



**CONFRONTING CLIMATE
DISPLACEMENT:
Learning from Pakistan's Floods**

NOVEMBER 2010

ALICE THOMAS &
RENATA RENDÓN

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Refugees International would like to thank the staff members of the UN and international and local non-governmental organizations for taking the time to talk and provide information on the flood situation in Pakistan. We are also indebted to those who have been affected by the floods and who bravely shared their personal stories with us.

In addition, this report would not have been possible without the generous support of the many individuals who contributed to the Ken & Darcy Bacon Center for the Study of Climate Displacement. Refugees International is grateful for their generosity.

ABOUT REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Refugees International advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises. Based on its field-based knowledge of key humanitarian emergencies, RI successfully challenges policy makers and aid agencies to improve the lives of displaced people. The Ken & Darcy Bacon Center for the Study of Climate Displacement was established at Refugees International in August 2009 thanks to a generous financial contribution made by Ken & Darcy Bacon just before Mr. Bacon's death. Refugees International is a Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization that was established in 1979 and receives no government or UN funding. www.refugeesinternational.org.

*Cover photo:
Residents carry
their belongings
through a flooded
road in Risalpur,
located in
Pakistan's Khyber
Pakhtunkhwa
Province on
July 30, 2010.*

*© Reuters/
Adrees Latif*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	I
The Floods and Future Climate Disasters.....	3
Slow Response to a Rapidly Changing Disaster	5
Improving Initial Relief Activities	8
Helping Communities Recover Quickly	11
Reconstruction Efforts Must Support Vulnerable People	14
A Broader U.S. Response to Climate-Induced Disasters	16
Recommendations.....	20
Endnotes.....	22

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2010, massive rain in Pakistan led to unprecedented flooding that submerged one-fifth of the country and affected more than 20 million people. While many experts believe the floods were the result of climate change, others say the science is uncertain. Regardless, most agree that natural disasters are occurring more frequently and that the international community is ill-equipped to respond. It is estimated that by 2050, as many as 200 million people will be displaced by natural disasters and climate change. The world's poorest and most crisis-prone countries will be disproportionately affected.

This report explores what climate-induced displacement looks like and outlines steps to ensure that U.S. and international agencies address the threat that climate change poses to economic, political and human security. (See a full list of recommendations on page 20.) By evaluating and learning from the emergency response, the international community can implement more effective mechanisms and programs to prevent and respond to displacement from future natural disasters of this magnitude.

When the flooding began, the United Nations “cluster system” — whereby relief agencies coordinate efforts around a humanitarian service — was unable to respond effectively due to insufficient staff, resources and leadership. The UN should review the mechanisms available to prepare for and respond to large-scale disasters and focus on ways to improve cluster leadership. In regions where future disasters are likely, the UN Country Team should work closely with national governments and in-country climate experts to map at-risk areas and devise potential disaster scenarios.

Comprehensive early recovery programs that rebuild homes, community infrastructure and livelihoods must also help people who were vulnerable before the floods hit. The poor and landless will be affected the most by the floods over the long term, and the UN and donors should work with the Pakistani government to ensure that reconstruction dollars do not reinforce pre-existing inequities by favoring landowners. In addition, programs must be put in place now to assist communities living

in at-risk areas to voluntarily relocate to avoid having them move back to flood-prone areas because they have no other options.

The United States also has an important role to play given the international humanitarian community's limitations in responding to rapid onset disasters. The U.S. government has invested over \$15 billion in mostly security assistance to Pakistan since September 11, 2001, and recent legislation authorized another \$7.5 billion over five years in economic assistance. But despite Pakistan's high climate vulnerability, U.S. assistance only marginally aims to help avoid such calamities. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard Holbrooke should prepare a strategy report that discusses how U.S. assistance will address climate vulnerability in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

If the United States wants to continue to lead the world in humanitarian assistance, it must be prepared to assist the millions of people displaced by climate-related disasters. First, the Secretary of State, in consultation with other relevant federal agencies and non-governmental organizations, should conduct an assessment and develop guidelines for a whole-of-government response to mitigate projected increases in long-term displacement as a result of climate hazards. Second, President Obama should request, and the Congress should provide, increased funding for disaster preparedness and response and for displaced populations through the State Department's refugee bureau and U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. Third, it is critical that the State Department and USAID develop a clear government-wide policy and guidelines for preventing and responding to internally displaced persons.

