

September 2011

The 2010 Flooding Disaster in Pakistan An Opportunity for Governance Reform or another Layer of Dysfunction?¹

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Introduction and Background

The catastrophic flooding in Pakistan in 2010 laid bare the multiplicity of fault lines that beleaguer the country as perhaps no other single event in its history. Not only did the flooding threaten the life and livelihoods of well over 20 million citizens, it exposed once again the gravity and complexity of unsolved governance issues in this 60-year-old nation, issues that are inextricably linked to the overall stability of the region and of the world.

Since the massive flooding of July/August 2010, political observers have pondered the impact of the disaster on the future of the country. What consequences would the flooding have on long-standing governance and security dilemmas in Pakistan? And, more specifically, would the disaster recovery process narrow or broaden opportunities for building democracy and political stabilization in this chronically unsteady nation?

Less than a year on, the answers to these questions remain elusive. While there was some initial hope that Pakistani governance could be strengthened by the disaster response experience—that the urgency of local requirements post-flood could “jump start” subnational political processes in the country and begin to bridge the trust deficit between Pakistanis and the state—near consistent reports of poor government performance at local levels and typical stories of political infighting at the central level have put a damper on earlier optimism. Still, it would be premature to judge the Pakistan government’s performance with absolute finality so early on in the reconstruction process. There are, after all, some parts of the country that are still in standing water all these months later, and in many ways, the real work lays ahead.²

The goal of this paper is to outline the main problem set that is conferred by the flooding disaster as relates to on-going, and until this point unsuccessful, efforts to localize political legitimacy in the country. In the process, it will consider whether there is any chance that the flooding disaster might set a new tone for building governance in Pakistan, one that moves from a longstanding narrative of widespread corruption and perceived lack of legitimacy to a more balanced story of state-society interface.

Post-flood Context

Given the importance of perception in Pakistan, it is worth noting three main perceptions that have come out of the flood response as a way to contextualize longer-term governance-building efforts.

Perceived Role of Government

Similar to the experience of the 2005 Kashmir earthquake response, the single primary actor on the ground in the immediate wake of the 2010 floods was the Pakistani military. In this instance, the military was supported by the recently established (2007) and quasi-civilian National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The Pakistani central government in this disaster has been civilian led and has come under sharp criticism for its perceived lack of effort to match the actions of the military in this time of national crisis.

Of particular note in this regard was the immediate outrage regarding the virtual absence of government at the outset of the flooding, with the president continuing his overseas travels in the face of a multiplicity of reports about the catastrophe, a cabinet that was slow moving in its recognition of the scale of the crisis, and many provincial and local-level officials reportedly nowhere to be found when the waters were rising. Add to this, additional fury over the

¹ This paper was prepared as part of a forthcoming report on governance and militancy in Pakistan. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the Ploughshares Fund, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

² The research for this paper was completed before the most recent floods began, but its findings are directly relevant to ongoing efforts.

diverting of floodwaters by wealthy landowners in certain parts of the country to protect their properties at the risk of others, without state retribution, and one begins to understand the potential for governmental mistrust and resentment in Pakistan today.³

Several months later, one might say that boiling outrage over the government's handling of the disaster has transformed into a simmering cynicism about Pakistani governance in general. In some instances, the NDMA and its provincial apparatus have conducted their work with relative competence given the agency's institutional youth and limited experience.⁴ That said, the actions of a single government agency cannot erase the void of other parts of government and the overall disconnect between national and provincial decisionmaking in the face of a disaster the magnitude of the 2010 flooding.

At the same time, NDMA's performance has not been without controversy and, in some cases, has functioned to reinforce corruption and patronage stereotypes generally associated with Pakistani governance. For example, the cash distribution or Watan card scheme—the centerpiece of the Pakistani government's relief program and a primary component of NDMA activities—has encountered multiple problems along the way, many of which relate to its capture and corruption by government officials. Officials in some locations have reportedly requested bribes in distributing the cards, and both a Sindh Provincial Disaster Management Agency (PDMA) official and a senior revenue official have had to be removed from their positions due to allegations of corruption. Documented grievances in equitably accessing both the cards and the money attached to them have been high.⁵

Perceived Role of Militants

In the context of immediate flood relief, there were reports that militant groups such as Jamat-ut-Dawa, a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jamat-e-Islami, through its Al-khidmat Foundation, had been active in the same way that they and other militant groups responded following the Kashmir earthquake.⁶ The relief activities of these organizations were observed to have a sizeable reach in the early weeks of response (as they had surely gained a high level of experience through their participation in the Kashmir response), although they were not generally thought to be in any way comparable to the efforts of the government and secular civil society. As an example, the Pakistani ambassador to the United States, Husain Haqqani, noted in late 2010 that according to reports he had received in the wake of the floods, over 5,000 camps were established by the government of Pakistan, some 400 camps put up by secular civil society, and only 29 camps by groups that could be loosely associated with militant Islam.⁷

There was also no evidence that the assistance relationship between militant groups and flood-affected populations was ideologically centered.⁸ As was the case following the earthquake, disaster-affected populations were reportedly accepting assistance from a range of actors following the floods with little concern about where the aid was coming from or what ideology was supplying it. In fact, as immediate relief gave way to longer-term recovery efforts, there was less and less talk about the role of militant groups.

