

Pakistan 2012 Monsoon Floods: A prolonged disaster



Introduction: the situation six months on

Almost six months after Pakistan's 2012 flood emergency began, hundreds of thousands of people still need help to meet their basic needs, including clean water, food, shelter, health and medical services, sanitation facilities, and cash to buy other essentials. Those in greatest need of assistance and protection include children, women (such as breastfeeding mothers), as well as elderly people and flood survivors with disabilities.

Today, most flood-affected people have returned to their communities after floodwaters finally receded, often to find their homes damaged or destroyed. Many farming families missed the winter sowing season because of prolonged flooding, depriving them of their usual food and income sources. They face risks of ill health, exploitation and deepening debt unless they receive adequate and timely help.¹ Moreover, tens of thousands of people who can resume their livelihoods need help to do so to ensure, for example, that they do not miss the next sowing season because of a lack of seeds or tools – the time to provide such support effectively is running out.²

The latest monsoon floods provided yet another reminder that Pakistan is one of the world's most hazard-prone countries, with each crisis costing lives and money, and deepening alarming levels of poverty and malnutrition. Backed by donors, Pakistani authorities should build on recent progress and accelerate efforts to prepare the country more effectively for future disasters, taking climate change into account. This should be a priority for the next government after elections due in May 2013.

The flood response: valuable efforts

Initial hopes that Pakistan had avoided a third successive year of floods in 2012 were dashed in mid-September when late monsoon rains triggered flooding in southern Punjab, northern Sindh, and eastern Balochistan. At least 450 people lost their lives. Over 4.8 million people were affected, with an estimated 636,438 homes damaged or destroyed.³ An estimated 1,172,045 acres of crop were lost⁴ – a serious blow in a country where agriculture is a crucial pillar of the economy, employing 45 percent of the labour force.⁵ The floods left more than 850,000 people relying on food assistance and more than a million people needing help to resume farming activities.

Designating 13 districts as calamity-hit, with seven of those prioritised for assistance, the Pakistani government launched its response in late September. Military personnel, civilian authorities and relief organisations worked hard in the critical initial days and weeks to rescue thousands of stranded families and assist the sick and injured. The Ministry of Finance released 1.5 billion rupees (\$15 million) to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to fund the federal government's relief effort.

By November 2012, the NDMA had allocated 47,000 tents, 220,750 ration packs and 1000 blankets to provincial and district authorities for distribution among flood survivors.⁶ Provincial authorities in Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan mobilised additional assistance including medical supplies, water, dewatering pumps and livestock vaccinations. Funds were transferred to badly hit districts⁷ and compensation packages were devised for tens of thousands of damaged and destroyed homes. By 1 March 2013, the NDMA had spent over 2.1 billion rupees (\$21 million) on providing flood relief. The collective efforts of federal, provincial and district authorities, supported by many NGOs and local groups, was valuable in preserving lives and reducing suffering for tens of thousands of families.

Although the federal government decided not to call for aid from international donors, the authorities identified the need for support from UN agencies and NGOs. The UN launched the Monsoon Humanitarian Operational Plan (MHOP) in October 2012 to assist 2.8 million people.

The MHOP sought \$168.5 million from donors to provide urgently needed water, food, shelter and healthcare as well as services such as education and protection.

The MHOP was revised in February 2013 to continue essential emergency relief, help returning families rebuild their livelihoods, and assist communities prepare for future crises. Dozens of international NGOs and hundreds of local groups also contributed to the flood response, helping UN agencies implement their projects, or conducting their own relief activities. Several international donors responded generously to requests for funds from UN agencies and NGOs, with the USA, the European Commission and the UK leading the way.

The collective efforts of Pakistan authorities, international donors, UN agencies, international and local NGOs, as well as many Pakistani citizens and local businesses and charities, provided millions of flood-affected men, women and children with some form of assistance, and helped save lives and prevent mass outbreaks of disease.

Gaps and challenges

Despite these achievements, the overall level and scope of assistance has been insufficient, with hundreds of thousands of families receiving very limited aid: many received no aid at all. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the huge scale of the floods would have tested many developed countries. Despite serious efforts, the Pakistani authorities, with limited financial and human resources (notably at district level) were unable to respond as effectively as they would have wished.

The situation has been exacerbated by persistent floodwaters. In December 2012, at least 40,000 people were still displaced and living in camps and temporary settlements, with floodwaters still standing in some districts of Sindh including Jacobabad and parts of Kashmore. Such prolonged flooding also prevented people from resuming their usual means of earning money and obtaining food. Meanwhile, over a million people who returned to their communities found their homes badly damaged or destroyed and uninhabitable.⁸ Ultimately, the level of resources mobilised by the authorities has been insufficient in relation to the scale, impact and duration of the floods.