The floods in Pakistan are an opportunity to draw lessons and address some of the underlying factors that rendered so many people vulnerable to begin with. The failure to do so could undermine the long-term stability of countries likely to experience increased floods, storms, droughts and other climate-related events. Given the high costs of responding to natural disasters, it is in the global community's best interest to plan now for the massive displacement they cause and protect those most at risk.

CONFRONTING CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT: Learning from Pakistan's Floods

INTRODUCTION

“Although there is a growing awareness of the perils of climate change, its likely impact on human displacement and mobility has received too little attention.”

– António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees¹

In late July 2010, a unique confluence of weather systems collided over northwest Pakistan dumping a massive and unprecedented amount of rain. Ferocious flash floods ripped down mountainsides tearing away roads, bridges and entire villages. As the rain continued, the deluge moved south eventually submerging one-fifth of the country's landmass and damaging or destroying vast expanses of water, power and transportation infrastructure. Ultimately, more than 20 million people were affected. Over 1,900 people were killed, seven million were rendered homeless and 1.8 million homes and two million hectares of agriculture were destroyed.²

While Pakistan has a history of floods and other natural disasters, many experts believe that the weather systems that led to the unprecedented 2010 mega-floods were the result of climate change. They point to the fact that the floods are in line with scientists' predictions that climate change will cause an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (including variability in the monsoon) and to meteorological data showing a doubling of recorded natural disasters over the past two decades.³ Others say that it is impossible to prove that any one weather event was caused by global warming.

What all agree on, however, is that natural disasters are forcing more and more people from their homes. Thirty-six million people are internally displaced within their own countries as a result of natural disasters, compared to 26 million internally displaced by conflict and human rights abuses.⁴ It is estimated that within the next 40 years, as many as 200 million people could be displaced (the vast majority within their own country)

by natural disasters and climate change.⁵ The world's poorest and most crisis-prone countries will be disproportionately affected owing to higher exposure to climate-related hazards like floods and droughts, and because of pre-existing social, economic and political vulnerabilities.

As the Pakistan floods demonstrate, the humanitarian community faces unique challenges in responding to natural disasters versus humanitarian emergencies brought on by conflicts. First, there is little or no advance warning before the crisis strikes. In many conflict scenarios — both internal and between states — there is often an opportunity to foresee consequences and prepare for an emergency humanitarian situation. In contrast, in the case of sudden-onset natural disasters, the crisis comes with little warning, the displacement occurs much more quickly, and often on a far larger scale. Moreover, in the case of sudden-onset events like floods and storms, most people are displaced for only a short period of time and are not constrained from returning home by ongoing, prolonged conflict. However, many often return to hazard-prone areas, leaving authorities with the undesirable option of either allowing them to remain in harm's way or forcibly relocating them to places less exposed to repeated disasters.

In short, much more thinking, planning and action are needed to address the impacts of natural disasters and changing climactic conditions on displacement. The floods in Pakistan are an opportunity to begin to draw lessons and, as the country rebuilds, address some of the underlying factors that rendered so many people vulnerable to begin with.

In late September 2010, two months into the onset of the massive flooding, Refugees International (RI) sent a team to Pakistan to begin looking into some of these urgent issues. This report reflects their initial findings and recommends next steps for UN agencies and the governments of the United States and Pakistan.

THE FLOODS AND FUTURE CLIMATE DISASTERS

“It is projected that climate change will increase the variability of the monsoon rains and enhance the frequency and severity of extreme events such as floods and droughts.”

– Pakistan’s Task Force on Climate Change
Final Report, February 2010⁶

In late July 2010, massive rainstorms let loose over mountainous areas in northwestern Pakistan. The unprecedented rain was caused in part by the monsoons, which emanate from the Bay of Bengal. Historically, the monsoon rains occur further south and feed the Indus River Basin, but this year, monsoon rainclouds shifted northwest over Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, formerly known as the Northwest Frontier Province), a mountainous and relatively dry region.⁷

Here the monsoons collided with a wave of low pressure from the west that typically comes this far south only in winter months. Carried by the jet stream, this low pressure system is fueled by the Mediterranean Sea and typically bypasses Pakistan to the north in summer months. This year, however, a depression in the jet stream over western China blocked it and pushed it southward where it met up with monsoon rainclouds over KP.⁸ (Some experts believe the blockage in the jet stream is also responsible for the heavy rains in China that caused landslides that killed 1,200 people, as well as the devastating heat wave and wildfires in Russia.)⁹

