

IRIN

In-Depth

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*When disaster strikes:
the response to the South
Asian earthquake*

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1. Features - The complexities of delivering aid



Injured await help in remote mountainous areas of Battagram, Pakistan close to the epicentre of the South Asian earthquake of 8th October 2005. Tens of thousands of people in thousands of locations needed urgent medical assistance immediately after the quake.
Credit: Kamila Hyat/IRIN

Whenever there is an emergency where organisations and governments rush to respond there often follows a string of complaints about how the aid was delivered. This

article will focus on the complexity of delivering aid in emergencies, with an emphasis on natural disasters rather than complex emergencies.

While those outside the aid world may be critical of the failure of the delivery of sufficient aid, the lateness of aid, the diversion of precious resources, the politicisation of aid, or the apparent high administrative costs, these criticisms serve to illustrate the extremely complex realities that face the aid community in its efforts to respond to emergencies.

Those within the sector face a wide range of limitations that potentially compromise or mitigate the success of their work. They themselves are critical of their own failings as a sector, but battle against a many-headed monster of challenges trying to deter them from success.

This article explores the character of these limitations, using examples from recent emergencies, to show why crisis response is fraught with difficulties. It will also show how the case of the recent South Asia Earthquake - striking Pakistan with force on 8 October 2005 - was an extraordinary example where many of the usual problems were overcome through unusually effective cooperation and commitment.

Is it on the box?

Whether a crisis is an act of nature, or caused or exacerbated by man, it is the media - especially television - that is most likely to be the first channel of information to the public. Broadcasting is the most powerful medium, with over a billion television sets, and twice as many radios being used globally. The famous news focus by BBC reporter Michael Burke and cameraman Mohamed Amin in 1984, led to the unprecedented interest in the Ethiopian famine which was then covered exhaustively as the progress of the famine drew out over subsequent months. It spawned other media and international celebrity events that made Ethiopia's experience the most watched disaster ever.

Over a million Ethiopians starved to death despite massive, but late, intervention financed by an unparalleled outpouring of public and government funding.

The impact of Hurricane Mitch in Central America in 1998, the international impact of the Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 2004, Hurricane Katrina and flooding in New Orleans and the South Asian Earthquake - all in 2005, were extensively covered by television and radio broadcasts. In many cases, first reports of the disasters were made public before aid agencies, national governments and international donors were fully apprised of the disaster.

Television is the key source of intelligence in the first hours or days of a crisis. This is less the case for complex emergencies or slow-onset disasters, but increasingly it is television images that force governments to act, and the public to give. In the case of Niger during 2005, the famine in parts of that country were well-monitored by aid agencies and food security experts long before it became a recognised crisis requiring international assistance. Not unusually for slow-onset disasters such as famines, "the situation in Niger didn't hit the spotlight until eight months after the first appeals were launched, but footage of the dramatic Tsunami was on our screens practically as soon as it had hit," claimed Marcus Prior of the World Food Programme. The same is currently happening in relation to the drought affecting an estimated 13 million people in the Horn of Africa. Too little, too late, claim those working on the ground.



Stories do not go very far unless they get 'on the box'. Here a cameraman films flood survivors in Mozambique in January 2001. The relationship between the media, crisis response and resource allocation is critical.
Credit: Nadia Bilbassy

Where journalists, and particularly TV crews, are barred from reporting, or fail to report, such as during the Rwandan genocide, the Khmer Rouge rule of Cambodia, the Sudanese government and Janjaweed attacks on Darfurian civilians, or the continuing carnage in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), public and

governmental motivation and impetus will be weak.

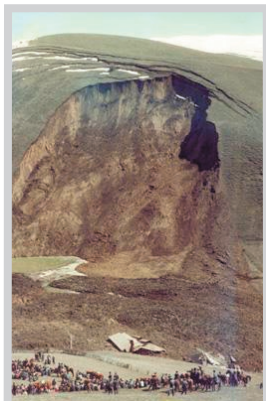
The "responders' cauldron"

According to the "World Disasters Report 2005", produced annually by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, natural disasters claimed the lives of over 249,000 people in 2004 in 360 reported disasters globally. The figures for 2005 are still being prepared, but the overall annual trend shows a clear increase in the number of disasters and number of casualties per disaster. In terms of lives lost, developing countries pay a disproportionate and overwhelming price.

When disaster strikes, the machinery of aid springs into action, including: national governments and donors; a plethora of international and national NGOs; the Red Cross/Crescent movement; and the agencies of the

United Nations. Local people also show enormous solidarity by offering immediate physical assistance, or by spontaneously distributing goods to victims as was seen after the Tsunami, the Bam earthquake in Iran in 2003, and in Pakistan after the earthquake.

Relative newcomers to the club of responders are military contingents and the corporate business sector. During the Tsunami response, military contingents from 34 countries were deployed, while increasing numbers of private corporate bodies also turned up offering support to the victims and displaying 'corporate social responsibility'. All these actors make for a "responders' cauldron" according to Ajun Katoch in a recent article in the "Journal of International Affairs", (Spring/Summer 2006).



Landslides such as this one that struck southern Kyrgyzstan in May 2004 kill thousands every year and destroy homes and livelihoods in seconds. As overpopulation and climate change creates new stains on the environment, natural disasters are increasing in number annually.
Credit: Kyrgyz emergency ministry

Katoch outlines how unique the international disaster response needs to be in comparison to other aid work, and decries the unregulated and uncoordinated nature of many of the responders who show reluctance to play ball with the various UN-led international mechanisms for response management.

Firing up the engines

In terms of speed, the local population and instruments of local government are best placed to respond immediately to any disaster. Normally, in developing countries, they neither have the expertise nor human or resource capacity to do so. In natural disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, volcanic eruptions and heavy flooding, the UN has dedicated teams of early response, through their Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams (UNDAC), along with the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, and the accompanying agreements with countries around the world that allow them to deploy search and rescue teams without restriction.

At the same time, many of the major international NGOs, and the elements of the Red Cross movement, mobilise resources to fly into the disaster zone. Some may have limited standby facilities of essential equipment such as tents, bedding, kitchen kits and plastic containers ready to be flown out of their storage locations. While other agencies may focus on health and have emergency standby health units and drugs ready for immediate deployment with medical staff. In the case of the global network of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, their local staff are prepared in emergency response and can be activated at short notice.



In terms of speed, the local population and instruments of local government are best placed to respond immediately to any disaster. In the case of the Tsunami in Thailand in late 2004 thousands of volunteers rushed to help the affected. Here helpers remove the dead.
Credit: IRIN

The larger agencies - often those that can source non-earmarked public funding - have contingency finance available to immediately hire and deploy staff, and purchase equipment before or when disaster strikes. The smaller agencies start petitioning their governments for emergency grants as soon as they can. Both

launch media campaigns and public appeals that can raise large amounts, particularly if fundraising is well organised and coincides with extensive media coverage of the event. The British public, for example, can only be persuaded to send agencies £30 for a Darfuri refugee to purchase a new donkey if they have seen harrowing sights of refugee livestock dying on their televisions.

Governments and large donors may pledge money or make grants in favour of an emergency, as many did in the case of Pakistan. Equally, with the Tsunami, donors made wave after wave of increasing financial pledges as new information about the extent of the devastation was released in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

Getting resources on the ground

Before getting food and non-food items to where they are most needed - into peoples hands - they need to be flown, shipped or trucked into the country concerned. Unlike complex emergencies - where aid agencies may be trying to cross lines of conflict or deal with uncooperative governments or commanders - those who respond to natural disaster are normally given relatively free reign to get their resources 'into theatre'.



Fast-onset disasters are normally natural disasters and include cyclones, hurricanes, flooding, earthquakes, volcanoes, locust attacks and fires. In 2002 a volcano near Goma in DRC spewed lava through much of the town. Many were displaced and needed international aid.
Credit: WHO

Emergency response is time-sensitive, not least because by the time the responders act, or by the time the TV crews are covering the story, the crisis has already happened or has matured. Purchasing food and shipping it to remote locations already takes weeks or months. Studies in the 1990s revealed

that for the European Union and other major donors, the time from when they receive emergency requests for critical food needs to the time of actual delivery of food to the starving populations is around 11 months. In sudden onset disasters, the delivery of aid is even more time-critical. Late delivery of assistance directly contributes to higher mortality in emergencies.

Banditry, poor roads, the rains and an uncooperative Sudanese government forced the World Food Programme in the last two years to avoid trucking food aid to Darfur from the Red Sea. Instead, they drive the 12-day, 2,800 kilometre route through the Sahara desert from Libya. In recent months they have been forced to cut rations to the 2 million displaced in Darfur due to low donor support.

Issues of access are normally the most critical factor facing emergency relief in any emergency. In Aceh, Indonesia, the only road serving most of the Tsunami-affected communities was destroyed, as were many sections of the mountain passes in Pakistan. However, in Sri Lanka and Thailand, the damage caused by the Tsunami was restricted to the coastal half-kilometre of land, which meant that necessary supplies could be brought by road or train directly into the area affected quickly and cheaply. In less accessible communities and islands, boats were used to bring basic survival assistance.

Throughout Africa, poor or non-existent infrastructure is the major limiting factor for effective and cost-effective aid delivery, particularly where the impact of a drought is spread over vast remote areas such as South Sudan, Niger, Northern Kenya, or Mozambique. Long-term delivery of food aid by plane characterised the first decade of Operation Lifeline that sought to feed South Sudan in the 1990s, but the costs have been enormous.



Drought, though a slow-onset emergency normally affected a far wider and higher number of people. The drought of early 2006 affected over 13 million people in the east and horn of Africa. Credit: FAO

The logistical aspects of any relief programme can be formidable and frequently the most constraining factor. Backlogs in seaports or airports are common. Access to lifting equipment, storage and efficient warehouse management is also critical. Recognising this, the

US military contingent in Pakistan placed a full airport-based aeroplane-unloading team in Islamabad to service the hundreds of freight flights that began arriving in the weeks and months after the earthquake. "At the 48-hours mark [after the earthquake struck] we had the Crisis Response Group from the Air Force of about 70 handlers move into the airport with their material handling equipment. They were out of New Jersey in fact and had just got back from working [Hurricane] Katrina, and after three days were told to pack up and get out here," explained Rear Admiral Mike Lefever, in charge of the US response to the quake. The US alone sent 400 flights with over 9,000 MT of relief supplies and equipment.

Funding was also initially a problem in Pakistan which, in contrast to the Tsunami, did not initially enjoy high levels of financial support. But finance was by no means the only obstacle. The earthquake in Pakistan tested agencies that flew in with small amounts of pre-positioned equipment, which were then forced

on international shopping sprees to find adequate supplies of tents and blankets. Over half a million people were displaced without warmth or shelter as winter rapidly approached in late 2005. The world literally ran out of available 'winterised' tents in late 2005; and while factories worked round the clock to produce more, agencies had to find alternative shelters to protect the displaced.

Getting it into people's hands

While getting emergency aid into a country and close to an affected population presents responders with sizable challenges, the actual matter of putting it into their hands is equally complex and difficult.

The devil is in the detail, because in many situations the population needing assistance may be spread out over wide and remote areas making final delivery of assistance impossible for logistical or economic reasons. People already weakened or traumatised by events need to be informed of the imminent arrival of aid and allowed to travel to distribution points. Correct screening and registration will need to have taken place – all requiring careful organisation. Mismanagement, corruption and bullying can result in aid distribution being poorly distributed where most needed, being diverted to individual local leaders or chiefs, or fail to assist more vulnerable groups who may be denied equal access to aid.

Socio-political issues aside, the logistical coordination and timely delivery of the different elements of assistance – food, medical help, water, shelter, sanitation, kitchen equipment, plastic sheeting, and fuel – is fraught with problems. In Pakistan, the earthquake took place in a part of the Himalayas covering possibly the two most mountainous provinces in the world. The logistical challenge of getting all the emergency provisions listed to approximately half a million people in remote, high altitude locations with the threat of Himalaya winter approaching was unprecedented.

Also unparalleled was the extensive use of helicopters to deliver aid. According to James Reynolds of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Islamabad, "To bring large amounts of goods in the only realistic alternative [as roads were destroyed] was the use of helicopters on a scale which was new for us in terms of numbers of helicopters in the fleet – it must have been new for the UN as well." It was. The combined air fleet comprising the Pakistani military, the numerous assisting military contingents, the UN and private helicopters hired by NGOs numbered more than 140. They formed an air bridge to the affected areas for months, making more than 28,600 sorties between October 2005 and March 2006; and the work continues today, almost eight months after the disaster.

In the history of international aid, this represents a stunning example of coordination and cooperation; a major accomplishment where aid was repeatedly delivered to the most remote mountain communities,

and the injured were evacuated without any flight accidents or crashes. According to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shaukut Azis, it was "the largest ever humanitarian emergency air-bridge in the history of the world".

Staffing emergencies

In terms of available experienced workers, disasters of the magnitude of the tsunami or Pakistan create problems for agencies who may already be stretched or have few qualified staff. Recruiting is never a swift option when hours and days are of critical importance. Agencies normally rely on existing staff for immediate deployment and then start to recruit for new staff to take over from the first wave of managers.

Despite the tens of international agencies that respond to emergencies, Katoch claims, "there are few major international agencies or NGOs that actually have significant experience in international disaster response. This is the case because disaster response has been a neglected facet of humanitarian aid." Many agencies redeploy staff already on mission in complex emergencies or other aid programmes. The turnover of staff during emergency response is consequently fast for many agencies as they rotate, often inexperienced, staff into the disaster zone for short periods.

Many professionals who initially arrive following a natural disaster, such as search and rescue and paramedic staff, are deployed for a short period only. Doctors and surgeons may be released from western hospitals for discrete periods of time. While people are willing to work for short periods to save lives in almost any condition, when it comes to longer complex emergencies in difficult, dangerous or bleak surroundings, agencies find it hard to recruit experienced staff. In the current context of Western Sudan, agencies complain that few senior managers are willing to be located in Darfur where they are most needed, in what has become a protracted emergency in a 'no-frills' context.

Apart from certain specialised tasks or roles that may require external staff, much of the work of disaster response can and does depend on an army of locally employed staff. In many cases in an emergency, those working for the UN or NGOs will have come from the communities affected or even have been caught up in the crisis themselves.

Using local, well-meaning volunteers can be a mixed blessing. They are normally unqualified and are traumatised themselves, and may contribute in a random unorganised way. Many may be related to those affected. In Pakistan, immediately after the earthquake, where 73,000 lay dead and where hundreds of thousands needed assistance, the arterial roads to the earthquake zones were clogged with hundreds of cars of Pakistani helpers trying to assist the victims. In addition to the landslide-damaged roads and broken bridges, rescuers and the Pakistani military were slowed in their work by cars and taxis blocking roads for many miles. However, the authorities considered

that the outpouring of generosity and concern from other Pakistanis was sufficiently important to allow them to continue unhindered.

Katoch cites the example from Bam in Iran where 85 percent of the city was destroyed with over 30,000 killed after a tremor lasting some few seconds. In this case, about 1,300 international helpers from 34 countries had arrived in Bam by day four of the disaster. Their presence overwhelmed the local administration tasked to coordinate the response. Again, he cites coordination as a key component of effective response.

Disasters in context

Emergencies requiring international support predominantly occur in developing countries. The social, political and cultural constraints and complexities are a real and vital aspect of any response. This is especially true of slow-onset emergencies like drought, and complex emergencies involving conflict, such as Northern Uganda and Darfur, where responders have to steer a path through dangerous waters.



Flood damage revealed in Madagascar in 2001 as the waters receded. Most natural disasters globally affect a disproportionate number from the developing world who in many cases struggle for years to rebuild their lives after disasters strike. Credit: IFRC

Getting assistance to those in need may serve to exacerbate existing tensions and power-struggles. Analysts consider the large amounts of food aid that came into Somalia in the early 1990s as directly related to the increased factional and clan warfare that has characterised the country ever since.

Similar situations occurred in the Balkan war in the early 1990s, where not only resources but also aid personnel became targets, as they have in Chechnya, Northern Uganda and Afghanistan. The issue of maintaining neutrality for aid agencies in contexts which are not politically neutral has been the subject of much debate in the aid sector in the recent years and continues today.

Additionally, poverty is often the overriding context where local officials and relief administration by the authorities can be undermined by corruption, lack of capacity, inexperience and inefficiency. In some cases, the local administration may themselves be rendered ineffective or traumatised by the nature of the disaster. After the Tsunami in Indonesia, and in the Pakistan earthquake, the buildings and resources of the local authorities were destroyed and many of the personnel themselves killed or injured.

When it comes to refugees and internally displaced people living in camps, those responding to emergencies may face difficult ethical issues. In 1994/5, in the case of assisting fleeing Rwandan Hutus in camps in Goma, DRC, responders became aware that in many cases they were assisting those responsible for the

genocide inside Rwanda. The same people were also violently controlling the camps and dictating term and conditions to aid workers. Aid agencies and the UN faced a similar situation fifteen years earlier in the Khmer Rouge-controlled camps along the Thai-Cambodian border following the Vietnam invasion that ousted the Pol Pot regime.

Doing no harm

The call in the aid sector to “do no harm”, first promoted by the writer Mary B. Anderson at the end of the 1990s, has led to deeper reflection that not all aid is good aid. To make the right judgement call, to take considered choices in the heat of a major humanitarian emergency, is a lot to ask for when delays in aid have mortal consequences. Wrong decisions may lead to longer-term problems, and yet the humanitarian imperative remains the focus of the responder.

Translating motivational images on television around the world into aid that assists those in need is not a straightforward matter. Instead, it is fraught with financial, logistical and political problems. In this context, when the Herculean task of successfully delivering emergency assistance to those in need is achieved, and when wide-scale human suffering is averted, those people and agencies involved have indeed pulled off something remarkable, and it may be a more unusual result than most suppose.

Learning from the past – a human rights approach to natural disaster response



The earthquake that hit Bam in Iran in December 2003 devastated vast parts of this old town. Disasters sometime offer opportunities too, however, to rebuild with great services, safety and respect for human rights. Credit: Ramita Navai/IRIN

Following the 26 December 2004 Tsunamis, and the magnitude of the human suffering in no fewer than 12 countries, much thought has been given to the humanitarian

response and what lessons may be drawn from it.