While persistent criticisms regarding poor government performance in the wake of the floods cannot be ignored, whether this has equated to a corollary rise in militant Islam in the context of recovery is contestable. Still, the latest spate of political assassinations and suicide bombings in the country would seem to indicate that militancy in certain

³ Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *The State of Human Rights in Pakistan in 2010*, AHRC-SPR-007-2010 (Hong Kong: AHRC, 2010), http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/5CA24C75397E12A6C12577F4002DC589-Full_Report.pdf.

⁴ Based on interviews with disaster experts in Washington, D.C., New York, and Islamabad.

⁵ Oxfam, "Six Months into the Floods: Resetting Pakistan's Priorities through Reconstruction," 144 Oxfam Briefing Paper, Oxford, January 26, 2011, <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp144-resetting-pakistans-priorities-6month-260111-en.pdf>. It should be noted that the World Bank has recently authorized a cash distribution program of its own and has contracted the International Rescue Committee to supervise its implementation and manage grievances as they arise. World Bank, "World Bank Supports Flood Affected Households in Pakistan with Cash Grants to Rebuild Lives," press release, March 29, 2011, http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22872509~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html?cid=3001_7.

⁶ "Pak cracks down on banned groups engaged in flood relief work," NDTV, August 23, 2010, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/world/pak-cracks-down-on-banned-groups-engaged-in-flood-relief-work-46608>.

⁷ Husain Haqqani, "Pakistan's Floods: The Road Ahead" (speech, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., November 15, 2010), <http://events.georgetown.edu/events/index.cfm?Action=View&EventID=81103>.

⁸ See C. Christine Fair, "Averting our Eyes: The Shameful International Response to Pakistanis' Suffering," *Huffington Post*, November 16, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/c-christine-fair/averting-our-eyes-the-sha_b_784325.html.

parts of Pakistan is alive and well. At the same time, a sharp increase in polio cases driven by post-flood conditions, as well as widespread vaccination refusal on religious grounds, reflect how central orthodox religion is to decisionmaking and community building in Pakistan moving forward.⁹

Perceived Role of the United States

Given the rising acknowledgment of the strategic importance of Pakistan, the U.S. government was keen to demonstrate its support of Pakistan through disaster relief. Unfavorable views of the United States by Pakistanis are deep-seated, generally stemming from public disapproval of U.S. counterinsurgency activities in the country, including drone attacks.¹⁰

Although the U.S. government was the first and largest contributor to the flood relief effort, there was seemingly little recognition on the ground of the U.S. role in early disaster response efforts and mounting agitation in Washington, D.C., about the lack of U.S. government visibility vis-à-vis the Pakistani people. Still, the U.S. government remained fixated on a “hearts and minds” mission in Pakistan in the immediate wake of the crisis and sought direct ways to demonstrate to the Pakistani people that it was doing something to help.

Some \$500 million of Kerry-Lugar funds was authorized for accelerated distribution for flood relief (in addition to the approximately \$1 billion contributed via other channels since mid-2010) by way of direct cash distribution cards. Wishes to connect to the Pakistani people were so intense that one proposed approach to distributing these payments was to have the direct payment cards branded with an American flag.¹¹

By the time the first tranche of these monies was released in January 2011, however, U.S. insistence on visibility in response had seemed to diminish, and relations between the two countries had grown uneasy. The shift in tone between the countries was due to two developments not directly related to the U.S. humanitarian assistance agenda. One was the untimely loss in December 2010 of U.S. special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke and his strong stewardship of Af/Pak U.S. foreign policy. A second was the diplomatic fracas between the two countries as related to the arrest and detention of CIA agent Raymond Davis in late January 2011.

Still, U.S. commitment to flood relief was unwavering, and by April 2011, the United States was still the largest donor to Pakistan by far with a diverse donor recovery portfolio of nearly \$1 billion.

Institutions

Preexisting Government Structures

In the context of Pakistan’s tumultuous political history, there have been multiple efforts to decentralize civilian government engagement since the 1970s, loosely founded on the rationale that if power were decentralized and embedded in structures closer to citizen beneficiaries, it would be possible to improve service delivery, accountability, and hence, governance in the country.¹² However, decentralization efforts in Pakistan have been unsuccessful, most notably because local systems of government that have been established over the years have been subject to capture by political elites at all points along the power chain and, therefore, have not resulted in a legitimate transfer of power from the Pakistani elite/military to the vast majority of the nation’s citizens.

