

Floods in Pakistan: Rethinking the humanitarian role



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Humanitarian Outcomes

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This report on the humanitarian response to flooding in Pakistan is the second in a series of rapid reviews conducted by Humanitarian Outcomes under the Humanitarian Rapid Response Initiative (HRRI), commissioned and supported by the UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub with UK aid from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. The research took place in September/October 2022, and figures are current as of October 2022. The review encompassed interviews with 86 informants from Pakistani and international aid entities, government authorities, and international donors (list appended), as well as analysis of humanitarian funding and operational data. In October, Humanitarian Outcomes commissioned GeoPoll to implement a telephone survey of 2,000 people in the provinces of Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab to obtain the views of people affected by the floods. Humanitarian Outcomes has updated its [Global Database of Humanitarian Organisations](#) (GDHO) to reflect the current response in Pakistan.

The review team comprised researchers from Humanitarian Outcomes, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute in Islamabad (SDPI), and independent experts. The individual authors/researchers are Paul Harvey, Abby Stoddard, Lewis Sida, Nigel Timmins, Shafqat Munir Ahmad, Meriah-Jo Breckenridge, and Shoaib Jillani. The sponsors and team at UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub provided research direction, quality assurance, and management support.

The report represents the views of the authors, based on evidence gathered. For further information, please contact info@humanitarianoutcomes.org or info@ukhih.org. This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Acronyms

| | | | |
|---------------|---|--------------|--|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank | NDMA | National Disaster Management Authority |
| BISP | Benazir Income Support Programme | NFRCC | National Flood Response Coordination Centre |
| DDMA | district disaster management authority | NOC | no objection certificate |
| EU | European Union | OCHA | UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| FTS | Financial Tracking Service | PDMA | provincial disaster management authority |
| IFI | international financial institution | SDPI | Sustainable Development Policy Institute |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund | UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration | WASH | water, sanitation, and hygiene |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee | WHO | World Health Organization |
| MoPDSI | Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives | | |

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Summary

The scale of the flooding in Pakistan since June 2022 is immense, with impacts exceeding previous disasters such as the 2010 floods. An estimated 33 million people have been affected, with 7.9 million displaced, and an estimated US\$30 billion in combined losses and damages. Large parts of Sindh and some areas in other provinces remain inundated.

Pakistan's government and civil society entities are struggling to mount a commensurately large-scale humanitarian response that can meet critical needs, with a fraction of the international humanitarian funding and operational support that was mobilised in 2010. Evidence from interviews, available data, and a survey of affected people suggests that the international relief response to date has fallen well short of the need, raising fears for the prospects of recovery.

An underfunded response over-reliant on debt

Unlike in the 2010 flood emergency, when global humanitarian aid contributions topped US\$3 billion, donors have to date come through with just US\$297 million in grant-based contributions for relief and early recovery activities. Instead of humanitarian aid, the global response to the current crisis, by collective decision or default, appears to be primarily through debt-based financing. The most significant support in the first few months of the crisis was a round of cash payments to vulnerable people through the country's Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) – the social protection mechanism. Quick action by the World Bank to repurpose existing loans allowed the government to employ this well-established system, which had benefited from over 12 years of investment. But this cash infusion only reached a minority of those affected and was a one-off payment. Sustained relief and recovery aid is needed for basic income support for people who have lost livelihoods, to prevent secondary impacts of the disaster such as waterborne illness and outbreaks partly caused by the disruption of vaccination programmes, to enable continued safe return for displaced people, and to avert a significant upsurge in poverty.

Relying on debt financing puts more stress on Pakistan's existing balance of payments and economy. While early action by international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank is critical, it cannot substitute large-scale humanitarian and grant-based support.

Inadequate climate and anticipatory financing

Climate change has exacerbated the flooding, and Pakistan's government and others have made the case that Western countries – overwhelmingly responsible for causing the phenomenon – have an obligation to respond generously to help mitigate its consequences. Thus far, no climate financing mechanisms have been developed that could meaningfully augment traditional sources of humanitarian financing. New anticipatory financing models hold promise but failed to activate in the 2022 Pakistan flooding. It remains to be seen if donors will step up more generously to fund the estimated US\$16.3 billion Pakistan requires for its rehabilitation and reconstruction plan.¹

¹ Government of Pakistan, Asian Development Bank (ADB), European Union (EU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and World Bank. (2022). *Pakistan floods 2022. Post-disaster needs assessment*. <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/pakistan-floods-2022-post-disaster-needs-assessment-pdna-main-report>

Future development needs to consider risk as a central element given the increased risk caused by climate change. Investments in disaster risk reduction made since the 2010 floods reportedly made a positive contribution but clearly, as risks grow, lessons about what worked in terms of these investments, and where improvements or changes might need to be made, are critical going forward.

The wrong model for middle-income countries

The case of Pakistan (like Ukraine and Sri Lanka) has raised questions for the international humanitarian system about how it responds in middle-income countries that have substantial government, civil society, and disaster management capacity. When large-scale crises overwhelm those capacities and international assistance is needed, it makes sense for international aid to take a back seat, complementing nationally led efforts, and to focus their efforts and resources on gap areas. But the international humanitarian system is geared to respond with its own operational capacity and distinct systems. Not finding the space in Pakistan to fit its particular machinery, the humanitarian system appears to have largely abdicated its role rather than adapting it.

The initial UN appeal, and the amounts contributed to Pakistan by many of the major humanitarian donors, are widely deemed too small. Operational agencies have reduced their footprint in Pakistan over the past decade and would not have been equipped to respond at scale even if major funding had been made available. While Pakistan's government was appropriately fully in charge, positioning international aid as supportive of nationally-led efforts cannot be an excuse for an insufficient international response.

Financing systems, ways of working, and contingency planning need to be more geared to more direct, faster support to local and national actors. Surge coordination also needs to be better able to support nationally led systems – and not just provide technical capacity when the formal cluster system is activated. International aid needs to have a greater focus on: technical support; bolstering critical capacities for coordination and information management; more directly supporting national actors; filling critical gaps in particular sectors; and advocacy where people are unfairly excluded from assistance. For survey respondents, corruption was the most commonly reported obstacle to receiving aid, suggesting scope for a particular focus on accountability and tackling exclusion challenges.

The 2022 floods: A climate-driven disaster meets declining humanitarian resources

Beginning in June 2022, record-breaking monsoon rainfall in Pakistan, 10 times greater than usual, triggered a flooding emergency that the country's prime minister declared "the worst in the country's history".² On 26 August 2022, the government declared a state of emergency, listing 84 districts as "calamity-hit", mostly in the provinces of Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By October, the number had risen to 94 districts. The floods have affected an estimated 33 million people with 7.9 million displaced from their homes. Large parts of Sindh and some areas in other provinces remain inundated. The government estimates that there have been 1,700 deaths and that 12,900 people have been injured, with 800,000 houses destroyed, 1.3 million damaged, and over a million livestock lost. All told, the cost of loss and damage resulting from the floods is estimated at US\$30.1 billion.³

Table 1: Estimated damage, loss and needs by region as of October 2022

| Region | Damage (Million USD) | Loss (Million USD) | Needs (Million USD) |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Balochistan | 1,625 | 2,516 | 2,286 |
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 935 | 658 | 780 |
| Punjab | 515 | 566 | 746 |
| Sindh | 9,068 | 11,376 | 7,860 |
| Cross-provincial | 2,731 | 67 | 4,540 |
| Special regions | 32 | 49 | 48 |
| Total | 14,906 | 15,233 | 16,261 |

Source: UNDP (2022) *Pakistan Floods 2022: Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA)*. Main report. 28 October 2022.

Seasonal flooding in Pakistan is not unusual. The scale and distribution of the floods in 2022, however, has been exceptional, and their severity has been linked to climate change. An event attribution study by climate scientists found that "the 5-day maximum rainfall over the provinces Sindh and Balochistan is now about 75% more intense than it would have been had the climate not warmed by 1.2C".⁴ Areas not normally subject to such intense monsoon rains experienced significant rainfall. These areas have less natural drainage and so standing water has become a significant issue. Despite its low carbon footprint, Pakistan is one of ten countries most affected by extreme weather events, according to the Global Climate Risk Index 2021 and

² Magramo, K. (2022, 2 September). *A third of Pakistan is underwater amid its worst floods in history. Here's what you need to know*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/02/asia/pakistan-floods-climate-explainer-intl-hnk/index.html>

³ Provincial disaster management authorities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh. (2022). *Pakistan. 2022 multi-sector rapid needs assessment in flood-affected areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-2022-multi-sector-rapid-needs-assessment-flood-affected-areas-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-punjab-and-sindh-september-2022>; Government of Pakistan, ADB, EU, UNDP, and World Bank (2022).

⁴ Otto, F. et al. (2022). *Climate change likely increased extreme monsoon rainfall, flooding highly vulnerable communities in Pakistan*, World Weather Attribution. <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/wp-content/uploads/Pakistan-floods-scientific-report.pdf>

Climate Watch.⁵ This has led to appeals by the government, the UN Secretary-General, and others for increased financial assistance “through the mobilisation of support for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, and through concrete and equitable climate action”.⁶

1.2 Preparedness challenges

Pakistan has made significant investments in its national disaster management capability and flood preparedness since the floods of 2010. Loans and grants from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank alone have been close to US\$1 billion, and bilateral donors have also provided significant support. The UK approved a UK£38 million investment in government systems (via UN agencies) and community-based disaster resilience (through NGO partners).⁷ The World Bank approved a US\$100 million Sindh Resilience Project in 2016 to mitigate flood and drought risk, as well as strengthening the Government of Sindh’s capacity to manage disasters.⁸

Despite these investments, there appears to have been a mixed performance in terms of both resilient infrastructure and rapid response. The impact of the flooding has been made more severe by poor maintenance of flood protection and drainage infrastructure and issues of governance and planning regulations, which have allowed buildings in unsafe areas and sub-standard construction.⁹ In terms of rapid response, the provincial disaster management authorities (PDMAs) in both Sindh and Balochistan (as the worst-affected provinces) have reported success in rapidly distributing relief materials such as temporary shelter and household items. By September supplies had run short.

Interviewees and reports have suggested that early warning systems functioned to a degree and helped to reduce the number of immediate deaths – but the picture is mixed. A 2022 analysis of the implementation of lessons learned in 2010 concluded that subsequent government actions had, “mitigated the expected loss and damages to infrastructure and human life”.¹⁰ There have, however, been questions over how effectively warnings from Pakistan’s Meteorological Department fed through into actions at provincial and district levels. Disaster management capacity and local government systems to respond also appear to have been weaker than hoped given a decade of investment. District disaster management authorities (DDMAs) do not appear to have been fully activated, with relief operations run by deputy district commissioners instead – the same model as 2010.

Finally, according to the remote survey conducted for this review in the most flood-affected areas, public opinion on the country’s state of preparedness was decidedly unfavourable, with most respondents judging it “poor” or “very poor” (Figure 1).