In January 2005, within days of the disaster, 26 members of the UN Commission on Human Rights issued a joint statement calling for an urgent commitment to upholding human rights standards.

The consensus over a year later is that this has not been achieved, despite earlier optimism. Following a mission to Asia in February and March 2005, just two months after the Tsunamis, Walter Kälin, Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, remained hopeful: "There was wide agreement that...a human rights focus had been largely absent in the initial phase of the response to the 26 December Tsunamis," he said, but "now that the immediate emergency phase was over, it was important to include human rights in the next phases".

Under international human rights law, states bear primary responsibility for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of their citizens, including in natural disasters. Human rights obligations extend to both responding adequately to the devastation that natural disasters cause, as well as to the less obvious mitigation of their effects.

Following the December 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran, for example, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights appealed that the tragedy would "drive resolve towards development of safe housing standards worldwide".

At the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005 in Japan, a general communiqué reaffirmed that "states have the primary responsibility to protect the people and property on their territory from hazards, and thus, it is vital to give high priority to disaster risk reduction in national policy, consistent with their capacities and the resources available to them".

International human rights law, therefore, provides a legal and moral basis on which to hold governments accountable. Inadequate consideration for human rights, on the other hand, creates "a man-made

tragedy", exacerbating the suffering of those already weakened by a natural disaster, according to a recent report by Action Aid International, Habitat International Coalition and People's Movement for Human Rights Learning.

This is exactly what is happening in the Tsunami-affected countries, they added: "Governments in the Tsunami-affected countries are ignoring the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and violating binding international human rights law with clear disregard for human dignity."

Opportunities for change

The effects of any disaster, however natural, are profoundly discriminatory in the impact they have on peoples' lives, Oxfam has claimed in several studies of the post-Tsunami response. Wherever natural disasters hit, preexisting inequalities and social structures, including those based on income, sex, and colour or caste, determine that some members of a given community will be more affected than others.



The Tsunami of December 2004 affected 12 countries and killed approximately 250,000 people. Even the coasts of part of Somalia felt the impact of this multicountry undersea earthquake. Hafun village, Somalia. Credit: IRIN

Typically, for example, the poorest in any community will have the weakest housing structures, the most fragile livelihoods, the least access to quality healthcare and services, and the least means of survival and escape.

Following the emergency response to any disaster, the much longer-term reconstruction phase, if based on a human rights framework, can ensure that the poorest and most marginalised are lifted out of poverty. This is what Oxfam calls 'reconstruction plus'.

"The reconstruction effort must reduce vulnerability to future disasters and ensure that households are restored to better living conditions than they experienced before the crisis," the agency has advocated. This involves using the opportunity and the often vast sums of money donated by the international community to address a chronic lack of access to, as well as quality of, basic services.

"The opportunity must be seized to raise those affected out of the poverty that existed before the earthquake," said Oxfam.

Pakistan's post-earthquake emergency phase officially ended on 31 March, making way for rehabilitation and reconstruction. By May 2005, over US \$ 6.4bn dollars had been formally committed to assist earthquake-affected areas for recovery and reconstruction.

The immediate challenge of providing earthquake displaced persons with emergency shelter, food and sanitation for the winter is therefore considered over, but the next phase poses even greater and much longer-term challenges.

Focusing on women and children

The Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons provide a basic framework on government obligations, but are not legally binding. Human rights treaties, in contrast, are technically binding, although enforcement mechanisms are weak and therefore frequently ignored.

Pakistan has not yet ratified either the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, or the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, two of the key guarantors of universal human rights. However, it has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (without having introduced enabling legislation), and acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), albeit with a declaration stating that the accession is subject to provisions in the national constitution.

The constitution itself states that all citizens are equal before the law, are entitled to the protection of the law, and that there shall be no discrimination based on sex. In practice, however, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said that discriminatory laws, combined with harmful customary laws and practices, deny Pakistani women their human rights. This, combined with "pervasive institutional and judicial discrimination" makes it nearly impossible to obtain justice for many women, according to the watchdog. Women and girls are also confronted with "astounding levels of violence".

Despite this reality there are, however, clear and binding international legal obligations with regard to women's and children's rights, not least that enabling legislation should be introduced to implement both treaties.



Typically, for example, the poorest in any community will have the weakest housing structures, the most fragile livelihoods, the least access to quality healthcare and services, and the least means of survival and escape.
Credit: Christopher Horwood/IRIN

CEDAW, for example, binds states to: promote the advancement of women; to guarantee equal access to education, employment, health and credit schemes; to guarantee equal treatment in land reform and resettlement programmes; to guarantee equal access to rural development; and to

guarantee equal access to adequate sanitation, electricity and water for women in rural areas.

Similarly, the CRC guarantees fundamental human rights for children, based around the core principles of non-discrimination, taking children's views into consideration, and the best interests of the child.

The CRC, which monitors adherence to the convention, has specifically requested Pakistan to implement a host of measures by 2007, many of which are particularly pressing following the earthquake. These include: raising the minimum age for marriage to 18; preventing forced marriage of children; establishing a minimum age for employment; ratifying protocols to the CRC on the sale of children as well as child prostitution and pornography; ensuring that primary education is free and compulsory; ensuring that street children are provided with food, shelter and healthcare; improving healthcare in rural areas; legislating on sexual abuse of children; supporting poor families; and prioritising spending on health, education and child development.

A human rights approach to the post-earthquake reconstruction phase could envelop these principles by providing policies, laws and funding to implement them, as well as preventing violations. This would require making policies around the answers to key questions: do widows have access to their husbands' land? Are young girls being forced to marry early to relieve the family of an expense? Are women being given equal pay in cash-for-work schemes? Are parents being supported to care for their children? Are single parents abandoning children to institutions in violation of a child's rights?

Using a human rights framework means recognising that some groups in society experience situations differently to others, and making provision for the difference.

According to HRW, for example, the collapse of traditional societal support mechanisms, male attitudes of disrespect towards women and girls, and the psychological strain on men unable to assume normal cultural, social and economic roles - including boredom and anger at loss of control - can also result in increased violence against women and girls during humanitarian disasters. Females who are on their own - either widowed, unaccompanied, single, or separated in the chaos - are generally considered to be at particular risk.

Assessing and responding to the needs of different groups of people is therefore key: this, in turn, requires listening to their problems and continually asking for their participation.

A place to live

One year after the Tsunamis, Oxfam reported that the provision of shelter was still the biggest challenge: building permanent houses is a slow business, even in wealthy societies.

It took seven years before pre-earthquake social and economic levels had been reached in Kobe in Japan, following an earthquake in 1995 that left 300,000 people homeless, Oxfam said. In Bam, Iran, it took two years before the rebuilding programme even reached "optimum production levels".

Factors that keep people in temporary settlements – in tents in the case of Pakistan – include: uncertainty about livelihoods and the availability of food; the lack of availability of land; lack of legal rights to customary land; the lengthy process of rebuilding; the price of materials and labour; access to livelihoods; and cash-flow problems. “Reconstruction plus” efforts can slow the recovery phase by imposing higher, earthquake-proof standards.



“The opportunity must be seized to raise those affected out of the poverty that existed before the earthquake,” said Oxfam.
Credit: Claire Mc Evoy/IRIN

Post-Tsunami, many NGOs involved in reconstruction reportedly also lacked the necessary skills and expertise. Many governments lacked understanding about their human rights obligations. In some cases, an over-emphasis on permanent housing

left people lacking adequate temporary shelter.

In Pakistan, despite the generous cash compensation given to many families to reconstruct and repair destroyed and damaged homes, and the monitoring system put in place to ensure earthquake-proof construction, there are concerns that standards will slip.

During the earthquake, almost all government buildings collapsed, because they were the worst built, according to one of Oxfam’s partner organisations, Sungi. “They were probably the worst affected of all buildings. We all know this because corruption led to the use of sub-standard materials and techniques,” said a Sungi representative in an Oxfam report. “We really need to be careful that the same corruption isn’t allowed when the reconstruction of public buildings begins,” he added.

Many of those who have received compensation in Pakistan have begun to rebuild, but reportedly without sufficient information and skills to do so in an earthquake-proof manner; without these, the same mistakes may be made again.

Access to land for those whose homes and farm land disappeared in the quake or subsequent mudslides remains a hazy issue.

Post-Tsunami, Oxfam documented the importance of early identification and allocation of alternative land for displaced persons. The lack of government policies on land left only 20 percent of affected Indonesians and Sri Lankans living in permanent new houses a year after the disaster, it reported.

Lessons for the future

A range of post-Tsunami human rights violations have been documented by human rights researchers, which may offer lessons for other disaster zones: governments failed to prevent land grabs following the natural disaster; patchy compensation payments left people destitute; compensation payments exacerbated inequality by excluding some groups; overcrowding in camps left women and children open to abuses; affected families were not consulted on the reconstruction phase; the lack of livelihood support for some groups, including women, exposed them to further exploitation; single women were not always recognised as a household unit; and other groups were discriminated against during relief deliveries and allocations of resources.

Governments’ policies had “reinforced rather than challenged social divisions,” Action Aid said.

Yet lessons learned from past emergencies offer the opportunity “to put things right”, according to Miloon Kothari, UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing. “All actors involved in relief and rehabilitation work must undertake efforts to make sure that the grave mistakes made in post-disaster experiences of the past are not repeated,” he warned recently.

The role of the military in the Pakistan earthquake



In the initial days the Pakistan military were the only force able to deploy men and resources to the affected areas. They airlifted tens of thousands of injured to hospitals and delivered basic supplies to remote villages. The challenge was enormous.
Credit: Kamila Hyat/IRIN

M o h a m e d Naim Omar is a school-teacher in Kanog village in the Mansehra district in northern Pakistan. He recalls the S a t u r d a y morning last year when the quake hit.

"I was on the road on my way to my school when the earth started to shake. There was a vibrating sound followed by big bangs like an explosion. It was like doomsday and I felt like the world was opening up and we would all be buried. Of course I was very, very frightened. Clouds of dust surrounded me and the sky was dark. It was impossible to stand - we were lying on our faces. Mothers were terrified for their children and everyone was looking for ways to save themselves."

'Now I am president of a graveyard'

At 8.52 a.m. on 8 October 2005, an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale - the most devastating to hit the region in a century - destroyed towns and villages in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), leaving more than three million people homeless. "Now I am president of a graveyard," said the president of Muzaffarabad on national television on 9 October 2005.

Balakot, a town of 30,000 people in NWFP was almost entirely destroyed with more than 10,000 dead. "To give you an example of the kind of casualties, there was one school with 350 students killed in it. Another one where 49 children died... it was like a mass grave where people found dismembered hands and feet and unrecognisable faces," recalled Iftikhar Ahmed, a medical student in Balakot, just after the quake.

Later that month the official a death toll was initially reported to be over 73,000 with more than 70,000 injured. By November, that figure had risen to 88,000 deaths and over 100,000 injured, according to some reports. More than 10,000 students and school children, and over 1,500 teachers, were immediately killed with over 12,000 schools or colleges damaged or destroyed. Over half a million homes were destroyed along with many hundreds of kilometres of roads and dozens of bridges.

Commenting on his feeling that morning, Major General Farooq, chief of the Federal Relief Commission (FRC) - charged with the masterminding the relief effort - said, "...it was a very bleak day because there was too much destruction and, hour by hour, during the day, the situation and the scale of the disaster started to become clearer. Suddenly I was put in

charge of the whole relief response; then named the Federal Relief Commission."

The military imperative in Pakistan

The scale of the disaster was massive covering over 30,000 square kilometres in the most rugged mountainous terrain - the Himalayas. Despite warnings in recent years of potential seismic activity, Pakistan was ill prepared for a disaster of this magnitude. Like many countries, particularly developing countries, Pakistan had no mechanism for disaster preparedness and no government department dedicated to handle the disaster relief.

Farooq was candid about Pakistan's deficiencies. "There was no disaster management authority in Pakistan. Even myself I was doing another job working under the prime minister. We didn't have an organisation... if we had an existing organisation I think the response would have been of even a better quality. I am talking in relative terms."

For the military-led government of Pervez Musharraf, who assumed power in October 1999 in a bloodless military coup, the army was the only obvious option to lead and organise the huge response required to meet the needs of the quake's aftermath. Unlike the civil authorities, and particularly the police force, the army of Pakistan widely enjoys a positive reputation for service to the people, for discipline and for honesty.

It is clear that senior staff in the military may have profited illegally during the Afghan wars when billions of dollars and military hardware were being channelled through Pakistan to the mujhadeen; indeed, they may still control certain aspects of contracted services. However, as an army, its relationship with its own people is unusually good. The Pakistani army is also recognised internationally as a professional and well-ordered force, participating as it does in numerous United Nations Peacekeeping missions globally. In recent years it has been operational in UN missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chechnya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia and Haiti.

During the earthquake relief operations they appear to have confirmed this reputation and have been almost universally and repeatedly praised for their work by victims of the quake, international donors, aid officials from the NGOs and the UN, as well as other military contingents working in Pakistan. .

"We are so proud of the army. God made them a medium to help us in our hour of trial. They performed well," said one villager echoing the sentiment often heard from those in the affected areas. "The army were great. They stood by us and even though they are poor like us they helped a lot," said another.

An international staff member of World Vision wrote during the relief effort, "Often I hear of the dismay

from the civil population when rumours spread that the army will pull out in the near future. The people complain of the inevitable corruption, inefficiency, bias in distribution and lawlessness that will result from the government departments who will take over the army's operations."



The scale of the disaster was massive covering over 30,000 square kilometres in the most rugged mountainous terrain - the Himalayas. Despite warnings in recent years of potential seismic activity, Pakistan was ill prepared for a disaster of this magnitude.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

According to Farooq of the FRC, "The only machine that could have enacted this gigantic task was the military and it was working through the FRC; it was not working independently. Even in Katrina [in the US in 2005] the national guard and the regular military were called in to help."

A critical report from the International Crisis Group (ICG) in March 2006, "Pakistan: Political Impact of the Earthquake", claims that the military machine that led the national and international relief work deliberately bypassed and disempowered civil structures and civil administration in the quake-affected areas.

The reality appears to be that the local authorities were too damaged, traumatised and in some cases dead, to provide effective leadership during the aftermath. "Because of the destruction, about 50 to 60 percent of their government was devastated. Government employees dead, or with dead relatives, meant that just after the event the local government was paralysed," explained Rear Admiral LeFever, who commanded the US military contingent in the relief effort. "This meant the Pakistani military stepped into place and rapidly deployed into the affected areas...even though they lost lots of their own soldiers that Saturday morning as well. They reassured the people and were out amongst their own people very early on. Their response was excellent."

Irrespective of the role, or desirability, of the military in Pakistani politics, on 8 October 2005, there was no other force capable of mobilising immediate and wide-scale assistance. For most of those seeking to respond to the disaster - a multifarious collection of national and international agencies, international governments, the general public and the international media - that was all that mattered.

Military - civilian cooperation and action

"The army moved fast...By the evening of 8 October, army helicopters were hovering over every hospital in Islamabad and Rawalpindi... within three or four days 50,000 troops reached their locations. This is no mean achievement by any army of the world," claimed President Prevez Musharraf in December 2006. Musharraf continues to enjoy international praise for his government's response to the earthquake in international fora.

Fifty-thousand troops were deployed into the affected area as the FRC was established, and fast-moving strategies were developed in the first few hours of the disaster. They immediately restored order in affected areas, prevented looting, cleared landslide-affected roads, replaced bridges and re-established communications in the difficult mountainous conditions. While helicopters started to evacuate the thousands of injured, ground troops helped villagers search for those trapped, and began household surveys to establish the extent of the damage and to assess the levels of need. They evacuated over 80,000 people from the affected areas.

Captain Dilawar of the Baloch Regiment told IRIN, "We moved out two hours after the earthquake - the engineers were clearing away the landslides...we are doing surveys and our men are carrying food relief on their own backs.... Even the soldiers are giving money from their salaries. Men on leave came back demanding to be part of the relief."

Saying the relief effort is dominated by the military may be misleading. Farooq stresses that the FRC is a civilian organisation with some serving officers, but most senior managers are civilian. The operational wing of the FRC has direct command and control of military resources. The president gave Farooq unprecedented access to different instruments of the government as well as the army in the relief operations.

"The FRC has two wings," he explained. "One was the military wing which was responsible for the execution of the relief - in other words, the blue collar workers. Then I had the civilian wing full of civil servants who acted as the go-betweens with the line-ministries, the international organisations, the foreign agencies and the NGOs. So they were coordinating at strategic level with these elements. It was the military wing that was executing the relief and rescue activities because the military formations were moved directly to the affected areas."



Fifty-thousand troops were deployed. They immediately restored order in affected areas, prevented looting, cleared landslide-affected roads, replaced bridges and re-established communications in the difficult mountainous conditions.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

One of the main factors cited as the mark of success in Pakistan is the speed and consistency of delivery of essential supplies to such a widely dispersed group of displaced people; and, more importantly, the avoidance of the much-feared second wave of deaths that everyone felt

the Himalayan winter would cause. The Pakistani army immediately opened up the long-closed regions of Kashmir to foreigners and worked closely with other military contingents.

The international NGOs and the plethora of local agencies were not alone in developing partnerships with the Pakistani military as they responded to the quake. In the days and weeks following 8 October,

hundreds of military personnel and resources poured in from a wide variety of countries. The US had an early presence with more than 2,000 people involved in the relief effort, along with dozens of helicopters, field hospitals and thousands of tons of relief supplies and equipment. Assistance from Australia, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, and Afghanistan - in terms of airlift capacity - added to those of the United Nations, NATO and various private helicopters brought in by international NGOs, such as MSF and Oxfam. Nevertheless, of the 140 planes and helicopters used in the airlifting operations, about 45 per cent were Pakistani.

NATO created an air bridge from Turkey and Germany to bring in relief goods, while military personnel from the UK, Luxembourg, France, Portugal, Germany, Slovenia, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, and Holland, worked in Pakistan under the leadership of the Spanish. In total, over 1,000 NATO engineers and supporting staff, as well as 200 medical personnel, worked in Pakistan during the crisis.