Numerous Pakistani officials and hydrology and meteorological experts that RI spoke with attribute both of these unique phenomena — the northwesterly shift of the monsoons and the mysterious depression or blockage in the jet stream over western China — to climate change. While the debate continues, what most experts agree on is that increases in water surface temperatures in both the Mediterranean Sea and the Bay of Bengal pumped an excessive amount of water into the atmosphere that fueled these weather systems.¹⁰

The vast extent of the flood damage was not without a human hand print. Deforestation and flood control engineering system failures are also to blame and, as Pakistani government officials

admit, made the flooding 30 percent worse (although some believe their contribution was far higher).¹¹ A key problem was the failure of officials to properly maintain the system of barrages and canals. The result was the worst flooding in the country's history.

Policymakers and scientists are concerned that things could grow worse. For example, despite the fact that the floods inundated the country with massive amounts of water, many experts warn that Pakistan is nonetheless likely to face a serious drought in 2011. According to the World Bank, "[o]ver the long term, if temperatures increase by just a few degrees... it will be necessary to radically retool some sectors of [Pakistan's] economy such as agriculture and power generation."¹² In short, climate change presents a risk that cuts across all sectors of Pakistan's future. The failure to address these risks could undermine the country's long-term economic development, political stability and human security long after the waters recede.



Two months after the flooding began, this village in Sindh Province is still submerged.

© Refugees International

SLOW RESPONSE TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING DISASTER

“The floods have demonstrated that whatever we have in place [to respond] is inadequate and whatever planning assumptions we made were insufficient.”

– High-level UN official on the effectiveness of the UN’s response to large-scale natural disasters

There have been innumerable challenges to executing a timely and adequate response to the super floods in Pakistan that reflect not just the massive scale of the disaster, but the fact that the humanitarian community is not prepared for the major threat to human security that climate change presents.

By all accounts, international humanitarian actors, the Pakistani army, U.S. military personnel and local authorities have been working tirelessly since the flooding began to address the enormity of needs. However, according to many UN officials with whom RI spoke, the UN cluster system (see box on page 6) in many instances was unable to achieve its primary goal of enabling a timely, coordinated and comprehensive humanitarian response to the floods. In short, it was ill-prepared, uncoordinated and under-resourced.

In large part, the international community was unable to keep pace with the rapidly changing nature of the disaster. The result was a humanitarian community that was constantly scrambling south to keep up with flood waters, abandoning or being forced to minimize the relief effort in areas that had already been hit and constantly behind the curve. Compounding the problem, cluster leads in Islamabad who should have been supporting sub-clusters in the field were directing energy and attention to drafting the Revised Humanitarian Appeal to generate international funds for the response effort. One UN official told RI, “The clusters are being used as funding channels and spend too much time focusing on how to allocate funds and less time on cluster coordination.”

Of the four provinces affected by the floods, the relief effort was the quickest and most effective — at least initially — in the north. This was in large part because the army has maintained an almost permanent presence there since military offensives against

The Cluster System

National governments are first and foremost responsible for taking care of victims of natural disasters and initiating, coordinating and implementing humanitarian assistance. In order to compliment a government's response, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator through the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance created the "cluster system." In this system, clusters composed of UN agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations coordinate their activities around a specific humanitarian service (e.g. protection, camp coordination and management, water, sanitation and hygiene). In each cluster, an agency is designated as the "cluster lead" to oversee all efforts. In addition, individuals known as "cluster coordinators" manage and work with implementing partners to collect information about the situation on the ground. This information should help them to identify and assess the current needs, agencies' capacity to respond, the rate of progress and any gaps in assistance.

the Taliban began in late 2008. International NGOs and the UN also had a presence in the region providing relief to conflict-affected people and therefore had more experience navigating local officials, the army and the terrain as well as an understanding of pre-existing vulnerabilities and political sensitivities.

In the south, however, where the humanitarian community did not have a presence, the response was far slower and less coordinated. Clusters were unable to effectively communicate and coordinate with local authorities which seemed to stem from the fact that they did not have pre-existing relationships. Communication with UN cluster coordinators and other international NGOs was also weak. According to one UN official stationed in Punjab, it took five weeks for the UN to obtain information from the International Committee for the Red Cross on its relief efforts. Overall these shortcomings made for an incomplete understanding of the numbers and locations of people, their needs and the activities being executed throughout the region.