⁵ Eckstein, D., Künzle, V., and Schäfer, L. (2021). *Global climate risk index 2021. Who suffers most from extreme weather events?* Briefing paper. Germanwatch. <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777>

⁶ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2022a). *Revised 2022 floods response plan Pakistan*. 1 September 2022–31 May 2023 (Issued 4 October 2022). <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/revised-pakistan-2022-floods-response-plan-01-sep-2022-31-may-2023-issued-04-oct-2022>

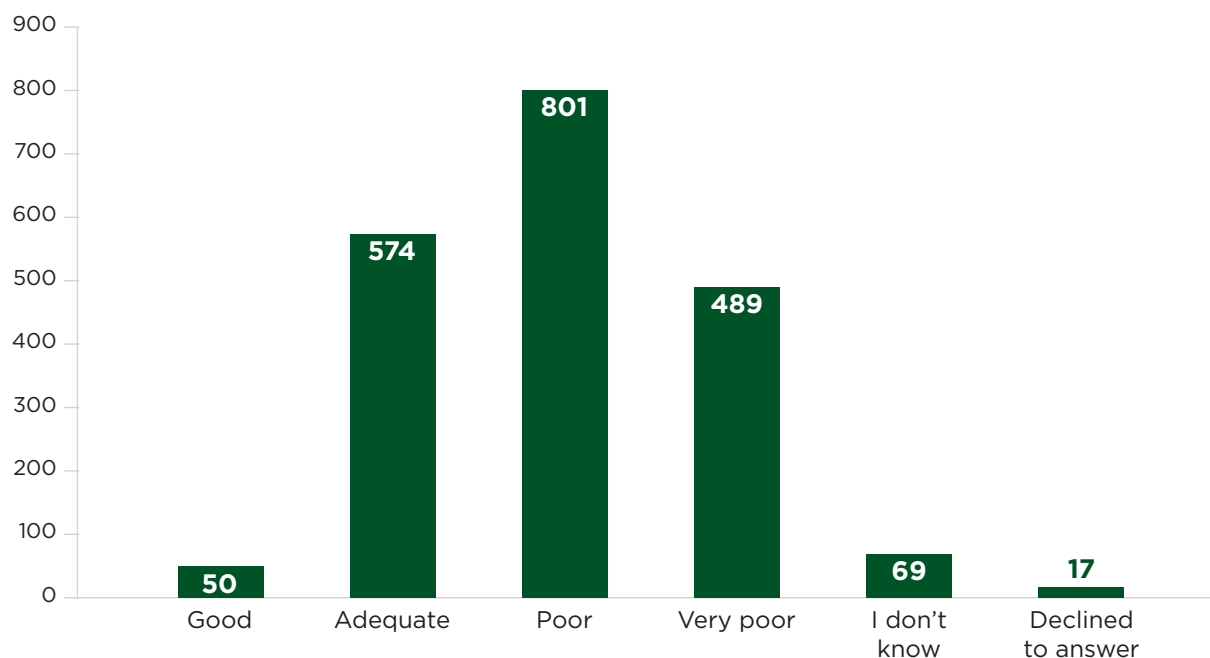
⁷ Inayatullah, C. (2020) Performance Evaluation of the Community Based Disaster Risk Management Component of the BDRP Phase II. Ace Worldwide Action for Revitalizing Sustainable Development, Islamabad, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/building-disaster-resilience-pakistan-bdrp-community-based-disaster-risk-management>

⁸ World Bank. (2022). *The World Bank in Pakistan*. Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview#3>

⁹ Otto et al. (2022).

¹⁰ Rashid, A., Sarfraz, H., and Naeem, M. (2022). *Dealing with disaster: Learning from 2010 floods*. TabadLab. <https://tabadlab.com/dealing-with-disaster-learning-from-2010-floods/>

Figure 1: What is your opinion on the level of preparedness prior to the floods?



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

1.3 Reduced humanitarian presence

International humanitarian organisations' footprint and capacity in Pakistan has declined significantly over the past decade and national civil society actors have also been constrained. In part this reflects Pakistan's middle-income status and aid actors shifting to more development-oriented programming. It also reflects what had become an increasingly restrictive operating environment and the fact that the government had expelled several international aid agencies in 2018.¹¹

Shrinking civic space and increasingly securitised governance have affected both Pakistan and international NGOs. New regulations and laws have made it difficult for NGOs to register and access funds and, in 2019, a number of national NGOs were deregistered.¹² Those that did maintain their registration need to renew on an annual basis, limiting their scope to engage in advocacy for fear of deregistration. Administrative and legal constraints such as strict and lengthy project approval and travel permit processes have restricted the operational space of international and national civil society organisations in Pakistan.¹³ Access for international aid actors within the country is regulated via a system of 'no objection certificates' (NOCs).

In the face of the current crisis, and following a call for international support, aid agencies have faced fewer internal bureaucratic obstacles in aid programming for emergency flood responses. For example, the PDMA in Sindh is reportedly approving NOCs within 24 hours.

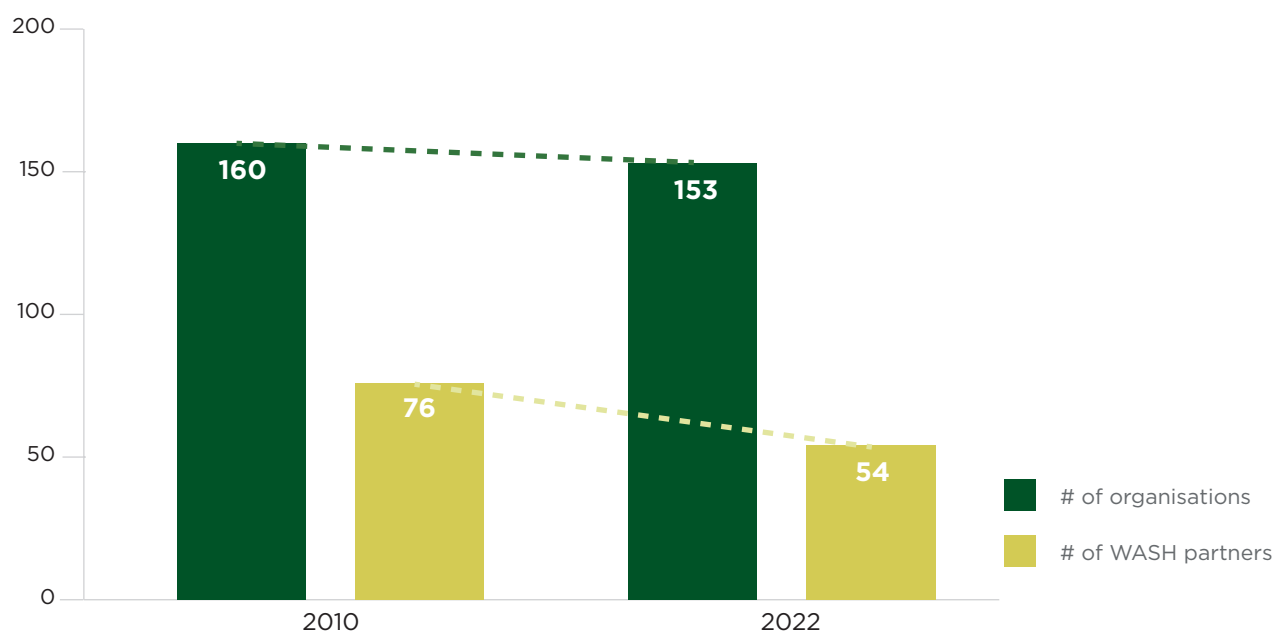
¹¹ Reuters. (2018, 4 December). *Pakistan's aid group clampdown could hit 11 million people, diplomats say*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-pakistan-ngos-idAFKBNIO318Y>

¹² Khan, A. and Qidwai, K. (2021). *Donor action in Pakistan: A comparative case study of CDIP and AAWAZ*. IDS Working Paper 541. <https://doi.org/10.19088/IDS.2021.025>; Mohmand, S. K. (2019). *The implications of closing civic space for sustainable development in Pakistan*. IDS Working Paper 521. <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/the-implications-of-closing-civic-space-for-sustainable-development-in-pakistan/>

¹³ Hövelmann, S. (2020). *Triple nexus in Pakistan. Catering to a governmental narrative or enabling independent humanitarian action?* Centre for Humanitarian Action. <https://www.chaberlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-09-triple-nexus-pakistan-hoevelmann-en-online.pdf>

Nevertheless, the shrunken NGO operational presence limited the potential for rapid and widespread response, as Section 2.3 details. Once operational capacity is scaled down, scaling it back up again takes time, and meant that the international response to the floods was slow out of the gate. As one international NGO interviewee noted, “This flood has really exposed the diminishing capacity of NGOs, both national and international, in Pakistan. The needs are huge, but capacity has reduced”. Comparing the international humanitarian operational presence in 2010 to the current flood response, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported close to the same number of total organisations responding in 2022 as 2010¹⁴ – but the reality is that the programming capacity of many of these organisations is far reduced in 2022. Moreover, in the critical sector of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), the number of responders has declined by more than a third (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Humanitarian operational presence overall and in WASH sector, 2010 and 2022



Source: OCHA (2010, 2022a)

Prior to the floods, OCHA no longer had a full office but retained six staff members to support the UN Resident Coordinator and administer the country-based pooled fund, which closed in 2022 due to insufficient support. And although a humanitarian country team (HCT) was in place, stakeholders questioned the quality of strategic discussion in that forum and felt more could have been done to engage civil society through existing humanitarian networks such as the National Humanitarian Network (NHN) as the floods unfolded. The decision by the HCT not to invoke the cluster mechanism for the response, citing it as a government-led response, limited the deployment of external capacity to support coordination, particularly on sectoral issues. Interviewees noted that only a few international NGOs have been active in the response (through their local partners) and that their scale has been much reduced compared to 2010.

¹⁴ OCHA. (2010). *Pakistan floods emergency response plan, revision, September 2010*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-floods-emergency-response-plan-revision-september-2010>; OCHA (2022a).

1.4 Political and economic crisis, and underlying vulnerability

The floods took place against the backdrop of an economic and political crisis. Pakistan was recovering from COVID-19, had just had a change of government and negotiated an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan in the face of a balance of payments crisis, and was being hit by the global effects of rapidly rising food and fuel prices. The government's ability to finance its response from domestic resources has been constrained by the economic crisis and the need to stick to IMF conditions. The IMF extended its soft loan facility to cope with COVID-19 impacts but to date there has not been a similar response to the floods.

The areas worst hit by the floods were also places with very high levels of underlying vulnerability, food insecurity, and challenges with access to basic services. Even before the floods started in June 2022, 40% of children under 5 in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh suffered from stunting, and 23% from wasting. An Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis of 28 vulnerable districts in the three areas estimated that just under 6 million people would be in IPC Phase 3 (crisis) and 4 (emergency) between July and November 2022.¹⁵ A multisector needs assessment carried out in September found people facing barriers to accessing health care due to long distances to clinics and a lack of doctors – a consequence both of flooding and pre-existing health sector weaknesses.¹⁶ The recently released post-disaster needs assessment estimates that the floods will push between 8.4 million and 9.1 million people into poverty with intergenerational impacts.¹⁷

The initial response: Who is helping?

Flooding emergencies are difficult to respond to logistically as standing water, washed out roads and bridges, and damage to other infrastructure make it very hard for rescuers and aid providers to reach people. The relief response to the 2022 floods has involved military and civilian, national, international, and local action to meet the acute and medium-term needs of people who were directly affected.

2.1 Government leadership and coordination

The humanitarian response has been directed and coordinated by the government, which established a National Flood Response and Coordination Centre (NFRCC) chaired by the Minister of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (MoPDSI). The armed forces and civil administration have been providing search and rescue as well as logistics and engineering support. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is procuring relief supplies and coordinating bilateral in-kind donations for distribution through the army, which is mobilised under constitutional provisions.¹⁸

¹⁵ OCHA. (2022b). *Pakistan: 2022 monsoon floods*. Situation report No. 8, 30 September 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-2022-monsoon-floods-situation-report-no-8-30-september-2022>

¹⁶ Provincial disaster management authorities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh (2022).

¹⁷ Government of Pakistan, ADB, EU, UNDP, and World Bank (2022).

¹⁸ OCHA (2022a). *Revised 2022 floods response plan Pakistan*. 1 September 2022–31 May 2023 (Issued 4 October 2022).

