

Linking emergency aid with long-term development in Pakistan: From response to preparedness

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Pakistan is facing severe natural and manmade disasters. The country is prone to frequent and intense large-scale natural catastrophes such as floods and earthquakes. The volatile security situation together with social challenges, e.g. a high unemployment rate and limited access to basic facilities like gas/water/electricity, are working as a catalyst in increasing vulnerability. This paper prepared for the Berlin Summer Dialogue 2012 on “International Disaster Relief. The challenges posed by fragile states and climate change” argues that responding to these challenges with “response-oriented set-ups” will no longer work. What is needed is to shift the focus of all engaged stakeholders from a response-oriented to a preparedness mentality.

Geographically, Pakistan is placed at a strategic location in the South Asian Belt, with the Himalayas in the north and the Arabian Sea in the south. Due to disruptions in the different regions triggered by global warming, the country faces monsoon flooding, flash flooding, landslides, avalanches, glacial lake outburst flows, sea intrusion, droughts and cyclones. Earthquakes also occur regularly. Additionally, a volatile security situation, political unrest, the interference of the external world in national matters of interest, an increasingly precarious socioeconomic situation with fewer jobs, fading access to basic facilities such as gas/water/electricity, inflation and the

media highlighting negative and violent features are working as a catalyst in increasing vulnerability in Pakistan.

However, until 2005 there was no nationally recognised lead entity in Pakistan for coordinating the humanitarian response to the catastrophes resulting from this high vulnerability. At that time, the international community responded to Pakistan’s requests for assistance by providing funds, which were channelled through government pipelines. Ensuring accountability for the funds was a major challenge for donors, however. Building a consensus on the use of multilateral and bilateral commitments and setting modalities, especially for early recovery leading to reconstruction, was a lengthy process. Finally, in 2005/2006, the Earthquake Reconstruction Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) was formed and funds worth billions of rupees were routed through these structures. But bureaucratic procedures and remote monitoring of access remained difficult for donors. On the ground, slow progress on reconstruction, with few visible outcomes in spite of available funding, created an environment of mistrust among stakeholders (donors/international humanitarian agencies/general public in Pakistan). Then, in 2010, the Pakistani Government mandated the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) under the Prime Minister’s Secretariat to undertake the coordination

of disaster management. The NDMA quickly emerged as the main body nationally and was soon faced with the challenge of mounting multiple large-scale responses to a number of disasters occurring within a very short time. It earned the trust of the stakeholders by acting as a focal agency for coordinating relief, recovery and rehabilitation projects and also managed to establish its own provincial structures (provincial DMAs). The super-flood in 2010 and further floods in 2011 were dealt with smartly by the NDMA but the devastation was so great that response, recovery and reconstruction leading to development were too complex to be handled by the usual players, including the Government and the international community. The monsoon floods in 2011, which came when Pakistan was still in a recovery phase, placed a further overwhelming burden on governance and the international community. Donor fatigue and alarming unpredictability in a deteriorating internal security environment increased the already immense difficulties facing all reconstruction and development interventions in the country.

Linking relief, rehabilitation and development is extremely important

The NDMA and other stakeholders have now recognised the need for a shift in strategy. In order to ensure sustainability in the use of funds to deal with the natural hazards hitting Pakistan with more frequency and intensity, a different approach to mitigating the impacts on human lives, infrastructures, livelihoods and the environment is needed. Responding through relief operations with “response-oriented set-ups” will no longer work. Instead, linking relief, rehabilitation and development is becoming extremely important – both to meet basic humanitarian needs in times of disasters (relief) and as an “entry point” into the affected communities to establish the bases for joint preparedness (risk reduction) actions. To me, climate smart disaster preparedness is the best strategy for survival, and community-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR) is the key to impartial and neutral coordinated humanitarian actions in Pakistan. But still, it will take some more time to shift the focus of the engaged stakeholders (government, humanitarian actors, communities/general public and media) from a “response-oriented mentality” to a “preparedness mentality”. Here are some recommendations for bridging gaps and building resilience:

Improving political and social conditions

- As vulnerability and resilience are linked to poverty and the lack of basic necessities for daily life, the provision of energy, safe drinking water, the protection of the livelihoods of the Pakistani people, sufficient job opportunities, price controls, sustainable services for health and education, social welfare, environmental protection, including forestation, safe transportation and above all security should be the priorities for the administration in Pakistan.
- To stop cross-border terrorism and build harmony among neighbouring states (Afghanistan, India and Iran), global political efforts such as sustainable mediation and international forums between governments, various groups like religious parties, political set ups/parties and general communities are an urgent necessity for the South Asian region, especially for Pakistan.

Strengthening early warning

- Pakistan needs hazard mapping for risks and cluster mapping of emergencies for all major areas.
- Furthermore, Pakistan needs to develop effective and interlinked early warning systems/mechanisms at all levels of government. Therefore technical and institutional assistance for government departments which monitor climate change and related events, including the provision of training/equipment, is needed.
- In particular, there is a need to restore and enhance the meteorological monitoring network (both conventional and automatic), with hydrological monitoring stations in flood-affected areas. The flash flood forecasting system needs to be improved. Regional flood forecasting centres should be established in the provinces. Radar services need to be strengthened to provide coverage for the whole country.
- The public should be provided with literature and made aware of the various signals/media used as part of early warning and evacuation.
- The dissemination of early warnings down to the community level needs to be improved. Telecommunication network coverage and the availability and use of different media should be studied to

identify the best possible way to communicate early warnings to people in remote rural areas.

Building capacities

- Capacity building, in terms of structural (infrastructure strengthening) and non-structural (training, simulations, gear/equipment) mitigation actions, needs to be increased.
- A comprehensive manual of disaster-specific good practices/lessons learned needs to be developed, continually updated and disseminated by a body of representatives from government, INGOs, media and donors.
- To facilitate peer-to-peer communication in and cooperation on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation measures, more advocacy for and technical support in the provision of information, education and communication material are needed at all levels.
- Similar INGOs and other agencies must share information about their capacities with national authorities for better coordination. Resource mapping of civil society organisations, INGOs and international aid organisations is therefore required.
- The coordination, cooperation and collaboration role of the existing NDMA structure as the lead agency and “disaster management coordination hub” should be strengthened.
- The capacity of organisations such as the NDMA could be enhanced through adequate budgetary provisions and annual budgets for “preparedness”.
- Trained and adequately equipped assessment and disaster response teams must be available at community and district levels.
- A results-based management system (RBMS) should be developed to increase donor confidence and create transparency in the use of donor funding.
- National media should be encouraged to play a positive role in disseminating correct information and to portray responses and rehabilitation projects, rather than highlighting gaps and giving a negative picture to the international community but also to the nation as a whole.
- Government flexibility in making policies to support the provision of timely international aid in terms of visa provision for technical HR expertise, goods and consumables, taxes, customs etc. should be improved. For example, the Interior Ministry should play an active role to assist international humanitarian organisations with visas, security and general facilitation with law enforcement agencies.

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* The paper expresses the personal opinions of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of his employer or the publisher

Improving credibility/assistance to international actors

- Credibility plays the most important role in attracting local and international donors. Good governance and strict checks and balances are needed. Accurate facts and figures need to be collected and disseminated to ensure donor confidence. Multi-tier audits and M&E mechanisms should exist in all organisations.

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