⁹ Polio Global Eradication Initiative, “President of Pakistan kicks offer emergency plan to stop polio,” January 25, 2011, <http://www.polioeradication.org/tabid/408/iid/86/Default.aspx>. The only polio-endemic country with an increase in cases in 2010, Pakistan has struggled in the past six months to keep a lid on transmission of poliovirus. The number of children paralyzed by the virus jumped by 60 percent (from 89 in 2009 to 144 in 2010, as of 25 January 2011).

¹⁰ A June 2010 poll in Pakistan by Pew indicated that 68 percent of the population has an unfavorable view of the United States. “America’s Image Remains Poor: Concern about Extremist Threat Slips in Pakistan,” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., June 29, 2010, <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/Pew-Global-Attitudes-2010-Pakistan-Report.pdf>.

¹¹ Molly Kinder, “How \$500 Million in U.S. Aid Can Help Pakistan’s Flood Victims Rebuild,” Center for Global Development, November 24, 2010, http://blogs.cgdev.org/mca-monitor/2010/11/how-500-million-in-u-s-aid-can-help-pakistan%e2%80%99s-flood-victims-rebuild.php?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+cgdev%2Fmca-monitor+%28Rethinking+U.S.+Foreign+Assistance+Blog%29.

¹² Marco Mezzera et al., *Devolution Row: An Assessment of Pakistan’s 2001 Local Government Ordinance* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute for International Relations, November 2010), http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2010/20101119_CRU_publicatie_mmezzera.pdf.

The latest disaster in Pakistan has raised the stakes of national governance-building efforts multifold as local civilian structures have been called on to manage the rebuilding of district-level infrastructure and to deliver critical services to their constituents at an unprecedented scale. With large-scale recovery needs and what will likely be sizeable reconstruction budgets to administer over the next three to five years, the required caliber of performance and accountability expected of local government is likely to increase sharply. At the same time, potential governance pitfalls—the likes of administrative inefficiencies, lack of access, perceptions of corruption and inequality—may multiply.

This section looks specifically at what local government structures existed prior to the floods as a basis for analyzing the potential impact of recovery efforts on the development of these and other decentralized government administrations. The focus here is on formal political and disaster risk management government apparatuses, although it is clear that local governance in the broadest sense includes the nonstate security and service providers that are represented in varying configurations in subnational Pakistan by informal governance models, militant groups, civil society associations, national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others.

Local Political Structures

As has often been the case since the country's inception, Pakistan was in the midst of a major political transformation when the floods hit.¹³ Former president Pervez Musharraf's Local Governance Ordinance (LGO) of 2001, creating three layers of decentralized government at the district, subdistrict, and village levels, had lapsed in late 2009, leaving somewhat of a local governance vacuum in the country.¹⁴ Soon thereafter, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani called on the country's four provincial governments to devise their own local governance systems, and in March 2010, the Pakistani parliament made landmark revisions to the constitution by way of the 18th Amendment that reaffirmed the prime minister's summon that subprovincial governance structures be developed by provincial authorities themselves.¹⁵ However, the time between March and July was short, and it is widely acknowledged that few provinces had instituted structures, standards, or other types of comprehensive local political arrangements when the floods came in late July.¹⁶ At the same time, the extent of provincial and district-level devolution even during the period of the LGO was said to have been highly variable with significant differences in district-level presence from department to department.¹⁷

As a result, areas affected by the floods represented a hodgepodge of local political and governance arrangements, most of which were highly personalized in function and reflective of individualized iterative histories rather than a coherent and standardized national and/or provincial framework. In fact, each district of each province in Pakistan had come to represent its own distinct dynamics even further reinforced with the lapse of the LGO at the end of 2009, at which time elected *nazim* officials who had been in office since the LGO came into effect in 2001/2002, were required to step down and return power to previously appointed district coordinating officers (DCOs). The challenge

¹³ Provided here is a cursory analysis of the pre-flood political situation. A fuller explanation of the evolution of subnational governance processes in Pakistan, including details related to former president Musharraf's Local Governance Ordinance (LGO) and Prime Minister Gilani's more recent call (2009) on provinces to devise their own local governance systems, as well as changes decreed by the 18th Amendment, can be found in Sadika Hameed and Robert D. Lamb, *Subnational Governance, Service Delivery, and Militancy in Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, forthcoming).