PDMA maintain significant autonomy under the constitution, but lines of authority and boundaries of decision making are less clear. There have been differences of approach between the NDMA and PDMA, sometimes depending on which political party holds office at the federal and provincial level.

The performance of DDMA has been variable and often dependent on the leadership in any given district. However, there was a widespread view that DDMA were under-resourced relative to need and had not maintained contingency stocks required for 48-hour response standards. While they were able to do a reasonable job in tracking which locations had received assistance, they have not always been able to facilitate strategic discussions at a sectoral level.

Government situation reports have provided details about the one-off cash payments provided through the BISP. As of 14 October, “the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has reached over 2.7 million flood affected families with flood relief cash assistance of PKR 25,000 (US\$115) per household. The Government has disbursed close to US\$300 million to affected people”.¹⁹ BISP had initially planned a second payment, but this has not been made to date. Daily government situation reports have also provided details about numbers affected and damage to housing and livestock. Provincial situation reports provide details on levels of in-kind assistance.²⁰

The UN-led cluster system of humanitarian coordination was not activated in this emergency, given pre-existing mechanisms for government-led coordination through the NFRCC, NDMA and PDMA. Instead, international actors such as UN agencies and international NGOs participate in ‘sector’ coordination led by government ministries. Interviewees highlighted concerns about international aid actors being slow to resource dedicated coordination capacities – both to coordinate within the international system and to support government-led coordination. Without the activation of the cluster system, international aid actors appeared to struggle to get people with the right skills in place, leading to technical deficits in sector-level and strategic-level coordination.

2.2 Local action: Volunteer and community-based efforts

At the local level, communities, volunteers, civil society, faith organisations, and the private sector have raised funds and provided support. As one interviewee noted, “Every street corner in Islamabad and other big and small cities have tents collecting clothes, food and non-food items and cash”. An assumed large – though untracked – volume of assistance has flowed through local and community-based efforts and from philanthropic, faith-based and private sector actors. People inside and outside Pakistan have been raising funds and sending goods and cash to help friends, relatives and communities. As ever, much of this remains invisible in the response data, which only tracks official efforts through voluntary reporting.

Where substantive investments had been made in preparedness, these helped to support local responses. For example, the Aga Khan Development Network had an established programme of support to community-based disaster risk management. It worked with 172 community emergency response teams (CERTs) across Pakistan and trained over 36,000 community volunteers as first responders, over 50% of whom were women. These teams had been provided with stockpiles of relief supplies such as tents, blankets, search tools, and first aid supplies, which strengthened local response capacities. Aga Khan Agency for Habitat supported local

¹⁹ OCHA. (2022c). *Pakistan: 2022 monsoon floods*. Situation report No. 9, 14 October 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-2022-monsoon-floods-situation-report-no-9-14-october-2022>

²⁰ Government of Sindh Provincial Disaster Management Authority Rehabilitation Department. (2022, 31 October). *Daily situation report*. https://www.pdma.gos.pk/new/Docs/SITREP_30-10-2022.pdf

search and rescue teams working with community-based warning systems and were able to evacuate over 9,000 people from at-risk areas. Crucially, 36% of the search and rescue teams were women.

Nationally, faith-based charities have been particularly active. Examples of larger responses include Alkhidmat Foundation, the charitable arm of Jamaat-e-Islami, which has a network of equipped and trained volunteers. Interviewees noted that it was one of the first to reach people with rescue efforts and both food and non-food items. The Foundation has fundraised locally through philanthropists and the private sector. The Akhuwat Foundation is another example of a large national charity actively involved in flood response, generating funds from domestic individual and corporate philanthropists, and now planning to build houses in the recovery phase. Minority religious groups such as churches similarly organised collections for distributions nationally and locally across dioceses.

These local and international fundraising efforts are feeding through at the local level in flood-affected areas through networks of volunteers. Many of the local organisations interviewed were not primarily relief or humanitarian organisations but are managing to respond to the floods through these complex networks of support (see Box). A common feature of these locally-led civil society responses seems to be real capacities at the local level and philanthropic support but a lack of significant additional support or funding from government or international organisations.

“The civil society response has been timely, significant and, for many, the only aid received”

- Kainat Development Association, a local NGO working on education started distributing rations to local residents as soon as flooding started and established a medical camp. It was assisted by the Legal Aid Society, the local government, and Karachi business networks.
- Ghazi Social Welfare Association is a small non-profit organisation working in several districts in Sindh. Prior to the floods it supported a mother and child health centre, an HIV and AIDS counselling centre, and worked with the transgender community and sex workers. When the rains hit, it began distributing food and non-food items, and operating health centres with its own resources. It has so far received just PKR150,000 (US\$670) from a national charity.
- In terms of coordination, organisations interviewed in Sindh have formed the Indus Democratic Network, which includes 30 registered social organisations, all active in flood-affected areas. The network has been coordinating with OCHA, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

An important issue emerging from many interviews is that local NGOs do not have staff trained in humanitarian action. The relative lack of international humanitarian organisations compared to 2010 has left gaps in training and human resources, which have been felt in the flood response. Many trained Pakistani humanitarian workers are now serving in other crises around the world. Other interviewees noted that informal camps provided by landlords were voluntary and uncoordinated, had variable levels of facilities for water, sanitation and shelter, and were challenging contexts in which to enforce minimum standards.

The ad hoc nature of local level support, the difficulty in coordinating efforts, and the problem of inappropriate in-kind donations were also raised as concerns. Stronger coordination at district levels was seen as the best way of harnessing the energies and resources provided by this outpouring of local solidarity.

While the generosity of neighbours and civil society cannot be underplayed, it may not be financially significant when compared to government and international efforts. Leading organisations such as Alkhidmat, Saylani Welfare International Trust and Akhuwat Foundation are estimated to have budgets in the region of USD millions (rather than tens of millions) of dollars. Immediate donations from well-wishers may already be fading, and experience from other disasters suggests the quality of such donations is variable.

Volunteers' time is unquantifiable and undoubtedly significant. But these efforts do not match up to the scale of the crisis in 2022 – or to the scale of the response mounted by the international community in 2010. Consequently, the aid being received by people affected by the flooding is often ad hoc, of variable quality and, as some respondents noted, directed to people on the basis of networks and connections rather than objective, needs-based assessments.

2.3 International operational and financial support

Aid through the international humanitarian system has been slower to get moving than national and local efforts. The initial UN appeal in August was for US\$160 million and revised upwards in October to US\$816 million.²¹ There was concern that this initial small target was based on an expectation of what might be possible (given other situations globally such as the war in Ukraine) rather than being an objective assessment of humanitarian need. This was viewed by NGOs and donors as messaging that the situation was not as severe as in fact was the case, leading to less international support early on in the response than might otherwise have been the case. Further, some NGOs also saw a lack of consultation in developing the appeal.

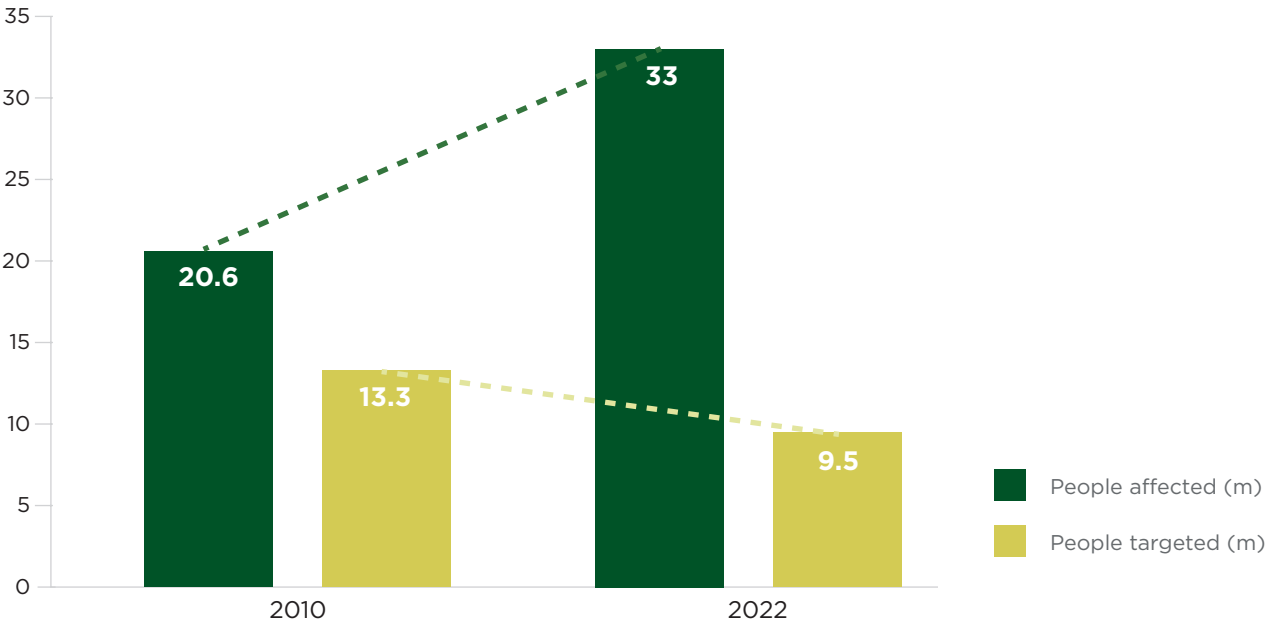
Due to a combination of government restrictions on civil society and an increasing development focus, there was a less substantial international aid agency presence and capacity prior to the floods in 2022 than prior to the floods in 2010. Some agencies that had an existing presence were able to quickly respond in areas they were already operating in – but scaling up was a challenge in places like Sindh, where the humanitarian presence was thin. Additionally, whereas in 2010 the clusters were stood up and facilitating operational coordination at grassroots level, in 2022, coordination support was a notable gap. And although the government has relaxed the internal restrictions on movements and programming, international NGOs report difficulties in obtaining visas to bring in additional international technical staff capacity.

²¹ OCHA. (2022a). *Revised 2022 floods response plan Pakistan*. 1 September 2022–31 May 2023 (issued 4 October 2022). <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/revised-pakistan-2022-floods-response-plan-01-sep-2022-31-may-2023-issued-04-oct-2022>; OCHA. (2022d). *2022 floods response plan. Pakistan*. 1 September 2022–28 February 2023 (issued 30 August). <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-2022-floods-response-plan-01-sep-2022-28-feb-2023-issued-30-aug-2022>

Framework agreements in place with local partners were seen as enabling agencies with existing presence to respond rapidly. IRC, for example, highlighted partnerships in Sindh with Research and Development Foundation (RDF) and with Medical Emergency Relief Foundation in Balochistan. Concern Worldwide was running a community-based disaster preparedness and resilience programme, working with over 100 small local organisations, which enabled it to respond quickly. Communities they worked with to help them prepare were able to save livestock, grain, and assets. Local grassroots organisations they worked with were able to respond. As an example, just 24 hours after agreeing an emergency grant, a local partner was able to carry out over 1,000 medical consultations.

