

Starting on the road to recovery: saving lives and rebuilding livelihoods after the Pakistan earthquake

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Summary

On 8 October 2005, an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale ripped through northern Pakistan, leaving 80,000 people dead and affecting 3 million more. The crisis is far from over: survivors of the earthquake still face dangers and difficulties as the worst of Pakistan's winter weather has now settled in. Many people are huddled in tents and shelters that give inadequate protection against the freezing temperatures, with only sporadic and insufficient supplies of food.

While saving lives remains the immediate priority throughout the winter, there is also a need to start laying the foundations for reconstruction and rehabilitation. As the journey towards reconstruction begins, the opportunity must be seized to raise those affected out of the poverty that existed before the earthquake. Measures must also be taken to reduce people's vulnerability to future disasters. Particular attention needs to be given to addressing the needs of the poorest people and of women.

Oxfam urges the international community, the Government of Pakistan, and others to take action as follows:

- The quantity and quality of the relief effort must be scaled up to address gaps and needs, in order to sustain people throughout the winter months with adequate shelter and food. The conditions in camps need to be addressed. At all levels, the humanitarian community needs to aim towards meeting Sphere standards – the internationally agreed minimum standards for a disaster response. Co-ordination needs to be improved in order to address the gaps, and UN agencies – particularly UNHCR and IOM, with support from OCHA – must provide the necessary leadership in identifying the appropriate actors to fill them.
- The reconstruction effort must reduce people's vulnerability to future disasters and ensure that living standards are restored to conditions better than those that existed before the earthquake. Accountable, 'reconstruction-plus' plans must be drawn up

with the participation of affected communities, including minorities, and with a specific focus on including women in reconstruction planning. The Government of Pakistan, the UN, and donors have a responsibility to ensure that public buildings are rebuilt to the highest, earthquake-resistant standards.

- All displaced people must be given a genuine choice: either to return home, with the necessary support, or to remain in camps until adequate alternatives are found. Decisions on relocation must be based on voluntary consent and in consultation with affected communities. The UN's Guiding Principles on internally displaced people must be upheld. The property rights of women and the marginalised must be ensured. Principles and procedures of cash compensation by the Government of Pakistan must take into account land entitlement and registration issues.
- The Government of Pakistan and donors must work through the appropriate civilian authorities to deliver on reconstruction. Effective co-ordination mechanisms need to be put in place at national, regional, and local levels to handle the reconstruction effort.
- Both the government and the international community have a responsibility to address existing gender disparities during the reconstruction process. For instance, reconstruction provides an opportunity to tackle the massive gender gaps that existed before the earthquake in education and access to health services.
- The Government of Pakistan and the international community must provide timely and appropriate support for livelihood restoration that is both targeted according to immediate needs and which addresses longer-term needs: for instance, through cash-for-work schemes, training opportunities, or restocking of livestock.
- Aid received must be sufficient for the Government of Pakistan's relief and reconstruction needs. Donors need to deliver on their pledges of funding for the reconstruction phase, ensuring that the US\$5.8bn committed at the donors' conference in November 2005 materialises in time to be used effectively.

A crisis still unfolding

More than three months after the devastating earthquake struck northern Pakistan, the crisis is still unfolding for many of the three million people affected by it. Of the two million made homeless by the quake, around one and a half million remain in tents, with temperatures plummeting to -15°C in some areas. It is estimated that there are 185,000 people in the official registered camps, with many more in numerous smaller, unregistered camps, or 'tent villages'.

Conditions for survivors in the official camps remain difficult, especially with the onset of the harsh mountain winter, while inhabitants in many of the unofficial camps are finding that even their most basic needs are not being met. Only a handful of camps meet the Sphere standards - the internationally agreed minimum standards for disaster response¹.

Smaller, spontaneously established camps have missed out on aid provision, often owing to confusion over responsibility for the distribution and delivery of urgently needed items. People still do not have access to the heating and cooking equipment they need, or to appropriate and adequate food to sustain them in freezing temperatures.

