

# PAKISTAN FLOODS EMERGENCY

Lessons from a continuing crisis









# Summary

The floods that began in August 2011 and swept across the province of Sindh and parts of neighbouring Balochistan resulted in one of the most destructive disasters that Pakistan has experienced. More than five million people have been affected: 1.8 million people were left homeless and more than 2.2 million acres of crops were lost, resulting in agricultural losses of nearly \$2 billion.

Supported by private and institutional donors, Pakistani officials, military personnel, aid workers, volunteers and the affected communities themselves have together saved thousands of lives and ensured that vital aid has reached millions of men, women and children. Such efforts deserve recognition.

Six months after the floods began, however, the crisis is far from over. In total, more than 2.5 million men, women and children lack basic necessities such as adequate food and durable shelter. Most people who have returned home are still living in makeshift shelters, struggling to keep their families alive and healthy. The threat of hunger, malnutrition, disease and destitution continues to hang over them.

Persistent floodwaters prevented tens of thousands of rural families from planting their winter crops in November and December, leaving them dependent on aid. Elsewhere, many farmers who were able to plant seeds and begin their recovery needed help to do so. That help often came too late or not at all. Today, and for many months to come, an estimated one-in-four flood-affected farmers can neither grow their own food nor earn the money to buy what they need.<sup>1</sup>

This missed opportunity is just one example of how the problems and challenges of the approach to the 2011/12 flood aid effort limited its effectiveness and left many people struggling to survive.

Although it launched its own response quickly, the Government of Pakistan waited several weeks before allowing international aid agencies to support the Pakistani relief effort. There were reports of discrimination and political bias influencing the distribution of aid in a few cases. Some people, such as women, children and disabled people, faced particular challenges and needed specific support, which was often not made available. Restrictions on the activities of aid agencies, such as the use of cash grants, caused delays or prevented flood survivors receiving the most appropriate support.

The weak response of international donors has hindered the aid effort. The Floods 2011 Rapid Response Plan launched by the UN sought a relatively modest \$357 million but remains only 47 percent funded.<sup>2</sup> This has left many aid agencies struggling to keep operations going, despite millions of people continuing to need help to survive and rebuild their lives. The floods appeal was not perfect in terms of timeliness and design, but donors remain responsible for ensuring that the humanitarian response is adequately supported through all appropriate channels.

Coming just a year after the worst floods in Pakistan's history, the latest crisis is another reminder - if one were needed - that the Pakistani authorities need to do more to limit the impact of disasters, whose severity is likely to increase with climate change. Pakistan has already developed many of the right strategies and disaster management structures. However, greater political commitment and resources are needed to make them more effective and to tackle the social and economic injustices that leave some Pakistanis more exposed than others to the impact of hazards such as floods and earthquakes. Such an approach would ultimately save both lives and money, leaving Pakistan safer, stronger and more self-reliant.

**'We have been living in this tent since August. We can't go home as we're still waiting for the water to recede.'**

**Ghulam Fatima, 55, mother of six, Tando Allah Yar district**

## Recommendations

### The Pakistani federal authorities should:

- Ensure that all flood-affected people receive adequate and appropriate humanitarian assistance for as long as necessary on the basis of need, with particular attention to vulnerable groups such as women, children, and disabled and elderly people. This requires unbiased access to aid for people in need, and unhindered access for the aid organisations trying to assist them.
- Ensure that all official and non-government entities providing emergency relief do not discriminate on the basis of religion, sect, political affiliation, or ethnicity. This requires the introduction of special measures, including specific instructions and stronger monitoring.
- Ensure that flood-affected families receive appropriate support to return home and rebuild their lives in a process that is voluntary, safe, informed, and dignified; or to resettle freely, in accordance with their constitutional rights and the international guidelines on internally displaced persons.