Flash floods rip a new river course through a home in Swat Valley.

© Refugees International



The humanitarian community also lacked sufficient staff and resources. The head of one prominent international NGO working in Pakistan noted that since the beginning of the floods he had recruited 100 people per week for seven weeks to meet new demands. UN staff members were pulled from all over the world to contribute to the disaster response. RI met with several UN staffers who had flown in directly from Haiti, where the ongoing humanitarian effort for the earthquake itself is stuck in paralysis. One NGO working in Pakistan told RI that following the Haiti earthquake, a major international donor shifted a very large amount of funding for non-food item (NFI) kits away from Pakistan to Haiti, resulting in a short supply of these items in Pakistan after the floods.

Others raised concerns with RI that there were too many cluster meetings which diverted attention from relief efforts. The system also suffered from weak cluster leadership and a lack of local Pakistani expertise to plug into for analysis and implementation.

IMPROVING INITIAL RELIEF ACTIVITIES

Unfortunately, the UN's response to the Pakistan floods is further evidence of the significant challenges the cluster system faces in coping effectively with large scale natural disasters. The UN should undertake a fundamental review of the international community's preparedness and response mechanisms, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as the coordinating agency in emergency disasters, should take the lead in addressing lessons learned.

While greater analysis is needed as to what exactly went wrong, Refugees International believes the following steps will address some of the shortcomings.

First, in climate-vulnerable countries such as Pakistan, the UN Country Team should work closely with in-country environmental and climate experts to map at-risk areas and to better understand potential disaster scenarios. Not enough contingency planning is occurring in Pakistan. OCHA must acquire more staff with expertise on climate change and its consequences to better plan for future extreme weather events. Potential natural disaster scenarios and response requirements should be, to the extent practicable, included in all consolidated donor appeals. Doing so would bring greater attention to climate vulnerabilities in country as well as the impact a large-scale disaster could have on ongoing humanitarian efforts (especially in countries with ongoing armed conflict). It would also allow for a greater understanding of the potential funding needs should a disaster strike. The UN Country Team should engage in more pro-active planning, especially before the monsoon and hurricane seasons, or when drought conditions start to appear.

Second, cluster coordinators should have in-country experience and should be required to relinquish agency affiliation and/or responsibilities in order to allow for an independent and full-time focus on cluster coordination activities. In order to facilitate this, the coordinated appeal process (CAP) may need to include funding to cover the salaries of cluster coordinators since they are currently paid through the agency they are affiliated with. Third, UN and NGO cluster coordinators must be better trained in effective leadership and management.

Finally, going forward, major humanitarian donors like the United States must push the UN to improve cluster coordination and require accountability. Donors must also make an effort to better understand how the cluster system works and be prepared and informed so that they may engage in discussions and provide resources to implement needed reforms.

A flood-affected man picks up emergency supplies.

© Refugees International



At the same time, since it is the responsibility of national governments to take the lead in responding to natural disasters, more focus is needed on building local capacity. Therefore, the United States and other donors should invest in strengthening the capacity of in-country disaster response and preparedness authorities, particularly at the local and community level, and of civil society actors. While the Pakistani army did a very good job in responding, the civilian government was largely absent. The country's National Disaster Management Authority had an extremely limited role and was largely without authority or resources to respond. Moreover, neither the UN nor the international community had a presence in many areas of the country that were affected. Thus, the main responsibility and burden for responding to the floods initially fell to local district authorities and communities.

RI met with one NGO that has been working over the past year to help local communities in Sindh Province improve disaster preparedness and response. Based on the NGO's assessment, these communities had weathered the floods better than those without disaster preparedness skills. For example, despite inaccurate official flood reports, the communities closely monitored water levels and thus were able to predict that the scale of the flooding would be far worse than in previous years. They also had established direct lines of communication with flood authorities, had invested in materials to help protect their homes and belongings thereby minimizing damage and had sound evacuation plans in place.

The ongoing development of Pakistan's Climate Change Strategy and Action Framework presents an opportunity to improve disaster preparedness and response at the local and community level as well to address the protection gaps in the response. RI further encourages the UN and donors who are working with the Pakistani government to develop strategies to ensure that this framework includes measures not only to minimize climate-induced displacement but also to protect populations who are left homeless and vulnerable after such disasters strike and to take a rights-based approach in the response.