The case of Bano, a woman living in a 'tent village' with her six children in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), is typical of the complaints that Oxfam hears from survivors living in the spontaneous camps: 'We need more food, more blankets,' says Bano, her clothes muddied from the slush beneath her feet. 'The cold is our biggest problem now.' She lost one child in the disaster and her husband is still missing. She is desperately trying to keep her children warm in an inadequate tent, amid the freezing wind in this mountainous area of northern Pakistan.

The difficult Himalayan terrain and the region's rudimentary infrastructure have presented local authorities and relief agencies with a massive logistical challenge. Many roads were damaged during the earthquake and since then have been frequently blocked by landslides caused by aftershocks and heavy rain. Hundreds of affected villages and settlements are spread across an area the size of Switzerland.

'It is over three months since the earthquake struck and we're still in full life-saving mode, as this crisis shows no sign of abating. Those affected have been very lucky that the heavy snowfalls have only just struck, and the challenge now is to reach vulnerable people before it is too late,' says Farhana Faruqi Stocker, Oxfam's Country Director for Pakistan.

Addressing urgent needs and looking forward

Co-ordination needs to be improved in order to address the gaps and the urgent unmet needs of the earthquake survivors. UN agencies, particularly UNHCR, IOM and OCHA, must provide the necessary leadership in identifying the appropriate actors and in mobilising their assistance to fill these gaps immediately. The UN, donors, and the Government of Pakistan must include NGOs in strategic co-ordination mechanisms for relief planning and in developing and delivering on transitional strategies and plans.

Better camp management is urgently needed in many of the spontaneous camps. Internationally agreed minimum standards for camp management – the Sphere standards – must be reached and the transition from military to civilian responsibility must proceed carefully and in a sensitive manner. Idrees Khan, Oxfam's Area manager for Manshera, explains the problems in meeting these standards: 'Oxfam is trying to meet the international humanitarian Sphere standards. However, we have faced challenges in many camps, often because of a lack of good camp management and planning. For instance, poor camp planning often leads to a lack of space to properly position latrines away from tents. We have also found it difficult to access women in the consultation process, due to strong cultural traditions that limit communication with women.'

The shelter requirements for survivors to make it through the winter are still not met. As of mid-December, it was estimated that 75 per cent of all tents were not fully 'winterised'. In order to meet these winterisation needs, tents are being upgraded with additional blankets, plastic sheeting and ropes. The process of winterisation of tents is still ongoing, with around 4.8 million blankets distributed to date, with another 1 million still required, and the distribution of stoves for heating and cooking is still at the early stages of delivery. Around 40 per cent of those above 5,000ft are estimated to need additional food.

The necessary funding to meet these needs is still lacking and has, in many respects, added to the slow fulfilment of these obvious needs – for instance, only 60 per cent of the funding pledged to the World Food Programme has arrived. This reflects an

overall shortfall in funding to the UN Flash Appeal, which is still only just over 50 per cent funded.

Despite all the challenges, the relief effort has made a huge difference to the lives of many. Operation 'Winter Race' (the UN's name for the programme to meet urgent winter shelter needs), has just officially completed its first phase, which targeted survivors living at altitudes above 5,000ft². Phase two is now under way and is focusing on providing assistance to those living in areas between 3,000ft and 5,000ft. Some official, planned camps are now meeting the immediate needs of residents and are also providing support for the rehabilitation phase. For instance, Meera camp near Battagram – the largest camp in the region and home to more than 18,000 people – is meeting Sphere standards. At least 2,500 children in the camp are now going to school, and a community centre for women, where they can receive training on sewing machines, has been built.

While saving lives will remain the immediate priority throughout the winter, an estimated three million people lost their livelihoods, land, or livestock in the October earthquake and there is a crucial question of what happens next for these people.

Once the worst of the winter weather is over in early March, there is expected to be a movement of people returning back to their areas of origin. There are already signs of some spontaneous recovery throughout the affected areas: many local markets are up and running again and people have begun rebuilding their homes. The humanitarian community and the Government of Pakistan must be prepared to support affected communities in their reconstruction efforts. To maintain the momentum for recovery, as well as getting through the emergency phase, the international community must remain engaged and must support the Pakistani authorities and the work of NGOs.