Resistance to the military

With the controversy between humanitarians and the military alive and kicking in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with the reputation Pakistan has as a military regime, the international community was uncomfortable about working closely with the Pakistani and international military. Some organisations have clear mandates to keep their operations separate from activities of the military under all circumstances, while others were forced to overcome their apprehensions. "None of the NGOs here were willing to work with the military. But after a week they started coming to us," said Dilawar.



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, Pakistani troops unload supplies from a US Chinook helicopter in one of the worst hit areas. The Pakistani army worked closely with military personnel from dozens of countries during the relief phase.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

Jan Vandemoortele, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan, and head of the UN Development Programme there, felt the same initial resistance. "Of course there was a problem linking with the military... Fortunately most partners in the humanitarian communities also took a

very pragmatic stand saying: 'No, we have not worked with the military before, and we do not normally work with the military, but in this case we will.' And the army were just as much committed emotionally, individually as any of the other relief workers."

Detractors of the military-led regime are unhappy that the ability of the Pakistani military to play a dominant and positive role in the disaster relief work has received an improved international image. Not surprisingly, Musharraf is exploiting this goodwill received over the last eight months - the successful cooperation between international donors, politicians, celebrities, foreign armies, and numerous international NGOs.

For thinktanks like the ICG, the relationships have been too cosy. The ICG believes that the international community needs to wake up to the realities of the non-democratic rule in Pakistan, and the political impact of the earthquake - which they claim will lead to deepening extremism, as well as a more entrenched military regime enjoying international support.

The ICG also criticise the Pakistani military for poor and slow performance in response to the disaster which, they claim in their March report, led to increased deaths. They stand virtually alone in this accusation, against a wide range of observers, aid workers and military who found their response to be prompt and efficient. Combined with the other assisting military contingents, the UN and the many international and national agencies the disaster response in Pakistan represented for many a coming of age in terms of military-civilian cooperation and coordination in a emergency programme.

Coming hard on the heels of the international response to the impact of the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean less than a year earlier, many experts also claimed that lessons learnt from their experience there helped make Pakistan a success.

After the chaos of the early days of the disaster response, and the regularising of the relationships between the military and the hundreds of non-military actors, what was achieved by the joint action is generally regarded as remarkable. Seasoned aid workers and emergency experts have said that considering the scale of the disaster, the potential for disorganisation, and more disaster during the winter months, this response experience will be regarded as probably the best so far.

On the eve of handing over the reins to the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority, the head of the FRC told IRIN, "We have managed it successfully - such a big disaster relief - with the help of all stakeholders... which is not just the army and the government of Pakistan, but also [with the] help of the international agencies."

Abu Diek, the head the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - the UN coordinating body in Pakistan - was surprised by the results of the recent months of joint action and successful relief intervention, "Cooperation between [the] UN and [the] military has been exceptionally unprecedented. The UN has to rewrite its books about civil/military cooperation."

Aid agencies, donors, the UN, and the Pakistan government all recognise that more difficult times lie ahead, as Pakistan tries to deal with the massive task of recovery, and where the relationship between the affected people and their government may be severely stretched. They also recognise that the main success of the relief effort was little more than to provide basic needs to the earthquake-displaced, and save them from more death by disease or cold. The real work of population return, infrastructure recovery

and sustainable growth are the new challenges, not to be faced by the Pakistani military but by the re-established civilian authorities.

Making Peace from Disaster?



Barkat-U-Llah, 45, walked 10 hours from Neelum Valley to Muzaffarabad for help after the 8 October quake. Armed with a shovel, he will now return to retrieve the body of his 3 year old son still buried under the house nearly 3 weeks on. Despite personal tragedies disaster can offer new opportunities for political dialogue.
Credit: David Swanson/IRIN

The massive tremor that struck on 8 October 2005, killing some 90,000 people, paid no heed to the Line of Control (LoC) demarcating Indian- and Pakistani-Administered Kashmir.

Pakistan reportedly did not want Indian pilots flying over her territory, while India insisted on using its own pilots. Meanwhile, it took the Pakistani military up to two and three weeks to reach some of the more remote earthquake-affected areas, according to Dr Samina Ahmed, Project Director with the International Crisis Group (ICG) in South Asia.

"It was an opportunity for both countries to work in a more substantive fashion, that would have benefited them and the Kashmiris, but mutual mistrust came in the way," she said. "It's actually a lost opportunity there."

Improved relations

The potential for humanitarian cooperation on both sides of the border was clear. The quake's catastrophic destruction had provided "a terrible but golden chance" to accelerate and deepen the ongoing normalisation process between the two countries, wrote Muzamil Jaleel, bureau chief of the Indian Express in Srinagar, India, in November 2005.

"The potential to make a shared relief effort the foundation of bilateral cooperation, and ultimately real peace, is evident," he continued. "This opportunity must not be wasted."

Goodwill prevailed in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. On 11 October, one of the militant groups operating in Indian Administered Kashmir (IAK), Hezb-ul-Mujahedeen, called a temporary ceasefire. Thousands of volunteers flocked to affected areas of Kashmir and neighbouring North Western Frontier Province to help.

Within two weeks, India had offered close to 300 tonnes of food, medicine and other materials to Pakistan, allowed Pakistani helicopters to operate in a no-fly zone along the border, and temporarily reestablished cross-border phone links cut nearly 16 years earlier, according to the thinktank, Worldwatch Institute. It had also pledged an additional US \$25m worth of aid.

After some initial hesitation, Pakistan – whose capital Muzaffarabad was beside the epicentre of the quake, and therefore worst affected – accepted the aid, but then rejected an offer of helicopters to assist with relief efforts.

The disaster did change the political spectrum, however. Both governments, which have fought two wars over the status of Kashmir since independence from Britain in 1947, agreed to negotiate the historic opening of five cross-border points across the LoC. Progress was slow, but a month after the quake the first crossing opened on 7 November, with the first civilians crossing 10 days later. Not even the massive bombs that ripped through busy marketplaces in New Delhi, killing 62 people and injuring over 200, just hours before the two sides concluded the agreement on 29 October, managed to derail the agreement.

Both sides exercised uncharacteristic restraint and efforts to maintain good relations, according to US-based independent thinktank and publisher, The Council on Foreign Relations. India refrained from accusing Pakistan directly – which it accuses of backing militant groups operating in IAK, a charge Pakistan has consistently denied – and Pakistan immediately condemned the attacks and promised cooperation on an investigation.

The incident had posed a crucial and difficult challenge to the two countries' relations. But the "calm response to the terror attack defeated the perpetrators' purpose to sow discord and derail the Indian-Pakistani peace process at a crucial juncture," Jaleel said.

In recognition of the danger of a nuclear exchange – after one million soldiers confronted each other in a six-month standoff along the LoC in 2001 – and under pressure from the international community, the two states have been engaging in a series of talks since 2003. The high-level "Composite Dialogue" has

encompassed wide-ranging issues including peace and security; terrorism and drug trafficking; economic and commercial cooperation; the promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields; and peace talks over Kashmir since February 2004.

The revived Joint Commission, dormant for 17 years, focuses on cooperation in areas such as science and technology, health, agriculture, tourism, education and the environment.

Significant confidence-building measures, achieved since 2003, include: the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries; the adoption of a ceasefire along the LoC since November 2003; an agreement to notify each other of ballistic missile tests; and one of the first tangible signs of a thaw in relations, the inauguration of a bus service across the LoC since February 2005. The symbolism of the bus service, allowing separated families to reunite, has resonated across the two communities.



Civilians caught in the quake cross the Line of Control between Pakistan and India in the disputed region of Kashmir.
Credit: Ramita Navai/IRIN

The earthquake occurred in the midst of these improving relations. Observers on both sides of the divide, as well as international conflict analysts, unanimously appealed to both governments to use the resulting goodwill to achieve a breakthrough

on Kashmir.

Various ideas have since been put forward as to how this might best be achieved.

Goodwill and confidence-building in the aftermath of disasters can be a powerful catalyst for transforming conflict dynamics, according to Michael Renner, Director of the Global Security Project at the Worldwatch Institute, and researcher on the nexus between natural disasters and peacemaking.

But in order to achieve this, tangible steps would have to be taken to address root causes of the conflict and demilitarise Kashmir.

Making progress would also mean addressing the "vested interests" of those who are against the peace process, who either benefit from its continuation or who are ideologically opposed to its resolution, he says. These include military personnel who fear that conflict resolution might lead to cuts in budgets and diminish their influence over society, militant groups who fear having less influence in peacetime, and even arms industries and dealers who would see sales decline.

Even allowing for inflation, India and Pakistan's military spending escalated by over 50 percent from US \$12.1bn to US \$18.7bn between 1995 and 2004, according to the Worldwatch Institute.

Harnessing humanitarianism and goodwill for peace

Despite the failure to overcome deep mistrust of one another in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, six months later the potential for cross-border cooperation based around reconstruction efforts, as well as environmental and scientific cooperation in the quake zone, remains, say observers.

While the study of peace initiatives emerging from natural disaster and environmental cooperation is relatively new, precedents have already been set. After decades of conflict between Peru and Ecuador, both countries ceased hostilities in 1998 in an agreement facilitated by Brazil, Argentina, Chile and the US. The two governments agreed to establish a conservation zone along their shared border - the Cordillera del Condor or "peace park" - which is managed by national agencies, but headed by a bi-national committee. The agreement "used the interdependence of the two countries' ecosystems to remove a thorny obstacle to peace," Worldwatch reported.

Environmental peacemaking involves using cooperative efforts to manage joint resources "as a way to transform insecurities and create more peaceful relations between parties in dispute," according to the Institute. By their very nature, environmental problems demand a long-term view and planning, thus lending themselves to influencing politics long-term.

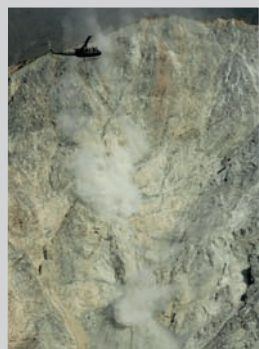
Mistrust, wariness and narrow political interests can, therefore, be shifted into a shared knowledge base, and common goals and aspirations. Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank, for example, manage to cooperate informally to manage aspects of their shared water resources.

The Indonesian province of Aceh - where 170,000 people died in the 26 December 2004 Tsunami - is the most conspicuous example of goodwill being harnessed after an environmental disaster. Following the utter devastation of the area and the arrival of the international community to provide relief, a variety of factors combined to produce an August 2005 peace agreement to end a 30-year conflict between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement. This involved the latter giving up aspirations of independence for a compromise agreement on meaningful self-government.

"The humanitarian presence and opened access to international observers to Aceh was successfully leveraged to promote the peace process," said Alder Kovaric, an aid worker who witnessed the change in Aceh. "I have no doubt that Aceh would have stayed closed, possibly for years, if the disaster of the tsunami was not successfully leveraged," she added.

Although efforts to rejuvenate a 2002 Cessation of Hostilities agreement had already begun before the waves struck, "the December 2004 Tsunami brought Aceh into the international spotlight, made it politically desirable for both sides to work toward a

settlement, offered ways of linking the reconstruction effort and peace process, and ensured the availability of major donor funding outside the government budget," ICG reported.



Muzaffarabad. A Pakistani helicopter flies past a cliff wall as landslides cascade down the cliff walls. After some initial hesitation, Pakistan accepted the aid offered by its bitter enemy, India, but then rejected an offer of helicopters to assist with relief efforts. Pakistan reportedly did not want Indian pilots flying over her territory.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

While the process still faces tough challenges, it remains firmly on track: "One of the strongest reasons to believe [it] will work is because it can be tied to the reconstruction effort, not in the sense of politicising the latter...but in the sense of working together to build a new Aceh, physically, economically and politically," ICG reported in March 2005.

The potential for parallels with Kashmir are striking. But in order for Kashmir

to reap any tangible peace dividends from its tragedy, bold steps need to be taken by both sides.

This could begin with fully implementing existing confidence-building measures. While recent progress, such as the introduction of the bus service between both sides of the Kashmiri divide has been a major breakthrough, it has not been implemented as fully as it should have been. Services are intermittent, procedures cumbersome, and it can take months to get a clearance.

According to Ahmed, expectations have been raised and then dashed. "When these agreements are not implemented the way they should be then it creates resentment and it could play into the hands of spoilers," she warned. Existing agreements must be implemented in both "spirit and form".

While any dialogue between India and Pakistan is considered better than no dialogue, bilateral talks have reportedly skirted around substantive issues, add observers. A high-level government official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, noted that that no progress at all had been made on the status of Kashmir.

Role for international community

In order to change the current entrenched positions, dialogue is deemed essential between all involved parties, according to ICG. Alongside high-level government talks, therefore, respective talks between federal and state authorities in both countries, within the two countries as a whole, and between Kashmiris across the LoC, must also be encouraged and supported. Ordinary Kashmiris, after all, have most to gain from peace.

Building up civil society is a key means of achieving

this, according to conflict analysts. "To build strong constituencies for cross-border dialogue and peace, civil society contacts must also blossom," claimed Renner.

The international community has a key role to play. Currently in PAK, militant groups "are playing a major role in feeding, housing and clothing survivors and providing medical care. The danger is that this will provide them with additional sources of legitimacy and recruitment," Renner wrote.

By accepting a major role for banned militant groups in humanitarian relief efforts, the Pakistani government's policies are helping "Islamist radicals" to bolster their presence in the earthquake-affected areas, according to the ICG.

Reacting to the criticism, President Musharraf has been quoted as saying: "If we see any single activity of their involvement in anything other than welfare, we are not only going to ban them but we are going to get them out."

But effective monitoring of the myriad of "charitable" groups' activities is inherently difficult. Meanwhile, the fear is that the increased and more visible presence of militant outfits - including groups associated with terrorism, both international and within Kashmir - risks entrenching their ideologies.

"We are not talking about some unknowns. They are listed terrorist groups. Let's make a distinction here between terrorism and humanitarianism," said Ahmed.

The international community should counter these influences by actively supporting secular civil society groups, said conflict analysts.

However, as long as India and Pakistan continue to talk, and even if no substantive progress has been made on Kashmir, there is always room for hope. "As long as they talk, as long as the ceasefire holds, there is hope that a stable environment will lead to a relationship in which they can deal with more contentious issues," Ahmed said.

Huge gaps remained in the respective positions of India and Pakistan on Kashmir; a large amount of mistrust, as well as differences in approaches, she added. But, "...so long as there is a dialogue process, that is a healthy sign."

A chronology of response to the South Asian Earthquake



Devastated buildings in the Battagram/Battal area, close to the epicentre of the regional earthquake that was felt as far as Delhi in India and Kabul in Afghanistan. By the final count some weeks later, an estimated 88,000 people fell victim to the quake.
Credit: Kamila Hyat/IRIN

On Saturday, 8 October 2005, at 08:52 local time (03:52 GMT), a massive earthquake struck close to Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-administered Kashmir,

sending shockwaves across an area of 30,000 square kilometres. According to Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shaukat Aziz, "What was built in decades and generations was lost in seconds."

The quake initially caused 73,000 deaths and injured another 70,000 people, leaving an estimated 3.3 million people homeless, and causing such devastation that it may take a decade to repair. By November, the official death toll rose to some 88,000 deaths and over 100,000 injured, according to some sources.

Saturday is a normal school day in the region, and most students and schoolchildren were in their classrooms when the earthquake struck. Thousands were buried under collapsed school buildings. Many were also trapped in their homes, and because the disaster occurred during the holy month of Ramadan, many adults were taking the short sleep traditionally taken after their predawn meal and did not have time to escape during the earthquake – they died in their beds. According to official reports, entire towns and villages were completely wiped out in Northern Pakistan; with surrounding areas suffering widespread damage.

A humanitarian operation on a massive scale was required to respond to the needs of some three and a half million affected people. Aid such as shelter, medical, food and other basic assistance was needed immediately. It soon became of critical importance that those staying at higher altitudes receive this relief aid before the onset of the Himalayan winter, which would have made relief operations in an already remote and hardly accessible region, difficult, if not impossible.

Swift response to disaster

The size and nature of the affected region, an area of 30,000 square kilometres in the foothills of the Himalayas, presented great difficulties for aid-delivery operations. The majority of this area is mountainous, with steep ravines, posing a particular challenge for suitable site selection of camps for displaced people, landing areas for helicopters and key delivery infrastructure. In addition, many of the roads were blocked or damaged by the initial earthquake and subsequent aftershocks and landslides.

The government of Pakistan and its military immediately mobilised its own available resources for the earthquake response of what has been, according to officials, Pakistan's biggest natural disaster.

By the evening of 8 October, Pakistani army helicopters had mobilised rescue missions throughout the earthquake-affected region, transporting the wounded from the remotest mountainous area of the country, to the closest available hospitals that had survived the massive shocks of the earthquake, as many of the clinics and hospitals had been destroyed. Due to the number of villages affected and their remoteness, some villages did not see any relief helicopters or rescue teams for two or three days, others had to wait longer.



Muzaffarabad Region, Pakistan. Two figures stand and watch a landslide thunder down the opposite valley wall as a series of after shocks, over 500 during the next 6 months, rocked the region. Few areas of the world are more inaccessible than the quake zone.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

The following day the army reopened access on one of the roads leading to Muzaffarabad. Within three days, 50,000 Pakistani troops reached the affected region where they continued rescue missions, set up field hospitals and organised relief by way of blankets, shelter

materials and food.

According to local journalist, Ahmed Rashid, Pakistanis have "astounded themselves" with their own generosity since the natural disaster shook their country. In a BBC article, Rashid described how ordinary people rushed to help the victims of the earthquake, delivering goods to Kashmir and raising funds.

Within hours of the quake, doctors flew from Karachi and Lahore to set up medical camps in the worst hit areas, as many of the local hospitals collapsed during the earthquake, or following the numerous shockwaves that continue to make the area unstable even to this present day. Ordinary Pakistanis throughout the country set up collection points for contributions and sent supplies and people to assist with the emergency, in an outpouring of solidarity and concern the country had never previously witnessed. The prime minister later described the deluge of assistance as, "unparalleled levels of generosity that galvanised the whole nation with an esprit de corps that we had not seen since independence."