- Accelerate efforts to reform and strengthen Pakistan's disaster management institutions and systems. This involves clarifying the roles and responsibilities of government bodies responsible for preparedness, disaster management, and reconstruction at the federal, provincial, and district levels, and strengthening their capacity with greater human, financial, and technical resources.
- Commit to better monitoring of hazards and disaster risks, and to moving quickly to declare future emergencies to prevent unnecessary delays in providing life-saving assistance.

### **Provincial governments should:**

- Ensure that flood-affected people are supported with humanitarian and recovery assistance adequately, appropriately, and impartially for as long as necessary and solely on the basis of need, regardless of gender, religion, class, or political affiliation.
- Make Provincial Disaster Management Authorities more effective by investing in well-trained permanent staff with clear roles and responsibilities.

### **International donors should:**

- Provide timely and adequate support for the relief and recovery effort by fully funding the Floods 2011 Rapid Response Plan and channelling resources through other appropriate mechanisms. Support for flood recovery and reconstruction activities should be used as a cost-effective way to improve the resilience of hazard-prone communities and to protect development investments.
- Support the Pakistan government to fulfil its obligations under the Hyogo Framework for Action by strengthening its disaster management capacity and supporting increased investment in community-based disaster risk management.

### **International NGOs should:**

- Ensure that local partner NGOs receive adequate technical support when expanding operations in response to an emergency.
- Design and follow appropriately detailed and effective contingency plans to prepare for increasingly frequent emergencies in Pakistan.

# 1 The floods emergency: far from over

Pakistan was still recovering from the catastrophic effects of the 2010 floods when new floods caused by heavy rains began in mid-August 2011. In the following weeks and months, more than five million people were affected, mostly in the province of Sindh and to a lesser extent in Balochistan. An estimated 1.8 million people were made homeless and more than 2.2 million acres of crops were lost, leading to agricultural losses of almost \$2 billion.<sup>3</sup>

Once again, a large-scale, rapid emergency response was needed. Pakistani officials and disaster management staff, members of the armed forces, national and international aid organisations, and countless volunteers worked hard to rescue trapped families and to provide food, water, shelter, healthcare and money to more than three million flood-affected people.<sup>4</sup> The aid effort has been supported by generous individuals in Pakistan and around the world, the Pakistani diaspora, businesses and international donors. Owing to these combined efforts, many lives have been saved and a secondary health disaster has so far been prevented.

Six months after the 2011 floods began, however, the emergency is far from over. The receding floodwaters have permitted most displaced families to return to their villages to salvage what they can from their ravaged homes and communities - but tens of thousands are still displaced. In total, more than 2.5 million men, women and children lack the essentials of life, such as clean water, adequate food, and durable shelter, putting them at serious risk of hunger and malnutrition, disease and ill-health and deepening poverty, as well as risks of exploitation such as bonded labour, sexual abuse and human trafficking. Malnutrition was already at emergency levels in parts of Sindh and Balochistan before the floods struck, with children at Global Acute Malnutrition levels of 17.5 percent and 16.1 percent respectively.<sup>5</sup> The malnutrition crisis is expected to worsen owing to the lack of food and the deterioration of sanitation and health facilities.

**'We lost our crops and couldn't salvage anything. We don't know when our next meal will come.'**

**Chungul, 30, mother of five, Sanghar district**

## **Shelter**

An estimated 800,000 homes were destroyed in the 2011 floods. Today, about 50,000 displaced men, women and children, as well as millions of people who have returned to their wrecked villages, are struggling to survive in flimsy tents and makeshift shelters. Exposed to cold winter temperatures and other health hazards, pregnant women, children, and elderly and disabled people are especially at risk of illness in a region where almost half the medical facilities were damaged. Homeless families require durable shelter that protects them from the winter cold, the coming



summer heat (often more than 45C in Sindh), and mosquitoes (in a region where malaria is common), as well as providing essential privacy. With adequate shelter in short supply, many families remain camped in schools. Approximately 60 per cent of primary schools in Sindh and Balochistan were still closed in December 2011; a huge disruption to children's education.<sup>6</sup>