Guaranteeing 'reconstruction-plus'

The reconstruction effort must reduce vulnerability to future disasters and ensure that households are restored to better living conditions than they experienced before the crisis. Investment in development and improved education, health, and livelihoods will help to reduce people's vulnerability to future disasters. Internationally agreed development frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals, are a useful point of reference against which to measure progress.

Before the earthquake, there was crippling poverty in the affected areas, with poverty rates significantly above the national average, and it will be an enormous challenge to avoid simply rebuilding that poverty. Six out of nine of the districts affected were among the most food-insecure parts of the country, and were characterised by small landholdings, tenant farming, low literacy rates, and poor access. In the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), average earnings before the disaster were lower than in any other province in Pakistan, with an estimated 35 per cent of the population belonging to households that lived below the poverty line. Only 58 per cent of households had access to safe water, compared with 86 per cent for the whole of Pakistan. Achievements in education and health were also well below the national average in NWFP, with literacy rates standing at just 38 per cent, compared with 45 per cent for the rest of Pakistan.

The devastation wrought by the earthquake makes development even more difficult, with hundreds of towns and villages reduced to rubble and massive losses of crops and livestock. All reconstruction plans must address the poor access to, and quality of, education, health care, water, and sanitation in the affected areas.

Ensuring transparency and accountability to affected communities

Oxfam's experience in previous disasters shows that where communities are able to have an input into reconstruction planning, this contributes towards strategies that tackle longer-term poverty at the same time. The involvement of communities not only reduces their dependency on aid, but also ensures that plans are in line with local traditions and are sensitive to cultural needs. At present, reconstruction planning in Pakistan does not sufficiently enable affected communities to play a leading role in the reconstruction agenda.

Those involved in reconstruction planning – the Government of Pakistan, donors, the UN, and humanitarian agencies – need to find a way to initiate a process of participation, paying specific attention to setting up mechanisms that give women and marginalised groups a voice. Civil society monitoring, through reputable local NGOs, will be a useful mechanism in ensuring accountability. Organising public hearings and public assemblies attended by local women and men will further enhance accountability and transparency.

It is particularly important that affected people have all the information they need to be able to make informed decisions about their options in the early recovery phase. This involves open communication of the responsibilities and plans of relief agencies, supported by transparent feedback mechanisms and the sharing of information.

When speaking with affected people, Oxfam has found that many have no idea what will happen to them next or do not have enough information to make informed decisions about their next steps. Those in spontaneous camps are particularly confused about where to get help.

There are currently some services in place to deliver information – for instance, radio programmes have been started to reach some of the affected areas on specific sectors and issues. However, information flows to affected communities are, at present, ad hoc and many of the people and communities most at risk do not have access to all the information they need. An effective information and communication campaign needs to be put in place at the district and *Tehsil* levels³, so that affected people are adequately informed about the overall design of the recovery programme and can access mechanisms to raise their own concerns and grievances.

Given the relatively high levels of illiteracy in the affected areas – female literacy in rural areas of NWFP is only 16 per cent – multiple channels of communication need to be deployed in a comprehensive communication campaign: for instance, through radio, community leaders, and places of worship.

There is particular need for a communication strategy, which ensures that women and marginalised groups are receiving all the information they need. We at Oxfam have found great difficulties in reaching women in our communication programmes in the Pakistan earthquake response, as women are severely restricted in terms of where they can go and whom they can meet. We have therefore implemented a strategy to reach women via their children, in the hope that the information will 'trickle down'. It is likely that similar strategies to reach women will need to be used to ensure that information on reconstruction plans reaches all those who need it.

Mitigating the risks of future disasters

Of the total housing stock in the affected areas, 84 per cent in Pakistan Administered Kashmir was damaged or destroyed and 36 per cent in NWFP. A significant proportion of public buildings were damaged or completely destroyed: for instance, in Pakistan Administered Kashmir, 90 per cent of the district buildings were destroyed and the offices of the Civil Secretariat were damaged. A total of 7,000 schools were damaged beyond repair in the quake- killing more than 18,000 children when they collapsed.