¹⁴ It is reported that the LGO, although somewhat stabilizing, was never terribly successful. It apparently resulted in tensions and political power struggles between newly elected district *nazims* and previously appointed district coordination officers (DCOs) and between district *nazims* and local-level provincial administration. In any event, the LGO is criticized for being used as a tool by the military-led center to destabilize and undermine the authority of coherent provincial government administration by bypassing the provinces to seek legitimacy through the devolution of political, administrative, and fiscal authority to lower levels of government. See Mezzera et al., *Devolution Row*.

¹⁵ The 18th amendment is widely observed as highly controversial given its decentralization tendencies: "Tensions between the central government and the provinces over the distribution of authority and revenues date back to Pakistan's inception and have prompted some of its most traumatic upheavals, most prominently the 1971 secession of Bangladesh. Many of the country's leading political parties have long demanded increased autonomy for the provinces. The 18th Amendment takes important steps toward resolving some of these tensions through devolution of authority and a strengthened role for the Council on Common Interests, a joint federal-provincial forum." Colin Cookman, "The 18th Amendment and Pakistan's Political Transitions," Center for American Progress, April 19, 2010, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/04/pakistan_political_transitions.html.

¹⁶ Observers note that the provinces were not anxious to replace subprovincial governance structures, as it devolved power even further. As such, it was likely to lead to tensions, which had been the case during the period of the LGO.

¹⁷ See Mezzera et al., *Devolution Row*.

brought about by this development is that when the floods hit, many of the newly reinstated DCOs had been out of the political game—at least officially—for nearly a decade. As a result, their networks were cold across the district, vis-à-vis provincial centers, and the nation’s capital.

While local government responses to the flooding largely have been viewed as inadequate and even flippant in many instances,¹⁸ it would be unfair to proclaim that there has been a complete and absolute vacuum of local governance either before or after the floods hit. It is, however, more than reasonable to say that subnational governance was in a deep state of flux and, at the same time, variable with the existence of some local officials who took their work seriously and others who did not. Corruption and “clientalist” behavior is widely thought to typify political behavior in Pakistan, but there is certainly anecdotal evidence of competent and dedicated local administrative officials in certain areas. For example, parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province have been talked about favorably by international aid practitioners who have noted that local governance gained a certain level of legitimacy there, with strong support from units of the Provincial Relief, Rehabilitation, and Settlement Authority (PARRSA), as well as the Pakistan Army Special Support Group (SSG), as a result of combined efforts to respond to large-scale conflict-induced displacements in the northwest in 2009. At the same time, Punjab is generally noted to have a strong provincial government with pockets of real competency at district levels. In short, Pakistan represents a mixed bag wherein each district is said to embody its very own political dynamics.

In the post-flood environment, the key challenge, then, is to consider each local ecosystem in its own right, being careful to address the adverse impacts of traditional patronage habits where they exist and to reward and work closely with competent political structures and the people who run them in other locations, continually balancing the need for democratization, on the one hand, and the need to deliver prompt and effective services, on the other.¹⁹

Local Disaster Risk Management Structures

Occurring during generally the same period as the legislative and political developments described above has been a heightened momentum within Pakistan for the establishment of a national disaster risk management (DRM) government apparatus in the country. Particularly since the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, there have been a number of internationally supported efforts to build government capacity in the area of disaster risk management, both centrally and at subnational levels, that have gone well beyond the flood management capabilities of Pakistan’s 1977 Federal Flood Commission.

Before the Kashmir earthquake, no centralized authority existed within Pakistan to plan for natural disasters or coordinate responses. With a disaster the scale of Kashmir, Pakistan had to create new entities to coordinate and implement relief and recovery processes. As an immediate response to the earthquake, the government of Pakistan established the Federal Relief Commission and later the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA).²⁰ Interestingly, despite the lack of holistic structures for DRM prior to the earthquake, Kashmir is widely considered to represent one of the premier disaster responses of all time, in large part due to the effective management of relief aid by the ERRA. Headed by Lt. Gen. (ret) Nadeem Ahmed and his deputy, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Farooq Ahmad Khan (now chairman of the NDMA), ERRA (and the response as a whole) was heavily dominated by the Pakistani military. Still, ERRA can nevertheless be considered the first permanent quasi-civilian structure in Pakistan to manage disaster risk, and it is from this structure that current national disaster risk management mechanisms in Pakistan were born.²¹

¹⁸ See Altaf Ullah Khan and Mary Hope Schwoebel, “Flooding Challenges Pakistan’s Government and the International Community,” *USIP PeaceBrief* 46, August 17, 2010, http://www.usip.org/files/resources/pb46_0.pdf, wherein they note the lack of local government response, quoting one local resident as saying “The politicians didn’t even bother to visit their own constituencies.” See also Alejandro Quiroz Flores and Alastair Smith, “Pakistan’s Flood of Cash: How Aid Made Flood Management Worse,” *Foreign Affairs* (November 28, 2010), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67017/alejandro-quiroz-flores-and-alastair-smith/pakistans-flood-of-cash>, wherein they explain, “Some officials reinforced their dikes; others allowed them to fail. One local official acknowledged that ‘local government figures in Sindh Province conspired with prominent landowners to bolster the riverbank running through their property and others deemed important, at the expense of other regions, which were left vulnerable to flood waters.’”

