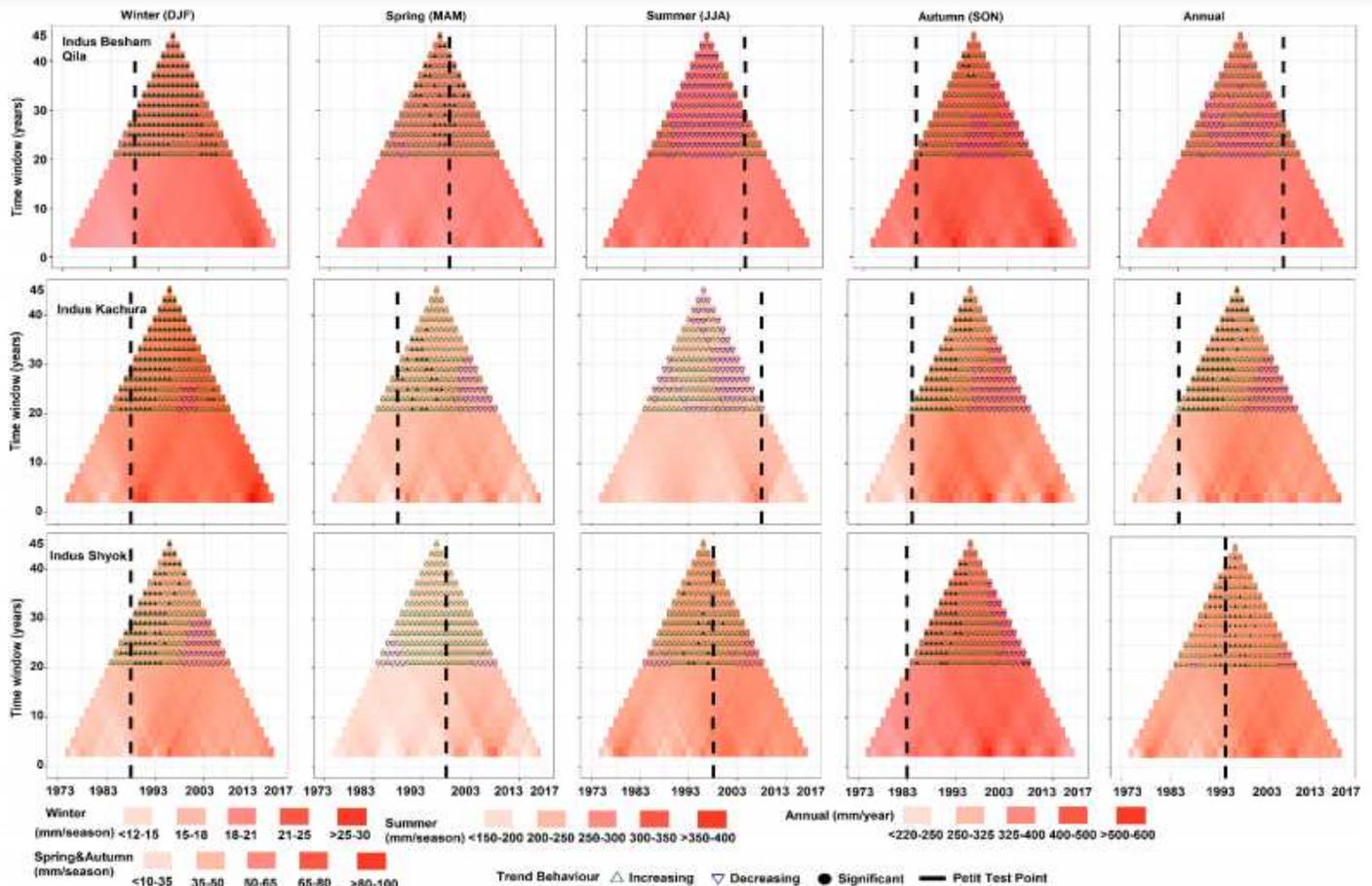


Figure 5

Running trend of annual and seasonal discharge series. Average discharge values are divided into various classes (white to red). Trend values are showed by upward (green) and downward triangles (blue) while trend significance is described by filled circles (significant with at least 20 data and Mann-Kendall p-values < 0.05). Black vertical line expresses 'change point' year (Petit Test) in the entire time series. The x axis is the starting year (central year), while the y axis is the moving window (a minimum assessment duration of 10 year is selected).

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [SupplymentaryMaterial.pdf](#)