‘Almost all the government buildings – schools, hospitals, etc. – collapsed during the earthquake. They were probably the worst affected of all buildings. We all know this is because corruption led to the use of sub-standard materials and techniques. We really need to be careful that the same corruption isn’t allowed when the reconstruction of public building begins.’

– Faheem of the Pakistani NGO, Sungi, one of Oxfam’s partner organisations

There are concerns that coherent building standards for safe, earthquake-resistant structures are not being fully developed or shared with all the relevant agencies involved in reconstruction. The planning and construction of all public buildings, especially schools and hospitals, should be based on the highest earthquake-resistant standards and the awarding of contracts for reconstruction, by donors or by the Pakistani government, should only be done with reference to earthquake-resistant standards. Community monitoring and transparency in the awarding of reconstruction contracts will help to guard against corruption and the use of sub-standard materials or building techniques. Donor governments should incorporate disaster preparedness into their development work and ensure that sufficient expertise in earthquake-resistant construction is made available.

‘There is a glaring lack of experience and knowledge of earthquake engineering in Pakistan. The October earthquake released only a very small percentage of the total energy contained in the tectonic plates and another earthquake is bound to happen. When this will occur is unknown – it could be in five weeks, or five centuries – but one thing is sure: it will happen. And this means there is a need for earthquake-resistant structures. The saddest thing about the October earthquake is that anything up to 90 per cent of the buildings may not have collapsed if they had been built to earthquake-resistant standards. I keep trying to foster the necessary sense of urgency, in my conversations with the Government of Pakistan and with donors, for the need to ensure that the country has sufficient earthquake engineering expertise, but this seems to fall on deaf ears.’

– Earthquake engineer working for an international organisation in Pakistan

Oxfam has found that people are beginning to rebuild their homes. However, many have begun to do this without sufficient information on how to make the structures earthquake-resistant. Critically, information must be shared with the affected population on rebuilding their homes to earthquake-resistant standards.

The local governments in Pakistan Administered Kashmir and NWFP need to have the necessary information on safe building practices. From conversations with Oxfam, it appears that local government officials, who are responsible for the distribution of government compensation to people who have lost their homes, do not have such knowledge.

Further distribution of compensation by the Government of Pakistan ought to be linked to ensuring that information is shared on earthquake-resistant building techniques. Local government authorities can work with NGOs – especially local NGOs that are already working with affected populations – to ensure that the necessary training in safe building techniques is given to affected communities. The training of masons, engineers, builders, and contractors in earthquake-safe building techniques needs to begin now.

Rehabilitation and the need to ensure that the rights of displaced people are recognised

Of the two million people made homeless by the earthquake, it is estimated that around 20 per cent have been displaced from their area of origin. About 185,000 of those displaced are living in more than 40 official and 333 spontaneous registered camps. Numerous smaller, unregistered ‘tent villages’ have also sprung up. Many of these people have lost all their land, which disappeared in landslides during the earthquake; others will need to be relocated away from vulnerable sites below rocky slopes that continue to be rattled by tremors.

Tahir, a resident of Havellian camp near Abbottabad in NWFP, told Oxfam that he and his family would not go back to their area of origin because they were scared of further landslides: ‘We don’t know where we will go next. We’ve lost our lands and cattle but we can’t go back and risk losing our children too.’

Dealing effectively and equitably with issues of land allocation will be vital in the rehabilitation process. Oxfam’s recent experience following the Asian tsunami has clearly demonstrated the importance of early identification of alternative land for those who have lost their own. One year on from the tsunami, only 20 per cent of people in Indonesia and Sri Lanka who lost their land are living in permanent new houses. One of the major factors that Oxfam has identified as holding up progress is that the affected governments had no policies in place to ensure that appropriate new land is allocated to those who need it.