People working in cities with relatives in the affected areas immediately returned to their home villages and began searching for survivors, administering first aid as best they could. Indeed, the approach roads to the affected areas were completely blocked in the early days by voluntary assistance and landslides, hampering relief work. The government later admitted that this was a serious problem but that they chose to allow ordinary Pakistanis to show their concern in this

way rather than ban road movement to the areas.

Political tension set aside

Long-standing and bitter political tensions between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region became second priority for both sides, as the Indian government offered early assistance in the quake-stricken area. On 12 October, an Ilyushin-76 cargo plane from New Delhi, India, ferried across seven truckloads (about 82 MT of army medicines, 15,000 blankets and 50 tents.

On 14 October, India dispatched the second consignment of relief material to Pakistan by train through the Wagah-Attari border in Punjab. According to an article in the Indo-Asian News Service published in New Delhi, the four-wagon train carried 80 MT of relief material for the quake-hit victims. The materials included 5,000 blankets, 370 tents, five MT of plastic sheets and 12 MT of medicines.

Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh appealed to the nation five days after the earthquake, "People across the Indian subcontinent have felt the pain and anguish of those who lost their loved ones and livelihoods in the earthquake that ravaged Jammu and Kashmir, on both sides of the Line of Control, and parts of Pakistan." He added, "I am sure Indian civil society will step forward and contribute to the relief and rehabilitation effort. I appeal to every concerned citizen of our republic to donate generously to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund to help us help those in need."

International response



Members of the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team (UNDAC) were in Pakistan within 30 hours of the quake. Andrew MacLeod (see interviews) led the UN OCHA team for the first two months.
Credit: Andrew MacLeod

International response was swift, with many countries, international organisations and NGOs offering relief aid in the form of monetary donations and pledges, as well as in relief supplies including food, medical equipment, tents and blankets.

This article cannot do justice to the overall effort, but highlights some of the efforts by individual nations and agencies and thereby give the reader a sense of the scale and speed of the international commitment to the disaster from early October 2005.

Saudi Arabia

Just days after the natural disaster, for example, the Saudi King, Abdullah, announced an emergency aid package worth US \$133m for infrastructure projects in Pakistan; making it one of the largest single donations by any country for the Kashmir earthquake.

On 9 October, King Abdullah ordered the "rapid" establishment of an airlift of doctors, medicines, tents, covers and food to Pakistan. In addition, the Saudi people made a substantial contribution in persuading the Saudi government to generously help the victims of the earthquake.

Britain

Twelve countries from the European Union have all continued to support Pakistan in the last eight months in their efforts to assist the earthquake victims.

Dr Yusuf Samiullah is the head of Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) in Pakistan, and Development Counsellor to the British High Commission there. In April 2006, he explained DFID's funding strategy and priorities in earthquake affected areas in Pakistan.



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, British fire-fighters with a search and rescue crew at the scene of a collapsed university. The team from West Midlands has been at the center of coordinating search and rescue efforts along with medical evacuation.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

"DFID has pledged a UK contribution of £70m (over US \$130m) over three years for the reconstruction and rehabilitation effort. This is in addition to the £54m (over US \$100m) which has already been spent on relief efforts."

In the immediate response to the earthquake, DFID sent out the first search and rescue teams to the region and worked with more than 30 organisations on the ground, providing relief supplies and support over the following months to cope with the aftermath of the disaster.

"The impact of the Asia earthquake was devastating, not only to the families and homes destroyed, but also to the global community who came to the rescue...Within hours of hearing the news, DFID's response team scrambled the first international search and rescue teams to the region, arranged for medical support to be flown in, and emptied the UK's stores of blankets, and tents in the race to prevent further loss of life," Hilary Benn, the UK Secretary of State for International Development, announced in a press release in April 2006.

Meanwhile, local NGOs in Britain were pursuing immediate aid funds to be sent to Pakistan. The Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC), a UK-based organisation that unites the leading independent humanitarian aid agencies in their efforts to maximise income to create an effective humanitarian response, had received by 12 October 2005, US \$3.5m from the British public. This amount was reached in the first 24 hours of the DEC Asia Quake Appeal.

NATO officially ended its earthquake relief operation at the start of February 2006, which represented its first large disaster mission involving ground troops outside an alliance country. They limited their opera-

tion to 90 days but it had involved over 1,000 staff including medics and aircrews and five helicopters. The mission had also included the vital air bridge from Germany and Turkey that delivered aid from the European Union, the UN, overseas Pakistanis.

Although NATO officially withdrew from the situation in early February, after the end of the winter, and when discussion of longer-term recovery started in earnest, many individual alliance members such as Britain and France, stayed on and continued their assistance.

France

France's aid to Pakistan had already reached €10.5m by November 2005. In addition to these bilateral donations, France contributed to EU multilateral support through governmental programmes, various NGOs and private companies mobilised in France and in the stricken region since the first day of the quake.

According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during Saturday 8 October - the day the earthquake struck - and the following day, the French authorities rushed 25 civil security personnel, 20 rescuers accompanied by dogs, and specialised search and rescue material. In addition, five people were assigned to assist the French Embassy in Islamabad in assessing immediate needs.

The following Monday, France had sent an Airbus with 41 of France's emergency medical agency (SAMU) personnel, as well as 18 military doctors with relief material. Two C135 FR planes with surgical and medical equipment, including a field hospital, left on the night of 10 October from Paris.

"Given the very difficult situation in the local area, France in continuing its efforts to assist the earthquake victims in Pakistan. Emergency food aid for the stricken population amounting to €2m has been released. The aid will be donated through the UN World Food Program. This new contribution brings total French aid to Pakistan so far to €10.5m. In addition to this, there is France's contribution to EU programmes and the generous contributions to various NGOs and private companies mobilised in France and in the stricken region since the first day of the quake," according to a statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 4 November 2005.

European Union

Apart from the donations from individual member states of the European Union (EU) and the work of NATO, the European Commission itself was at the forefront of the international response. On the day of the disaster, the Commission contributed €3.6m for emergency aid while EU experts were dispatched to the field to make emergency assessments. This started a programme of rolling funding by the EU that, by the end of December, reached €48.6m.

United States

Initially the United States offered US \$100,000 in aid. This was the same amount of aid Afghanistan sent to the US after hurricane Katrina hit the southeast of the American continent. However, within weeks, the US aid for rescue and reconstruction was increased to US \$50m.

As of 3 November 2005, the US department of defense (DOD) had 933 personnel providing relief and reconstruction assistance in the Kashmir hit area. Five CH-47 Chinook and three UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters had been moved into Pakistan immediately after the earthquake. In addition, a C-17 Globemaster 3 military aircraft was assigned to bring blankets, tents and other relief supplies to the victims.

On 25 October, the US army established the 212th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) in Muzaffarabad. The MASH currently has 36 Intensive Care Unit beds, 60 intermediate minimal care beds, and two operating rooms.

According to Andrew Natsios, then Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the organisation has provided more than US \$41.8m for relief work in Pakistan, including nine complete airlifts of supplies.

"In addition to the monetary and material support provided by USAID, the US military is also playing a pivotal role in the relief effort. American military helicopters have completed 390 helicopter missions, delivering 886 tons of humanitarian aid and evacuated 4,511 injured people," Natsios told reporters.

By the time the US relief mission to assist the victims of the earthquake officially came to an end at the end of March 2006, their helicopters had made more than 5,000 sorties delivering more than 14,000 MT of relief supplies, and they had transported over 19,000 people including victims, aid staff and military personnel.

Ground assessments and coordination

In Europe, people awoke to the news of the violent quake that had repercussions not only in Pakistan, but which was felt deep into Afghanistan and India. In Geneva, a core team of emergency staff at the UN met within hours of the quake, and the same night were aboard a designated aircraft from the Swiss government en route to Islamabad.

Within two days of the earthquake, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) organised an immediate Flash Appeal of close to US \$312m for action up to six months. As access to the affected areas increased, and the scale of the disaster became more apparent, it was necessary to review and update the appeal. OCHA developed a strong presence on the ground taking control of the coordination of relief, flights and the development of the cluster meetings where sectoral experts would

meet on a regular basis throughout the relief period.

On 26 October 2005, the Earthquake Relief Cell (ERC), together with the government of Pakistan, gave priority to their needs at the High Level Ministerial Meeting in Geneva, presided over by the UN's Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland. Advocating strongly for donor support for the humanitarian response effort, the subsequent financial revisions raised the final Flash Appeal to US \$550m.



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, A Spanish K-9 search team combs through a school when the dog signals a hit. Digging revealed 10 children dead where they had huddled for shelter, the concrete building pan caking in on them.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

The Joint United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and OCHA's Environment Unit, is the United Nations mechanism to mobilise and coordinate the international response to environmental emergencies, including natural disasters with major environmental

impacts.

Hours after the earthquake struck, OCHA had mobilised an eight-member United Nations Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team to assess and coordinate work, in response to a request made by the government of Pakistan. The team arrived in the capital, Islamabad, on the morning of 9 October 2005.

UNDAC's task was to conduct a rapid environmental assessment (REA) to assess any threatening environmental issues in the disaster area. The REA identified various precarious environmental issues, including waste management and continued instability of the ground.

In response, UNEP/OCHA's Joint Environmental Unit deployed four experts to Pakistan to provide practical advice, solutions and technical support. REA information and findings regarding the disaster area were disseminated to national and international partners as they became available during the earthquake response.

The Pakistan military deployed over 50,000 troops in the affected areas, international NGOs poured into the country with staff and supplies, and international agencies already on the ground stepped up their work. International television and radio coverage of the disaster, along with rapidly expedited fundraising campaigns in different European countries, resulted in widespread awareness of the earthquake, backed eventually with serious funding. Initially operators feared a funding shortfall and at different points in the early days appeals efforts had to be redoubled.

The early weeks of the emergency were characterised by search and rescue missions; the setting up of an air bridge, where tens of helicopters continually delivered aid to devastated communities while returning

with injured, initially, and then later displaced people who could no longer stay in the higher areas; the setting-up of military and non-military field hospitals and health units; and the setting-up of hundreds of small encampments of organised and spontaneous displaced people. Over 200,000 displaced people in these camps needed to be fed and watered, provided with cooking equipment, bedding, sanitation, medical assistance, schooling for the children, and in some cases psychological support for the massive communal trauma.

Hardships in aid delivery

After three weeks of international aid agencies rushing to muster resources and equipment, and setting up assistance programmes in Pakistan, on 28 October 2005, OCHA estimated that an average of 30 percent of the affected villages, which had been hit by the earthquake, had still not received any assistance, as roads leading to remote villages were still blocked. OCHA added that the situation was of "grave concern" as around 200,000 people had not yet received any aid.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), three weeks after the earthquake, some 500,000 people had still received no aid at all. This was mainly due to the continued landslides, decimated infrastructure and extreme challenges caused by the unforgiving mountainous terrain.



UN emergency relief chief, Jan Egeland told reporters when visiting Pakistan in October 2005, that the situation in the earthquake-hit region of south Asia was a "logistical nightmare".
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

UN emergency relief chief, Jan Egeland told reporters that the situation in the earthquake-hit region of south Asia was a "logistical nightmare". Adding that the aid sent ten days after the disaster was not enough. "We have never had this kind of logistical nightmare, ever. We thought the Tsunami was the worst we could get. This is worse."

OCHA stressed the crucial importance of member states to understand the gravity of the situation, as more money was needed for the quake victims. Not least because winter was fast approaching; and with 3.5 million people affected by the earthquake, the concern for shelter, fuel and food for the winter months was paramount.

More aid needed

At first, the aid organisations feared that, unlike the response to the Tsunami, the response to the South Asian Earthquake would be inadequate. Although there were times in October and November when people feared this would be the case and publicly begged for more aid, it appeared that the essen-

tial needs were met and further deaths that were expected over the winter were averted.

On 9 October 2005, Ann Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), made an urgent appeal for more funding to support the relief work in Pakistan; expressing concerns about the high risks still facing thousands of children across the remote region.

"This appeal means immediate action to save children's lives," said Veneman. "Needed assistance includes medical care, clean water, nutritional food for infants, clothing, and shelter - the things that matter most in the critical few weeks after a disaster like this when children and their families have lost everything."

According to UNICEF, almost one in every five people in the earthquake zone, is a child under age of five, and nearly half are younger than 18. Making the situation worse, a quarter of the population, live under the poverty line.

"Beyond immediate relief, our focus is to get children back to school as soon as possible. We are all shocked by the news that children were killed as they sat at their desks. But very quickly it will be time to get those who survived back to their classrooms. School provides the very structure and rhythm that they've lost, a touchstone that will help overcome shock and trauma," said Veneman. Over 8,000 schools and colleges were destroyed by the quake, while a further four thousand were damaged.

According to senior aid officials in the first weeks of the emergency appeals there was a serious concern that donors would not give adequate funding to meet the needs. Egeland made an impassioned request on international television for more aid and pulling no punches in his criticism of donors' reluctance to fully fund the emergency response.

Logistical tasks

On 10 October 2005, Pakistani authorities approached the NATO, with a request for assistance regarding relief operations in the disaster region. NATO agreed to the request the following day, 11 October. Later the same day, their operations plan was agreed.

According to the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), the first stage of their operations plan focused on the air bridge. "The first element was the air bridge, which NATO started within two days of being asked for assistance by the government of Pakistan. And through this bridge flowed some 300,000 tons of aid in over 100 sorties...170 sorties throughout the mission. In addition to that, we deployed engineers. We deployed medical capabilities, a field hospital, and we deployed helicopters and crews. And together that package provided disaster relief to the surviving population from the earthquake over the 90 day period of the mission," said Andrew

Walton, Commander of NATO's Disaster Relief team in Pakistan, in an interview in February 2005.

Forty-two Euro-Atlantic Partnership (EAPC) nations provided assistance to the Pakistan earthquake, through the EU Community Civic Protection Mechanism or through EADRCC.

NGOs

Hundreds of NGOs mobilised to assist the earthquake victims in Pakistan. Many were international, but there were also tens of local Moslem agencies offering support. Agencies that may have been focused on long term development projects with a handful of staff were suddenly galvanised into fast-moving relief agencies as supplementary support staff and equipment were rushed in from outside.

The Red Cross movement, incorporating the Federation and the International Committee (ICRC) were active, mobilising support in terms of funding, supplies and personnel from its unique network of national offices around the world. Apart from delivering shelter and food to thousands of remote villagers through the winter, the ICRC established two large field hospitals, which for months served the injured of the earthquake. Smaller agencies such as Merlin, the UK-based medical NGO, set up five clinics in remote villages, while over 2,300 Cuban doctors and nurses made a significant and remarkable contribution with 32 field clinics that served over 60 percent of all injured and sick in the earthquake zone.

Oxfam, a UK-based NGO was operational within three days of the earthquake disaster in Pakistan. By Thursday 13 October, a plane with Oxfam shelter equipment, blankets and 16 tonnes of water and sanitation equipment left the UK. By that time, an Oxfam helicopter from Islamabad had begun lifting aid material to remote areas of the affected region, and was supporting other organisations by transporting medical equipment and taking the injured to nearby hospitals.

On 10 October 2005, Doctors Without Borders/ Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), was operational in the disaster area, conducting assessments and making emergency distributions of blankets, water and food items. In the following days, MSF focused on getting a response capacity to help the numerous victims of the earthquake, while recognising that the long-term problems facing those hit by the quakes were formidable.

"You could have half a dozen orthopedic surgeons working their entire careers in the Manshera district to care for the long-term problems related to earthquake injuries," said Courtland Lewis, an orthopedic surgeon who spent three weeks in Manshera, Pakistan, where he worked in the MSF field hospital.

During the emergency response, ActionAid, a UK-based NGO, supplied vulnerable communities with more than 3,000 shelters and 10,000 blankets, and

treated 16,000 people in specialised medical camps.

However, six weeks after the earthquake struck aid agencies were deeply concerned that the world had failed to react quickly enough to send appropriate help to Pakistan. About 5,000 people died in the immediate aftermath of the quake. As the harsh Himalayan winter closed in, one UN official warned that up to 380,000 in the disaster area still needed emergency housing.

After the emergency response

The response of the international community after the Pakistan earthquake was prompt and impressive, with more than 79 countries providing essential support in the form of helicopters, tents, and blankets, as well as field hospitals and medical equipment. In addition, national and international NGOs have provided a great amount of needed relief. However, eight months on, the task of restoring a sense of normality and stability in the affected region is still far from over.

Although some of the rubble has now been cleared, survivors are still living in tents and shelters that are shaken sometimes daily by aftershocks from the quake. At least 500 aftershocks have been recording since October 2005, many of which cause new landslides or loosen rocks and earth ready for the next shock.

According to ActionAid, now that the relief operation is over, there is the harder task of rebuilding lives and helping to heal the physiological impact of the disaster.

"The challenge is now to help survivors rebuild their houses, livelihoods and communities. It is important that we do not underestimate the size of the task," said ActionAid Head of Emergencies, Roger Yates.



The slow, slow road to recovery. An elderly man retrieves old bricks by chipping the cement off bricks found in the rubble from the devastation in Balakot, NWFP.
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

In a BBC article published on 8 April 2006, aid agency Oxfam said that quake survivors "still need aid", as more support was needed to help rehabilitate huge numbers of displaced people to their former homes as official camps are closed down.

"More support is now needed as thousands of displaced people are being moved from official camps to their home

area, while authorities begin to implement plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction," Oxfam said.

After the initial enthusiasm and optimism following the widely praised relief effort, people are more sober concerning recovery. The TV crews and reporters have left, the international missions have reduced their number or left, military contingents and emergency NGOs have wound up and pulled out leaving a few development organisations and the Pakistan civil administration the task of rebuilding what was destroyed in seconds. For many the challenge has only just started.

A humanitarian dilemma: Civil-Military adventures



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan A US Army Blackhawk crew chief oversees the unloading of supplies. The US intervention in Pakistan, following the earthquake in 2005, was their longest and largest overseas humanitarian effort.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

The provision of aid by military forces is by no means a new phenomenon, although the controversy between humanitarian actors and the military is. According to a March 2006 report by the Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute, "The relationship between humanitarian and military actors has changed considerably in the past decade. Military functions have expanded beyond tra-

ditional war-fighting to encompass a range of tasks related to humanitarian goals, including support for humanitarian and rehabilitation efforts and the protection of civilians."