Along with having a smaller footprint in Pakistan in 2022, the humanitarian sector has set itself lower goals. Despite the needs being greater, the number of people targeted for assistance in the Pakistan floods response plan is 50% lower in 2022 than it was in 2010 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: People affected and people targeted for aid 2010 and 2022 (millions)

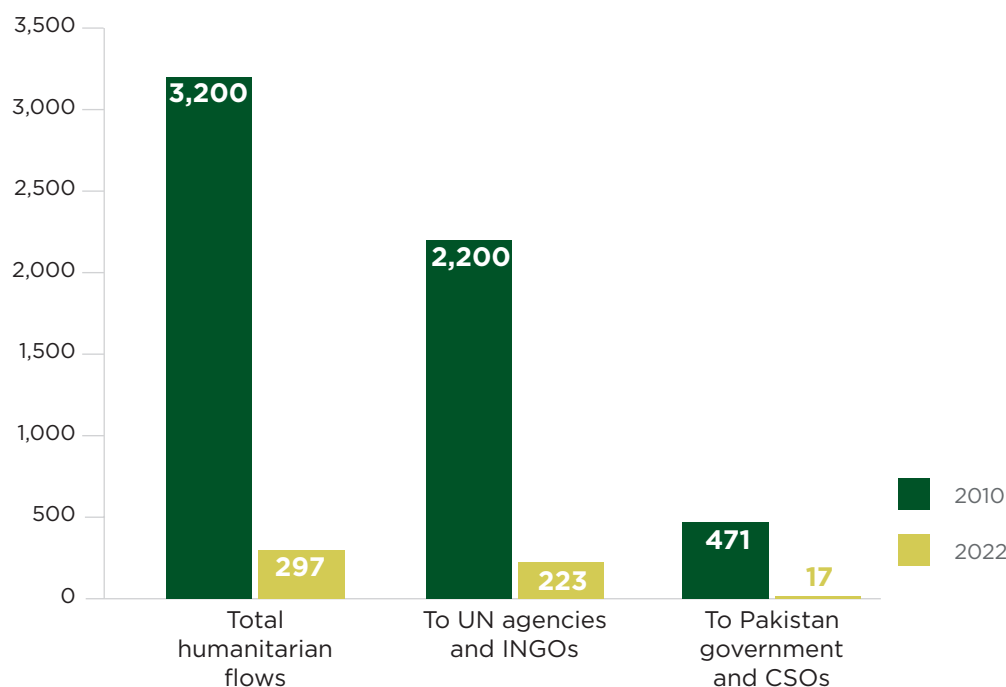


Source: OCHA (2010, 2022a)

[Note: Due to a different means of estimating people affected and people in need in 2010, the response plan in 2010 used the same number (20.6 million) for both categories.]

According to the UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS), as of 29 October, the total official humanitarian funding committed and dispersed for 2022 (year one) is US\$267 million, an order of magnitude lower than the flood response funding in 2010 (US\$3.2 billion). At the same time, the proportions of funding directed to national and international actors are at roughly the same levels. Moreover, at just 28% of requirements funded, the Pakistan floods response plan ranks near the bottom of the 42 current humanitarian appeals in 2022 in terms of funding coverage.

Figure 4: Humanitarian funding to Pakistan, 2010 and 2022 (USD millions)



Source: UN FTS 2022

It is not immediately clear why this precipitous drop-off in unconditional assistance should be the case. Pakistan's government was already a capable humanitarian actor in 2010, then as now very much in the driver's seat of the response to that crisis, with significant civilian and military capacities for independent response. While the Pakistan economy has enjoyed a relatively healthy 4% average annual growth rate since 2010 and has advanced to lower-middle income country status, this would not seem to obviate the need for infusions of funding, material, and operational assistance to meet urgent needs. Some donors reported a disappointing lack of coordination and information sharing, even as late as mid-October – the implication being that this was undermining their ability to argue for resources within their own agencies.

Interviewees consistently noted struggles to deliver a response commensurate with the scale of the crisis.

“We just did not realise the scale of the impact. We based our numbers on what had happened rather than a projection of where it might go. We did not understand the needs or make good judgements on what the needs could be. We did not anticipate the floods not receding, or the scale of the agricultural impact, or how quickly WASH needs would emerge.”

In addition to the international humanitarian funding, financing for the acute relief phase of the crisis has also come from IFIs, including US\$357 million that was identified from the current World Bank portfolio and repurposed to help meet immediate needs. Activities supported include cash transfers (about 65% of the total) and procurement of goods and services, as well as rehabilitation works for emergency response. From that total, US\$230 million was reprogrammed to support the emergency BISP payments. These flows are harder to track in real time and may potentially be more significant than the humanitarian contributions even for the emergency relief phase. However, to the extent that they are made through concessional loan instruments rather than grants, they risk exacerbating Pakistan's debt and economic crisis.

While launching the post-disaster needs assessment report calling for US\$16.3 billion in support, Pakistan's Ministers for Planning and Climate Change were critical of the international donors and IMF for a lack of support and slow action so far.²² They argue that these huge losses and damages are linked to climate change and that the global community, especially the Annex-I countries, need to realise their commitments and responsibilities in line with climate justice principles. The Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reform, Ahsan Iqbal, criticised IMF's fiscal restrictions.

"The IMF has imposed a condition on Pakistan that it cannot even spend 40% of its own development budget before the last quarter of this fiscal year, which is harsh, unjust, and unfair and needs to be immediately reversed."

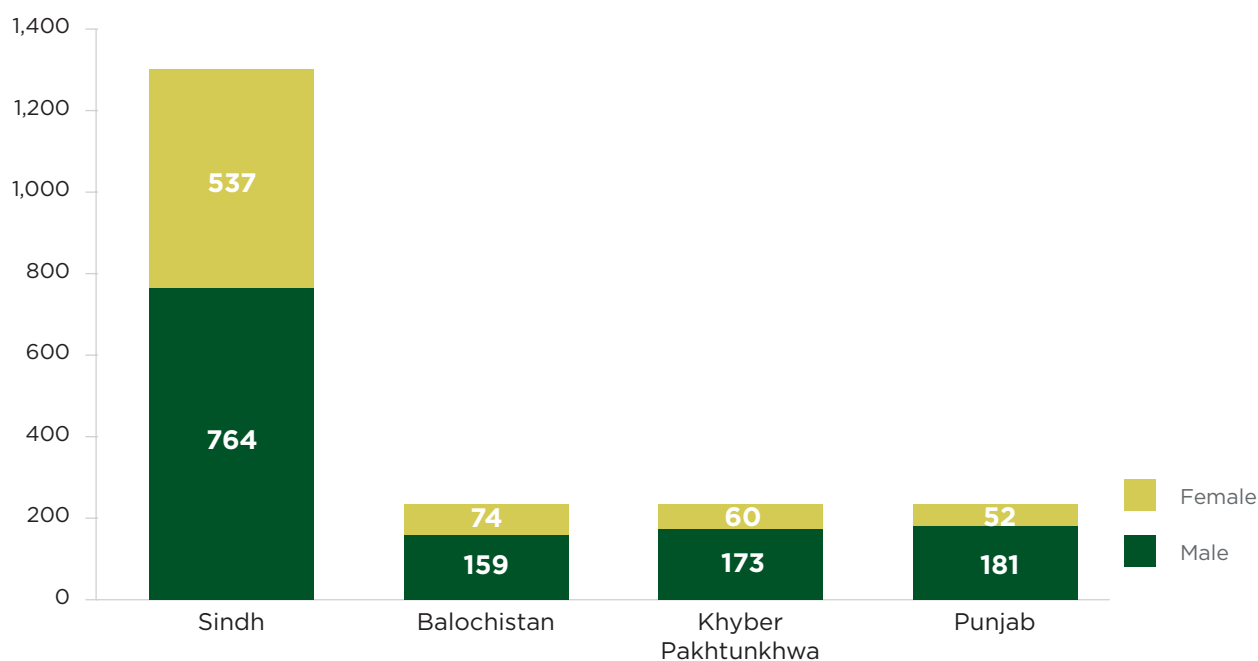
The Minister for Climate Change, Sherry Rehman, selected as one of nine members of the global committee that is setting the agenda for COP27, stated, "Other countries get relief in debt, but we have been asked to launch an appeal for humanitarian assistance. We have not been able to serve even half of the flood affected people".

2.4 Affected people's perspectives

A mobile telephone survey of 2,000 people in the four hardest hit provinces revealed an affected population largely dissatisfied with the relief response and worried for their immediate future.²³

Survey respondents were 64% male and 36% female, and the survey was geographically targeted to represent mostly inhabitants of Sindh (65%), the worst-affected province, with the remaining equally distributed between Balochistan, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (11.65% each) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Survey sample composition (N=2,000)



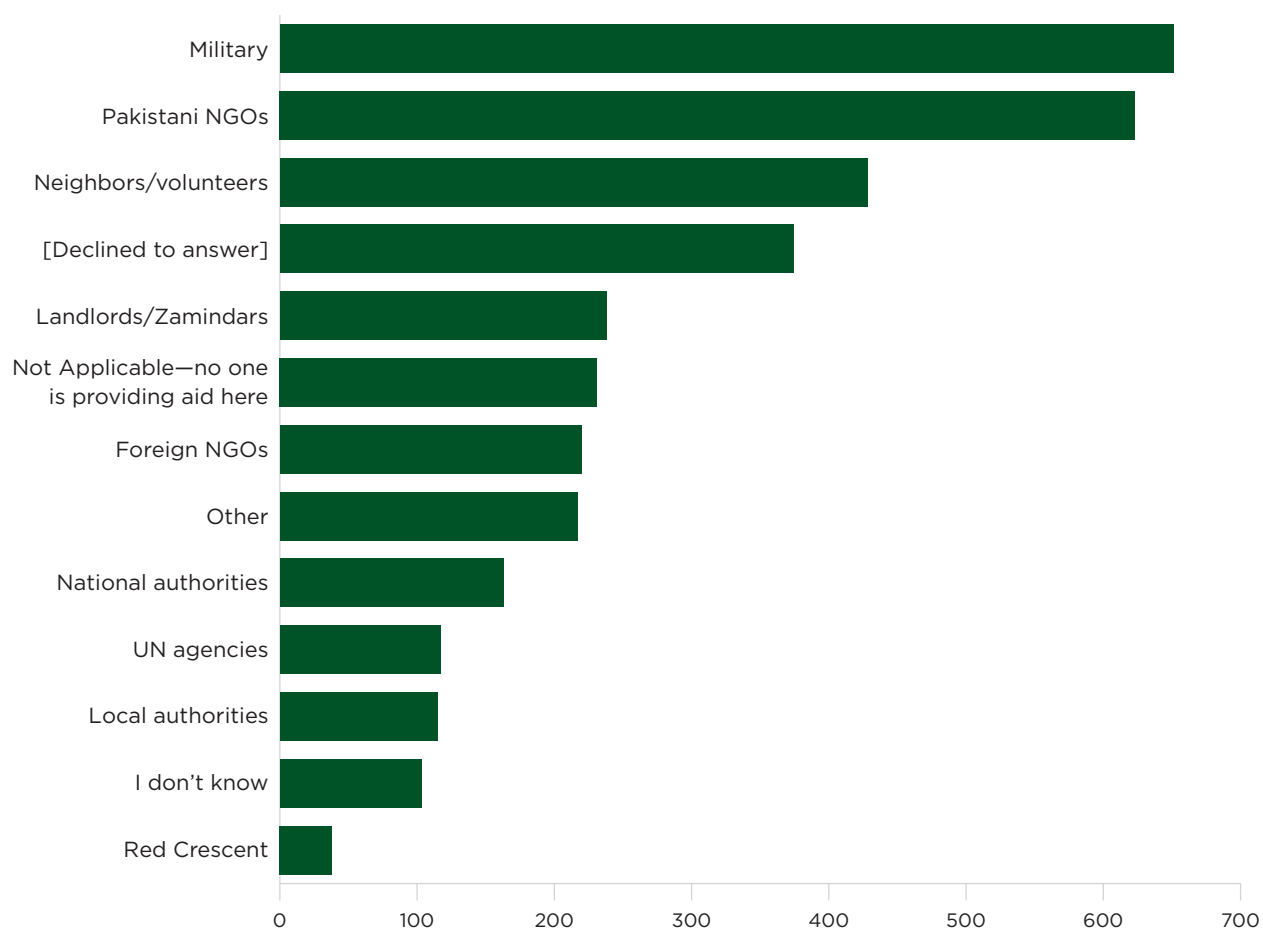
Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

²² Government of Pakistan, ADB, EU, UNDP, and World Bank (2022).

