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PAKISTAN: FLOOD SURVIVORS STILL STRUGGLING TO RECOVER

One year after massive floods submerged much of Pakistan, millions of flood survivors are still without permanent shelter and struggling to access food. The disaster exposed Pakistan's vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change. While some members of Congress are reluctant to extend additional aid to Pakistan, supporting programs that provide shelter and food security to the most vulnerable sectors of Pakistani society would demonstrate America's commitment to Pakistan's longer-term interests while helping people rebuild their lives. Therefore, it is critical that the U.S. government make strides in demonstrating that flood assistance, in addition to providing life-saving assistance, is also helping to alleviate poverty and in building a more democratic and economically and politically stable Pakistan.

PAKISTAN'S 2010 MEGA-FLOODS: AN EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

In August 2010, massive and unprecedented flooding inundated Pakistan, submerging one-fifth of the country's land mass. With 20 million people affected, the humanitarian crisis was larger than the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2005 Kashmir earthquake and the 2010 Haiti earthquake combined.

Despite Pakistan's extreme vulnerability to floods, droughts and other natural disasters, little had been done in terms of preparedness. The country's national, provincial and district-level disaster response authorities lacked capacity and resources. The humanitarian response was initially uncoordinated, under-resourced and racing to keep pace with the rapidly unfolding nature of the crisis (see Refugees International's (RI's) in-depth analysis of the 2010 floods).

In July 2011, RI returned to encounter a dramatically different situation. The emergency response to the floods, while not without significant gaps, was largely effective. The Pakistani government, UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other local and international humanitarian organizations overcame initial challenges and successfully executed a massive emergency relief

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. and other donor governments must prioritize support for programs to help vulnerable flood victims recover, especially by providing secure shelter and increasing food security and nutrition.
- USAID should commission an independent review of its flood assistance programs to evaluate the extent to which they not only addressed humanitarian needs but also promoted longer-term goals of building democracy and mitigating risks and vulnerabilities.
- The U.S. should consider conditioning additional flood recovery and reconstruction assistance on the Government of Pakistan's suspension of the 16 percent tax on bricks that is increasing the already-inflated costs of construction materials.
- With respect to shelter support, USAID must insure that its grantees are using cost-effective and locally appropriate designs, are prioritizing the most vulnerable households, and are delivering their commitments on time.
- The U.S. must prioritize investments that increase Pakistan's disaster-risk management capacity at the provincial and local levels, and help it adapt to climate change. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) should prepare a report that clearly describes the effectiveness of these programs.

effort. The loss of life was minimized, millions received emergency assistance and secondary humanitarian crises were averted.

The United States and other governments provided \$1.3 billion in emergency assistance despite a global economic downturn and competing needs in Haiti and elsewhere. The United States, as the lead donor, provided \$678 million for relief and early recovery including for food and clean drinking water, emergency shelter and emergency health care. The United States was also a large contributor to a cash compensation program for flood victims (the WATAN scheme) that was instrumental in providing short-term financial assistance at a crucial time (read an in-depth assessment of the scheme). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) also provided \$57 million to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to supply seeds which helped four million farmers to salvage the winter planning season.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES AHEAD

One year later, millions of flood survivors are still struggling to get back on their feet. Approximately 5.6 million people in flood-affected areas remain food insecure and alarmingly high numbers are malnourished. As the 2011 monsoon season commences, some 9 million people who lost their homes in last year's floods still lack secure shelter. Moreover, provincial governments have not fully implemented zoning laws to prevent the construction/rebuilding of houses in flood-prone areas or developed laws and policies to better protect vulnerable, flood-affected populations from dispossession.

The fact that relatively limited numbers of people remain displaced (approximately 300 to 400 families who are squatting nearby closed camps for flood-displaced families) is largely due to a strict government policy of closing all remaining camps and prohibiting the further distribution of aid. Abandoned as the poorest of the poor, many are tenant farmers whose homes were destroyed and who lack permission from the land owner to rebuild.

The 2010 floods exposed Pakistan's vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change, and its preparedness and capacity to respond at the provincial and district levels remain limited. There are reports that many embankments, dams and other water control infrastructure damaged by last year's floods have not yet been repaired. Recent flooding from the 2011 monsoons has left more than 95,000 people newly displaced in Sindh Province and resulted in dozens of deaths across the country.

Programs to help flood victims recover have been slow to get off the ground, poorly coordinated and underfunded. When in late January the Pakistani government officially announced the end of the relief phase in all but five districts, both the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – the UN agency responsible for coordinating emergency relief – and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) – the UN agency designated as responsible for early recovery – were surprisingly unprepared. The various coordination bodies in the Early Recovery Working Group (ERWG) were not formed until March, and it took two months for UNDP and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to complete an early recovery gap analysis. The final Strategic Early Recovery Action Plan was not released until April 15.

