



Role of the Local Government in Disaster Preparedness and Response in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Pakistan is ranked among the top ten countries of the world with a high likelihood of being impacted by natural disasters as a result of climate change. Numerous cities in Pakistan are already experiencing water scarcity both for drinking and agricultural purposes, and this shortage is projected to worsen in the foreseeable future. Land, air, and water pollution are spreading rapidly, while the existing resources for water and energy are inadequate and being neglected. Conversely, the population growth rate is accelerating at an alarming pace as well. Therefore, Pakistan must always be ready to manage such unexpected situations; adequate resources should be allocated, and the necessary skills of personnel in various organizations should be enhanced. This paper emphasizes the significance of a robust local government system in Pakistan for efficiently responding to natural disasters. The focus is on examining the impact of local government presence and activity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the devastating floods in 2022 and how their preparations beforehand could have reduced its effects.

Pakistan is familiar with natural disasters. In October 2005 a devastating earthquake of 7.6 magnitude hit the country. It was followed by the destructive floods of July 2010. Recently, the historic and catastrophic floods of August 2022 submerged a third of the country under water, affecting 30 million people, as well as the infrastructures and other basic facilities. Until today some of the affected regions are still inundated with water, and the relief or rehabilitation efforts have yet to commence efficiently.

These events have shown time and again that most of Pakistan's institutions are either not active from the start or not prepared to deal with such critical situations. However, keeping in mind the different examples from different countries around the world, it is known that for a sustainable and effective disaster preparedness and response system local governance structure is of critical importance. Research has shown that in both developed and developing countries, local governments play the most active and effective role in preparing for and dealing with disasters since their representatives are usually influential individuals in the local community who can quickly mobilize government machinery and resources to minimize damage and casualties. Local governments play a key role in maintaining the sustainability and upkeep of local development projects as well as in dealing with sudden emergencies and natural disasters. They are the first to reach out to affected local areas and people, gather statistics, estimate damages, take immediate life-saving actions, and provide emergency relief. They coordinate and supervise other relief agencies and activities, bring government machinery to work on an urgent basis and distribute resources and relief items among affected people as per their needs and numbers. That is possible only because they have the necessary resources and have effective coordination with concerned agencies that enable them to plan and respond on urgent basis.

In Pakistan, local governments are often not present or active, and if they are present, they lack resources and their financial and technical capabilities are not sufficient to cope with sudden emergencies. Especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, local governments are either

non-existent or inactive, and they lack both human and financial resources to take the lead in the disaster preparedness and response system.

In 2022, despite the presence of local governments during heavy rains and floods in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they did not perform an efficient role. Local governments have not played a significant role in the relief and rehabilitation of affected people or other emergency measures taken. This is because provincial and national governments have ignored the local governments throughout the process. Therefore, elected representatives under the jurisdiction of local governments have not had the opportunity to gain practical experience that could have been put to use during the emergency. However, some representatives made individual efforts to help people in their areas in their personal and individual capacity or with the financial resources of their political parties.

Natural disasters have different stages of impact and various humanitarian agencies play different roles at each stage to successfully mitigate them. The emergency and rescue stage require coordination among all humanitarian agencies, especially the fire brigade, paramilitary forces, army units, District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) trained responders, civil defense personnel and volunteers, etc. They work together to identify affected areas and people, collect data, and monitor the response. In the next stage, the provision of food, shelter, medicines, and protection from seasonal effects requires the delivery of necessary supplies and equipment, which is primarily the responsibility of PDMA, DDMA, and

the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). Local governments provide support, but their primary responsibility is to oversee and monitor the work of these provincial & national humanitarian agencies. Later, resettlement and rehabilitation of the affected people is the responsibility of the local, provincial and central governments. The most important task of local governments is to plan, provide resources, and supervise all these stages.

Suggestions to enhance the preparedness and effectiveness of the local government system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for responding quickly and efficiently to natural disasters are:

1. District and provincial administrations as well as representatives of local governments need to devise an effective and comprehensive strategy for coordination and disaster management.
2. Line agencies working at federal and provincial levels should establish separate disaster cells and make them responsible for effective coordination and disaster management with DDMA, PDMA and NDMA. The DDMA should be brought under the management of the local governments.
3. Local governments must activate DDMA to create policies and strategies for disaster management at the grassroots level on a long-term basis to prevent natural disasters or minimize their impact.
4. To effectively prepare for and respond to the climate change, it is essential to assess the capability and potential of local governments in dealing with this issue. This entails a comprehensive evaluation of their knowledge, training, human resources, basic infrastructure, equipment, and other critical requirements. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct a thorough needs assessment to determine the necessary capacity building and skill enhancement programs for individuals affiliated with the local government system.
5. The municipal system in the form of village, neighborhood, and tehsil councils is a very powerful

human force that is not only familiar with local issues but also with ground realities, so the local government system should be strengthened further and the urban defense department should also be made part of it.

6. The autonomy of local governments in legal, financial, and technical aspects is the key to their effective role in Disaster Preparedness and Response.
7. Women, girls, and minorities suffer more losses in natural disasters due to class-based discrimination and lack of access to resources. Empowering them and ensuring their inclusion in disaster management planning is essential to address this issue. It is highly necessary and effective to include women, youth (girls), and minority councilors for this purpose, so that they can guide and assist in solving their issues.
8. Translating available literature on Disaster Risk Reduction into Urdu and presenting it in booklet form can enhance the councilors' understanding and knowledge.
9. Close coordination between PDMA and local governments at the provincial level should be promoted through practical measures to ensure the effective engagement of the local governments from formulation to implementation of the projects in a coordinated manner.
10. The Civil Defense Institution should be brought under the local government system so that this institution can not only be strengthened at the local level but also its performance can be improved with the participation and guidance of the representatives of the local government.

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Imprint
© 2023 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES),
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