HELPING COMMUNITIES RECOVER QUICKLY

“We needed a returned strategy, not a return strategy, and we still don’t have one.”

– A high-level UN official speaking about flawed early recovery efforts in Punjab two and a half months into the onset of the disaster

The humanitarian community was woefully slow in meeting the relief and early recovery needs of affected populations. According to one UN official, by the time the UN arrived in Punjab to provide relief to the displaced, most had already left the camps. This was in part due to the Government of Pakistan’s desire to move displaced populations out of schools and other public buildings as quickly as possible, in some instances resulting in secondary displacement.

For the most part, however, flood-affected people wanted to go home as soon as possible to salvage what was left of their assets, safeguard their belongings and begin to rebuild their lives. For those without land tenure or documentation of property ownership, the need to secure property was particularly acute since in many instances the flood waters had wiped away land demarcations. Returnees living in or nearby the remains of their homes often lacked ready access to food, sanitation or clean water — and more than four months later, still do.

While agencies identified the need to provide seeds for planting of the winter crop early on, other relief and early recovery needs — transitional and permanent shelter materials, basic infrastructure for water and sanitation, cash payments or cash for work programs — have been slow to arrive and insufficient. The relief and early recovery response in the north has also been slow because the international community was forced to move south to respond to new flooding.

A comprehensive early recovery process should include mechanisms for working with affected populations to assess whether people living in disaster-prone areas should be allowed to return. Where return may put people at risk, agencies should provide them with informed and voluntary relocation options. In Pakistan, many have moved back to flood-prone areas because

they have no other viable alternatives. On the other hand, lack of equitable, community-driven relocation options in the wake of natural disasters are likely to harm the most vulnerable, particularly those who lack land rights.

In Pakistan, an illustrative example is the 23,000 Afghan refugees who were displaced from Azakhel, a settlement outside of Peshawar, which was 90 percent destroyed by the floods. While many of the residents had lived there for more than 30 years and considered it home, they were prevented from returning and rebuilding once the flood waters subsided, ostensibly to permit the government to conduct a safety assessment. Consequently, the UN undertook its own assessment which deemed many of the same areas safe enough for return. While it may be that the selective nature of Pakistan's zoning enforcement was unintentional, the situation nonetheless highlights the risk that without protection mechanisms and advance planning, vulnerable populations may be forcibly displaced or relocated in the aftermath of disasters.



Azakhel, an Afghan refugee settlement home to 23,000 people, was 90 percent destroyed by the floods.

© Refugees International

RI also learned that government authorities were prohibiting flood-affected people from returning in KP's infamous Swat district. This is not only one of the most scenic parts of the country, but sadly, now one of the most dangerous. In 2008 when the Taliban took over, people were terrorized. A year later, they were forced to flee when Pakistan's army began military operations to drive out the extremists. Many civilians had only recently returned when the floods hit. Swat's District Coordination Officer (DCO), a local government official, has put in place a temporary law prohibiting people from returning to and rebuilding along riverbanks where hotels and villages alike were ripped away by the flash floods. According to the DCO, rapid population growth, lax zoning enforcement and a desire to promote tourism has resulted in massive encroachment of villages and hotels along the river's edge in Swat. While acting to protect people from future risks, the DCO acknowledged that the temporary measure could lead to discontent among a civilian population that already has endured so much upheaval over the past several years.

Going forward, much more government effort, thought and planning needs to go into voluntary relocation programs that are community-driven, since natural disasters, climate change and other environmental stressors are likely to render more and more areas uninhabitable or at risk. In Pakistan, the timely development and implementation of relocation programs or schemes has been challenging given the political realities and the urgent nature of the current situation, not to mention the desire of people to move back to their homes. Thus, ensuring that relocation programs are in place that adhere to human rights principles (including those enumerated in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement) is of utmost importance. The Government of Pakistan should work with the international community to develop policies to promote voluntary, community-driven relocation as part of a national policy on internally displaced persons (IDPs) when return to disaster-prone areas would put residents in harm's way.

RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS MUST SUPPORT VULNERABLE PEOPLE

As the focus turns to rebuilding ravaged areas of Pakistan, donors and assistance providers must recognize the opportunity for reconstruction efforts to address the underlying vulnerabilities of affected people. This can only occur by working closely with affected communities. Often reconstruction dollars go first to landowners, large infrastructure projects, industry or developers. The need to provide homes, security and livelihoods for the poor and landless are often secondary.