At the time of RI's visit in July 2011, several agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with whom RI spoke complained that the ERWGs were ineffective, disorganized or not completely functional. In addition, the Strategic Early Recovery Action Plan has not garnered strong support of either donor governments or the Pakistani government, which is emphasizing developmental interventions instead. As of August, with only four months left to complete the government-designated early recovery phase, a \$413 million funding gap remains.

In the near-term, donor governments should prioritize support for early recovery programs that help get flood victims back on their feet. To address these challenges in future disasters, OCHA and UNDP must identify procedures and plans to smooth the transition from relief to early recovery. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator must also ensure that sufficient leadership and staff are in place to meet early recovery coordination challenges and gain donor support. The U.S. State Department's and USAID's efforts to track the transition of U.S.-funded relief programs into longer-term development programs as part of the FY13 budget process.

MORE EFFECTIVE SHELTER POLICY NEEDED

The most urgent gap for the United States and other donor governments to address is in the housing sector. The need for more effective shelter strategies that look beyond temporary solutions is of particular importance given the likelihood that mass displacement from climate-related events such as floods is likely to increase in the coming decades.

In Pakistan, the 2010 floods damaged more than 1.6 million homes and left some 9 million people in need of permanent shelter. There is no doubt that the scale of needs

in the shelter sector would have been impossible to meet even under the best circumstances. Nonetheless, the failure of the provincial governments, UN agencies, NGOs and donors to commit to a comprehensive, realistic, cost-effective policy on shelter early on in the response led to inconsistent and often unsuitable housing interventions, overlap in some places and significant gaps in others.

Rather than approaching housing needs in a holistic fashion, shelter interventions were largely driven by the perceived “phases” of the response. The focus during the onset of the emergency was on tents and plastic sheeting, and then shifted to temporary shelters. Thereafter, there were significant challenges in implementing policies to build permanent shelters, particularly the one-room shelter (ORS) standard policy. The policy was not adopted by all Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs), and building ORSs that met specifications required technical knowledge that was lacking in many flood affected areas. In addition, many NGOs reported difficulties in implementing the ORS standard designs due to their relatively high costs, and consequently, opted for cheaper and less permanent solutions that often did not reduce the risk from future disasters.

As a result, very few ORSs have been built leaving millions without secure shelter. As one agency representative involved in the shelter response noted, “[i]t’s disheartening to go to the field and see so many people still living in tents.” A July housing gap analysis revealed that registered agencies had committed to building ORSs for only 17.4 percent of the 825,000 destroyed houses.

Moreover, many agencies have been slow to deliver on their shelter commitments. At the time of RI’s visit in late July, only a small percentage of committed ORSs had been completed although the monsoon season had already started. Some agencies involved in the shelter sector provided materials only, meaning that local skilled labor had to be procured. Other problems included contract delays, procuring construction material, and delays over housing specifications and introducing new standards and technologies to beneficiaries.

In addition, it was not evident that the most vulnerable households (e.g., the poor, and those headed by women, the elderly, or the disabled) within the worst affected districts had been identified as beneficiaries. In general, most housing (and other) interventions were concentrated in easily accessible areas around towns or close to major roads. RI visited villages near Sukkur, Shikarpur and Jacobabad where new schools, water pumps and permanent shelters had all been provided, while several of the more remote vil-

lages RI visited had not received any assistance. Some agencies had programs that allowed communities themselves to decide who were the most vulnerable and therefore deserving of shelter assistance. Nonetheless, permanent shelter was often given to those who either owned property or had secure property rights. The Strategic Early Recovery Action Plan housing strategy prioritizes houses based on their geographical vulnerability to future disasters, not on the particular vulnerability of the individual household, stating only that “effort will be made to ensure inclusion of women-headed households for support under housing.”

To make matters worse, the government has recently extended a sixteen percent transaction tax to bricks, the price of which has already increased due to the huge demand. Unfortunately, the second phase of the government’s cash compensation program for flood victims who lost homes is not sufficient to cover the escalating costs of construction. Moreover, due to the lack of safeguards in the system for identifying beneficiaries, many of the poorest, most desperate families could be excluded from the program.