## Food

At least 2.5 million flood-affected people do not have enough to eat: 43 percent of flood affected people are severely food insecure (rising to 59 percent of women). Rising food prices have compounded the pressures on vulnerable families. Moreover, many rural families face a prolonged struggle to feed themselves because of the damage to their livelihoods in a region where agriculture is the main pillar of the economy. As much as 70 percent of food crops and 49 percent of livestock were lost in the affected provinces. Together with the widespread loss of farming tools, seeds and other agricultural assets, the result has left many farming families unable to produce their own food or to earn money to buy basic items including food, medicines, fuel, or building materials.

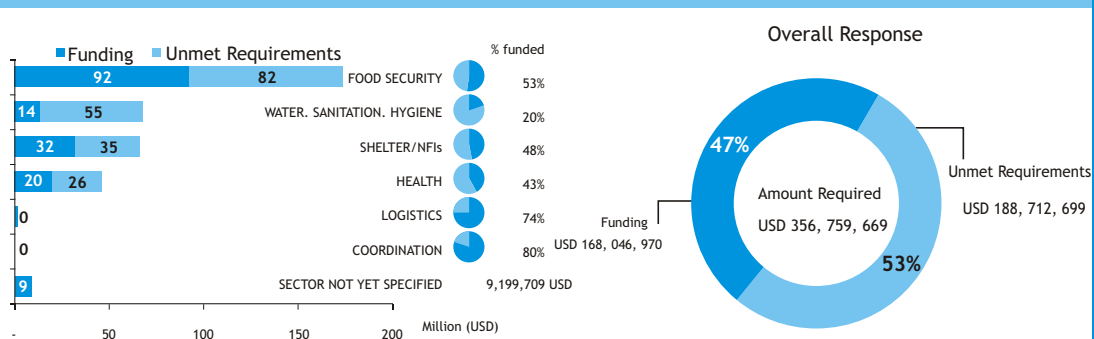
In addition to this short-term damage to food production and market supplies, there are longer-term effects. Persistent floodwaters meant hundreds of thousands of farmers and labourers were unable to plant their winter season (*rabi*) crops in November and December as usual. Tens of thousands of farmers and farm workers who could have planted winter crops were unable to do so because they had lost seeds, tools and other essential items. As a result, these farmers and labourers and their families will need food and nutritional assistance for several months to come, and will require items such as seeds to help them re-start their livelihoods.

An effective, timely and adequate humanitarian response that included early support for restoring farming livelihoods could have helped to re-start vital agricultural activities and prevent people becoming destitute and reliant on aid or credit. Pakistani authorities and aid agencies helped thousands of poor farmers to plant seeds in time - the federal government announced its Rabi Assistance Plan in early November - but overall, this support was too little, too late. Despite the clear lesson from the 2010 floods about the importance of exploiting the *rabi* planting season, the opportunity to revive livelihoods and minimise agricultural losses was partly missed. To a great extent, this was because the Pakistani authorities had not prepared adequately or mobilised sufficient resources quickly enough after the disaster struck. Meanwhile, donor funding was too slow and insufficient to support the efforts of aid agencies to fill the gap.