In Pakistan, many of the flood-affected people are poor tenant farmers who lack land rights. While the need for land tenure reform in Pakistan is by and large an issue for its government to address, the international community should be cognizant that reconstruction programs not reinforce pre-existing inequities, such as lack of land tenure. This has been a major area of concern for humanitarian and human rights advocates working with the conflict-affected population in northwest Pakistan. There, compensation for partially or completely destroyed homes is planned only for home owners, leaving the vast majority of the affected population without resources to rebuild or relocate. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has noted that “[f]ollowing the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, the failure of authorities to provide housing assistance to the landless was identified as a major reason for long-term displacement and the prolonged existence of temporary shelter settlements.”¹³

In northwest Pakistan, reconstruction should be particularly sensitive given that many people have now been affected by both the armed conflict and the floods. Despite a generally quick and coordinated flood response in some conflict-affected areas of the northwest, the army has recently hindered relief workers’ access to some flood-affected areas by requiring army escorts. Most NGOs won’t accept this requirement. As winter approaches, monitoring reconstruction efforts in conflict-affected areas and the ongoing delivery of emergency relief is essential to helping already devastated people get back on their feet. This will also promote human security in these areas.

The World Bank and Asian Development Bank Floods Disaster and Needs Assessment estimates that the floods caused \$9.7 billion in damage to infrastructure, farms, homes, and other losses.¹⁴ With the needs enormous and the resources few, RI urges donors to include the views of the affected communities in the decision of how and where to rebuild, rather than heeding only the priorities of the Pakistani government. Experience in the wake of other natural disasters has shown time and again that failure to include local communities in rehabilitation plans results in duplication and waste. The IFRC's 2010 World Disaster Report provides insightful recommendations for community-driven responses to disasters. The report emphasizes that reconstruction efforts must not be solely focused on bricks and mortar, but rather on empowering and providing capacity for affected communities to develop and implement solutions.¹⁵

The impact of climate displacement on urban areas also requires attention. One NGO leader told RI that an estimated 30 percent of Sindh's poor tenant farmers who lost their homes and crops could migrate to Karachi in search of livelihoods. There, they likely will face discrimination and violence and lack access to basic needs such as adequate shelter, jobs, health care and education. Several people expressed to RI their concern that the influx of flood victims to Karachi could exacerbate conflict and tension within the city.

Ensuring the protection of the displaced is a broader goal that must be addressed. The floods have added millions to the numbers of internally displaced in Pakistan. Millions more could be displaced in the future by continued natural disasters and climate change. RI has long recommended that the Government of Pakistan, with the assistance of the UN and the United States, develop a legal framework for the protection of IDPs. This IDP legislation and policy should be based on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The need to do so is now greater than ever.

A BROADER U.S. RESPONSE TO CLIMATE-INDUCED DISASTERS

“Climate change poses particularly challenging risks and opportunities that are important to many of the U.S. government’s international development, security and diplomatic priorities.”

– The White House Council on Environmental Quality Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force, October 5, 2010⁶

Climate change vulnerability is not only a function of a country’s exposure to natural hazards, but also its pre-existing vulnerabilities including poverty and the weak capacity of individuals, communities and government institutions to effectively respond to such hazards. Thus, climate change impacts will be felt most severely in some of the world’s poorest countries — for example Bangladesh and Haiti — as well as those that are conflict-prone and important for regional security initiatives of concern to the United States and others, such as Afghanistan, Burma, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

As previously cited, the Pakistani officials and civil society representatives RI spoke with almost unanimously believe that the floods are a result of climate change. They expressed frustration that carbon emissions from the United States and other industrialized countries are having such a devastating effect on Pakistan. Their sense of frustration was exacerbated by the fact that the United States has invested over \$15 billion in mostly security assistance to Pakistan since September 11, 2001 to strengthen Pakistani military operations against the Taliban, Al Qaeda militants and their affiliates. Military operations, while at first welcome, have displaced millions of people and resulted in internal debates on issues of sovereignty. The killing of innocent Pakistani civilians caught in the crossfire continues to be a source of resentment and even violence.