Particularly with the end of the Cold War, numerous western governments have become more involved in the provision of humanitarian aid, not only through the funding of UN Agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) but also with the tasking of the armed forces with a greater responsibility for peacekeeping or humanitarian operations. Non-western governments, too, have been closely involved with UN peacekeeping and peace-enforcing missions globally.

When disasters strike, either natural or man-made, governments often turn to the military for help as the military have certain resources immediately to hand, such as food, medicine and fuel, as well as transport and human assets with which to distribute them. These governments are often also funding the UN and private aid organisation at the same time and in the same location, creating for some, unavoidable and unacceptable contradictions. These contradictions are particularly acute in conflict situations where the same military forces are on military mission while involved in aid work.



Turkish soldiers assist with immediate relief in Turkey after the May 2003 earthquake in Bingol. When disasters strike, either natural or man-made, governments often turn to the military for help as the military have certain resources immediately to hand.
Credit: IRIN

Much as been written about the inherent differences between the military and humanitarian organisations and the resulting barriers to effective interaction.

According to Eric James in "The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance" of November 2003, "The humanitarian organisations are more or less horizontal while the military is largely vertical in structure. Humanitarian operations tend to be assembled on an as-needed basis, whereas the military prides itself on planning and preparation.

Humanitarian organisations strive for transparency and accountability while the military seeks a positive public image but must control information to ensure its operational security. Most fundamentally, the mandates differ so vastly between humanitarians and the military that interaction, let alone cooperation, makes them strange allies (when it occurs) in a conflict."

Independence of action and identity is a critical principle for humanitarians to maintain. This fact is widely known and enshrined in international law, but not completely understood or implemented, becoming instead a contentious issue.

Blurring of missions

The conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq serve as illustrations of where the debate has been most heated and where the polarities between the military mission and those delivering aid have been laid bare. For many NGOs the blurring of the provision of aid and military strategies is cynical and not accidental. In Afghanistan, for example, Provincial Reconstruction Teams consist of international service personnel deployed all over the country and involved in school- and clinic-building and other social projects. They are not uniformed but armed and, when required, revert to being soldiers on offensive military missions - sometimes in the same regions where they conduct their aid work.



In 2004 after extensive flooding in Tajikistan soldiers were used to repair the damage. Disciplined and immediately available military forces are the obvious choice for governments responding to natural disasters.
Credit: UNDP Tajikistan

"The deliberate linking of humanitarian aid with military objectives destroys the meaning of humanitarianism," said Nelke Manders, head of Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in Afghanistan in May 2004. "It will result, in the end, in the neediest Afghans not getting badly needed aid and those providing

aid being targeted."

His argument proved correct as just one month later in June, three international staff working for MSF were gunned down leading to the departure of MSF from Afghanistan after 24 years of work. For them, and others, the confusion of roles and missions between the military and the humanitarians was intolerable and undermined the *raison d'être* and mandate of NGOs.

Also in Afghanistan, hundreds of humanitarians united to forward specific recommendations, through their main coordination body, to the coalition forces. While they reaffirmed the military's role in activities, such as arms collection and demobilisation projects, they insisted that soldiers keep out of aid work. "The military should not engage in assistance work except in those rare circumstances where emergency needs

exist and civilian assistance workers are unable to meet those needs due to lack of logistical capacity or levels of insecurity on the ground. ... All such work should fall under civilian leadership." For a variety of reasons, including a lack of donor and political will, these recommendations have not taken effect and coalition forces continue to mix aid work with military missions. Aid workers continue to be targeted by enemies of the present foreign military forces, and enemies of the new government in the country.



An Afghan child watches US forces opposite from the local Provincial Reconstruction Team base in Gardez, Afghanistan. Little wonder there is confusion between military and humanitarian operations.
Credit: IRIN

In Iraq, the tensions between the humanitarian community and the military are strong with most of the western humanitarians increasingly uncomfortable with their own governments' role in the war being pursued there. At the same time, their unavoidable association with the occupying

forces and the increased violence of the emerging civil war in Iraq makes their operations extremely hazardous. Three years ago, from 2003, NGOs rebelled against US-led structures and organisations designed to coordinate and control their work there by refusing to join them. British, US, Kuwaiti and military personnel staffed the Humanitarian Operations Centre based in Kuwait, which not only bypassed the expertise and experience held by senior UN and aid agencies staff, but also directly associated aid workers with the coalition forces in the country. In order to ensure impartiality and independence, a group of major international NGOs insisted on UN coordination instead.

When the British forces were assaulting Basra in southern Iraq, humanitarian agencies took exception to the use of the name of the contingent seeking to secure the city. Many civilians were killed in the battle for Basra by the British Humanitarian Task Force, which some feel was named in a cynical attempt to give the political and military invasion of Iraq a wider moral justification. In an article in "The Lancet" magazine in 2003, Martyn Broughton of MSF-UK wrote, "a simple solution would be to call the military relief operation just that. The media should stop using the word 'humanitarian' when it is both wrong and unnecessary."

The 'new aid paradigm'?

According to Mark Duffield, an aid analyst writing in the 1990s, a "new aid paradigm" has developed in permanent emergencies where aid may be used by donor countries in lieu of political action, and where NGOs are simply contractors for government interests. Humanitarian crises such as those in Kosovo, the former Yugoslavia, East Timor and Rwanda are examples of situations where the military and humanitarian agencies are thrown together in the same context, funded from similar sources, and serving the same overall aim of their funders. The realisation of this fact

has become a dilemma for many agencies, but one that does not affect the military who are themselves state actors and, perhaps more importantly, understand themselves to be such.



UN HQ at the Canal Hotel (Baghdad) following the 19 August 2003 bomb were senior UN and humanitarian staff were targeted by insurgents opposed to the invasion of Iraq by Coalition forces. The end of perceived neutrality for humanitarians may be part of the 'new aid paradigm'.
Credit: UN

In Iraq, the debate about the justness of the war further muddled the water as many humanitarians continue to take a strong stance against military intervention, as they did during the years of the UN sanctions that preceded it.

The reality is that in most humanitarian emergencies (complex and natural), the UN agencies and the members of the international humanitarian community responding to the disaster will encounter armed actors.

Military forces of some western nations, UN and several of the larger international organisations have come to recognise the need to grapple with coordination between civil and military components, and are currently developing civil-military protocols, handbooks, guidelines and dedicated staffing positions. This development is still in its early stages.



A poster in the earthquake zone illustrating the level of violent extremism felt by the locals concerning India. Despite predominantly anti-western feelings of the area there were no security incidents even though thousands of foreigners worked in these politically active and sensitive provinces.
Credit: Christopher Horwood/IRIN

"One point agreed upon by both the military and humanitarians are the core missions of each; respectively, to win wars and to help alleviate human suffering," writes Eric James. "While these two roles may seem to be at odds, they are not entirely incompatible. There are examples of positive interaction, for example, where military resources have made a critical humanitarian impact, but the negative perception remains."

'Critical Humanitarian Impact': Pakistan

The response to the Pakistan earthquake from October last year is a clear example of a "critical humanitarian impact" achieved not only by the many military contingents assisting with the emergency, but predominantly by the Pakistani army itself. The Pakistani army was the only force able to immediately respond to the crisis and was quickly joined by resource-rich military contingents from other countries, in particular the United States, Australia, European contingents, and many others. For many aid agencies, the necessary cooperation they built in response to the Pakistan earthquake was initially difficult but effective. For many, the possibility of working with military sections

in pursuit of a joint aim was both a surprising and novel experience.



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, A German military surgeon and another medic bandage and splint a victim's broken legs in preparation for evacuation. NATO itself and individual member states were closely involved in the response to the Pakistan earthquake of October 2005.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

"We had very good cooperation with the military, the logistics from the Pakistani military and the other non-Pakistani military here. Maybe it worked well because from the beginning everybody subsumed themselves under the Pakistani military," explained Jamie

McGoldrick, the UN deputy humanitarian coordinator in Pakistan in March 2006. "It's a military government that we are dealing with, but that said, we dealt with militaries before but it has not always been that good, for example in Aceh in Indonesia. We were all slightly wary of the military, coy even, when we started; in-fact humanitarians have a deep-seated fear of been linked to militaries."

Despite this, the experience of different agencies in the relief phase in the months after the earthquake appears to have been positive. "Without the army it would have been a disaster after a disaster. [Distribution] Trucks would have been mobbed otherwise. Without them it would have been unworkable. The army was very professional and cooperative," one World Vision International spokeswoman told IRIN. "The military has been so vital to the response. Even if it is not comfortable for NGOs to deal with them, it is impossible to talk of the relief without giving them a lot of credit." Within the first few days, approximately 50,000 Pakistan military were deployed into the affected areas, and remained there as the operational wing of the Federal Relief Commission that was charged by the Pakistani president with responsibility to manage the whole response.

The epicentre and the main impact zones of the earthquake were situated in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Azad Kashmir (Pakistan administered Kashmir: PAK). Both areas are fiercely Islamic and noted for their political opposition to the west and to India (in the case of PAK). Azad Kashmir was a carefully restricted area prior to the earthquake where very few foreigners had access in recent years, but on 8 October full access was given to hundreds of foreign NGOs and international military personnel.

Bordering Afghanistan, the NWFP is notorious for harbouring anti-western Islamic groups and Pakistan-banned Islamic parties. It is also thought to hide members of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network and possibly Osama Bin Laden himself. Even Islamabad hesitates to impose its authority over the tribal communities in NWFP where gun-culture and traditional tribal and Islamic law rule many areas. Yet in the aftermath of the earthquake, with hundreds of foreign aid workers and military contingents active in the province, there was not a single incident.

The international furore over the publication of a Danish cartoon, considered by some as anti-Islamic, also occurred during the relief effort; and while there were violent demonstrations and killings elsewhere in the Muslim world, in the earthquake recovery zone, no foreigner reported security problems. Rear Admiral LeFever, head of the US forces in Pakistan said, "I think they saw us here helping them and so I am not surprised that there were no security incidents while we were here. Why would they bite the hand that was feeding them! I think they were probably acutely aware that should any of the aid workers be injured or attacked it would have been a disaster for the whole Pakistan people."

In countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Chechnya, Somalia, Uganda, and Sudan, aid workers in an increasing number of emergencies find themselves caught up in the politics and insecurity of the context. Directly threatened and targeted by different political sides, the delivery of assistance and aid is hazardous in a way that aid workers have never seen before. All the more remarkable that during the Pakistan earthquake response no incidents were reported: Mohamed Naim Omar, a schoolteacher in an affected village told IRIN, "The international community also helped us. We have come to see, and develop a sense that there are no divisions between Muslims, Hindus and Christians, of any caste or creed, because everyone came to assist suffering humanity."



A military helicopter ready for use one misty morning in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan. Pakistan provided over 60% of the helicopters and airlift strength that created the air bridge to affected communities for months after the earthquake.
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

According to aid workers, international representatives, military personnel, government officials and people from the affected areas, the civil-military cooperation in Pakistan from early October was remarkable. It has been suggested that the 'rule books' of international and national cooperation

involving the military, need to be rewritten after Pakistan.

Does the Pakistan experience suggest that the rules are different in a short-term sudden-onset disaster, as opposed to a complex-emergency where foreign armies are actually fighting? Or does the Pakistan experience indicate that where there is a disciplined, well-resourced army taking a lead the international community - so used to working in lawless scenarios without strong government leadership - has no choice but to fall in line?

It remains to be seen whether the last eight months in Pakistan and the - widely acclaimed - successful relief effort will mark the start of a new kind of fusion of civil-military efforts in future relief efforts, or, whether it was the specific characteristics of the Pakistan context that gave rise to this unique experience.

2. Frontlines - Education vacuum poses long-term threat to children



Lucky girls like these are able to continue to go to school, despite the earthquake.

Credit: Claire Mc Evoy/IRIN

There are 34 primary schools in Langar Pura Union Council, an administrative unit (with a population of some 37,000) south of the city of Muzaffarabad in Paki-

stani-administered Kashmir. One of the schools, in the tiny hamlet of Langar Pura, a village bearing the same name, is in a large tent donated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Two teachers are responsible for educating 72 children between the ages of four and 14, who learn together in the same makeshift classroom while seated on the ground.

Before the Pakistani earthquake more than 100 children attended the local school, housed in a building which caved in during the quake. Since then, however, enrolment has declined: Five children died, more than 30 were injured and many are now too scared to return to class, as sporadic tremors in the region bring back painful memories of the school roof collapsing.

Some 17,000 children were killed and an estimated 10,000 schools destroyed or damaged across the entire earthquake zone on 8 October. Since then, many survivors have been forced to skip school and collect relief items with their families, to look after younger siblings in cases where mothers' are dead or injured, or to work to support the family. Young boys can earn a few coins clearing rubble, while many girls spend hours washing clothes and collecting water each day.

The school in Langar Pura village plods on, without uniforms, furniture, a proper structure, sanitation, a water source or a fan to ward off the heat. Students go "wherever they can best hide" to relieve themselves, said Khurshida Barveen, one of the teachers. "They were poor before the earthquake, and they are even poorer after it. Poverty is the main problem in our village."

Prior to the earthquake, some 28 million children in Pakistan were being denied access to education, mostly due to poverty, according to Save the Children-UK. The country has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, at 48 percent overall and 22 percent for women and girls. Only 49 percent of girls enrol at primary school, and on average they stay there just over a year, said the organisation's 2004-2005 country brief for Pakistan. Economic pressures push many to join the workforce and to marry early. Older girls are less likely to attend school because of the risk to the family's reputation if they are abused or attacked sexu-

ally, according to the NGO. Girls are also less likely to stay in school "because of a perception that investing in the education of a girl is a waste, as her husband will benefit rather than her family."

According to the Pakistani-based NGO, the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), the two most important steps that could revolutionise Pakistan's education profile - increasing resources and making education free and compulsory - have never been taken. Budgetary allocations for education have remained consistently low. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends that countries allocate 5 percent of their gross domestic product to the education sector, but spending in Pakistan hovers at 2 percent. "Even these meagre allocations are not utilised efficiently," SPARC said.



Seven months after the quake, school-children in Sarli Sacha, Neelum Valley, Azam Kashmir province, sit outside on the rubble that was once their school.

Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Prior to the devastating earthquake, school facilities in Pakistan were greatly lacking in resources. Most public schools are situated in shabby or makeshift structures with little or no water and sanitation facilities and no learning materials. Many teachers

are themselves uneducated and without professional training. Some do not show up for work, and others abuse their students. The earthquake in some areas has wiped the slate clean, and the government has committed itself to 'building back better'. Within 12 months, the aim is to re-enrol the 450,000 primary-school children that were attending school before the earthquake, as well as increase new enrolment by 30 percent, according to Julia Spry-Leverson, the chief of advocacy and communications for Unicef in Pakistan. She said that many actors were involved in assisting the school reconstruction effort including the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the United States Agency for International Development, while the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank were likely to play key roles.

However, in the meantime, and for the foreseeable future, countless children are losing out. A February assessment by Save the Children-UK in Langar Pura found that roughly 85 percent to 90 percent of children were attending primary school in the lower areas, but only 45 percent to 50 percent of children in the higher-altitude villages were in school.

Unofficial schools being set up

Countless unmonitored charitable outfits and religious groups have also stepped in to fill the official vacuum.

'Madrasahs', for example, are learning centres with a tradition that dates back a thousand years. They were

established to educate the next generation of Islamic scholars and clerics, and today, one-third of all Pakistani children attend these schools, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG). Madrassas provide free religious education, basic literacy skills and serve socially important purposes: They run on the basis of public philanthropy and also produce Muslim clergymen.



Reciting the Qu'uran in a Madrasa in Pakistani-Administered Kashmir. Countless unmonitored charitable outfits and religious groups have stepped in to fill the official educational vacuum. 'Madrassas' are learning centres with a tradition that dates back a thousand years and is the only form of schooling for many children in Pakistan. Credit: Claire Mc Evoy/IRIN

A madrasa education is the only form of schooling for many children in Pakistan. For example, 60 out of the 90 children who attend the Langar Pura madrasa do not attend regular school, said Alam Gir Khan, director of the school. Fifty-eight of the 60 are girls. Before the earthquake, about 200 children came to the school.

But now, he said, everyone has to pitch in to support their families. "Some people can't afford school, so they send their children here."

From 9-12 in the morning and 1-5 in the afternoon, students at the madrasa in Langar Pura sit on the floor and engage in rote learning. "They only get education on the Qu'uran," Khan said. "They translate it and learn it by heart." To facilitate their religious education, the children are also taught basic literacy skills in classical Arabic and Urdu.

While public schools are technically free, associated costs like books can be obstacles to attendance. With the decline of the public school system and prohibitively expensive costs for private education – schools can cost as much as 500 rupees (US\$8) per month – poorer families often opt for the madrasa system instead. Some madrassas even provide food and clothes, further enticing students.

A minority of madrassas – some 10 percent to 15 percent – are affiliated with extremist religious or political groups, who by presenting a distorted view of Islam co-opt religion for their own ends, according to an analysis for the US-based independent research organisation, the Brookings Institution. This minority has reportedly become a breeding ground for radical militants, including both the Taliban and some Kashmiri terrorist groups.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) said it had received reports throughout the year of child abuse in madrassas. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN body responsible for monitoring Pakistan's adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has specifically asked the government to "ensure the protection from maltreatment in madrassas ... and ensure that children under 18 are not involved in hostilities and are not recruited forcibly," the implication being that recruitment into mili-

tant groups can occur through the madrasa system.

Need for a broad education

The HRCP reported in 2005 that the failure to register or regulate madrassas continued to create controversy in Pakistan. Although the government had tried to modernise the madrasa system, people argued that even if the schools followed a more mainstream curriculum, the "mindset of intolerance underlying education in many madrassas would not change." Critics advocated redirecting funds towards reviving public education instead.

The fear among secular NGOs and child-protection workers is that madrasa-type schools may replace normal schools, thereby depriving children of a broad education, and in some cases indoctrinating them with extremist views. Seventeen groups that had either been banned by the government or placed on its terrorism watch-list were involved in relief activities after the earthquake, according to ICG. Some of these may be involved in setting up schools in camps for displaced people and in villages.

"Every religious organisation has announced, through mosque loudspeakers, banners and pamphlets, that it will adopt children orphaned by the earthquake, rather than leave them at the mercy of western NGOs," ICG reported.