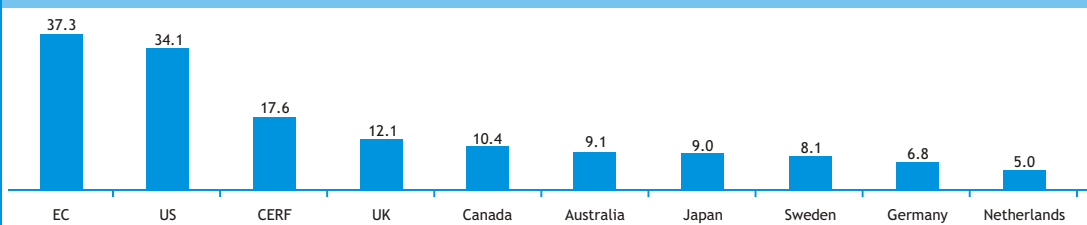
## Funding

The slow trickle of donor funding for the humanitarian response continues to be an unfortunate of the Pakistan floods emergency. The Floods 2011 Rapid Response Plan launched by the UN on 18 September 2011 had received only 47 percent of the requested \$357 million by 10 February 2012. Although not perfect in terms of its timeliness and design, the floods appeal represents a comparatively modest request for support, seeking \$66 per person, compared with \$97 per person that was sought after the Pakistan floods of 2010, \$217 per person after Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, and \$481 per person after the Haiti earthquake of 2010.

## HUMANITARIAN FUNDING UPDATES AS OF 8 - FEBRUARY - 2012



## Top Donors (USD in Million) of Response Plan



Source: FTS - <http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyDetails&appealID=960>

8-Feb-12

The European Commission has been the most responsive humanitarian donor with \$40.6 million to the appeal (11.4 percent of requirements) as well as \$48 million through other channels by 8 February 2012. The USA is next with \$37 million to the appeal (10.4 percent) and about \$8 million through other channels, followed by the UK with \$12.1 million to the appeal (7.2 percent) and about \$8 million via other mechanisms.<sup>7</sup> The response from several other wealthy developed countries and from traditional Western donors collectively is disappointing.

Wealthy Persian Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which in the past have responded generously to disasters in Pakistan, contributed to this humanitarian response by providing some relief items and personnel to assist in aid operations. The UAE had also given \$1.7 million to the 2011 floods appeal by 8 February 2012. However, by 8 February 2012, no Gulf state had donated substantial funds to the appeal or announced significant new humanitarian aid for the Pakistan government, despite the enormous scale of suffering of their neighbours.

As a result of the huge funding shortfall, UN agencies and NGOs have seen their aid stocks dwindle and have struggled to keep operations going, leaving hundreds of thousands of families with little or no assistance. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has overseen the provision of 20,000 rupees (about \$230) to eligible families in two instalments - a small but valuable contribution to help flood-affected families to buy food and other basic items. Much more is needed, however, to help families who have lost everything to stay alive and to rebuild their homes and livelihoods.



# 2 Challenges during the crisis and how to avoid them in the future

An effective humanitarian response is one that is timely, adequately resourced, provides sufficient, appropriate assistance on the basis of need, and is well coordinated with unhindered access for aid recipients and providers. The current aid effort has seen some significant successes but numerous challenges and obstacles many of them avoidable have limited its effectiveness.

As the floods spread across Sindh and parts of Balochistan in August 2011, the NDMA and the Provincial Disaster Management Authority in the two provinces began coordinating the humanitarian response, overseeing the establishment of relief camps and the provision of essential items such as tents, family ration packs, water purification and sanitation tablets, and blankets. The Pakistani army and navy evacuated tens of thousands of stranded people and helped to distribute relief goods.

## **Mobilising resources**

The efforts of federal and provincial authorities, as well as military actors and local NGOs, helped to save many lives in the initial weeks of the disaster. However, the federal government and especially the provincial authorities in Sindh appeared to underestimate the resources and the technical know-how required to deal with the growing emergency. By the end of August, more than two million people were affected, but the NDMA had still not permitted international aid agencies - with decades of experience in relief work in Pakistan and globally - to join the Pakistani-led aid effort. Consequently, precious time was lost and opportunities were missed to minimise the impact of the floods.

Realising that the unfolding disaster was beyond its capacity to cope, the Pakistan government belatedly called for international assistance on 7 September 2011. International aid agencies, including NGO members of the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum and several UN agencies, quickly mobilised and joined their Pakistani NGO colleagues to provide essential assistance such as clean water and sanitation, food, shelter, blankets, kitchen items, mosquito nets, medicines and healthcare.