¹⁹ Mezzera et al., *Devolution Row*.

²⁰ The ERRA still exists to this day. For information on its activities, refer to its website at <http://www.erra.pk/>.

²¹ In analyzing the growth of DRM governance in Pakistan, it is important to note that just prior to the Kashmir earthquake—in January 2005—the government of Pakistan, along with 167 other countries, signed the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), a landmark document that offered the world a common agenda for addressing not only immediate threats to life but also recurrent human

Because ERRA's reach was limited geographically to those provinces affected by the earthquake, namely KPK (then called North-West Frontier Province, or NWFP) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), it was not the permanent disaster risk management institution that the nation needed. With a growing awareness that disasters were not necessarily sporadic, but part and parcel of daily life in the twenty-first century,²² Pakistan established in 2007 the National Disaster Management Authority and called on the experienced military authority of Lt. Gen (ret.) Farooq Ahmad Khan to act as its chairman.²³

Although NDMA—like ERRA before it—has sometimes been criticized as representing an entity that further augments the power of the military in an already overly militarized Pakistan, it officially represents a central civilian government structure for DRM and is legally legitimized by the National Disaster Management Ordinance of December 2006. At the time of its establishment, it was charged with spearheading a network of national, provincial, and local bodies to implement DRM activities across the country, overseen and guided by the National Disaster Management Commission (NDMC). In the event of a disaster, all stakeholders, including government ministries/departments/organizations, armed forces, NGOs, and UN agencies are to work through and in concert with the NDMA to conduct “one-window” operations.²⁴

Further to its central functions, NDMA has made it a priority to establish a presence at subnational levels. Prior to the floods, NDMA had replaced preexisting provincial relief commissioners with provincial disaster management authorities (PDMAs) and, at the same time, instituted plans—though not yet implemented—to set up district disaster management authorities (DDMAs) to work with DCOs at district levels. Furthermore, NDMA had prioritized DRM training of district officials and representatives from other government organizations and agencies involved in disaster response, most notably the Emergency Relief Commission, the Federal Flood Commission, Civil Defense, National Crisis Management Cell, line ministries, local departments, and NGOs.²⁵

The main problem with much of the progress made by NDMA prior to the floods is that the DRM capacity-building efforts described here largely existed on paper only and did not reflect the demonstrated capability of its subnational entities to deal with disasters on the ground, at least not in any systematic and consistent fashion. Some of the

vulnerability in the context of an increasingly hazard-prone future. This document called on countries to reduce disaster losses—in terms of lives and the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries—by 2015. Following the devastating catastrophe in Kashmir in October, the HFA naturally became imbued with very real national meaning, mobilizing intensified efforts to nationalize the HFA agenda.

²² Pakistan is considered a high disaster risk country, with five major natural disasters over the last five years. “One reason why so many disasters occur in Pakistan is because its varied geo-physical and climatic conditions expose it to a variety of hazards. Mountainous areas in the north are at risk of earthquakes, landslides and avalanches. Coastal areas face the risk of flooding and cyclones. Deltas and mid-river basins also face flooding risks, while arid and semi-arid areas in southern Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan are vulnerable to drought. Add to these natural events numerous manmade hazards: poor construction which can lead to collapse of buildings and infrastructure, conflict and military operations, oil spillages, etc.” NDMA/UNDP, *One UN Disaster Risk Management Joint Programme Component: Supporting National Capacity for DRM* (Islamabad: UNDP, 2009), p. 4, <http://ndma.gov.pk/Documents/General%20Uploads/051209/UNDP-December09.pdf>.

²³ After the October 2005 Earthquake, Lt. Gen (ret.) Farooq Ahmad Khan was appointed chief military coordinator in the Federal Relief Commission (FRC) and articulated the entire relief/rescue operations. In 2006, he took the post of deputy chairman in the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), where he oversaw the complete spectrum of disaster management efforts post-Kashmir earthquake. From his NDMA biography at <http://ndma.gov.pk/chairman.html>.

²⁴ In particular, the NDMA has been mandated to: coordinate complete spectrum of DRM at national level; act as Secretariat to the NDMC; map all hazards in the country and conduct risk analyses on a regular basis; develop guidelines and standards for national and provincial stakeholders regarding their role in DRM; organize training and awareness-raising activities for stakeholders, particularly in hazard-prone areas; serve as the lead agency for international cooperation in DRM, and for NGOs to ensure their performance reaches accepted international standards; coordinate emergency response of the federal government in the event of a national-level disaster through the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC); require any government department or agency to make available such personnel or resources as needed and available for the purpose of emergency response, rescue, and relief; establish a National Disaster Management Fund. See NDMA/UNDP, *One UN Disaster Risk Management Joint Programme Component*, pp. 6–7.