Following the disaster, the Deobandi Wafaqul Madaris al-Arabiya, Pakistan's largest union of madrassas, established an earthquake-relief fund to rebuild 1,500 mosques and 300 madrassas in PAK and North Western Frontier Province, ICG reported. The original target of the fund was US\$4.16 million, but newspapers run by al-Rasheed Trust – against which sanctions were imposed by the UN Security Council in 2002 for alleged terrorist links, had run advertisements asking for further funding.



Girls are taught separately despite the earthquake. Unlike the tens of boys nearby in the open-air classroom, only two girls were attending classes in Sari Sacha village this day (March 2006). They sit facing the blackboard in the rubble that was once their school seven months earlier. Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Religious parties and "jihadi organisations" are also involved in setting up modern Islamic schools. ICG reported that in Battagram, for example, the al-Khidmat Foundation – a subsidiary of Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the most active religious party in the earthquake zone – set up 20 Islamic tent schools,

which would help spread the influence of another JI subsidiary, the Hizb Mujahidin. The latter is "one of the most prominent jihadi organisations in Kashmir," according to ICG.

With private donations aplenty from well-wishers, the scope for setting up educational establishments is enormous. "Anyone can establish schools and institutions. There is no prohibition here," said Jarfraz Ahmad

Abbasi, a coordinator in the Department of Social Welfare and Women's Development in PAK. He warned that without legislation to regulate these outfits, there was no oversight mechanism in place.

Meanwhile, the government is loath to clamp down on "humanitarian activities" by local groups, many of which have been praised for their speedy response to the earthquake. "Let me ask you something," said a senior government official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "If somebody is doing some good work, would you stop that person in a time of great tragedy?"

Rising inequality, unequal access to compensation



Only the courtyard remains of a huge mosque in Balakot—a town entirely destroyed by the earthquake and on live seismic faultlines. Despite the destruction prayer mats are laid out across the yard in what is an intensely religious society.
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Shortly after the 8 October earthquake that reduced hundreds of towns and villages to rubble in areas of North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and Pakistani-administered

(US \$415) rupees, a 17 March public-information statement from Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) said the rest would be paid in instalments. "You can apply for reconstruction shelter assistance in your areas of origin," it advised. For each of the estimated 450,000 destroyed houses, three further payments would be made following assessments: 75,000 rupees (\$1,250) after a memorandum of understanding was signed to ensure earthquake-proof reconstruction; 25,000 rupees (\$415) after a certain level of completion was achieved; and 50,000 rupees (US \$930) upon completion of the reconstruction. For damaged houses, one payment of 50,000 rupees would be paid.

Kashmir (PAK), the Pakistani government began paying compensation to the victims. Nongovernmental organisations such as Refugees International welcomed the move, because the quick infusion of cash into local economies enabled people to start rebuilding their homes and lives quickly.

"When analysts draw lessons from Pakistan's response to the earthquake, the decision to make quick and generous compensation payments is likely to stand out," said RI in a public statement. While the strategy was right, however, the key to its success would be the speed and fairness of its implementation, it added.

As early as December a number of key problems had already emerged and six months later, there are widespread complaints about a lack of transparency, corruption and discrimination in the compensation-payment process.

The earthquake, which measured 7.6 on the Richter scale, damaged or destroyed an estimated 84 percent of houses in PAK, and 36 percent in NWFP, according to Oxfam.

Following initial payments for destroyed and damaged houses in earthquake affected areas of 25,000

Eligible families would also get a livelihood-support cash grant of 3,000 rupees (\$50) per month and food rations for six months. The housing subsidies would be paid through bank accounts. "So open a bank/post office account as soon as possible," the ERRA advised. Early on, the Pakistani government also announced a death-compensation benefit of 100,000 rupees (US \$1,660), and an injury benefit of between 50,000 rupees and 15,000 rupees (\$830 and US \$250) depending on severity.

Unmet expectations

Although the government's compensation package was roundly welcomed, it has been criticised in practice. A number of recurring problems have been reported: People have been unable to open bank accounts without ID cards; banks are inaccessible to the mostly rural, uneducated population; families sharing accommodation have been excluded, as only one payment is made per dwelling; only one death is being compensated per family; homeowners, rather than tenants, are being compensated; and feudal landlords, allegedly colluding with local officials, have been collecting money "on behalf" of tenant farmers under the threat of eviction. Meanwhile, compensation for lost livestock, businesses, shops and liveli-

hoods is not being paid.

Salima Bibi, camped on the old university ground in Muzaffarabad with her husband and five children, said they had never received any money. "We have no ID card, therefore they are not giving me money. Only people with ID cards are receiving money," she said. Her husband lost the family card during the earthquake.



A hospital being built in March 2006 in Balakot, NWFP, claiming to use earthquake resistant materials. Despite the distribution of compensation money to affected families and the introduction of new building codes it is hard to see how they will be implemented in remote areas.
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Political affiliations are also allegedly being taken into consideration when it comes to compensation. For example, in the Kala Dhaka (Black Mountain) area, in the semiautonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas, "the actual people who are affected are not receiving the cheques, according to

a member of the opposition Awami (Public) National Party who requested anonymity. He alleged that up to 2,500 people had received 25,000 rupees (US \$ 415), 9,000 had been surveyed by authorities and had not received any money at all, and a further 900 had received cheques which had subsequently been cancelled. He added that the government had underestimated by half the number of people in Kala Dhaka who would be eligible for compensation money in the first place.

The closest federal institution of any kind is reportedly 3.5 hours away from Kala Dhaka, and there is next to no road access. "The surveys should reach the whole area, but they are done on a political basis," the source claimed. "People who belong to the opposition either don't receive a cheque or can't cash it."

In a January briefing paper Oxfam also said there were concerns about the impartiality of selection committees and that social structure, connections and political affiliations were "influencing" compensation decisions.

Raza Tanoli, district coordinator with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in Mansehra, said there was no reliable data on either the population or the numbers of houses destroyed and damaged. He added that local officials administering the funds were hardly experts in construction and could be likely to act "on the basis of whether someone voted for them" in elections.

Women also faced particular difficulties. "Women are unable to get compensation because, firstly, they are women - and in our society it is difficult for a woman to move freely," said Tanoli. "In our society, mostly they are ignored when it comes to property, and their brothers or any close relative are used to getting the property. If a woman does not allow [it], then there is a quarrel and a family boycott of that woman."

Akhtar Jan, a haggard, 30-year-old widow in Thuri camp in Muzaffarabad, said she was unable to access the money without a male relative. "I don't know who is giving the money. I have no son to go to the village to tell them that I haven't received the money."

The "extremely patriarchal culture" in Pakistan meant that women were largely confined to the home or tented camps, and, therefore, dependent on male family members to both make claims for the family and to cash cheques, said Azra Talat Sayeed, executive director of Roots for Equity, a local NGO. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the majority of seriously injured people moved with their carers to cities like Rawalpindi, Lahore and Karachi for medical care, where compensation money was inaccessible, Sayeed said. This has exacerbated compensation problems, because many carers are women and as a result have missed out on benefits. Most poor women were also unaware they had to keep records of prescriptions, diagnoses and X-rays for injury claims. "The more educated families and landowning class has had it easier in compensations, as they know how to work the system," she said.

Where cheques have been issued, they have not always been honoured. One high-level official in Muzaffarabad, who asked not to be named, said the government had failed to release 40 million rupees (\$650,000) necessary to honour cheques already paid out.

Concerns about corruption

The fear is that money earmarked for compensation payments may be falling into the wrong hands. "Given Pakistan's pervasive and institutionalised corruption, an effective mechanism for handling" money donated by donors was essential, ICG said in a March report. In Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index of 158 countries, Pakistan was rated 144.



A man and woman discuss leaving the relative security of tented camp-life to return to their village. For many the problems of recovery have only begun in a context where poverty and in some cases discrimination is the backdrop to their lives.
Credit: Claire Mc Evoy/IRIN

"The widespread allegations of corruption, pilferage and hoarding are extremely worrying," a post-earthquake Human Rights Commission of Pakistan report said. "It is essential to put in place an independent system to track distribution of aid and compensation. The government of Pakistan, in cooperation with

donor countries, must find a monitoring mechanism which is not solely in the hands of the military but representatives of the people of affected areas."

The Pakistani government has set up a number of "nominal bodies" to oversee donations, according to ICG, which it says are neither transparent nor independent. In any case, officials from the ERRA are immune from legal action, it said. Section 11 of the ERRA char-

ter states that “no suit, prosecution, [or] other legal proceedings shall lie against the Authority, the Council, the Board, the Chairperson, or any member, officer, advisers, experts or consultants in respect of anything done in good faith.”

Masudar Rahman, deputy commissioner in Muzaffarabad, is personally overseeing the distribution of compensation in PAK. He admitted there had been some hiccups: “There are complaints that people have been ignored. There are complaints that there has been some delay with regard to disbursing compensation. But so far, I have not seen a single complaint that a person has made money. ... We are trying our level best to make it transparent.” Anyone with a grievance may lodge a complaint, he added. “They should come to this office. They should also come to the complaint cells, stationed in the army camps.”

Still, geography, culture, tradition, education, class and gender bar many groups from attending these complaint cells, not least women, according to rights groups.

The hope remains that the quick and generous compensation scheme will allow most affected families to rebuild their homes and lives speedily. This will be in sharp contrast to Tsunami-affected victims, only 20 percent of whom were in satisfactory accommodation a year after the disaster, according to Oxfam. However, pockets of marginalised people are being left behind. The consensus from local NGOs such as Roots for Equity is that the flawed implementation of the well-intentioned scheme means that “class dynamics are being played out to weaken the weak and strengthen the powerful”.

Cuban solidarity – bringing healthcare to the people



Cuban GP, Usmani Ramos, explains how to take medicine. Usmani was one doctor of a total group of 2,500 medics sent from Cuba to assist Pakistan after the earthquake.
Credit: Claire Mc Evoy/IRIN

Castro said, “Graduating as a doctor is like opening a door to a long road leading to the noblest action a human being can do for others.”

Little did he know that in less than one month, that road would lead 2,500 Cuban medical personnel to a relief operation in faraway Pakistan, following a devastating earthquake on 8 October. Humanitarian assistance from the tiny Caribbean island comprised the largest international mission working in the earthquake-affected areas. The medical staff - members of Cuba’s Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialised in Disaster Situations and Serious Epidemics - operated 32 high-tech field hospitals and reportedly treated more than a million patients.

“We don’t even have a diplomatic relationship with Cuba, but on humanitarian grounds, President Castro

At a foundation ceremony on 19 September 2005 for the Henry Reeve Contingent, an association of Cuban doctors specialised in humanitarian crises, President Fidel

spoke to President Musharraf and offered to send medical assistance,” explained Maj-Gen Farooq Ahmed Khan, head of Pakistan’s earthquake emergency unit, the Federal Relief Commission. “They are respected, and I think people will always remember their contribution. If they had not come, there would have been very large gaps in medical support for the victims.”

Mobile healthcare

Usmani Ramos, a general practitioner specialising in family healthcare, is part of the Cuban team. Today, like every other day, six days a week, Ramos sets forth with his mobile team from the Muzaffarabad Hospital in Pakistani-Administered Kashmir, one of the worst-hit earthquake areas. The teams break down into pairs, a woman and a man in each. En route, and always on foot, along the narrow walkways and paths through the area of Domel in the city of Muzaffarabad, where the Neelum and the Jhelum rivers meet, the pairs break off to treat patients in prearranged areas. People stop to greet the team, to seek their assistance.

Since the first Cuban teams arrived on 14 October, just six days after the earthquake, they have earned quite a reputation. Farooq said the large number of female paramedics and doctors made the Cubans “a very popular medical element” because women and children were more comfortable seeing them.

“At the beginning, most of the women wanted to see

female doctors, but now they want either a male or a female," Ramos said. One exception was in the case of gynaecological problems, but this was natural all over the world. "The most important thing is the people trusting in you," he said. "The Cuban doctors, they don't talk about religion, and the people trust in you and the work. We don't talk about controversial things."



Muzaffarabad Region, Pakistan, A land cruiser that was converted to a bus was caught in a landslide. The blood soaked front seats a silent testament to the havoc caused. A typical sight in the days and weeks following the earthquake.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

Winning patients' trust was no small feat in a country where the lifetime risk of dying in childbirth is one in 31, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef). Cultural constraints – and what the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has described as a Taliban-like ban in parts of the neighbouring North Western Frontier Province – prevent many women from seeing male doctors. In other cases, husbands speak for their wives, precluding discussion about "female" problems, according to Frida, who asked to remain anonymous, a Cuban doctor working at the hospital in Muzaffarabad. Male translators also edit out intimate details of women's complaints.

Setting up shop on an open rooftop in Domel, where the Neelum River meets the Jhelum, Ramos and his team toss their rucksacks of medicines on the ground and a local resident provides plastic chairs. Within minutes, patients begin to arrive for treatment. A local schoolboy translates, and through a mixture of broken English, hand signs and basic Urdu, they communicate.



Almost a quarter of a million people were placed in organised camps following the earthquake. Thousands more set up spontaneous camps. With people cramped together in damaged homes and tents, without soap, clean water or sanitary facilities, scabies became rampant after the earthquake.
Credit: David Swanson/IRIN

With people cramped together in damaged homes and tents, without soap, clean water or sanitary facilities, scabies became rampant after the earthquake, leading some doctors to give lessons on basic hygiene in local schools. Today's 45 patients are a mixed bag: the respiratory diseases that were common in winter have given way to gastritis from overuse of anti-inflammatories to treat injuries, post-traumatic stress, kidney infections, diarrhoea and more scabies. Gynaecological complications, which always arrive at an advanced stage, include fibroids, fungal infections and tumours.

The treatment is basic, but referrals to the hospital are commonplace for operations or longer-term care, such as physiotherapy. "You have different choices. You can improve the style of life, the quality of life. Painkillers - I don't believe too much in them. I believe in physiotherapy. I believe in anti-inflammatories,

antibiotics. But you must combine everything," said Ramos. "It's difficult here, very difficult."

As the reconstruction of people's lives, homes and livelihoods begins, Pakistani doctors will take over the hospitals, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the government of Pakistan at the end of March. Just as Cuba provided all medical assistance free of charge, Pakistan is obliged to follow the same approach. The handover is to be managed gradually, based around local capacity to assume the responsibility.



A woman waits for her operation in one of the 32 high-tech Cuban field hospitals which reportedly treated more than a million patients during the months they worked in post-earthquake Pakistan.
Credit: Claire Mc Evoy/IRIN

Cuba's contribution of 32 new, state-of-the-art hospitals will greatly improve Pakistan's healthcare system, which according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) was in a shambles even before the earthquake struck. The HRCP's 2005 report said a very large number of the country's 916 hospitals – intended to serve a population of 166 million – were "either totally nonfunctional" or "offered grossly inadequate services". The statistics indicating the condition in which people lived and died "remained as dismal as in previous years," the report said. Standards in private hospitals were considered superior, but without regulations on either standards or prices, they remained beyond most people's reach.

The departing staff will train local health workers before they leave, and the Cuban government has generously offered 1,000 seats in its universities to Pakistani medical students. "It is a tremendous effort and incredible story," said Farooq. "The fact is that they have been here for over five months, day and night with no real relief. They left their loved ones and the work in Cuba, and they have really created a very good impression in Pakistan."

Ramos said he is motivated by a basic belief in humanity: "If you help people during natural disasters, in the future, they will help you," he said. "Solidarity is important, because you can help people, you can make friends. And friendship is better than weapons."

Women's access to land essential to reconstruction efforts



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, An elderly woman sits among the rubble, she received donated blankets and a jacket but as a single woman with few surviving relatives her future may be very difficult without targeted assistance.

Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

On 10 November 2005, a month after the devastating earthquake in northern Pakistan, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education sent a letter to the al-Khubaib Founda-

tion, a faith-based nongovernmental organisation, authorising them to establish an 'aashiana' (meaning 'nest') for orphans, widows and destitute women with children under age 16.

"The representatives of Bait ul Mal [a government social-welfare institution] and the al-Khubaib Foundation are authorized to collect/retrieve the above-mentioned beneficiaries/affectees from the concerned quarters (hospitals), relief camps and affected areas," the letter said.

According to Col Youssef Jan, who manages an al-Khubaib Foundation camp for people displaced by the earthquake in Muzaffarabad in Pakistani-Administered Kashmir (PAK), the foundation plans to run a total of five of these centres, with between 200 and 300 widows in each. In Hatian, a converted former army barracks an hour's drive from the capital, Islamabad, about 300 widows were being given food, clothing, shelter and vocational training by al-Khubaib, Jan said. The centre has capacity for 200 more. Four field offices with three field officers each go into rural areas and village communities "to motivate" widows to come. "There is nobody to look after them after the husbands have died," he explained.

Field workers had consulted with community representatives in each area, said a former army general who runs a separate al-Khubaib camp for women and young boys just outside the city of Mansehra in North Western Frontier Province. "Girls are not easy to manage in our society. We only take the girls with their mothers," he said. "If they [field workers] think they are real, deserving cases, they are brought here. ... If they [women] had a male member alive, they would go back [to their homes]."

Widows didn't feel secure in the villages, he added: "We give them protection here."

In addition to security, al-Khubaib offers up to three hours of religious instruction a day, or study of the Quran, in its Mansehra camp: From before first light to 7:30 a.m. and again from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

There are about 30,000 widows in earthquake-affected areas in PAK and North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), according to agencies working in the region. One draft study found that 86 percent of the estimated 6,000 widows in camps had no formal education. International relief organisation Oxfam has reported that female literacy in rural areas of NWFP stands at 16 percent.

Aside from groups officially mandated to look after widowed and destitute women, other, unauthorised groups are also seeking funding for and providing humanitarian services. The al-Rasheed Trust - which was included on the United Nations Security Council's 2002 list of sanctioned organisations because of alleged links with the al-Qaeda terrorist group - has been running camps for displaced people in PAK and neighbouring NWFP.

The trust plans to build 500 communal houses for widows, if given land by the government. "I am a local," said Mohammed Arshad, manager of a tented camp for women and children in the city of Mansehra in NWFP. "With my personal relations, we can confirm that these are widows and allow them to settle in the camp. After a year, we will make a plan; we will provide them with houses."