## **Assistance on the basis of need**

At the provincial and district level, many government officials, hundreds of Pakistani charities and NGOs, as well as the affected communities themselves, worked hard to help their fellow citizens in the weeks before international aid agencies were permitted to join the humanitarian response. Their efforts helped tens of thousands of people obtain some aid, but in some cases, social discrimination and political bias meant that many families received little or no aid. For example, human rights groups reported cases where people were denied access to assistance because of their religion or caste.<sup>8</sup>

Authorities in Sindh sometimes resorted to using political party mechanisms to distribute aid. This may have been well-intentioned, but such practices inevitably raise risks of political bias in determining who gets help, and reports of politicised aid appeared in the press.<sup>9</sup> This practice was also reported during the 2010 floods response. In order to minimise the risks of discrimination and bias and to avoid public fears of malpractice, Pakistani authorities should support the role of principled humanitarian actors with expertise in delivering well-targeted, impartial aid. The authorities should also ensure that all charities and institutions providing emergency relief do so purely on the basis of need, regardless of gender, religion, class or political affiliation.

### **Ensuring access**

The Pakistani authorities imposed some restrictions on aid agencies, such as limiting the use of unconditional cash grants, or restricting assessments, which caused unnecessary complications and delays. For example, aid agencies had to redesign their programmes by providing goods instead of cash, which not only caused delays but harmed local businesses by depressing local market prices. Cash grants have been recognised globally as a useful tool, not only to help people buy items that they know they need, but also to help support local markets and businesses in times of crisis.

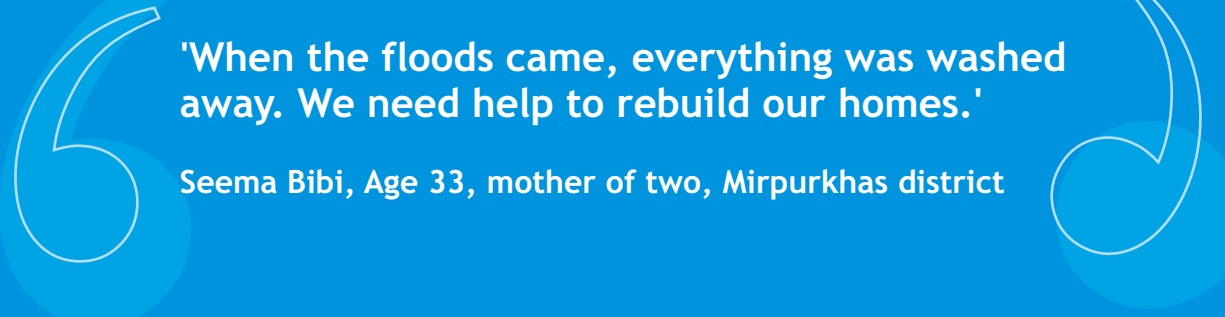
As was also documented during the 2010 floods, women, children, elderly and disabled people are among the hardest hit by any disaster, and obtaining assistance is generally more difficult for them. For example, many women and girls have no independent access to radios or phones and so received no warning of the floods. Unlike their male relatives, they had no time to collect basic essentials, valuables, or documents. This makes their recovery more difficult. Another issue that women face is access to sanitation facilities. Whereas men can use mosque washrooms, or open fields, women usually cannot. As a result, many women went for weeks without washing for lack of privacy, putting their health at risk. Some households were unable to access healthcare and clean water facilities because they did not have the ID card required for such services, or were discriminated against, or were disabled.<sup>10</sup>

Providing different kinds of assistance to meet the needs of different vulnerable groups is more costly and therefore more difficult when funding is scarce. Donors and the Pakistani authorities should ensure that there are sufficient resources and operational flexibility so that humanitarian organisations can meet the needs of the most vulnerable Pakistanis. Humanitarian and development NGOs should ensure that their programmes address these vulnerabilities and make assistance accessible to those who need it most.

