

Chapter 7

Discussions and Recommendations

Pakistan has successfully developed sound arrangements in terms of both institutional development as well as in coordination between the various stakeholders for controlling river-flood related hazards and disasters. There is an undocumented but well-drilled preparedness plan for response, relief, and recovery, involving dedicated agencies and departments at the federal, provincial, and local government levels. The same is, however, not true for the rest of the disasters arising out of natural hazards such as flash floods, earthquakes, and landslides. In essence, Pakistan's entire focus on disaster preparedness relies on mobilisation of the army corps or supply of relief items (tents, blankets, medicine, and food) through district relief offices. Civilian government institutions such as the civil defence, despite their existence since independence, have not been strengthened to respond to disasters and have fallen into disarray. In the following passages, the situation in Pakistan is evaluated in terms of mitigation and preparedness.

Pakistan's current status for mitigation of natural hazards can be rated from 90-100% for river-flood hazards and <10% for the rest of the natural hazards such as flash floods, earthquakes, and landslides. Multi-hazard vulnerability maps, which form the basis of mitigation as well as preparedness, are non-existent. Seismic hazard zonation and relevant earthquake-resistant building codes are either non-existent or not implemented. Mountainous dwellings and linking roads lack slope-stability data which, in combination with the lack of vulnerability maps, demonstrates the dismal state of mitigation against disasters.

As far as preparedness is concerned, a major disparity exists between the disasters caused by river floods and those caused by other natural hazards. Although undocumented, there is a well-practised and well-coordinated plan for response to river floods. All the participating government bodies clearly know their responsibilities at various stages of a disaster, including rescue, relief, first aid, temporary shelter, and restoration of communications. In contrast, for the rest of the disasters, no preparedness exists. For example, there are ambiguities in many of the following aspects of disaster preparedness.

Who will issue the first call for response? The Crisis Management Cell at the Cabinet Division is supposed to be responsible for this, but past history shows lapses on the part of this institution. For instance, for the disaster caused by the Kashmir earthquake 2005, it was the Secretariats of the President and Prime Minister that issued the call for action.

Who will conduct the search and rescue operation? Practically this phase is participated in by all the concerned, including the communities affected, local government, the police, army, and civil defence. However, this stage lacks clear unity of command and the efforts are badly coordinated. There is no rescue force trained in search and rescue for special disaster situations arising out of earthquakes, landslides, and debris flows.

Who will supervise evacuation of the survivors? Again this is handled in a completely haphazard manner. There is no unified command to supervise and carry out this crucial phase.

Who will provide the relief? This is the only component of disaster preparedness in Pakistan that is institutionalised. The Federal Emergency Relief Cell, through provincial relief commissioners and district relief offices, oversees the relief activity. The Emergency Relief Cell at federal level and the provincial relief departments play an effective role in collection of relief goods and their dispatch to disaster-stricken areas. In practice, in disasters the activities of relief departments are never on a par with the scale of the calamity, and it is the public and the non-government organisations that eventually participate in relief activities in terms of provision of temporary shelter, health, and food. Quite often there is no coordination between various agencies carrying out relief operations.

Who will carry out rehabilitation and reconstruction? Prior to the Kashmir earthquake 2005, the notion of rehabilitation was lacking completely. Every disaster the nation faced, the same scenario was observed repeatedly; a delayed response for rescue followed by an efficient relief effort. Once the dust was settled, communities were left on their own to cope with their reconstruction and rehabilitation needs.

There is no denying the effectiveness of the Pakistan Army in disaster response; but the dilemma is that this rather overwhelming role assumed by one agency has virtually barred the civilian government agencies and communities from taking on responsibility. Pakistan needs to develop civilian institutions, especially at local government and community level, to not only formulate preparedness plans but also respond effectively. Since it is the communities that suffer most from disasters caused by natural hazards, they must be empowered and prepared to respond to disasters.

In light of the considerations outlined in this report, the following recommendations are made to streamline disaster preparedness in Pakistan.

1. A dedicated institution is needed to address the issues related to disaster management. As outlined above, Pakistan has already taken a step in this direction through the establishment of a National Disaster Management Authority. Hopefully this institution will devolve to provincial, district, village, and community levels.
2. Mitigation efforts should be separated from disaster response: both need separate institutions. Whereas organisations like the Flood Commission, Frontier Works' Organisation, Pakistan Meteorological Department, Flood Forecasting Division, SUPARCO, and the Geological Survey of Pakistan carry out mitigation measures, the NDMA needs a Disaster Preparedness Plan that spells out the responsibilities, powers, and standard operation procedures (SOP) for all agencies involved in disaster management.
3. Disaster Preparedness Plans (DPP) should be rehearsed (drills) and should be constantly reviewed.
4. DPPs should include a comprehensive outline for coordination between all the relevant agencies and for communication with vulnerable communities.
5. The future DPPs must evolve by gradually shifting disaster response, recovery, and rehabilitation responsibilities from the army to the civilian government, from the civilian government to local governments, and, finally, from local governments to the communities themselves. These plans should ensure greater involvement of communities in decision-making as well as disaster response, recovery, and rehabilitation.
6. Pakistan needs a comprehensive emergency force, comprised of volunteers from every strata of society, and trained and well-versed in all disaster situations with the capability and resources for effective mobilisation. Practical training in higher secondary schools and universities can contribute to development of a sizeable volunteer force.
7. The public needs to be made aware of natural hazards and disaster management. Inclusion in the curricula at school level is one of the most promising solutions. It is at this level that practical training in first aid and general safety practices can be imparted to a sizeable population.
8. Research into disaster management that adapts to the cultural, geographic, and social system is the key to success. At the moment, teaching and research in disaster management is virtually non-existent. Dedicated research and education institutions need to be established.

Finally, Pakistan is already in an advantageous position to deal effectively with future natural disasters, because a) it has gone through the worst disaster perceivable in 2005 and experienced all the stages from first call for action, to search, rescue, evacuation, relief, reconstruction, and rehabilitation; b) it has institutions that have been dealing

with flood disasters effectively over the years and can broaden the scope of action and streamline the basic components into a disaster preparedness strategy; and c) it has a national character characterised by volunteerism, endowment, and sacrifice. The national response to the Kashmir earthquake 2005 is adequate witness to this special attribute.