²³ The survey was conducted for Humanitarian Outcomes by GeoPoll, 13-24 October 2022.

People perceived the military as the predominant provider of the aid they saw being delivered, followed by national NGOs, and then informal volunteers and community efforts. In contrast, national and local authorities were less frequently reported as having been seen delivering aid (Figure 6). With caveats that it is not always clear where the aid funds and materials originate, it is notable that volunteers, local landholders (zamindars) and even international NGOs were cited more frequently than national and local government authorities as providers of aid.

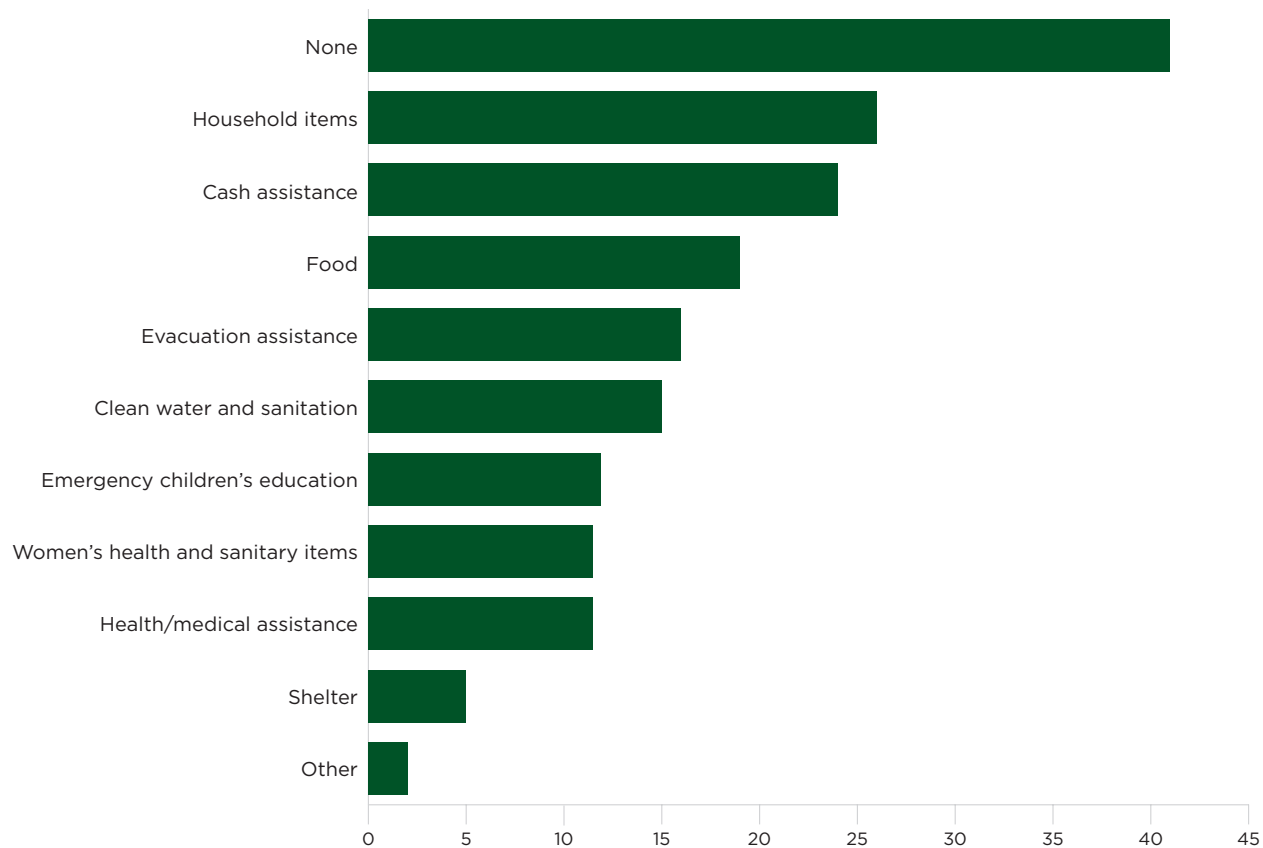
Figure 6: Who have you seen providing aid?



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

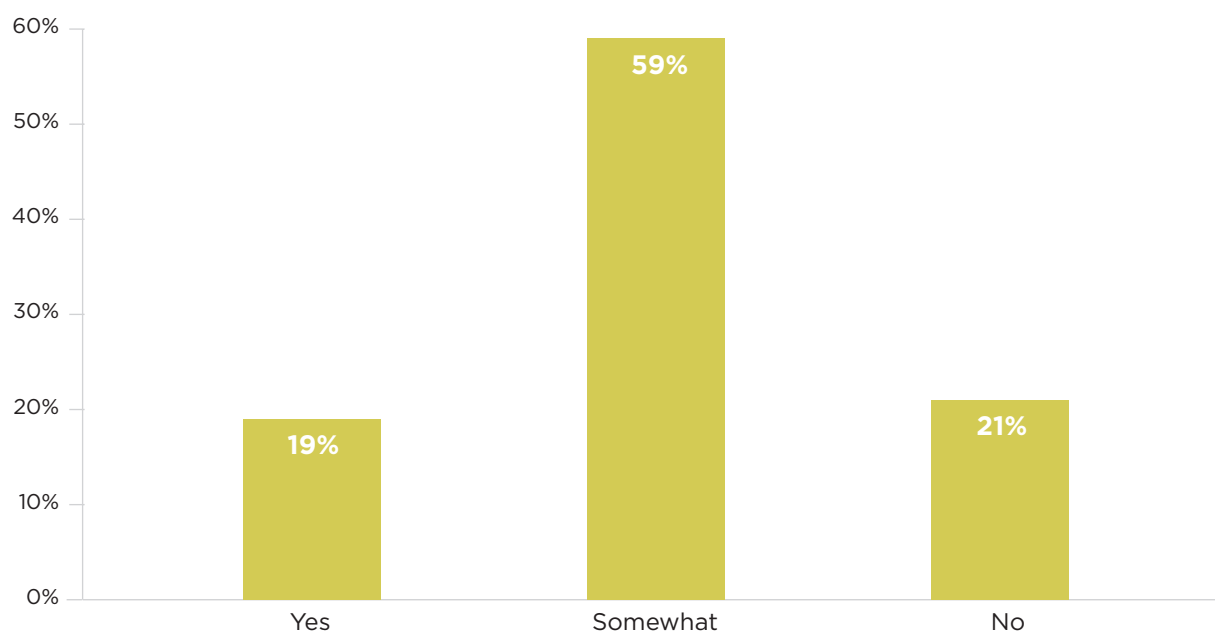
Survey respondents were unusually circumspect when it came to discussing whether and what kind of aid they received, with 43% declining to answer this question. Among the 1,112 people that did answer, the majority had not seen any aid at all. Aid was mostly received in the form of non-food relief (household) items and cash assistance (Figure 7). This largely accords with two areas emphasised in the government's initial relief response – material distribution by the military and payments through the BISP system. Most of those who received aid further reported that it either did not, or only partially, address their most urgent needs (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Aid received



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

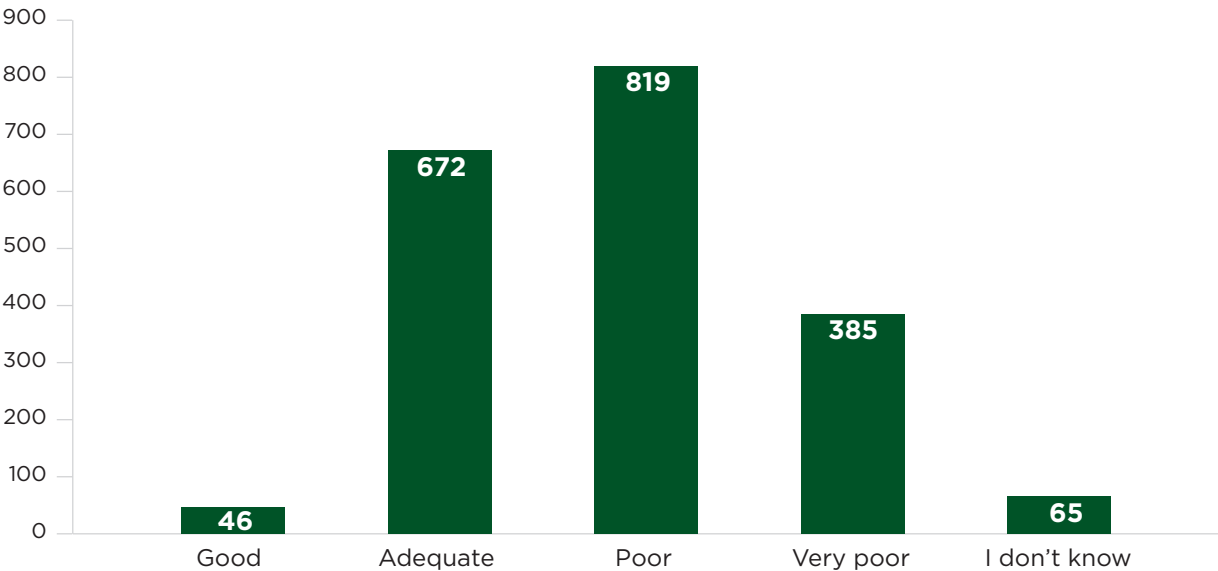
Figure 8: Did the aid that was provided meet the most urgent needs?



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

When asked to rate the performance on the early relief response overall, the most common response (41%) was “poor”, while only 2% rated it as “good” (Figure 9).

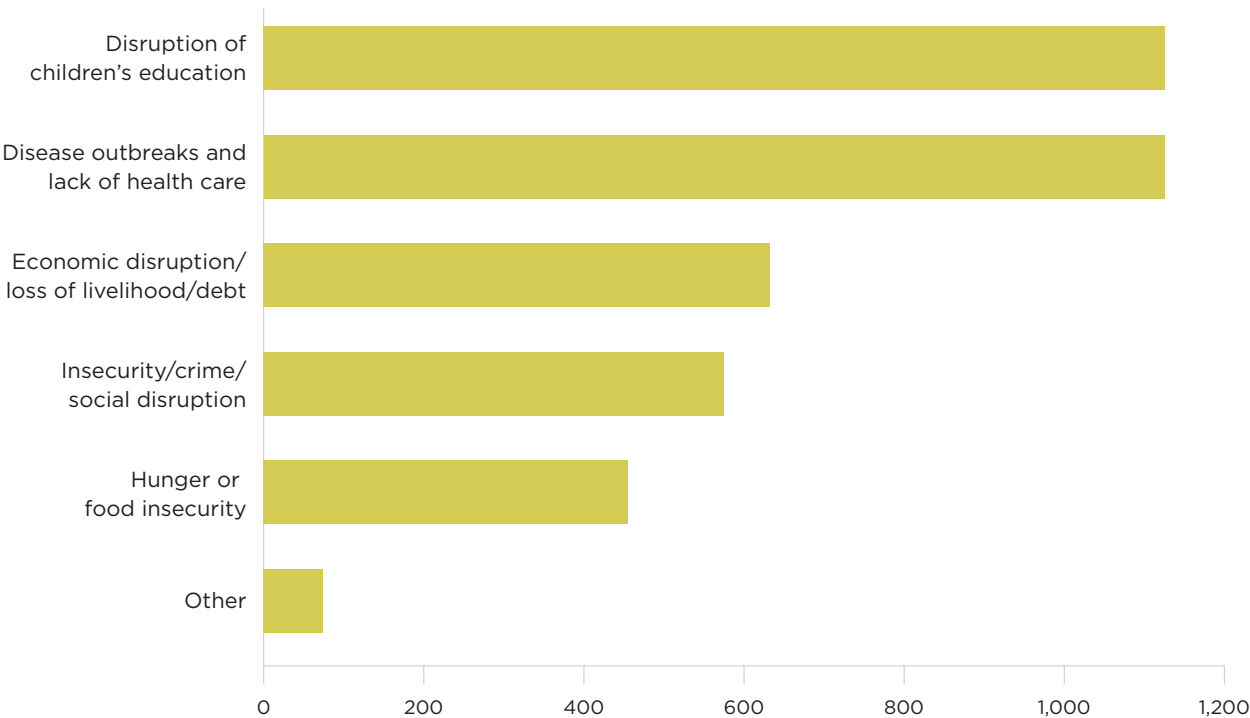
Figure 9: Given the scale of the disaster, what is your opinion on the response to the emergency during the past two months?