The Government of Pakistan, in consultation with affected communities, should begin developing a clear policy for relocation and land acquisition. To hasten this process, local government authorities can begin an assessment of relocation needs, starting with the collation of data, including in small and spontaneous camps, on those who have lost land. Local *Patwari*’s (land settlement officials) have close ties to the communities in which they work, and access to information on families in their areas who have lost land. Beginning a process of consultation with *Patwari*’s and with local NGOs and community leaders will help to speed up the assessment of relocation needs.

Where relocation is necessary, it will be important to transfer affected people, where appropriate, to areas close to their original land. NGOs can facilitate this process by assisting affected communities to take the lead in making decisions about relocation and to negotiate with landowners and authorities. The international community, and particularly the UNHCR, can support this process by providing data and technical support, e.g. by identifying land stability, water levels, and tenure.

Oxfam has real concerns that in conversations at various levels of government it has been repeatedly told that camps will be ‘closed’ at the end of March. This gives a worrying signal that there is an intention to move people from the camps regardless of whether suitable alternatives are in place. All decisions on relocation must be based on voluntary consent and must be taken in consultation with affected communities. There

is a great need to ensure complete adherence to the UN's Guiding Principles on internally displaced people and their return during the rehabilitation phase. These international laws address the specific rights of internally displaced people and guarantee their protection from forced displacement, as well as protecting and assisting them during displacement or resettlement.

Many legal documents were lost in the earthquake, at both the government and the household levels. Some 85 per cent of municipal records appear to have been lost, including records of births and deaths, and 25 per cent of revenue records. A lack of documentation is likely to slow the process of land claims. Inheritance rights will need to be dealt with, and the process of assessing inheritance claims should begin speedily, especially in the case of female-headed households, for whom dealing with inheritance rights is notoriously complicated and lengthy. There are already worrying signs that many women who vacated their homes after the earthquake, and whose husbands or male relatives died in the disaster, are now losing their properties, due to a lack of documentation proving ownership of land. 'We are very concerned about reports coming in that women who have lost the adult male members of their family are now being denied their rights to their property inheritance or to the compensation being given to owners of homes destroyed by the earthquake,' says Farhana Faruqi Stocker, Oxfam's Country Director in Pakistan. 'There is an urgent need to protect women's rights to inheritance and property and to put in place the necessary government mechanisms and policies to deal with this.'

Tradition in Pakistan dictates that property rights revert back to brothers or other close male relatives in the event of a husband's death. This means that some women are now being denied the right to the land or houses they previously owned. The case of Shazia is typical. Shazia told Oxfam: 'My husband died in the earthquake. Before this he had a share in the house, which collapsed. His five brothers have now claimed the property. They said that I could stay in a small room, but it is not enough space for myself and my children.'

Appropriate mechanisms need to be put in place now to ensure that land and inheritance claims can be dealt with in a timely manner, with particular attention given to making these mechanisms easy to access for women and socially disadvantaged groups. Donors and the international community should support the Government of Pakistan in building capacity by bringing in legal expertise to support local authorities.

The Government of Pakistan has initiated a process of compensation payments for the loss of homes to earthquake survivors. Overall this has proved to be a well thought-out strategy, enabling survivors to start re-building their lives and helping to revitalise the local economy. However, Oxfam has heard complaints from affected communities regarding the policy of compensating on a 'one roof' basis, with compensation being paid per lost house, as in the affected areas it is quite normal to have several families living under one roof. In many cases this has led to only one out of the several families sharing a house receiving compensation. It is also unclear whether tenants, who do not own land but do own houses on land, are receiving payments or if their compensation is going to landlords. There are concerns that women who have lost their husbands are being discriminated against, and the impartiality of the selection committees in certain areas is open to question, with reports that social structure, connections and political affiliation are influencing compensation decisions. It is vital that compensation payments are not only restricted to men and that tenants, and other affected people who do not own property, are not excluded from compensation.

Restoring livelihoods

Affected communities lost not only their homes but also their livelihoods in the disaster. In Pakistan Administered Kashmir, 80 per cent of standing crops and 100,000 head of cattle were wiped out. Of a total cultivated area of 1.3m hectares, 50 per cent was rendered unusable.