Protection versus deprivation of rights

In the strikingly well-equipped and spotless al-Khubaib Muzaffarabad camp - which will soon be converted into a dedicated women's and children's camp - the foundation has a well-equipped hospital, a communal kitchen, eight washing machines, television, security lights, a play area for children, a drainage system, free medical care, food, clothing, schools and vocational training. The aashiana will provide permanent homes for the women "so long as the foundation is alive," Jan said. "We were given responsibility for these people so they can live a better life and may not be given to people who can turn them into criminals," he added. "We are here to regularise things."

Nagina, aged 50 and without formal education, is a typical case. Her husband died in the earthquake leaving her no inheritance money. Her home - some 35km away - was demolished. "Why would I go there?" she asked. "There are no facilities of any kind. ... The [other] women here have husbands, so they can go back. I have no husband, so I can't." Later on, she tearfully admitted she longs for her village and community. Women like Nagina, even if they have extended families, can face tremendous problems exercising their right to return to their villages.

Almost two-thirds of all households in Pakistan do not own the land they live on, and 60 percent of the total land is distributed among less than 10 percent of the population, according to the Oxford Policy Management consultancy firm. Proving land title is difficult at the best of times, and as a result of the earthquake,

some 85 percent of municipal records and 25 percent of revenue records appear to have been lost, Oxfam said. In many cases, both land and papers have disappeared under landslides.



The major issue is that possession of land is predominantly controlled by males; law enforcement is chronically weak; corruption is pervasive; [and] subordination of women is reinforced through social and economic structures of power.
Credit: Merlin

Even in normal circumstances, women's access to land is considerably more restricted than men's. Inheritance law, governed by the Land Revenue Act of 1967, determines that inheritance is automatic: Property has to be distributed to inheritors within three months of a person's death. Women have automatic entitlement to one-eighth of their husbands' wealth, with the rest divided among his parents and children. Daughters receive half

the share of sons.

Without enforcement, tradition often dictates that property reverts back to brothers or close male relatives. "While the law is very explicit, practice is far from compliant," said Shahnaz Wazir Ali, executive director of the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP). "Across the country and for centuries, women have suffered violations of their rights and been deprived of their inheritance by the male members of their families."

Compounding matters, land in PAK and NWFP is numerically recorded but not physically divided in the records of the local 'patwari', or revenue officer. Neither is land physically bifurcated unless a land area is particularly large and the inheritors willing and powerful enough to seek separation into different land units. Physical transfer to women, therefore, rarely occurs.

"Women, because of their restricted mobility, low levels of literacy, lack of access to records, economic social and physical dependence on male members, rarely have information on the mutation of land on which they live or the land owned by their husbands or fathers," Wazir Ali said.

Following the earthquake, a massive number of people moved to camps in low-lying areas to avoid harsh winter conditions and have access to shelter and aid. Reports have surfaced of widows' land being taken over by male family members. "There are worrying signs that many women who vacated their homes after the earthquake, and whose husbands or male relatives died in the disaster, are now losing their properties due to a lack of documentation," Oxfam reported in its recent analysis of the response to the earthquake.

Although the extent of the land-grabbing is still unclear, the government needs to urgently address

the problem, according to the PCP. Wazir Ali said the authorities must issue strict instructions to district revenue officers that inheritances should be passed on within the three-month deadline. Legal assistance at local administrative levels, or union councils, must also be made available to women. The inclusion of teams of female paralegals or lawyers would greatly encourage women to understand and seek their entitlements, she added.

Land entitlements of all vulnerable groups, through inheritance or land grants, should be included in any reconstruction plans, according to the PCP. But so far, both the recovery plans of the NWFP and PAK governments, as well as the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) have all failed to address the issue.

In the absence of targeted policies and legal assistance, women's ability to exercise their rights remains extremely limited. In a 2005 report, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said that Pakistan measured 56 out of 58 listed countries in terms of equitable treatment of women with regard to economic participation, opportunity, political empowerment, education, health and general wellbeing. Women are "severely restricted in terms of where they can go and whom they can meet," Oxfam has reported.



Following the earthquake, a massive number of people moved to camps in low-lying areas to avoid harsh winter conditions and have access to shelter and aid. Reports have surfaced of widows' land being taken over by male family members.
Credit: Christopher Horwood/IRIN

Meanwhile, government policy is focusing on "protection", but only in the sense of physical security. "The reconstruction strategy, which focuses on the rebuilding of homes, needs to incorporate a 'legal rights' component so that in the case of widows, their ownership of housing is established," said Wazir

Ali. Placing women in 'camps or communal homes where they are dependent on charity is by no means a long-term sustainable solution, rights groups have said. Instead, women must be helped to resume their former lives through land-appropriation schemes, vocational training and livelihood-support schemes. This, however, requires a change of mindset, from perceiving women as vulnerable victims to respecting their rights as equal citizens.

For women like Nageena meanwhile, life in a widows' camp may be the only option. "The major issue is that possession of land is predominantly controlled by males; law enforcement is chronically weak; corruption is pervasive; [and] subordination of women is reinforced through social and economic structures of power," Wazir Ali said. "There is an absence of state subsidised legal assistance to vulnerable groups, and all these factors combine to deprive women of their legal ownership rights."

Families abandoning children to orphanages and religious groups



Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, A young boy stands in line, sandwiched in a group of men waiting for handouts of clothing and food. With the death and injury of so many adults some children are left caring for families.
Credit: Edward Parsons/IRIN

Two new boys, no older than eight or nine years of age, have arrived at the al-Islah Centre in the city of Mansehra, North Western Frontier Province this morning. On the road outside a

highly questionable.

Lack of oversight

Jens Edgar Matthes, senior policy adviser on child protection with the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), said that NGOs, 'madrassas', or religious schools and other groups providing care were encouraging families to place children like Juma and Altaf, who were being unofficially fostered by their extended family, into institutional settings, "claiming that children would be better off." Some of these facilities were acting "in good faith, others in less good faith," Matthes said.

billboard reads: "Helping of orphans and needy is a worship and a pleasure."

"They are orphaned due to the earthquake," said their uncle, Abdul Kwayum. Like most of the other 45 boys living in the home, Altaf and Juma have one parent who is alive, as well as an extended family. "After discussions with them [the management of al-Islah], they told us they can give the boys a good education here and many facilities, so they can achieve something in later life," said Kwayum.

Al-Islah was established after the 8 October earthquake to provide a home and Islamic education for "orphaned" boys. Between 15 and 20 of the boys have been abandoned there; the rest receive sporadic visits from relatives. Another 60 children are expected to arrive within the next few weeks.

According to the Pakistani NGO, the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), many Pakistani schools are in dire condition, with little or no water and sanitation facilities, no learning materials and abusive or absent teachers with little or no training. A recent study on the quality of the teaching staff found that only six out of 10 teachers were able to pass a mathematics examination suitable for 10 year olds.

Mohamed Jalal, the manager of al-Islah, said the staff at schools in the district of Koestan, where the boys lived, do not perform their duty. "There is no one to ask these teachers what they are doing. ... There are no checks and balances in the Pakistani system."

In general, Pakistani families are tightknit and extremely protective. In the wake of the earthquake, financial pressure on families is on the rise, however; the widespread loss of land, homes and livelihoods; and the ongoing and, in some cases, involuntary returns of displaced people to their rural villages. Numerous individuals, local NGOs and religious groups have set up charitable camps and organisations, or expanded existing networks, to help support them. While the vast majority of these appear to be well-intentioned, some motivations and practices are

Upstairs on the open rooftop, the young boys living in al-Islah are reciting Urdu words from a picture book, rocking back and forth, as if in a trance. They give rote answers to questions about their welfare. Would you like to go home? No. Do you miss your family? No. Would you like to live with your mother? No. What do you do you like about living here? They give me an education.



Boys in al-Islah rock back and forth as they recite Urdu words.
Credit: Claire Mc Evoy/IRIN

The house is almost empty, and there are no classrooms, qualified teachers, social workers or women present.

Aid agencies involved in local child-protection network in Mansehra have grown increasingly concerned about the

practice of institutionalising children whose parents and families should be looking after them: "Children have a right to a family, and families have a responsibility and duty to care for children," said a recent public statement from World Vision and other NGOs.

Children's institutions naturally appeal to families that are struggling to cope, who often believe in good faith that their children will be guaranteed a roof over their heads, food, clothing and, above all, an education. According to the child-protection network, however, "these are the visible apparent advantages to an institution, while it is the invisible needs of the child that have as much or greater impact in their ability to adapt successfully to society as an adult." These invisible needs include attachment to caring adults, social integration and an understanding of family roles.

Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Pakistan ratified in 1990, legally obliges states to prevent children from being separated from their families, unless in cases of abuse or neglect. Under the convention, countries are also obliged to respect parents' primary responsibility as caregivers and to support them to achieve this.

International aid workers are often reluctant to criti-

cise the approach publicly - which is often favoured by their Pakistani counterparts - but are privately very clear about their concerns: "This is not a solution. If the family is poor, then the solution is to support the family," said one aid worker in Manserah. "A child needs a family first and a social environment."

"If you are putting someone in institutional care, it's like sending him to prison. He will follow only the rules, regulations and discipline of that institution. He cannot express his opinion. He cannot go out for his own recreation. It's just like a punishment for a person," commented another.



Photos of injured children from the 8 October quake greet visitors at the entrance to PIMS medical centre in Islamabad. Thousands of children were killed by the quake. Many died trapped under the walls and roofs of their schools while attending Saturday morning classes.
Credit: David Swanson/IRIN

"Unicef's position is that institutionalization in this context is not in the best interests of affected children and should only be used as a last resort, regardless of who is running the institution," said Matthes.

Fostering community care, however, means rebuilding schools,

homes, health centres - and giving people a livelihood. "It's a very difficult thing: how to motivate a community to take care of a child, in the circumstances where they are unable to take care of their own families?" said another protection worker.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Unicef and other partners have prepared a Plan of Action on the Protection of Vulnerables, which is currently with the Prime Minister's office and should be approved shortly. The plan is to establish a formal system of registration and guardianship procedures so that all children who lost parents in the earthquake are accounted for and assessed individually. In the meantime, however, there is no monitoring or oversight of charitable activities in earthquake-affected areas, no clear government policy on the issue, no legal framework, and only a minimal understanding of protection issues within the ministries that are responsible for them, said child-protection workers.

"There is no functional system in place ... to formalise the relationship between a child and foster parents," whether they are relatives or institutions, Matthes said. Neither is there a proper referral system in place for abandoned or neglected children or an adequate legal framework to address abuses. In its 2005 report, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan lamented the absence of any laws for the protection of children.

"Children's rights are vastly denied and do not receive priority in the government's policies," it said.

Potential for abuse

The concerns about institutionalised abuses are many. One is that the smaller NGOs and religious groups run-

ning orphanages may leave or withdraw support from the institutions they created after a few years, leaving the children high and dry.

In some cases, charitable and religious groups actively seek out needy children in communities, who are handed over by relatives and needy parents. For example, in the al-Khubaib Foundation camp close to Atar Shisha outside Manserah city in North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), where 150 boys live in a spotless, well-organised camp, "field workers" go into villages and consult with local community representatives, bringing back "deserving" cases to the camp.

In other cases "orphaned" children may be "given away" to childless families. Mohammed Arshad, manager of the al-Rasheed camp for more than 200 "orphans" under age 12 in Manserah, said he had received about 50 requests for children since the earthquake. In only "two or three cases" he planned to give a child away, and only to families that he knew personally, he said. Each would be asked to sign forms guaranteeing the child's security, as formal adoption was banned by the government following the quake.

"We are giving the children away, because they [the families] can provide education and training," he said. It is a risk, he admitted, but only because the families have "another culture, another language," which the children find difficult.



Unicef's position is that institutionalization in this context is not in the best interests of affected children and should only be used as a last resort, regardless of who is running the institution.
Credit: World Vision Pakistan

While local groups like al-Rasheed have been highly commended for their speedy humanitarian response to the earthquake, the organisation was placed on a 2002 UN Security Council list of sanctioned organisations because of alleged links with the al-Qaeda terrorist group. In tiny numbers of madrasa schools, children are also reportedly being "recruited" for military purposes. The International Crisis Group (ICG) think-tank

reported in March that "every religious organisation has announced, through mosque loudspeakers, banners and pamphlets, that it will adopt children orphaned by the earthquake, rather than leave them at the mercy of western NGOs."

Some groups, such as the Jamaat-ud-Dawa - the renamed Lashkar-e-Tayaba, which was declared a terrorist organisation and banned by the Pakistani government in 2002 - also saw in the earthquake as an opportunity to gain new recruits, ICG said.

One NGO worker in NWFP said that he personally knew of "quite a few so-called madrassas" offering

military-style training in Balakot. Of 100 boys in these places, the best 10 or 20 would be sent away to learn basic military skills after a couple of years. "Basically, what happens is they initially indoctrinate the children with lots of religious education. The military part comes last," he said.

A tiny percentage of the roughly 10 percent of madrassas that offered full-time boarding to children were the "big worry," he said. "They are producing Taliban. That goes without saying."

Local authorities in earthquake-affected areas are struggling to cope with the challenge. The Department of Social Welfare in Pakistani-Administered Kashmir (PAK), for example, currently has capacity to look after only 50 orphaned girls, as part of a pilot project running two children's homes. It plans to expand, opening up five more homes over the next three years, according to Jarfraz Ahmad Abbasi, a department coordinator, but each will house only 25 children. In the meantime, the consensus among officials in both PAK and NWFP seems to be that any help is better than none at all.

"Without the government having facilities in Kashmir, and with these groups working on a humanitarian basis, if the extended families allow it, how can you stop them?" asked Abbasi.

Anis Sahibzada, regional relief commissioner in the city of Manserah, said, "Frankly speaking, we don't want to discourage anyone. We don't want to discourage private initiative."

3. Interviews - Mike Lefever, rear admiral of the United States Navy



Credit: US Admiralty

Mike Lefever, is commander of the Disaster Assistance Centre in Pakistan, which was set up to support relief for earthquake victims. In March 2006, close to the end of the US assistance mission in Pakistan, Lefever took time to tell IRIN about the details of "the longest relief effort in the history of the United States".

QUESTION: To what extent have resources from the United States been deployed in recent months to assist the Pakistan emergency?

ANSWER: The US response was virtually immediate. We had some units with helicopters working here on the drugs issues, and their helicopters were rapidly diverted and redeployed for rescue missions in the earthquake zones from the first day. As far as the US military response was concerned, within the first 24 hours I had been called and nominated as commander of the Disaster Assistance Centre here in Pakistan. I was off the coast, and we were proceeding up to Iraq as part of an expedition strike group. I was on the ground within 48 hours. At the same time, our helicopters in Afghanistan - that were fighting in Afghanistan - were being moved into theatre. By the third day, they were removing casualties from the impact zone.

At the same 48-hour mark, we had the Crisis Response Group from the Air Force with about seventy 70 handlers move into the airport with their material-handling equipment. They were out of New Jersey, in fact, and had just gotten back from working [Hurricane] Katrina, and after three days were told to pack up and get out here. Around the same time, the specialist-communications equipment teams came in and set up the expeditionary command centre as well. We identified engineering equipment and had that flown in sea-lift, along with engineers who were coming into Karachi at that time. We also got hold of a MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit, which functions as a Level 3 hospital - this came in with about 200 staff from Germany and got on the ground within three weeks. They were set up within a day in Muzaffarabad. We soon had two fully kitted-out hospitals and all their medical staff, plus about 100 engineers.

Then we started flying in more helicopters from all over the United States. Twenty-one Chinook helicopters, four UH60s, two MH60s from Bahrain and two H60s from Bahrain as well. At our peak, there were about 1,250 US servicemen on the ground. In total, about 1,900 people had passed through the theatre at some point to contribute to the earthquake relief. Over 400 strategic airlift deliveries were made at the main airport during this mission bringing supplies.

Q: Presumably, at that time, when you were given this command, they didn't know how bad the emergency was.

A: We had no idea. All we were seeing was what was on CNN - and you remember, those initial photographs were really about Margalla Towers in Islamabad [the capital]. It wasn't until later that you realised the scope and devastation of this earthquake, the 100-by-300 kilometre area that was devastated by this disaster.

Q: Who makes the decision in the US for US military to be deployed in a situation such as this?

A: Ultimately, it is the secretary of defence that makes that decision in Washington. There was a recommendation from the commander of the central command saying that Pakistan had come to us and asked for assistance, and we'd like to support them and here's what we plan to do - and then the secretary of defence supports and approves the deployment of forces into the area. You know, the major reason for our success was due to our regional deployment, which led to the fast speed at which we arrived here, and the other issue is capacity. No one else has our level of strategic sea lift and airlift that we are able to call upon.

Q: Is this kind of deployment normal? Is the military called upon to respond to emergency responses of this nature?

A: It sure is. If you look around, particularly this year - it's been a crazy year for disasters. The tsunami: We had forces that were in the area, in Guam, who were sent to do relief. Medical relief, helicopters and support for the tsunami relief. We quickly loaded up an aircraft carrier with helicopters and relief. We were involved in Hurricane Katrina. But this one was big. This relief effort has been the longest relief effort in the history of the United States. Normally, they are only about 45 to 60 days in duration, but the unique topography of this region made this one almost six months in duration.

Q: Would the US assist in a situation like this in other conditions? I mean, to what extent is the US support for the Pakistan during this emergency a quid pro pro, and repayment to Pakistan for being compliant with your wars in Afghanistan and generally the “war on terror”?

A: No, not at all. In fact, the Pakistan government were very sensitive that this was all only related to humanitarian assistance, and that’s what we came in for. We came in to support them in humanitarian relief, strictly for saving lives and helping people. We worked with Iranians, Chinese, Cubans and off-loaded every conceivable aircraft that needed our help. It was all about working together towards one goal. Probably one of the great hallmarks of this relief effort was that it worked, irrespective of politics. There was this great cooperation, and barriers were broken down. The press tried to make a big thing about it when we helped off-load Iranian aircraft, but to us it was irrelevant. I think we did the right thing. We all worked towards this single, common goal to save lives.