Last year, the popularly coined “Kerry-Lugar-Berman” legislation attempted to balance U.S. investments in military security by authorizing \$7.5 billion over five years in economic assistance to Pakistan. The bill’s assistance strategy states generally that one of the key initiatives will be to improve water management and agricultural production, yet there is no mention of how water

and food security will be impacted by climate change or how U.S.-funded programs will address these risks. The Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, should prepare a strategy report that discusses how U.S. assistance will address climate vulnerability in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, which is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change.

The White House Council on Environmental Quality's Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force has called for an "integrated and long-term approach" to climate change that "leverages the full technical capacities of the Federal Government" to lead on adaptation internationally. Today, it is unclear to what extent the issue of climate change has been mainstreamed into U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) disaster risk reduction (DRR), response, recovery or longer term development efforts in climate-vulnerable countries. For example, relief and early recovery programs being implemented by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) must link up with climate change adaptation programs recognizing that climate change cuts across all sectors of relief and development assistance.

Moving forward, the United States must recognize the importance of a greater investment in DRR and building preparedness in high-risk countries. Recent experience in Pakistan and other disasters has shown that DRR investments must be focused at the local level, as it is often local governments and communities that have the requisite knowledge of risks, circumstances and what is needed in order to plan for and respond to disasters. Congress should also appropriate new and additional funds to help the world's poorest countries adapt to climate change.

In addition, the Secretary of State, in consultation with other federal agencies and NGOs with expertise on displacement, should conduct an assessment and develop guidelines for a whole-of-government response to mitigate projected increases in long-term displacement as a result of climate hazards. Such guidelines should be crafted with an eye toward early recovery activities that increase the resilience of those most vulnerable to future disasters. Experience suggests that the longer people

are displaced, the greater the risk that their human rights will be violated and the less likely they will be able to rebuild their lives.¹⁷ Moreover, because the vast majority of population displacement resulting from climate disasters in developing countries is likely to be internal, the United States should improve and develop a government-wide policy to deal with internally displaced people. Insufficient attention to the growing numbers of IDPs globally, gaps in the U.S. framework for addressing IDP needs and resolving displacement crises are felt within the international system.



Children outside Peshawar who lost their homes in the floods find shelter in a nearby settlement.

© Refugees International

U.S. policymakers must confront the fact that the current budget for humanitarian efforts in disaster response is and will continue to be insufficient as disasters increase in frequency and intensity. If the United States wants to continue to lead the world in humanitarian assistance, increased flexible funding for the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and USAID's OFDA will be critical to ensure a quicker and more effective response to more frequent disasters. Humanitarian assistance is not charity, but based on a common respect for human rights and the recognition that it is an effective way to promote international stability and build trust with foreign governments and their citizens. Such aid traditionally has enjoyed widespread U.S. popular support. Moreover, if the ultimate goal of foreign assistance is to promote economic development and increase stability in Pakistan and other climate-vulnerable countries, the United States and other donors must recognize that climate change can pose a direct threat to security in these countries.

For the United States, an important question is the extent to which the deleterious impact of the floods on the poor will increase political instability over the longer term in Pakistan. While rumors of an impending military coup have now been dismissed as largely unfounded, the floods are likely to aggravate pre-existing tensions between rich and poor, between tribal factions as well as between citizens and the civilian authorities. Numerous reports were heard of Sindhi landowners intentionally breaching dykes and barrages to save their agricultural lands, causing floodwaters to inundate nearby villages that might not otherwise have been affected. RI also heard reports of local politicians meddling in the distribution of humanitarian aid to ensure that their constituents received relief first. If aid relief and reconstruction efforts are not directed at addressing the underlying inequities between rich and poor, the floods and the response could have a significant politically destabilizing effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the increasing number and severity of climate-induced disasters, the large number of populations displaced by such disasters and the recurring high costs of responding to these crises, RI recommends the following:

The UN and the Humanitarian Community:

- Undertake a fundamental review of the international community's preparedness and response mechanisms to address large-scale natural disasters.
- In coordination with national governments, map at-risk areas and potential disaster scenarios in climate-vulnerable countries such as Pakistan. Such assessments should be developed in coordination with in-country environmental and climate experts and be included in all consolidated donor appeals.
- Ensure that cluster coordinators are better trained in effective coordination leadership, protection practices and management; and require them to relinquish agency affiliation and responsibilities to allow for independence and a focus on cluster coordination activities.
- Work to ensure that the internationally aided reconstruction process does not reinforce pre-existing inequities and emphasizes providing shelter and livelihoods for the more vulnerable sectors of society to avoid long-term displacement.