²⁵ Additionally, NDMA, with the support of UNDP, was working to mainstream DRM in future development initiatives by advocating and providing training for ministerial staff most closely involved in infrastructure building and maintenance. By end 2009, NDMA had identified the Planning Commission of Pakistan, the Ministry of Water and Power, the Ministry of Housing and Works, the Ministry of Industries, Production and Special Initiatives, and National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK) for first phase activities. Furthermore, it had apparently prepared provincial and regional DRM plans for Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, AJLK and the Northern Areas and, moreover, had compiled district plans for 14 districts, including Gwadar, Thatta, Badin, Quetta, Kech, Sialkot, and the eight earthquake-affected districts. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

problems identified by NDMA itself, even before the summer floods, were that the capacities of those involved in disaster response varied greatly from area to area, activities were not yet centrally coordinated or integrated, and many of the institutions and measures provided for in the post-2005 Pakistan DRM system had not yet come into operation.²⁶ Therefore, much like the transitional character of local political governance structures at the time of the floods, DRM governance structures were very much in their first stages of development and reflected highly varied capabilities.

At the same time, it is important to note that full legislation for the setup of disaster management infrastructure had been stalled pre-flood (by the Supreme Court in 2009), meaning that NDMA had not been legally supported by other necessary governmental institutions, particularly at district levels, to enhance its functionality.²⁷

Subnational Governance through the Prism of Disaster

If government legitimacy is best achieved through performance,²⁸ the Pakistani government's integrated response to the flooding is the prism through which all governance-related challenges in the country must now be viewed. A thoughtful approach to disaster recovery over the long term will necessarily involve capitalizing on opportunities to promote decentralization through the recovery process and, in the inverse, empowering emergent decentralized structures with the tools necessary to deliver much-needed post-disaster and reconstruction services. The remainder of this paper will describe what a thoughtful approach might involve and what major dilemmas will need to be addressed in order that disaster recovery ensures the promotion rather than the hijacking of true participatory democracy in Pakistan.

The massive flooding in Pakistan achieved one thing right off the bat. It reconfirmed to Pakistan and the world that disasters are not discrete, intermittent events in the twenty-first century. In case the scientific literature was not convincing enough,²⁹ actual events of the last few years confirm that disasters of high-level intensity will occur repeatedly. In this context, global populations will increasingly depend on their governments to mitigate exposure to them, to assist in preparing for them, and to coordinate large-scale national and international disaster response efforts in their aftermath. Pakistan has suffered not one, but two, large-scale natural disasters in five years. It will have to learn to manage this risk if it is to build itself into a strong state.

In addition to confirming the centrality of disaster risk management in Pakistani government affairs, the flooding also explicitly bolstered the notion of a Pakistani nationhood in a way that has not always been readily acknowledged by political observers, due to the international community's focus on the country's deep-seeded statehood challenges. The catastrophic flooding in Pakistan destroyed homes and infrastructure across nearly the whole of the country, and in response, regular Pakistani people from different corners of the globe crossed geographic, ethnic, and cultural boundaries to help their fellow countrymen.³⁰ Such action was carried out in large part by members of a growing urban middle class, by newly formed NGOs, and to varying degrees by the Pakistani diaspora.³¹ This demonstrated that, despite its historical fractures and myriad modern troubles, a strong sense of solidarity does unite Pakistan. No longer can the country be criticized as an artificial construct that exists only in opposition to India. Instead, this latest disaster would seem to have shown that there are strong social forces that bind the Pakistani people, even if those forces have never been manifested politically by a democratic government that instills widespread public confidence.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁷ For more on the state of disaster management legal mechanisms and infrastructure pre- and post-flood, see AHRC, *The State of Human Rights in Pakistan in 2010*.

²⁸ Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank Group, has stated, "Legitimacy must be achieved through performance. It needs to be earned by delivering basic services, especially visible ones. Clean up the garbage. Build institutional capacity by doing things: supplying clean water; sanitation; simple roads to connect territories that may have been cut off from one another; electricity for some part of the day; basic preventative health care such as immunizations." As found in Elizabeth Ferris, "Earthquakes and Floods: Comparing Haiti and Pakistan," Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., August 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2010/0826_earthquakes_floods_ferris.aspx.

²⁹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007* (Geneva: IPCC, 2007), http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syr/en/main.html.

³⁰ Mosharraf Zaidi, "The Rainbow after the Floods," October 27, 2010, <http://www.mosharrafzaidi.com/2010/10/27/the-rainbow-after-the-floods/>.