### **Rebuilding homes and livelihoods**

Although many people have been able to return home following the 2011-12 floods, millions of men, women and children are still struggling to meet their basic needs. There have been reports of government officials telling people to go home so that camps can be closed. Families were given just a month's food rations when they left





**'When the floods came, everything was washed away. We need help to rebuild our homes.'**

**Seema Bibi, Age 33, mother of two, Mirpurkhas district**

the camps, with little help in rebuilding their lives. Moving from relief to recovery is a desirable goal and, indeed, the sooner the better - but government officials should recognise that some people face greater challenges and require more help than others. The government should ensure that displaced families receive adequate support to return home in a process that is voluntary, safe, informed and dignified, or to resettle in accordance with their constitutional rights and international guidelines. Aid organisations played a valuable role, but also contributed to some of the challenges of the flood response. The UN could arguably have advocated more persuasively for international aid agencies to be allowed to join the relief effort sooner. International NGOs and the UN often placed great pressure on their Pakistani NGO partners to expand operations substantially, but sometimes failed to provide the necessary technical assistance. Some international NGOs struggled to expand their own operations effectively. More effective contingency plans by international NGOs working in disaster-prone areas would help to ensure a faster response in future.

### **Preparing for disasters**

Ultimately, the Pakistani authorities should do more to limit the impact of future disasters, whose frequency and threat is likely to increase with climate change. Backed by international donors, the Pakistan government should allocate sufficient financial and human resources and implement essential reforms so that disaster management institutions and the communities most at risk are well prepared before disasters strike, and the country can respond effectively and recover rapidly when they do.

The necessary steps are outlined in the Hyogo Framework for Action, a 10-year plan to make the world safer from natural hazards, which Pakistan and 167 other states adopted in 2005. Pakistan has made some progress in developing key strategies and disaster management structures. However, greater political commitment, resources and clarity regarding responsibilities are needed to make this system more effective including at district level. Reforms are also needed to tackle the socio-economic injustices, such as the lack of land rights, bonded labour, and gender discrimination that increase disaster risks for certain people. Such an approach will save both lives and money, leaving Pakistan safer, stronger and more self-reliant.

Each flood, drought and earthquake that Pakistan suffers provides another harsh lesson on why greater efforts to prepare and respond better are needed. The time to take those lessons more seriously is well overdue.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Multi-sector Damage Needs Assessment, presented in December 2011, <http://pakresponse.info/>

<sup>2</sup> According to the UNOCHA Financial Tracking Service, 8 February 2012

<http://pakresponse.info/MonsoonUpdates2011/AppealFunding.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> NDMA Summary of Losses/Damage Due to Rains in Sindh, 17 November 2011,

[http://ndma.gov.pk/Documents/monsoon/Archives\\_Updates/Losses\\_Damages\\_17Nov2011.pdf](http://ndma.gov.pk/Documents/monsoon/Archives_Updates/Losses_Damages_17Nov2011.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Pakistan 2011 Floods: An Overview of the Humanitarian Situation, UNOCHA, 31 January 2012

<sup>5</sup> 2011 Nutrition Survey as stated in UN Multi-sector Damage Needs Assessment, December 2011,

<http://pakresponse.info/>

<sup>6</sup> Multi-sector Damage Needs Assessment, presented in December 2011, <http://pakresponse.info/>

<sup>7</sup> Donor data according to UNOCHA Financial Tracking Service, 8 February 2012

<sup>8</sup> Article published by Asian Human Rights Commission 15 September 2011, The 'untouchables' waiting to get a touch of relief efforts: <http://www.humanrights.asia/opinions/columns/AHRC-ETC-041-2011>

<sup>9</sup> Article in The Nation, 4 October 2011, PPP seems selective in relief provision:

<http://nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Regional/Karachi/04-Oct-2011/PPP-seems-selective-in-relief-provision>

<sup>10</sup> Multi-sector Damage Needs Assessment, presented in December 2011, <http://pakresponse.info/>

<sup>11</sup> See Hyogo Framework for Action, UNISDR, <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/hfa>

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