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

Looking forward, people reported their two biggest worries for the coming months centred around the disruption of children’s education, lack of health care and disease outbreaks (Figure 10).

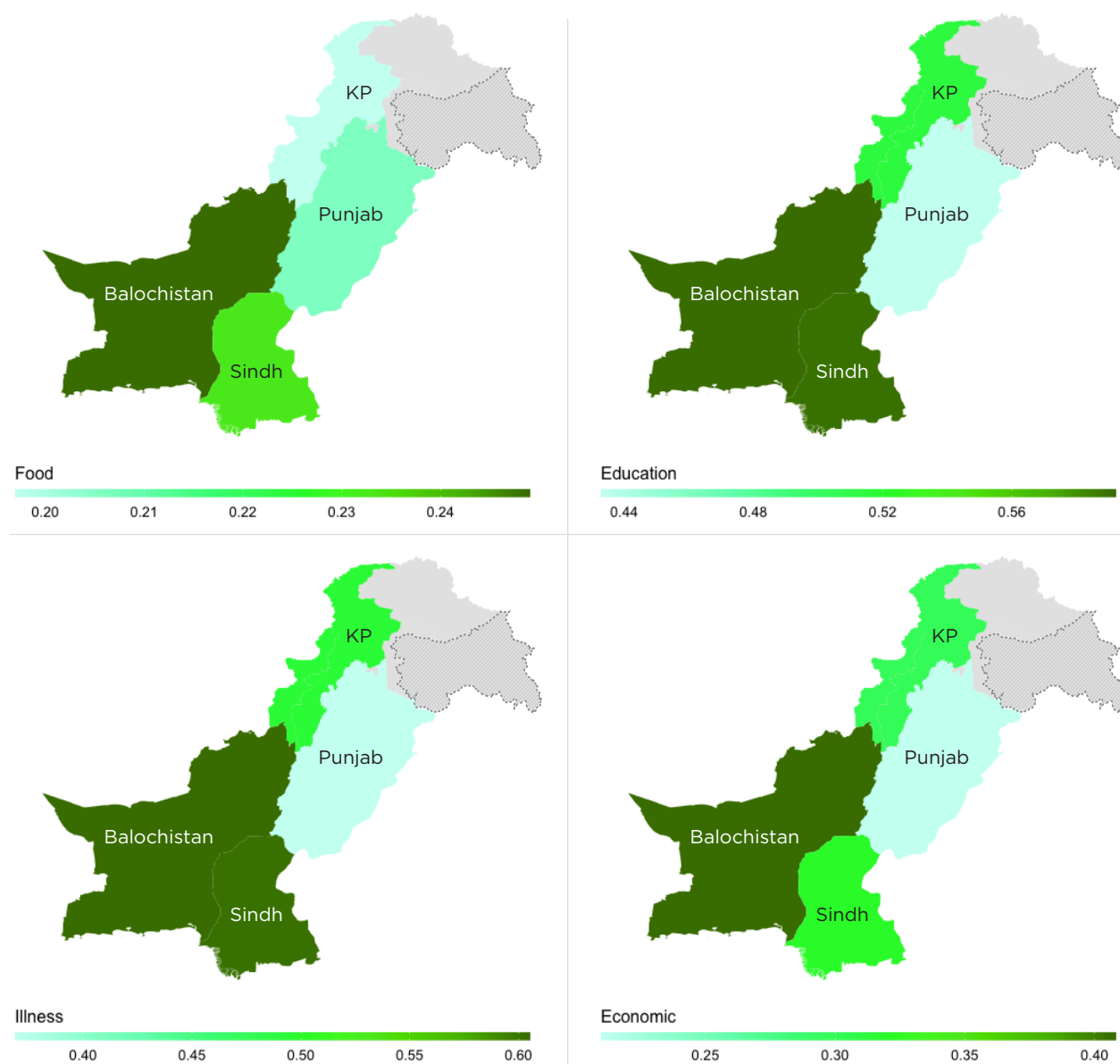
Figure 10: What is your biggest concern for the coming months?



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

Breaking down the survey results by province reveals considerable geographical variation. Respondents in Balochistan, which has faced protracted conflict, security challenges, and operational restrictions for NGOs, reported the greatest concern about economic livelihood, children’s education, illnesses, and food security going forward. The province already had the highest infant and maternal mortality rate, the highest poverty rate, and the lowest literacy rate in Pakistan. The flood seems poised to make conditions worse, further exacerbating political risk.

Figure 11: Affected people’s biggest concern in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh

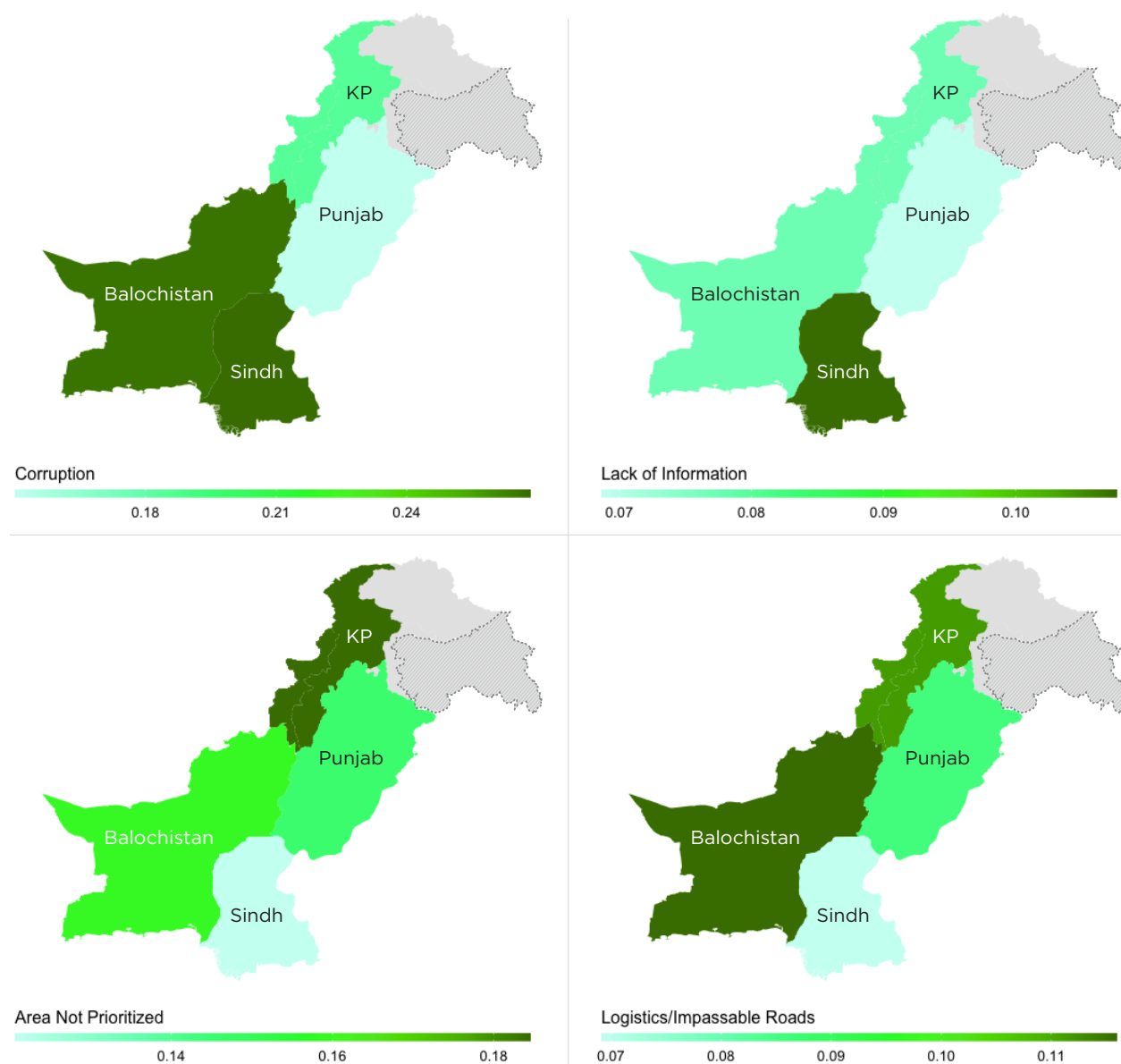


The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not been agreed upon by the parties.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, owing to its mountainous terrain, and Balochistan also noted significantly higher logistical challenges related to impassable roads, destroyed bridges, and lack of infrastructure. This is not particularly surprising given notably lower levels of economic development in the two provinces.

Respondents in Balochistan and Sindh also expressed higher levels of misgivings about corruption and noted the least involvement by national authorities. While some of these findings can be traced back to security constraints and access issues in the provinces, the fact that respondents in Punjab (where the governing Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) is based) did not consider corruption a significant impediment to aid delivery highlights the potential impact of ethnic politics on public perception. Despite these concerns, it is reassuring that relief efforts have prioritised Sindh, which has been most severely affected.

Figure 12: Perceptions of biggest challenge to aid in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh



Key sectors and cross-cutting challenges

3.1 Shock-responsive social protection and humanitarian cash

The World Bank has been supporting the BISP with a series of major programmes since 2009. Recently there has been a focus on updating the registry, support delivery mechanisms, and providing additional support during COVID-19. All of these investments and systems are now being tested in the flood response, and World Bank staff felt satisfied that “there was no way of doing it better or quicker”. The BISP reports having so far disbursed 97.3% of its available funds.²⁴ Funding for the emergency payments came in part from the World Bank agreeing to repurpose existing programmes and loans. These payments of US\$115 per household have been provided to people already on the BISP registry on a one-off basis. But due to budget constraints, payments could only be made to 2.76 million of the over 8 million existing BISP beneficiary families who reside in areas declared flood-affected, and it has not covered the millions of people made newly vulnerable by the floods. Self-registration for new beneficiaries has been open in flood-affected areas but as yet there is no data on the addition of new flood-affected families.

An issue raised by interviewees was that this response was seen as having helped to meet initial basic needs, but that more sustained and earlier complementary support was needed. While roughly half of survey respondents (47%) reported that new registrations for BISP were happening in their area, only 13% reported receiving any cash assistance to date.

3.2 Health, WASH, and shelter

Some of the greatest concerns in the first few months of the response have been risks relating to infectious diseases and outbreaks with such large numbers of people displaced, standing water, and inadequate facilities for water, sanitation, and shelter.