The Government of the United States of America:

- Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard Holbrooke should prepare a strategy report that discusses how U.S. assistance will address climate vulnerability in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- USAID and OFDA should increase investments in DRR and should work to strengthen the capacity of in-country disaster response and preparedness authorities (particularly at the local level), and of communities and civil society actors. The agency should also fill gaps between relief and recovery programs and development assistance to better help countries adapt to climate change.

- U.S. government officials at all levels should better understand how the cluster system works, its shortcomings and strengths and focus on how to improve the UN response to large-scale disasters and displacement.
- The Secretary of State, in consultation with other federal agencies and NGOs with expertise on displacement, should conduct an assessment and develop guidelines for a whole-of-government response to mitigate projected increases in long-term displacement as a result of climate hazards.
- President Obama should request and the Congress should provide increased funding for disaster response and displaced populations through PRM and OFDA and develop a government-wide policy and guidelines for preventing and responding to internally displaced persons.

The Government of Pakistan:

- Develop a legal framework for the protection of the rights of IDPs and work with the international community to develop policies that promote voluntary, community-driven relocation as part of a national policy on IDPs when return to disaster-prone areas is unviable.
- Address protection gaps in the response to natural disasters in the Climate Change Strategy and Action Framework. Ensure that it includes measures to prevent climate-induced displacement, to protect people displaced by natural disasters and climate change and follows a rights-based approach to relocation of at-risk populations.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ A. Guterres, *Millions Uprooted*, Foreign Affairs, Sept./Oct. 2008.
- ² UN OCHA, *Pakistan Flood Response Factsheet*, Nov. 3, 2010. Retrieved from <http://pakresponse.info/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=ekh82OrLXVQ%3D&tabid=96&mid=667>.
- ³ Emergency Events Database. Retrieved from www.emdat.be.
- ⁴ Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, *Improving the U.S. Response to Internal Displacement: Recommendations to the Obama Administration and the Congress*, June 2010, p. 2.
- ⁵ UK Treasury, "Chapter 3: How Climate Change Will Affect People Around the World," in *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, 2005. Retrieved from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/Chapter_3_How_climate_change_will_affect_people_around_the_world_.pdf.
- ⁶ Planning Commission Government of Pakistan, "Executive Summary and Salient Recommendations of Final Report," in *Task Force on Climate Change*, Feb. 2010, p. 2.
- ⁷ N. Gronewold, *Pakistan: The night the river roared in 'like a demon,'* The New York Times, Oct. 12, 2010.
- ⁸ *ibid.*
- ⁹ University of Reading Walker Institute, *Pakistan Floods*. Retrieved from http://www.walker-institute.ac.uk/news/news_pakistanfloods.htm.
- ¹⁰ N. Gronewold, Oct. 12, 2010.
- ¹¹ N. Gronewold, *Pakistan: Climate change, deforestation and corruption combine to drown a region*, ClimateWire, Oct. 13, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.eenews.net/public/climatewire/2010/10/13/1>.
- ¹² UN International Strategy For Disaster Reduction and The World Bank, *Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), Disaster Risk Management Programs for Priority Countries*, 2009, p. 276.
- ¹³ IFRC, *World Disaster Report*, 2010, p. 65.
- ¹⁴ ADB and The World Bank, *ADB-World Bank Assess Pakistan Flood Damage at \$9.7 Billion*, ADB News Release, Oct. 14, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.adb.org/Media/Articles/2010/13363-pakistan-flooding-assessments/ADB-WB-pakistan-assessment.pdf>; and M. Georgy, *Pakistan Floods Caused \$9.7 Billion in Damage*, Reuters, Oct. 14, 2010.
- ¹⁵ IFRC, 2010, p. 55-56.
- ¹⁶ White House Council on Environmental Quality, *Progress Report of the Interagency Task Force on Climate Change*, Oct. 5, 2010, p. 44. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ceq/Interagency-Climate-Change-Adaptation-Progress-Report.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, *Human Rights and Natural Disasters: Operational Guidelines and Field Manual on Human Rights Protection in Situations of Natural Disaster*, Mar. 2008, p. 1.

REFUGEES 
INTERNATIONAL

A POWERFUL VOICE FOR LIFESAVING ACTION

p: [202] 828-0110 · f: [202] 828-0819 · e: ri@refintl.org
2001 S Street NW Suite 700 · Washington, DC 20009 · www.refugeesinternational.org