Plans must be put in place now to provide timely and appropriate support for the restoration of livelihoods. Direct cash transfers will be vital in this process, allowing people to buy food and other items and to prioritise their own needs and expenditures. Cash transfers help to restore dignity, increasing people's sense of control over their lives and reducing their dependency on relief assistance.

Oxfam's experience with cash transfers shows that there is a strong case for cash-based interventions in contexts where markets are functioning and where food and other items are readily available. There are signs in the affected areas that the recovery of local economies and markets is now well under way. This suggests that it is appropriate to introduce cash transfer programmes to foster the process of early recovery and to help to jump-start the local economy. Donors and NGOs should incorporate such schemes into their reconstruction plans.

Oxfam's analysis of the earthquake-affected communities shows that, before the earthquake, 30 per cent of people depended on agriculture or livestock for their subsistence and 70 per cent relied on local markets. In an effort to help revive the local economy, part of Oxfam's work has focused on livelihoods support for local traders. Oxfam has also provided cash handouts and vouchers to earthquake survivors in the Manshera district of NWFP. The vouchers can be exchanged for goods sold by a selected list of traders. 'My father was killed,' says 13-year-old Yunis, one of the beneficiaries targeted in this scheme. 'My mother is very ill, so she had to stay in the village. She has asked me to buy flour, black tea, and sugar with the voucher and cash I received.' The cash and voucher programme not only allows the survivors to buy items of their choice, but also boosts local markets by helping traders to rebuild their businesses.

Identifying which areas of skills are urgently needed, and arranging training programmes in which both women and men can participate, will help to restore livelihoods. This has implications for the awarding of contracts. For example, firms that can guarantee to train, hire and employ survivors, including those who have been injured but who are still able to work, should be prioritised in the awarding of contracts. The early start of cash-for-work activities, including training and skills transfers, as well as public works activities, will be vital in feeding into longer-term programming to protect and strengthen livelihoods. When spring comes, the distribution of seeds, tools, and fertilisers and the re-stocking of livestock will be essential to restoring livelihoods - and should be provided both to displaced families returning to rural areas and to families still *in situ* in the mountains. The government should aim towards ensuring equitable access for poor producers to markets at district and national levels, as well as implementing price control mechanisms on high-demand items.

Prioritising the needs of women and ensuring equity in reconstruction planning

Serious gender disparities existed in the affected areas before the earthquake. Both the government and the international humanitarian community have the responsibility to address these disparities, through the reconstruction process. For instance, massive gender gaps existed in education prior to the earthquake in NWFP, with male gross enrolment rates standing at 97 per cent, while the female rate was only 56 per cent – the largest gender gap of any province in Pakistan. Reconstruction provides an opportunity to increase the access of girls and women to quality education and health facilities. Resources for the expanded provision of teacher training for women, by the Government of Pakistan, may help to ensure that quality education is available to meet the demand for it. There was a serious shortage of female teachers even before the earthquake and, given the large number of teachers killed during the earthquake, this situation is likely to be worse now.

A gender audit of the reconstruction plans should take place, with recommendations shared and a clear strategy outlined to ensure that the needs of women are given the highest priority in the allocation of resources. Internationally recognised human rights frameworks can act as guiding benchmarks for evaluating, through a gender lens, the plans for reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Restoring capacities to manage the recovery process

The rebuilding of physical infrastructure must be coupled with the reconstruction of social infrastructure. The earthquake caused huge damage to the infrastructure of the civilian authorities in the affected areas, as well as causing a massive loss of lives.

In order to manage the recovery process effectively, it is essential to restore the capacities of local and national civilian authorities. This is particularly critical as we move towards the reconstruction phase, in which it will be vital that civilian authorities are fully empowered to take the lead in reconstruction work. Policy planning and delivery of the earthquake response has, until now, been concentrated in the hands of the military, due in large part to the devastation caused to the infrastructure of civilian authorities.

Steps have been taken to initiate a phased hand-over of the delivery of relief and early recovery to civilian authorities. In NWFP a process of handing over camp management, from military to civilian authorities, has been under way for some weeks now. However, senior military figures in the province have criticised the local and provincial governments for not providing sufficient resources or a clear strategy for taking over.