³¹ Issam Ahmed, "Pakistan floods: How new networks of Pakistanis are mobilizing to help," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 19, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/0819/Pakistan-floods-How-new-networks-of-Pakistanis-are-mobilizing-to-help>.

Finally, the flooding disaster demonstrated with great clarity that district-level governance is required in Pakistan. Although provincial authorities have long posited that they can manage service delivery for districts according to a more centralized framework (and, in fact, none of the provinces plan to hold local-level government elections as stipulated in the 18th Amendment), the floods illustrated that a more local engagement is required if the government of Pakistan is to build confidence and trust vis-à-vis its citizens. The question remains as to whether the NDMA and its minimal district-level reach will fill the local governance void in recovery until more general action is taken on the issue. Some observers suggest that nothing will happen on the political arena until the next national elections scheduled for 2013.

Findings

The manner in which Pakistan chooses to tackle the two colossal and interconnected tasks of rebuilding after the floods and promoting decentralized democratic structures will be critical to the success or failure of both and, in turn, will have a major influence on the future trajectory of the country. Disaster recovery can be a tool for governance building, but the pairing is delicate, even tedious, and calls for incremental, steady, tandem progress on both fronts in order for either to be successful.

Priority requirements of the Pakistani government moving forward include the following.

- *Responsible fiscal decentralization for recovery through rigorous public finance monitoring and reporting.* An inherent aspect of building the capacity of local government for disaster recovery is a state-of-the-art public finance mechanism that is fully transparent, accountable, and closely monitored by an independent body and accompanied by on-the-ground reconstruction inspection. The Pakistani government has such a long way to go in rebuilding its credibility vis-à-vis its citizens that it will need to create mechanisms to show it has a “no tolerance” policy toward corruption and is working to reform a political system traditionally founded on elitism and patronage. Political decentralization will only have teeth if it is accompanied by strong fiscal decentralization legislation and infrastructure. One-time tax collections for the relief effort are helpful but do not preclude the need for structural tax and fiscal reform for the long term.

In relation to the recovery effort specifically, some observers have proposed that international donors such as the United States set up an escrow account in conjunction with financial monitoring and reconstruction inspection that would release monies based on clearly identified performance benchmarks.³² Whatever the eventual model, a truly sophisticated public finance mechanism is required with routine district-level monitoring of recovery projects.

- *Promotion of economic and social reforms through recovery with the aim of reducing poverty and future risk to disasters.* The landscape for disaster risk is conditioned by underlying social drivers, such as economic development, demographics, and globalization among others. Simply put, people living in poverty are more vulnerable to the risks posed by natural hazards than people whose resilience is not undermined by lack of access to assets, resources, infrastructure, and information.³³

In the context of Pakistan, national development policies, most notably related to the management of the country’s natural resources, have adversely impacted the disaster resilience of Pakistani citizens in very physical ways, such as the shocking deforestation along the Indus River, but also through the stunted growth of productive bases of society. In light of the catastrophic flooding in Pakistan, social and political policies will need to change across the board and disaster resilience will have to be central to all recovery efforts.

Tax reform is more critical to the country now than ever in its history. In light of the catastrophe, there have been multiple declarations of the need to reform the tax culture in Pakistan. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, fewer than 3 million of Pakistan’s 175 million citizens pay any taxes, making it nearly impossible to foot the bill for flood relief.³⁴ The mini-budget recently approved by the government of Pakistan, to

³² Flores and Smith, “Pakistan’s Flood of Cash.”

³³ The dynamic is called the disaster risk-poverty nexus. See UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, *Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate: Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow: 2009 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction* (New York: United Nations, 2009), <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/9413>.

³⁴ “Top US lawmaker: Aid recipients face sacrifices,” *352 LuxMag*, September 2, 2011, <http://www.352luxmag.lu/?p=edito&a=external&id=106972>.

include the imposition of a 10 percent flood surcharge on income tax paid by individuals for a period of six months, as well as an excise duty on luxury items from 1 percent to 2 percent, shows some effort but does not go nearly far enough in terms of the scope of tax reforms required.

Land reform, a clear requirement to counter poverty in the country, is also needed for the sustainable development of a politically active middle class and to mitigate disaster risk. The country's outdated feudal land system dictates that land in the country is still owned by only 300 families, leaving many Pakistanis to work as indentured servants. Although government-owned land has been distributed to poor rural families since 2008 in places like Sindh and Punjab, the scale of redistribution needs to be stepped up so that all rural Pakistanis can have access to the income, status, and security that land provides. Sindh's recent actions to dole out land, previously designated as government-owned flood runoff, to 5,800 female farmers are a step in the right direction and should be followed by other provinces.³⁵

There will also need to be a redirection of government policies vis-à-vis the timber industry—both licit and illicit—to slow the pace of the alarming deforestation in the country, particularly in the northwestern province of KPK where 70 percent of forests were illegally cut down between 2007 and 2009 when the Pakistani Taliban controlled the region.³⁶ According to experts, forests cover only 5.2 percent of Pakistan, and denudation is widely thought to be responsible for the scale of damage caused by the floods.³⁷ Land denudation has also resulted from the mass movement of populations to areas along the Indus River. As these populations have settled, they have cut down nearly all of the preexisting riverine forest to make room for farm land, greatly increasing exposure to disaster risk all along the river.