In addition, the provincial governments failed to address important zoning and property right issues that underlay a coordinated and well conceived shelter response. Historically, people have encroached along the river banks to farm the fertile floodplains as well as adjacent to flood control infrastructure. While laws are in place to prevent people from occupying these areas, they were not consistently enforced prior to the floods. Unsurprisingly, the 2010 floods washed many of these houses away. Yet during the response, a lack of communication between local government officials and agencies resulted in the construction of thousands of shelters in flood-prone areas that the government now asserts are illegal. In another instance, the government prohibited a whole village of fishermen from rebuilding their homes in a flood-prone area and relocated them to government-owned property nearby. However, UN Habitat has been hesitant to build one-room shelters for these families because they lack secure land tenure.

Going forward, agencies and organizations involved in the shelter and housing sector should work with government authorities to develop realistic shelter strategies that go beyond temporary solutions. These strategies must maximize limited resources, prioritize the most vulnerable and extend to remote areas. USAID and other donors should ensure that grantees are timely meeting their commitments. In addition, Pakistani provincial governments must develop laws and policies to provide those displaced by the floods and who lack land tenure with secure housing and land rights. This should include the development of non-

discriminatory, community-driven relocation programs that provide people living in flood-prone or other high risk areas with secure property rights.

DEMONSTRATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE

Unfortunately, convincing some U.S. policymakers of the need to continue support for Pakistan's flood victims has been challenging. U.S. skepticism is due in large part to the revelation that Osama Bin Laden was hiding out in Pakistan, raising serious questions about the Pakistani military or intelligence services' willingness to root out terrorist elements. But it is also due in part to the failure of the Obama Administration and USAID to effectively demonstrate how and why U.S. assistance – for the 2010 floods or otherwise – has made a difference.

But threats to cut non-military U.S. assistance to Pakistan are counterproductive. While the response to the Pakistan 2010 mega-floods was far from perfect, overall it was incredibly effective, both in terms of the number of people who received life-saving assistance and in comparison to other recent natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Further, as the Center for American Progress (CAP) points out, cutting aid is not likely to compel a radical change in behavior by Pakistan's military or intelligence services, and will only increase underlying misperceptions regarding U.S. motives in Pakistan (see CAP's report, *The Limits of U.S. Assistance to Pakistan*). Rather than implementing shortsighted measures likely only to heighten tension and mistrust at the expense of those least responsible, the United States must demonstrate its unflinching support for Pakistan's longer-term interests.

First, the United States and USAID must prioritize programs that target the least fortunate, including the millions of poor and innocent flood victims still struggling to get back on their feet. Housing and food security programs should be particular priorities. In addition, the Obama Administration and USAID must institute oversight, accountability and transparency mechanisms to demonstrate to Congress that U.S. assistance is making a difference in helping to alleviate poverty and to build a more democratic and economically and politically stable Pakistan. As the largest donor to the flood relief effort -- the largest humanitarian emergency in history -- the Obama Administration should require USAID to commission an independent review of its flood assistance programs. The assessment should go beyond measuring outputs (e.g., number of beneficiaries served) and evaluate the extent to which U.S. flood assistance contributed to meeting longer-term goals such

as: exposing and addressing underlying poverty; mitigating the significant adverse economic impacts of the floods; increasing local government accountability and capacity to respond to citizen needs; promoting public participation; strengthening local civil society; mitigating disaster risks; and improving disaster preparedness and response. For example, several people with whom RI spoke noted that one of the positive aspects of the floods was the extent to which flood response programs exposed some of the poorest sectors of Pakistani society to democratic principles including public participation and government accountability. The report should also highlight successes and identify lessons learned. Such a report would be similar to an independent evaluation commissioned by the UK Disaster Emergency Committee (see *DEC Real Time Evaluation Report of the 2010 Pakistan Floods*).

In addition, despite significant challenges, USAID must work to identify effective strategies for increasing the capacity of the civilian government – especially at the provincial level. In July 2011, constitutional changes went into effect in Pakistan that will result in the dismantling of many federal ministries and the devolution of their responsibilities and authorities to the provincial governments. As federal ministries will no longer be the U.S. government's main interlocutors with respect to several key U.S. assistance programs, USAID must devise strategies to build relationships with provincial governments including programs to assist them in meeting new responsibilities.

Finally, given Pakistan's high vulnerability to floods, droughts and other natural disasters, combined with the likelihood that climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of these mass displacement events, the United States must prioritize investments that increase Pakistan's disaster-risk management capacity, especially at the provincial and local levels, and help it to adapt to climate change. USAID/OFDA's current system for reporting on disaster risk reduction programs is incredibly opaque both regionally and with respect to Pakistan. Moreover, the information does not include any analysis of whether these programs have been effective either in terms of reducing risk or avoiding losses. USAID/OFDA should commission a report that clearly describes how and how much it is investing in disaster risk reduction programs in Pakistan, and whether these programs are proving effective.

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