In Sindh and Balochistan, there are increasing outbreaks of water and vector-borne diseases, and challenges in accessing health care. In a multisector needs assessment in the worst affected districts of Sindh, 37% of respondents reported that their nearest health facility was not functional.²⁵ The NDMA reports that 2,000 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed and there are reports of low stocks of essential medicines and medical supplies. An estimated 5.5 million people no longer have access to safe drinking water due to damages to water infrastructure and sanitation facilities.²⁶

Reports from the worst flood-affected districts suggest a high and rising incidence of communicable disease. This is also the principal immediate threat expressed most often by key informants to this study. The available data suggests this is the case, although surveillance has been slow to be established. In its 14 October situation report, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that an emergency surveillance system (EDSS) “has been

²⁴ Pakistan Today. (2022, 25 October). *BISP says it disbursed 97 percent of flood relief cash assistance among affectees*. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/10/25/bisp-says-it-disbursed-97-percent-of-flood-relief-cash-assistance-among-affectees/>

²⁵ Provincial disaster management authorities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh (2022).

²⁶ OCHA (2022c).

finalised and deployed”.²⁷ This is late in the timeframe of the response, especially compared to 2010 when weekly epidemiological bulletins of significant details were being produced earlier in the response. The WHO bulletin also reports that measles cases are not being recorded. This is concerning, as is the almost complete absence of confirmed cholera cases, which suggests not that they do not exist, but rather that diagnostic capacity is absent.

The pre-existing healthcare capacity in flood-affected areas was not particularly robust. Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure studies show a heavy reliance on private health care – something confirmed by key informants interviewed in these areas.²⁸ This suggests that the poorest will be the least equipped to deal with health shocks. Additionally, disruptions to vaccination campaigns caused by infrastructure damage and population displacement threatens new outbreaks of preventable diseases.

When asked their biggest concern for the immediate post-disaster period, people surveyed across the four provinces cited the risk of disease and lack of health care in equal measure with the disruption of children’s education (Figure 10). The health concerns were particularly pronounced in Balochistan and Sindh and are poised to worsen with the coming winter season.

3.3 Protection, gender, and exclusion

Significant challenges relating to gender, protection, and exclusion complicate the humanitarian response to the floods. Situation reports and appeals have noted, for instance, that 650,000 pregnant women in flood-affected areas require access to maternal services.²⁹ A lack of adequate, gender-segregated toilets and bathing facilities in unregulated displacement sites is a serious security concern and, in areas where women face cultural restrictions to mingling with men outside of family groups, some displaced people can face difficulties even going into camps.³⁰ These and other challenges require a particular focus on mitigating risks relating to gender based violence.

The huge number of people affected by the floods, and the limits of current responses, mean that many people have received little or no support – and that there is a need for attention to particular groups that may be excluded from assistance. People affected by the floods interviewed for the study had seen little assistance. In the words of one, “Nobody is helping us; The Assistance Commissioner came once, took the list, and then disappeared. The NGOs and the government do not exist in our village”.

Across rural Pakistan, in the provinces worst affected by the flooding, there are large landlords and many people who are landless and facing high levels of debt and poverty. A 2020 World Bank systematic country diagnostic argued that, “Inequality in the distribution of land has been at the root of Pakistan’s system of elite capture and of its reproduction over time”.³¹ Poor and marginalised people in flood-affected areas are often tied into highly unequal relationships with landlords and highly politicised patronage systems, which also affects who

²⁷ World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). *Pakistan floods situation report*. Issue 2, 14 October 2022. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/pakistan-floods-situation-report-issue--2---14-october-2022>

²⁸ Khalid, F., Raza, W., Hotchkiss, D.R., and Soelaeman, R. H. (2021). *Health services utilisation and out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditures in public and private facilities in Pakistan: An empirical analysis of the 2013-14 OOP health expenditure survey*. BMC Health Services Research 21, 178. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-06170-4>

²⁹ Parbhu, M. (2022, 23 September). *Pakistan’s flood crisis is particularly tough on poor women. Here’s why*. VaccinesWork, Gavi. <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/pakistans-flood-crisis-particularly-tough-poor-women-heres-why>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Redaelli, S., Mohib, A.S., Aslam, Z., Varela, G.J., Nasir, J.L., Mohammad, B.G., and Economou, P. (2020). *Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Levelling the playing field*. Systematic country diagnostic. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34549/Pakistan-Systematic-Country-Diagnostic-Leveling-the-Playing-Field.pdf?sequence=4>

gets included in aid distributions. In a recent rapid needs assessment, 31% of key respondents cited “political affiliation/connections” as the biggest barrier to receiving assistance.³² Relatedly, the survey conducted for this review found that affected people cited “corruption” as the second biggest obstacle to receiving aid (Figure 13).

It is not possible for humanitarian aid to tackle these deep-standing patronage and political economy systems – but it does highlight the need to pay particular attention to people left out of patronage networks and excluded from official assistance. There is a role for international aid actors and civil society to have a particular focus on those excluded in their own systems of targeting and distribution, and to advocate with government at local and national levels for feedback and accountability mechanisms that allow people to challenge unfair exclusion.

In planning support to recovery, there will need to be particular attention to land rights, levels of household indebtedness, and the needs of people largely dependent on casual labour. If assistance is partly focused on compensation for housing damage, care will need to be taken not to exclude people without land or housing titles, and to consider those who rent houses and rental markets. There may also be particular needs relating to neglected vulnerabilities. For instance, a 2019 report on multiyear humanitarian funding and factors affecting resilience noted a striking scale of drug addiction.³³ One interviewee who works with the transgender community said that the community felt left behind in the response and fears that it may be further ignored in the recovery and reconstruction phase. Refugees, older people, and people with disabilities may also face particular vulnerabilities.³⁴

Interviewees noted risks around the politicisation of aid distributions, both in terms of who gets assisted and which organisations are supported to provide assistance. In painting a “best-case scenario” for recovery from the floods, Dr Suleri (Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)) has noted a need to lower the political temperature and reduce political instability in the run-up to elections in 2023.³⁵

A Reuters analysis based on satellite imagery showed the extent of flooding around cities and towns in Sindh, many of which have been seriously affected.³⁶ In spite of this, assessments, international aid appeal documents, and situation reports have so far largely focused on rural areas. Interviewees noted the need for more attention to risk-sensitive urban development and planning in recovery processes.

Affected people surveyed revealed a lack of confidence that relief aid was being targeted where it was needed the most. When asked about the obstacles to aid delivery, most cited lack of prioritisation of the neediest. This de facto exclusion, together with corruption, registered as an even greater obstacle than the logistical challenges inherent in flood relief operations.

³² Provincial disaster management authorities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh (2022).

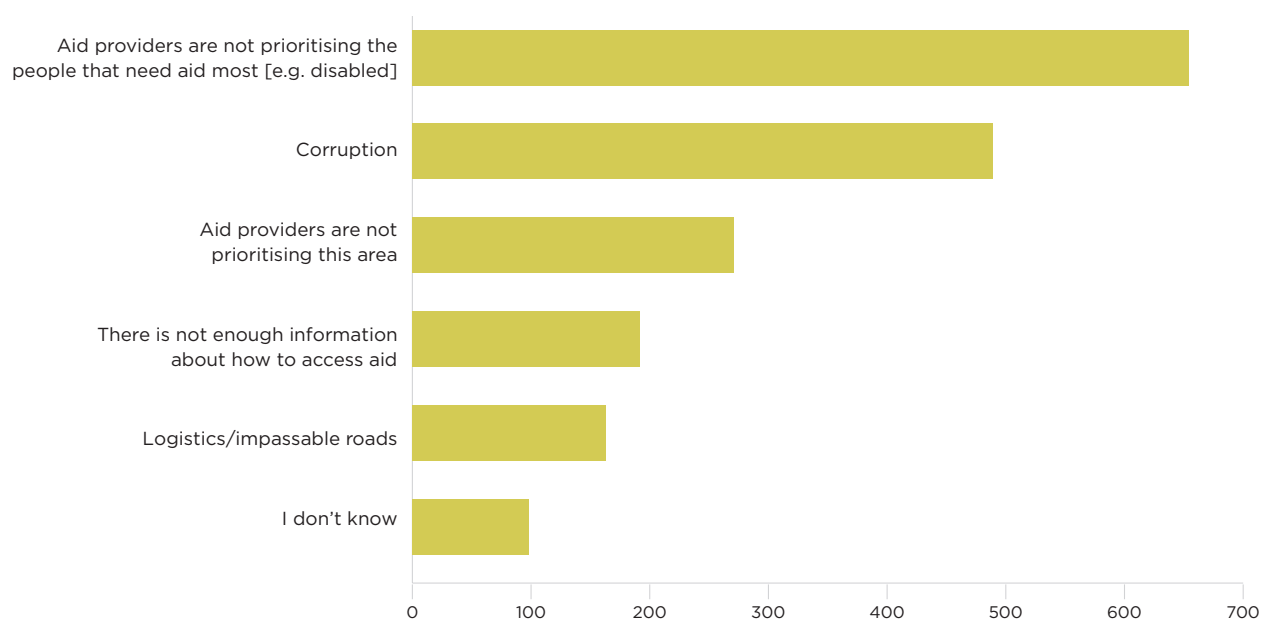
³³ Levine, S. and Sida, L. (2019). *Multi-year humanitarian funding in Pakistan*. HPG report. https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Multi-year_humanitarian_funding_in_Pakistan.pdf

³⁴ UNHCR. (2022). *Pakistan flood response. UNHCR supplementary appeal*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-flood-response-unhcr-supplementary-appeal-september-2022-december-2023>; HelpAge. (2022). *Pakistan floods: Rapid needs assessment of older people*. <https://www.helpage.org/silo/files/pakistan-floods--rapid-needs-assessment-of-older-people-24-oct.pdf>; Ageing & Disability Task Force (ADTF). (2022). *ADTF (Ageing & Disability Task Force) supporting floods response in Pakistan*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/adtf-ageing-disability-task-force-supporting-floods-response-pakistan>

³⁵ Suleri, A.Q. (2022, 16 October). *Guest editorial: Assessing post flood scenarios*. Pakistan News. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/999919-guest-editorial-assessing-post-flood-scenarios>

³⁶ Bhargava, A., Scarr, S., Kiyada, S., Chowdhury, J. and Katakam, A. (2022). *Submerged cities*. Reuters. <https://graphics.reuters.com/PAKISTAN-WEATHER/FLOODS/zgvomodervd/>

Figure 13: In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge to aid reaching people in your area?

