

May 10, 2006

Contacts:  
Michael McIntyre and Timothy G.  
Connolly

## Pakistan: Housing a Priority as Post-earthquake Recovery Begins

In November Pakistan faced the grim prospect of one million people confronting the winter without adequate shelter as the result of the October 8 earthquake that devastated the northern part of the country.

In response, the Government of Pakistan and its international humanitarian partners undertook a massive emergency shelter effort, including “Operation Winter Race,” an effort led by International Organization for Migration (IOM) and International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), which focused on the approximately four hundred thousand individuals and families remaining above the 5,000 foot level. At lower elevations, the Government and humanitarian agencies were able to meet the shelter, food, sanitation, and health care needs of over 300,000 individuals and families in the hundreds of both formal and informal, “self-settled” camps. These efforts, coupled with a late-arriving and relatively mild winter, resulted in a significant reduction from the predicted level of secondary, post-earthquake deaths.

While the emergency response saved lives, planning and organizing assistance for recovery have been less effective. To its credit, the Government of Pakistan established within a week of the earthquake the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), with the mandate to “plan, coordinate, monitor and regulate reconstruction and rehabilitation activities in earthquake affected areas.” ERRA was the second ad hoc agency established by the Government, the first being the Federal Relief Commission (FRC), charged with coordinating emergency relief efforts.

Since its establishment, however, ERRA has been unable to compete with its higher profile FRC counterpart for leadership, planning staff, and resources. As a result, it was unable to establish an integrated and coordinated planning process with those government and humanitarian agencies engaged in the relief phase of the overall earthquake response. Significantly, its participation in the United Nations’ inter-agency “cluster system,” an essential element of the overall

emergency response coordination process, was almost non-existent, thereby preventing ERRA from identifying opportunities to integrate emergency operations into future recovery planning.

To address the leadership problem, the Government has recently shifted Lieutenant General Nadeem, whose leadership at the FRC made a major contribution to its success during the relief phase, to ERRA. He has brought a much needed sense of purpose and direction. ERRA has begun to formulate the policies needed to guide the recovery process, but they are late in coming, resulting in confusion and disorganization at the field level.

The negative impact of this confusion is most manifest in the area of housing reconstruction. Those displaced who were living in camps, both formal and self-settled, have been strongly encouraged to return home, and a significant number of camps have been emptied and closed down. Yet there is no coordinated reception process in place for meeting the shelter and other needs of these individuals and families as they arrive in their areas of origin. Efforts by ERRA to identify implementing partners to coordinate the housing compensation and rebuilding program began late, and are still underway.

Local civil society and community based organizations have yet to be fully incorporated into the planning process, thereby depriving planners and decision-makers of the perspective of those most affected. Local governments at the provincial and district levels do not have the capacity to carry out both their daily civil responsibilities and simultaneously to be active participants in the reconstruction process. Consequently, a majority of the union councils in the affected area are still

without implementation capacity. This, combined with the lack of an effective public information campaign, has left returnees uncertain about what assistance is likely to be made available to help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods, and when it will arrive.

The full complement of technical experts in such areas as disaster mitigation, urban planning, housing, and structural engineering has yet to arrive in affected communities, owing in part to the delay in identifying and recruiting these key individuals, and the failure thus far by ERRA to tap aggressively into the vast technical expertise present within Pakistan itself. The arrival in January of a technical expert from UN HABITAT and the more recent secondment to the ERRA of an urban reconstruction engineer are but two examples of needed, but late arriving, capabilities. No comprehensive survey or mapping of land has been conducted, nor has a coordinated effort been made to immediately identify land options for those displaced who, for whatever reason, cannot reoccupy their original home site. These factors are likely to contribute to continued disruptions in the lives of those affected by the earthquake, and could seriously jeopardize their ability to establish adequate shelter prior to the advent of winter this year.

Overall, the housing challenges facing the urban displaced in particular are many and complex, and their solution will require an intensively focused effort on the part of the government and its international partners. Yet Refugees International found little being done in urban areas, with the exception of plans for debris removal, and there exists no strategy addressing how urban reconstruction should progress.

RI is also concerned that some of the planning assumptions used in the development of the housing reconstruction program may have unintended consequences. The current strategy calls for programs, established either by implementing partners or, in some areas, the Pakistan military, to train construction laborers in the use of earthquake-resistance building techniques. These individuals would then be available for hire by individual home owners, paid with government compensation funds. However, there does not appear to be any certification process for those trained, nor is there any plan to establish a specific wage. There currently is no plan in place to initiate price support measures for building materials, such as wooden beams and corrugated roofing, that are key to the construction of earthquake-resistant housing. The reliance on market forces for both materials and labor is likely to result in significant price increases for both, which could in turn would create economic incentives for home owners to “cut corners” and not comply with building specifications.

## REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDS:

- ❑ ERRA immediately initiate a comprehensive public information campaign, directed at both rural and urban displaced and carried out through local organizations, that provides clear guidance on the policies, procedures, and timelines of the recovery program.
- ❑ The Government of Pakistan take immediate steps to enhance the capabilities of provincial and district governments, including the temporary augmentation of affected local governments by municipal and civil officials from unaffected areas of Pakistan.
- ❑ The Government of Pakistan and international agencies identify civil society and community-based organizations, include them in both the planning and implementation phases of the recovery, and provide them with resources for capacity building.
- ❑ ERRA place renewed focus on information management, in particular land survey and mapping, as well as preserving data existing in other organizations and agencies involved in the relief operation, as key information managers, such as the UN Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) and the UN Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC), are scheduled to depart Pakistan within the next sixty days. Steps must be taken immediately to establish a transition process for their vast storehouse of data and institutional knowledge.
- ❑ The Government of Pakistan establish mechanisms to monitor the cost of labor and building materials in the housing reconstruction program, and be prepared to intervene where necessary to insure home owners can afford both, consistent with the level of financial compensation they have received to rebuild.
- ❑ The Government of Pakistan and external donors assign the highest priority to urban planning, in particular the needs of the tens of thousands of displaced whose land in Balakot and Muzaffarabad is no longer habitable.

*Director of Operations Michael McIntyre and consultant Timothy G. Connolly visited earthquake-affected areas of Pakistan in April. Their mission was supported in part by a grant from Foundation Open Society Institute (Zug). RI is solely responsible for the findings and recommendations of this bulletin.*