Finally, the government will need to work with international partners to devise a sustainable energy policy that acknowledges both the rising cost of oil and the nation's rising consumption rates as a means to overcome its current and future energy deficits in a fiscally sustainable way.³⁸

- *Resolute transfer of responsibility for recovery and reconstruction to civilian government entities.* There is no doubt that the Pakistani military has functioned as a critical asset for disaster response in the wake of the floods. National militaries are traditionally the first responders in cases of natural disaster, and the primary role of the Pakistani military in the wake of the 2010 flooding and the 2005 Kashmir earthquake is no exception. In the case of the flooding, the Pakistani military saved thousands of lives and delivered tons of urgently needed emergency supplies, often in close coordination with U.S. military forces.³⁹ In addition to its vital logistical support, it also presented to Pakistanis a symbol of institutional stability during a period of national crisis.

The trick for the government now is to transfer full responsibility for the longer-term recovery and reconstruction to civilian government entities. Given Pakistan's militarized history, many observers do not appreciate what they consider to be a continued glorification of the military under the pretext of emergency relief.⁴⁰ While the building of civilian capability is critical to the longer-term development of Pakistan, the transfer will have to be slow and individualized so that populations are not left feeling alienated and disenfranchised. In some parts of the country, a strong military presence will be required for longer periods than in others, and there should be no requirement for premature exit solely on the basis of an arbitrary time frame. In areas such as KPK, where the military's counterinsurgency activities may overlap with its engagement in disaster recovery, roles and responsibilities will

³⁵ Issam Ahmed, "Pakistan allots land to women in an effort to end a cycle of debt," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 23, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2011/0323/Pakistan-allots-land-to-women-in-an-effort-to-end-a-cycle-of-debt>.

³⁶ Medha Bisht, "Pakistan Floods: Causes and Consequences," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, August 19, 2010, http://idsa.in/idsacomments/PakistanFloodsCausesandConsequences_mbisht_190810.

³⁷ It is also noted that the covert storing of logs and the use of rivers as timber transport systems by the illegal logging mafia caused additional damage to infrastructure and homes when the waters rose, as the logs were carried along by the water, destroying everything in their path. *Ibid.*

³⁸ For additional information, see Civil Service of Pakistan, CSS Forums, "Energy Crisis and Pakistan," <http://www.cssforum.com.pk/css-compulsory-subjects/current-affairs/current-affairs-notes/4082-energy-crisis-pakistan.html>.

³⁹ It is reported that over 23,000 persons were rescued and 16 million pounds of food delivered through Pakistani-US military coordination in the first weeks of the crisis. "Relief Efforts in the Wake of the Pakistani Floods," a panel discussion at the U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., October 15, 2010, <http://www.usip.org/events/relief-efforts-in-the-wake-of-the-pakistani-floods>.

⁴⁰ Raza Rumi, "Pakistan's disaster could lead to collapse," August 16, 2010, <http://www.razarumi.com/2010/08/16/pakistans-disaster-could-lead-to-a-collapse/>.

have to be clearly delineated and continually communicated to communities in an accessible and transparent manner.

Also critical will be the transfer of adequate funding from Pakistani military to civilian entities so that they have the resources to deliver on their civilian governmental responsibilities.

- *Use of disaster recovery entities as interim systems for the building of longer-term local models of governance.* An integrated approach to recovery is critical to building back the country in a sustainable manner. What an integrated approach means by its very nature, however, is that a large number of government entities (as well as national and international partners) will be involved in recovery and accountable in different ways to the Pakistani people. Following a disaster, there are often systems and processes developed specific to the relief effort that run parallel to existing government models. The challenge for the government of Pakistan will be to employ disaster recovery modes of governance to build on traditionally weak and inconsistent local-level service delivery systems.

Integral to this process will be the need for continual clarification about the roles, capacities, and powers of different local-level government actors. Public perceptions of government legitimacy will depend in large part on the ability of individuals to understand the distinct responsibilities of their local service providers and to be able to access them accordingly. The government will need to make sure that the integration of recovery at the local level does not leave citizens feeling as though “everyone” and, at the same time, “no one” is accountable for the very specific problems with which they are confronted.

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