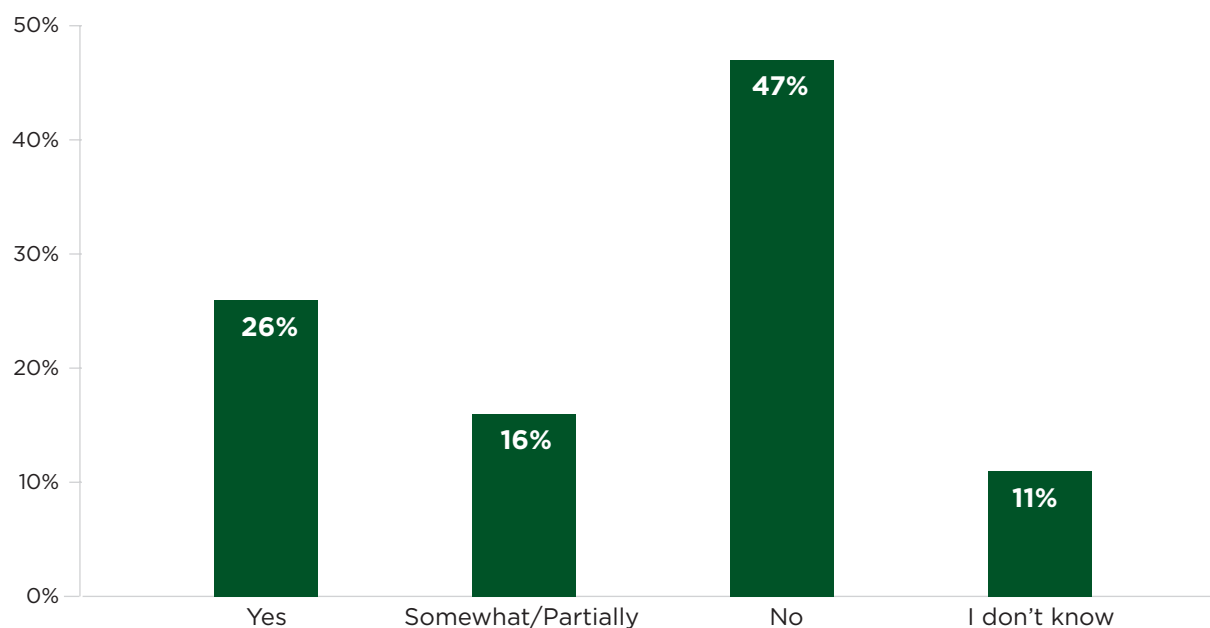


Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

3.5 Information in emergencies

The responses to the affected population survey suggest that information is an unmet humanitarian need in some areas. When asked if they knew where to access information on aid availability and eligibility, most people either said “no”, or that they didn’t know (Figure 14). This was especially true in Punjab, where only 27% of respondents answered “yes”, while 52% answered “no”, 12% responded “I don’t know”, and 7% responded “partially”.

Figure 14: Are you able to access information about what help is available in your area and who is eligible for it?



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes/GeoPoll

Inadequate information for affected people mirrors a wider lack of good data on conditions and needs. The figures on displacement and needs are based on broad estimates by the government. For instance, the number of 33 million affected people was arrived at by multiplying the 89 affected districts by 60% of their population based on the last census.

Where aid is delivered, most people do not know how to raise a concern or complaint. The Balochistan rapid needs assessment reported that 64% of community members interviewed did not know how to make a complaint regarding the distribution of, or access to, aid.³⁷

Finding the right role for international humanitarian actors in a government and local civil society-led response

International aid appeals have rightly presented the international response as complementary to, and in support of, national and locally-led efforts. However, many saw the initial UN appeal and levels of funding as far too small given levels of need. This has now been partially revised with a new, updated appeal. While the newly revised amount is five times higher at US\$816 million, it is so far poorly supported, at under 30% funded. Arguably this is too little, too late, and suggests the international humanitarian system needs to think about what it can do best with its limited resources. Positioning international aid as supportive of nationally-led efforts cannot be an excuse for an insufficient international response.

By contrast, as set out above, the civil society response has been timely, significant and, for many, the only aid received. This is unsurprising and reflects the situation in most natural hazard disaster responses of recent years. Some of these groups are supported by international NGOs, the UN and Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and some have benefited from preparedness support from international actors. But the vast majority are working with their own resources, with little connection to international aid. Due diligence processes make it hard for international actors to collaborate quickly with small and emergent organisations. Even the large national organisations with substantial programmes, such as Akhuwat Foundation, have found it hard to coordinate with international humanitarian organisations as they are not traditional humanitarian actors.

The lack of connection between the volunteer and community-led responses at local levels and the international aid response (with the two largely happening in parallel to each other) would matter less if the support being provided was complementary. However, opportunities to more directly support locally-led responses are being missed, and many of the very local organisations that we consulted and that are providing early and “on-the-ground” help to flood-affected people had received little additional support.

The response also shows the growing importance of IFIs in responding to humanitarian crises, particularly in middle-income countries. As also outlined above, the World Bank responded with impressive flexibility in repurposing existing loans to allow a rapid cash response through the BISP. With the launch of the post-disaster needs assessment, and the estimated US\$16 billion recovery requirements, attention needs to turn to the need for larger-scale support, the

³⁷ Provincial Disaster Management Authority Balochistan. (2022). *Rapid needs assessment report 2022. Monsoon floods. Balochistan, Pakistan*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/rapid-needs-assessment-report-2022-monsoon-floods-balochistan-pakistan-august-2022-0>

appropriateness of IMF conditionalities, and the extension of a soft loan facility for the flood recovery and reconstruction plan.

The importance of IFIs in supporting a government-led response, coupled with vibrant and effective local action, raises major policy questions about the role of the UN and the standard humanitarian model in such contexts. The international humanitarian system is best geared to major response in the absence of functioning institutions. In Pakistan, the need is for financing and technical support, and to augment and fill gaps in delivery capacity. In the case of the 2022 floods, the most significant financing is being provided by IFIs and other sources, leaving the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and UN agencies with a narrower role. Understanding this role and identifying and meeting the remaining acute needs should be a focus strategically in the next three months. For international NGOs the picture is similar. By far the best role they can play is to support national civil society organisations with finance and technical expertise where necessary. But even this more limited role, focused on technical expertise, gap filling and more direct support to local actors, requires more generous financing than has been made available.

While initial support provided through flexible adjustments to existing World Bank loans enabled a timely initial cash response through BISP, it does leave some major policy questions. Clearly there are areas of response where different parts of government are very capable: the military demonstrated its capacity in search and rescue and logistics for emergency and temporary infrastructure repairs; BISP its capacities for cash transfers; the Ministry of Agriculture in a detailed understanding of agricultural needs; and municipal water authorities in emergency repairs to get urban systems working again. However, this is dependent on excellent internal government coordination, and some areas of humanitarian response, such as protection and gender, can be relatively overlooked. It is in supporting government and civil society in technical areas where capacities are less strong, in filling gaps and in tackling neglected areas and challenges of exclusion and accountability, that international humanitarian actors can add the most value.

There are concerns that in technical areas, such as health surveillance and response, that more could be done. The UN played this role in the 2010 floods, and more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO was providing technical support to the Ministry of Health on surveillance systems. Better understanding vulnerability, and using this knowledge to refine targeting systems, is clearly also an imperative given emerging feedback from people in flood affected areas. Interviewees also noted gaps in coordination at the operational level, and a lack of effective international support to local and sectoral level coordination when compared to the response in 2010.

In the medium term however, there are other aspects of IFI support that the government and donors need to reflect on seriously. Development resources are primarily for productive investments – borrowing (even on concessional terms) to respond to shocks potentially means hard trade-offs. With climate change set to intensify the frequency of these shocks, and donor countries seemingly unwilling to donate large-scale funds as previously, how can the medium-term impacts of this kind of model be mitigated? Risk-informed development needs to become central to Pakistan’s national development strategy, together with a well-resourced disaster response capacity both in government and civil society. ADB noted in its country partnership strategy that, “Pakistan estimated its climate adaptation investment needs at \$7 billion–\$14 billion per year, but its ability to adapt and to manage disaster and climate risks remains insufficient”.³⁸

³⁸ ADB. (2020). *Pakistan, 2021–2025—Lifting growth, building resilience, increasing competitiveness*. Country partnership strategy. <https://www.adb.org/documents/pakistan-country-partnership-strategy-2021-2025>

Looking forward – recovery challenges and areas for action

Some examples of promising practice are emerging from the flood response. There has been a vibrant civil society response in Pakistan that, while ad hoc and hard to quantify, has been important in reaching people. Framework agreements and investments in response preparedness helped some networks of national and international NGOs respond quickly. The value of shock-responsive social protection to support people at scale was demonstrated by the rapid provision of an emergency cash payment to 2.7 million households. But with payments not reaching newly flood-affected people and limited to one-off support, it underscored how much remains to be done to make the social protection system more effectively shock-responsive to future disasters. In the meantime, the paucity of global humanitarian resources flowing to Pakistan for the response, and the reliance on debt-based financing, will add to financial and political pressures on the country. Acknowledging this, global financial actors should seriously consider adopting force majeure-type debt instruments such as the “pause clause” proposal recently put forward by the Centre for Disaster Protection, whereby debtor countries would get a grace period on debt payments, allowing them to redirect this funding for disaster relief.³⁹

As the flood waters start to recede there is a risk that the situation will start to fade from the news and ongoing humanitarian and recovery needs will not get the resources or attention they need. In the next 6–12 months, flood-affected people will be contending with inadequate shelter, disruption of basic services, livelihoods and education, high levels of debt, and likely new outbreaks of disease. Even for the minority who received the emergency payment, the cash has run out, and future income support is uncertain.

With the release of the post-disaster needs assessment, the scale of recovery needs is now clear and, like the initial response, will require the coordinated efforts of all levels of government and civil society as well as humanitarian and development actors. The post-disaster needs assessment is heavily focused on infrastructure and damage and will need to be complemented with continued attention to humanitarian and basic social needs. Instead of stepping aside for development actors and IFIs, or doing a miniature version of its standard response, the humanitarian sector should forge a new model for supporting needs in Pakistan – one that could be replicated in other middle-income and natural hazard affected countries in future.

³⁹ Talbot, T. (2022, 28 September). *Prime time for the pause clause? Making climate resilient debt work*. Centre for Disaster Protection. <https://www.disasterprotection.org/blogs/prime-time-for-the-pause-clause-making-climate-resilient-debt-work>

Humanitarian actors

Emphasise direct financial support and technical inputs to national and local actors

UN agencies and international NGOs that no longer have the in-country operational footprint or capacity for direct response at scale should seek to programme their resources through national, provincial, and district disaster management authorities and civil society entities. Aid in the form of direct monetary grants, equipment, and secondments of expert personnel in technical and coordination positions in government and civil society entities would provide a greater added value to the government-led response than increasing international programmatic presence.

For this to be possible, the government of Pakistan would have to reduce restrictions on foreign visas. More importantly, international donors would have to increase their humanitarian allocations to Pakistan (and extend the current appeal, which ends in May 2023) while making more meaningful efforts toward meeting their Grand Bargain commitments of providing this aid “as directly as possible” to national and local actors.

Government actors and IFIs

Step up development of climate-related and anticipatory funding mechanisms, shock-responsive safety nets and local level preparedness and response capacities

There is a clear case, based on the level of need and global climate justice, for a generous, grant-based response, and for rich countries to pay for partly climate change-induced losses and damages. That response should be able to draw on climate-related and other non-humanitarian financing sources. When disasters are predictable, trigger-based anticipatory financing mechanisms can be a highly useful tool, so long as care is taken to calibrate the triggers so they are reasonably sensitive and flexible. Cash payment mechanisms (social safety nets) can be a critical first line of response, and disaster preparedness plans could include advance provisional registration that would allow for rapid expansion (more payees) and topping up of these pipelines to better fulfil their potential.

Additional efforts are also needed from the government of Pakistan to strengthen policy frameworks, coordination mechanisms and capacity development for risk reduction, mitigation, and response, with particular attention to the local and municipal level. These efforts should focus on strengthening local and community-based measures and investments in disaster risk management and drawing more on the strengths of civil society. In a recent editorial, the Pakistani research institute SDPI (contributors to this review) called for district-level rehabilitation plans to build on the unique resilience, strengths, and vulnerabilities at the local level in the 94 calamity hit districts.⁴⁰

In the meantime, the disproportionately low levels of grant-based humanitarian aid flows for the flooding crisis in Pakistan are deservedly being called out. In this regard, humanitarians could usefully explore roles in advocating for climate justice from the humanitarian impact perspective; and, critically, compiling lessons from what will surely be just one of many similar climate-driven disasters to come.

⁴⁰ Suleri, A.Q. (2022, 16 October). *Guest editorial: Assessing post flood scenarios*. Pakistan News. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/999919-guest-editorial-assessing-post-flood-scenarios>

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Floods in Pakistan: Rethinking the humanitarian role

Photo by Arslan Barijo, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)



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