Oxfam still has concerns that greater authority needs to be given to civilian authorities, with a more rigorous process of capacity building and empowerment at the local level, in both Pakistan Administered Kashmir and NWFP. In a conversation with one senior military leader in NWFP, Oxfam was told: 'We [the military] are in the driving seat here in NWFP and will be until the spring. We are the ones who will decide how things work for the next three months.'

Significant support is needed to enable the civilian authorities to manage the recovery process. In order to fully restore the civilian capabilities, the handover process needs to be *genuine*, and take place in a phased and planned manner. Local government authorities must be resourced, with skilled staff and funds, to hasten the recovery

process. They must also be fully empowered to take a leading role in the recovery process.

Effective co-ordination mechanisms need to be put in place now between government authorities, NGOs, and the international humanitarian community to manage the early recovery phase at national, regional, and local levels. Attention should be given to avoiding gaps in co-ordination between the relief and early recovery phases. UN agencies – especially UNDP who is leading the early recovery phase - need to ensure that NGOs are able to contribute to strategic co-ordination forums for recovery planning.

The international community should give significant support to the capacity building of Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), through secondments and technical assistance, to ensure that it has the skills, knowledge, and expertise to manage the reconstruction phase. Donors and the UN should ensure that they second high-calibre and appropriately experienced personnel. ERRA must be fully supported and empowered to lead the recovery process and must work within appropriate institutional, policy, and legal frameworks.

The international community must fully fund relief and reconstruction efforts

At a meeting of 65 international donor countries on 19 November 2005, a total of \$5.8bn was pledged to the Government of Pakistan for the commencement of relief and reconstruction. However, historically, once the attention of the world has moved away from a disaster, only about half of pledges made by donors ever materialise.

Donors need to start releasing the funding committed towards Pakistan's reconstruction and rehabilitation, ensuring that the money committed to the Government of Pakistan at the November conference materialises in time to be used effectively. Worryingly, the bulk of the pledges (\$4bn) to the Pakistan Government are in the form of loans (albeit soft loans) and concerns remain over the sustainability of debt repayments. Pakistan already has debts of \$36bn and is paying millions of dollars more in interest. After securing loans of \$4bn-plus for reconstruction of the earthquake-affected areas, Pakistan's debt will be in the region of \$40bn. If the money pledged in grants fails to materialise, then Pakistan could be left both short of pocket and with an increased burden of debt.

Any funds released towards Pakistan's reconstruction must not detract from the urgent unmet financial needs for parts of the relief effort, for which there are still significant shortfalls in the UN Flash Appeal - with little over half of the funds appealed for (\$300 million of the \$549 million required) materialising to date.

Conclusions

The death toll from the 8 October earthquake could still rise further, unless the humanitarian response reaches all those who need it immediately, providing appropriate assistance for survivors to make it through the winter. The international community must remain focused, keeping the plight of Pakistan's earthquake survivors on its radar, and the humanitarian response must begin to address urgent needs.

As we begin the journey from relief to reconstruction, the opportunity to raise those affected out of the poverty that existed before the earthquake must be seized. This

involves a genuine commitment by all those involved in the reconstruction process to 'reconstruction-plus', i.e. helping to transform the lives of those who survived so that they can live in better conditions than they did before. The planning and implementation of reconstruction must be accelerated to help those affected to rebuild their lives, and a process of involving affected communities in reconstruction planning needs to be put in place now. Special attention needs to be given to ensuring that women and the poorest people are able to contribute to reconstruction strategies.

All these goals will require the continuing and sustained support of the international community for the relief and reconstruction efforts in Pakistan.

Notes

¹ The Sphere Minimum Standards for Disaster Response are internationally agreed minimum guidelines that delineate best practice and minimum standards in the management of camps and other relief activities. The Sphere Project (2004) *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, Geneva, www.sphereproject.org.

² There is anecdotal evidence that the shelter needs of those above 5,000ft are not fully met. However, at the time of writing both the UN and the Government of Pakistan maintained that these needs were being met.

³ An administrative sub-district of about 100,000 people.

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