The government's decision not to call for international donor aid had some unintended consequences. Firstly, in a world where media attention often influences donor priorities, internationally the floods disaster has been largely invisible. Secondly, without a government call for international aid, some donors faced procedural obstacles and delays in funding UN agencies and NGOs although many donor officials worked actively to overcome them. Nonetheless, these issues probably contributed to the struggle by aid agencies to obtain funding for the flood response. By 1 March 2013, the MHOP was only 30 percent funded. Certain key sectors remained severely underfunded such as shelter (five percent funded), health (six percent) and water and sanitation (eight percent).⁹

The trend of increasing bureaucratic restrictions on NGOs, especially on international NGOs, has hindered their work. Non-Pakistani aid workers have faced long delays (often several months) in obtaining visas, restricting the ability of some international NGOs to deliver timely life-saving aid. Many NGOs have also struggled to obtain No Objection Certificates (NOCs) that are officially required before they can begin their relief and recovery projects or deploy foreign staff in a growing number of districts. The process of acquiring NOCs sometimes takes several months. Aid agencies should share relevant information about their work with disaster management officials in a timely manner. However, Pakistani authorities should ensure that legitimate concerns about security and information sharing do not have a disproportionately negative effect on the ability of Pakistani citizens to obtain humanitarian assistance quickly and efficiently.

Security threats – including physical attacks and kidnappings – have also hindered the movement of aid workers and limited people's access to aid, especially in Baluchistan and Sindh. Access to women and children and the task of meeting their specific needs has been particularly difficult in some areas.

Preparing for the next disaster

The latest disaster to hit Pakistan, following major floods in 2010 and 2011, has highlighted once again the need for greater preparation and more effective capacity to respond to future shocks, with climate change likely to result in more frequent and large scale floods and droughts.

Pakistan has already taken significant steps, especially after the Kashmir Earthquake of 2005, to create many of the necessary policies and institutions. These include the National Disaster Management Act of 2010, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy and the National Disaster Management Plan 2012–2022, as well the setting up of the National Disaster Management Commission and the National Working Group on Mainstreaming DRR¹⁰. Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have also set up Provincial Working Groups on Mainstreaming DRR.

However, the latest calamity shows that much more needs to be done to minimise the impact of future disasters and make emergency responses more effective, in line with Pakistan's stated commitments and pledges.¹¹ To do this, the authorities need to intensify and accelerate their efforts to strengthen both disaster management institutions at all levels – including the critical district levels – and vulnerable communities themselves. This will require greater political will to prioritise such reforms and adequately resourced budgets for disaster preparedness, relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The next government should prioritise this challenge after elections due in May 2013.

At the same time, UN agencies and NGOs should also ensure that their coordination and support is as effective as possible.

Each disaster not only damages physical infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. Families left struggling to recover after a crisis often feel compelled to pull children out of school, avoid medical expenses (especially for women and girls), and slide deeper into debt – damaging their own prospects and the country's social and economic development progress as a whole.

By reducing the impact of disasters with better preparation, making disaster responses more effective, and helping people recover and rebuild their lives quickly before they have to resort to risky or damaging means of coping, the Pakistani government and its donor partners can thus not only save lives and reduce human suffering. They can also help protect precious development investments, promote the country's prosperity and strengthen its social fabric.

Recommendations

For Pakistani authorities:

- Ensure people still requiring humanitarian assistance are able to meet their basic needs, especially food, clean water, sanitation, healthcare, shelter, education, and physical safety, with special attention to women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Rapidly implement early recovery plans to ensure flood survivors can quickly resume farming and other livelihoods and minimise their dependence on aid or debt.
- Accelerate efforts to strengthen Pakistan's disaster management institutions at all levels, with adequate budgets and greater efforts to prepare communities for and strengthen their resilience to the impact of hazards.
- Implement policies and plans for ensuring risk reduction is incorporated systematically in all development programmes.

For international donors:

- Sustain support for essential relief efforts and early recovery activities aimed at restoring livelihoods, including in the revised MHOP.
- Systematically integrate disaster risk reduction (DRR) principles in all development projects where appropriate, and commit 10 percent of humanitarian and development funding to support DRR measures.

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This briefing note was jointly prepared by:



and



Additional notes

¹ More than 68 per cent of surveyed households have reported incurring new debts since the floods (UNOCHA January 2013)
² Kharif sowing season begins in April 2013
³ http://www.ndma.gov.pk/Documents/monsoon/2012/damages/december/damages_details_19_12_2012.pdf
⁴ Ibid
⁵ http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_12/02-Agriculture.pdf
⁶ http://www.ndma.gov.pk/news_room_2012.php
⁷ For example, the Punjab PDMA transferred 8 million rupees and 3 million rupees to the DCOs in Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur respectively (Floor Relief Operation update, 16 October 2012)
⁸ Over 1.1 million people who had returned from areas of displacement to their villages were unable to reoccupy their houses owing to flood damage (UNOCHA January 2013)
⁹ Revised MHOP February 2013
¹⁰ Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a systematic approach to identifying hazards such as floods, droughts and earthquakes and reducing their impacts. DRR aims to do this through various means, from strengthening physical infrastructure and improving state and community responses to such shocks to tackling factors such as poverty and social discrimination that increases the risk of disaster for some people compared with others. vulnerabilities to disaster as well as dealing with the environmental and other hazards that trigger them
¹¹ Pakistan is a signatory to the Hyogo Framework for Action, a 10-year global pact agreed in 2005 by nearly 170 governments, which outlines steps to reduce disaster impacts and improve countries' abilities to respond and recover. The NDMA has begun a process of review and consultation in preparation for the post-2015 framework