Q: According to experts, the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan is perhaps the most radicalised part of the world and most aggressive to Westerners. It’s somewhat ironic that the US effort was so focused in that area. Do you think this may have led to a change in perceptions among the people there?

A: Absolutely. We definitely feel it has had an impact. There was a survey done recently that showed that in this area of the world, only about 23 percent had a favourable opinion of the West. After the earthquake - about a month after the earthquake - they repeated the survey, and 46 percent had a favourable opinion of the United States and the West. Very interesting results.

The same was seen in Indonesia after our assistance there with the tsunami. People we met in the affected areas - people were incredibly grateful. I saw people going through the rubble of their houses to find places to make their own food and make tea to give our Marines who were working in their villages. I think they saw us here, helping them. And so, on another note, I am also not surprised that there were no security incidents while we were here. Why would they bite the hand that was feeding them! I think they were probably acutely aware that should any of the aid workers be injured or attacked it would have been a disaster for the whole Pakistan people. When the Danish cartoon incidents happened, we watched things very closely, but we saw no difference in any behaviour.

Q: What were your impressions of the Pakistani government and military during this emergency?

A: I thought both the Pakistan government and Pakistan military were superb in this evolution. They really were. Because of the destruction, about 50 to 60 percent of their government was devastated. Government employees dead or with dead relatives meant that just after the event the local government was paralysed. This meant the Pakistan military stepped into their place and rapidly deployed into the affected areas - even though they lost lots of their own soldiers that Saturday morning as well. They reassured the people and were out amongst their own people very early on. To be candid, I can’t say the same of the United Nations. This is the first disaster that I’ve been involved in. I have to say I was very disappointed. But this rapid-onset disaster - I don’t think is the UN’s forte. They were slow to get here and establish a strong leadership. Not just the UN, but all the different agencies. It was probably a month- and-a-half before they really got their feet on the ground and the right leadership and their hands around the problem. Also, the other thing that surprised me was the stovepipe issue. All the different UN organisations wouldn’t talk to each other: It was a stovepipe mentality.

James Reynolds, deputy head of delegation for the ICRC



James Reynolds.
Credit: Courtesy of James Reynolds

James Reynolds is the deputy head of delegation for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Pakistan. ICRC in Pakistan has assisted in refugee camps as far back as 1947 and visited prisoners of war in 1948, 1965 and 1971. More recently, the delegation assisted victims of the conflict in Afghanistan and provided logistical support for ICRC operations in that country. Prior to the earthquake, the ICRC worked to promote international humanitarian law in Pakistan and build the capacity of the country's Red Crescent Society, as well as visiting certain categories of detainees. Reynolds spoke to IRIN in Pakistan in late March about some of the highlights of the earthquake response.

QUESTION: To what extent were the requirements to deal effectively with the Pakistan earthquake unique?

ANSWER: Every context is, of course, different. Certainly the scale of this disaster was very large in terms of losses of life, damage to property, damage to infrastructure. What complicated things - particularly in comparison to the tsunami [Indian Ocean Earthquake of December 2004], for example - was the logistical challenge of the terrain.

We focused most of our efforts - but not all of them - in the Muzaffarabad area, where the affected villages, particularly at higher altitudes of around 2,000 metres, made things difficult. Previously, the infrastructure had been quite well developed, but obviously the road network suffered enormously from the earthquake. To bring large amounts of goods in, the only realistic alternative was the use of helicopters on a scale which was new for us in terms of numbers of helicopters in the fleet. It must have been new for the UN as well.

Q: So in comparison to other emergencies, the logistical challenges were perhaps the most dramatic in this crisis?

A: Yes. The difference in Sri Lanka, for example, after the tsunami was that you could buy goods in Colombo. You could put them on a truck, and they would arrive at the coast in the affected area the next day at the latest. The area that was affected was a kilometre wide in most areas. There was a high density of people in those areas, but you could get to those areas easily and deliver goods in those areas easily - neither of which was the case here in Pakistan. We had a maximum of 11 helicopters here at one point, chartered from various operators, and some 60 trucks delivering goods. The scale of the logistical challenge was enormous. We were very aware from early on that this was going to be the case - but that didn't make things any easier.

Q: Were there problems for ICRC dealing with the authorities, given that they are strongly represented by the military?

A: In Islamabad, we dealt directly with the Federal Relief Commission, but in the field, especially in the initial weeks, we dealt with the army. The military were generally very helpful - whether it was in crowd control on helipads or flagging outstanding needs. For obvious reasons, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir is a sensitive area, but very quickly the earlier restrictions and regulations were relaxed, so that was in no way a constraint. The cooperation with authorities in-country, I would say, went rather well.

Q: What about coordination with other humanitarian agencies, and especially the cluster system set up by the United Nations?

A: Initially, it took the humanitarian actors a bit of time to organise a coordination mechanism. The initial information and coordination meetings had crowds and crowds of people of all shapes and sizes. Rather a crazy kind of situation at first, but one which improved quite quickly.

For the ICRC, I think two things are particularly important in any coordination system. Firstly, that it remains action-oriented and reality-based - identifying the problems faced by vulnerable people and how best to address them effectively and efficiently. And secondly, that the ICRC is not accountable, through, for example, a cluster lead, to the UN system, in order to maintain its independence.

Q: Overall would you say this relief operation has been successful?

A: The relief operation as a whole has, I think, certainly been very successful - which, even if the terrain was difficult, was to be expected, as the resources deployed by different actors were very significant. The situation at the camps has been acceptable. One of the main aims of our activities, particularly focusing on the high-altitude villages, was to give people the opportunity to stay where they were instead of coming down the moun-

tains and swamping the camps in the towns. The winter race - or whatever you want to call it - was to prevent a second round of deaths, be it from cold, be it from disease or epidemics, be it from lack of food, or be it from a combination of this additional vulnerability.

Andrew MacLeod, the relief to recovery transition adviser for the UN in Pakistan



Andrew MacLeod.
Credit: Courtesy of Andrew MacLeod

Andrew MacLeod is the relief to recovery transition adviser for the United Nations in Pakistan..He was also the former officer-in-charge of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs during the first three months of emergency relief in Pakistan, having arrived within 24 hours of the earthquake and led the coordination of the UN-led response operation. The following excerpts are from an interview with IRIN in Islamabad in March 2006.

QUESTION: Will the transitions to recovery be swift for the thousands of quake-displaced families in Pakistan?

ANSWER: The last person to leave transitional accommodation after the Kobe earthquake [1995] left in August last year. That's over nine years after the event in the world's second most powerful economy. What on earth makes people think people are going to get it done here in the next three years? What a lot of people are saying optimistically is going to happen is just not going to happen. What we should do is lower expectations and then try to exceed them, not raise expectations and miss them. We are going to have people in tents next winter. And landslides will also be an issue: There will be some from the spring melt, and then a lot are expected with the monsoon season [June- August].

Q: How serious is the continuing environmental-risk factor in relation to the earthquake zone?

A: The big question is to what extent are we going to have landslides and mountain slide in the future. We have been having them every single day since the earthquake. To some extent, these ecological events are a natural part of the erosion of mountains in this kind of terrain. But there's never been anything on this scale before, and there is also a question of resources. This is not a first-world country, so resources are definitely a problem. There have been seismic experts from Switzerland and Japan - with Pakistan experts as well - conducting seismic analysis. We, too, are starting to map where the vulnerabilities are in relation to earth-slides. We are asking ourselves what are we going to do with the series of mini-emergencies that are going to happen. But, largely, we hope they will be of the size and scope for the provincial government to deal with and not in the federal domain.

Q: What are the main challenges facing Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA)?

A: ERRA actually have to manage two transitions: They have to handle relief-to-recovery, and then they have to manage the transition from recovery and reconstruction to development. Because whether the donors pay or not, we all know that the amount of money that goes into the earthquake-affected regions to build hospitals and medical facilities will detract from the money available for the development of health facilities in Punjab, Baluchistan, Karachi and wherever. And one day, the provincial governments are going to wake up to that, and then ERRA is going to have to bring what they are planning under a wider national-development programme.

The idea is not to develop in the affected areas to such a level that goes beyond what was there already - if we want to improve on what was there already, then that has to be part of an overall development programme. Just because an earthquake has hit an area does not that mean that the people of that area have a higher priority than urban slum dwellers in Karachi. Asking the government to deal with these sorts of questions now is too early. They have to focus on getting ERRA to work first. This is a question for two or three years' time.

Q: Do you trust the Pakistan authorities to handle the recovery well? How do you see your role in the process?

A: Pakistan will do it in Pakistan's way. I am confident of that. This is a country that can do the recovery quickly. Whether they will do it perfectly - well, of course not. Will they do it as well as another country could? Maybe yes, maybe no. Will there be critics? Yes. Will the human rights groups get upset? Yes. All that we know 100 percent for sure, but the solution that they come up with, I feel, will work within the Pakistani environment. When I say that, I mean currently - under the military-led government. I am not going to use this opportunity, as the International Crisis Group suggests, for the broader political reform. That's not my job, nor my concern - nor do I think it is my role. Donors and human rights agencies may want to push that agenda. However, I am confident that this earthquake will lead to some degree of political reform in the Pakistani government. It has led - intentionally or not - to some greater degree of decentralisation. Even the fact that they are opening up Kashmir to tourism is a remarkable step forward.

Q: How would you characterise the working relationship between the Pakistani authorities and the international community concerning the earthquake response?

A: What I saw in the relief operation is that we would go to the Pakistani authorities with an idea. They would look at it, they would analyse it, and they would improve it and send the model back to us. We would look at it, improve it a little more and send it back, and they would improve it a bit more. But they drove it, and they drove it better than we could. They couldn't have driven it as well without our input, and many of the solutions were genuine partnerships of ideas, even if not partnership of implementation. And I think that's how the reconstruction will have to go. The challenge for many of the NGOs will be to know when to go, to know when their added value comes to an end and let the Pakistanis take the rest on in their own way.

Jamie McGoldrick, deputy humanitarian coordinator in Pakistan for UN OCHA



Jamie McGoldrick (OCHA)

Jamie McGoldrick, is the deputy humanitarian coordinator in Pakistan for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Previously involved in various complex emergencies with Save the Children (UK), the Red Cross movement and OCHA in Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Tajikistan, the Balkans, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, McGoldrick has also been involved in emergency-response missions in Asia and the Middle East. Currently, he is chief of the Great Lakes Region, Middle East and Afghanistan in OCHA's response division in Geneva.

QUESTION: Generally, how do you feel the response to the earthquake on 8 October has gone?

ANSWER: I think everybody recognises the response to the earthquake was exceptional. When you look at the statistics - of the figures and the facts normally associated with humanitarian crises, including mobility and mortality - all the pre-earthquake levels haven't changed at all and in some cases have improved. Plus, the fact that we were able to maintain a population above 5,000 feet who were obviously being served well enough, relative to what they were used to. We prevented a further wave of people coming down the mountain, which indicates

that not only were we taking care of the population up there, we were also taking care of the population down here.

Q: What about the nexus between the international humanitarian community and the military players? Were there problems during the last six months?

A: No, quite the opposite. We had very good cooperation with the military, the logistics from the Pakistani military and the other non-Pakistan military here, which was another part of what was very positive here. The cooperation and the consolidation of their efforts is something we harnessed and used much better than any other crisis we have been in thus far. Maybe it worked well because from the beginning everybody subsumed

themselves under the Pakistani military. It's a military government that we are dealing with, but that said, we dealt with militaries before. It has not always been that good - for example, in Aceh in Indonesia. I do think that the military here is highly educated, and many of them have been involved in peacekeeping missions as well. But we were all slightly wary of the military - coy, even - when we started. In fact, humanitarians have a deep seated fear of been linked to militaries.

Q: There was much talk of donor reticence to fund the response in the early days. Was this the case?

A: The Pakistanis were very open and invited everyone in to help them when they saw quickly how big it was. That was an important step from the donors' point of view, that openness. People say there were issues of donor fatigue on the back of the tsunami [in December 2004], but I don't think there was donor fatigue. If you take out the less realistic projects from the flash appeal, then effectively we were funded up to 90 percent. In fact, the response from the donors and the different militaries was high quality, and more than enough, and they stayed the course.

Q: How would you describe and define the role of OCHA in the past few months since the start of this emergency?

A: I believe good coordination is never seen. I think if it's not there, people will moan about it. I believe that all the five hubs created at the start of the emergency are all completely and compressively coordinated by OCHA. OCHA came out in the earliest days as UNDAC UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team [and with them came the team-building and the setting of the coordination centres in the hubs, organising the search-and-rescue mission and creating a basis for the flash appeal. OCHA also oversaw the winter plan, and now we are seeing how to develop the return process. We have developed a framework for returns and an IDP [internally displaced persons] taskforce, and now we are doing an action plan, which is a recovery plan for next year. It is not really our job, but OCHA is doing it. We have totally been supporting the government here, and perhaps because there is an effective government in this crisis, OCHA has played a more subdued role.

As we are leaving in June, our role is diminishing. We will eventually reduce our presence and second our staff into, or be part of, the coordinating structure existing in the provincial civil administration in the affected areas. I think the humanitarian coordinator [Jan Vandemoortele] has been well pleased with what we have done, and the Federal Relief Commission has been very pleased with what we have done. ERRA [Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority] are also pleased, because we continue to give them the products they want, and not what we think they want.

Q: To what extent do you think international emergency response is finally "coming of age" in a context where lessons learnt are being taken seriously and are leading to more efficient response systems?

A: I would agree with that. Maybe with the tsunami falling so soon ahead of this earthquake it panicked people, or exhausted people. But I think at the same time it was so fresh in the minds of the people that rolled up here - many of whom were the same people - there was a nagging conscience that maybe we can do this better and we can do it differently. Of course having the military capacity - the US military capacity as well as the Pakistani - on your doorstep had a great value and probably was the saving grace in this emergency. But I think also people are reflecting more to the emergency response. Jan Egeland has been promoting this through various reforms recently.

Q: How well do you think the Pakistan authorities and agencies have anticipated the requirements facing rehabilitation and recovery?

A: I would say people were very smart in that regard. The Federal Relief Commission was set up on day one, and the ERRA was set up on day four - so they obviously gave it some serious thought that there would have to be some sort of longer-term planning. How well they performed in the early days, I am not sure. But it is certainly the case now that ERRA has very much become a robust and more formidable institution that we all have to work through. Before the earthquake, there were established development communities here, so the difficulty was getting them to think about emergency response, not to get them to think about development. But they will still face huge problems on the ground as they work towards the recovery. Working at the federal level is one thing, but the provincial level is quite another environment.

Q: In terms of the international mechanisms in place to respond to emergencies, how important is the recent establishment of the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF)?

A: I think it will change things, because the predictability will be there. I think the response to emergencies will be faster. I do have some concern about how it will be managed. We - OCHA, who are managing this fund - would have to bulk up our capacity, not only in administering the fund but, more importantly, in judging the

requests. And then the important job of following up on those judgments. I am not sure that we have that capacity right now; it's something we will have to build up to. But the bottom line is that everybody agrees that the product - CERF - is more than welcomed, more than needed and long overdue.

Jan Vandemoortele, UN humanitarian coordinator and head of the UNDP in Islamabad



Jan Vandemoortele.
Credit: Christopher Horwood/IRIN

Jan Vandemoortele is the United Nations humanitarian coordinator and head of the United Nations Development Programme in Islamabad, Pakistan. Vandemoortele started his job as head of the UN country team in Pakistan only days before the 8 October earthquake. Six months on, in late March, he reflected, in this interview with Chris Horwood of IRIN, on the impact of the crisis and how Pakistan and the international community responded.

QUESTION: Many people refer to the earthquake-relief response in Pakistan in recent months as a success. What role did the Pakistani military play, in your view?

ANSWER: It is definitely part of the success story that the military took the control early on. Not only did they take charge, but throughout they showed an openness and flexibility that was extremely welcome. They opened up Kashmir, for example. This time last year, you and I could not have gone into the area as freely as we do now. But they opened it up for the aid workers. There were hundreds of them who came to the area, and this was a most encouraging aspect. The military were not only in charge, but they knew that there were many things that they didn't know, and they reached out and they listened and they took appropriate action.

Another example of cooperation is the joint unit that was established for managing the helicopters wherever they came from - from the military, from the US, the Australians and the other bilaterals, and NATO as well as the UN - they were all managed through a central unit which was under UNHAS [UN Humanitarian Air Service]. Of course in the first few days it was purely Pakistan military. For the first two weeks, essentially all the medical evacuations were done by the military. Then we got the arrival of the other helicopters from outside and the Pakistan military scaled back, but it was all a joint effort. It worked because they showed the confidence and the competence that the bilaterals and multilaterals had no problem dealing with.

I think there are certain factors at play. Personalities played a strong role: The president [of Pakistan], who is the head of the army, gave orders to the army to get in to the earthquake. Also, Kashmir is the part of the country that is important to Pakistan politically - that also played a role. This area has been in dispute for many years, and there was a sense that we can't let Kashmir down. I am not a military person, and this was my first experience with any military, but I take my hat off to them because I have seen them in action - virtually from day one - the soldiers and commanders on the ground and then the leaders here in Islamabad. This has been a wonderful partnership.

Q: Did the international community have reservations dealing with the military and the fact that the government of Pakistan is a military regime?

A: Of course there was a problem in linking up with the military, but we should be careful that we don't let ideology get in the way. Looking at it from a pragmatic point of view is the best solution. Everybody who was concerned with delivering relief to the people on the ground realised very quickly that without the army this wouldn't work, especially given the state of the civilian authorities at that stage.

Now they are back on their feet, so we can work with them, and we will work with them in the recovery and reconstruction phase. But the truth is that in October, November and December, the civilian authorities had

hardly any visibility. Fortunately, most partners in the humanitarian communities also took a very pragmatic stand, saying, No, we have not worked with the military before, and we do not normally work with the military, but in this case we will. And the army were just as committed emotionally, individually, as any of the other relief workers.

A typical example of this is the payment of the cash compensation. Early on, the government decided to compensate families for casualties, injuries and for damages to houses. The banks had collapsed in the area; there was no way cheques could be issued. There were no places to cash them, so it was decided early on to give cash to the soldiers and to move into the area and pay the people. Many people wondered what was going to happen: Giving out cash and giving it to the military in an uncontrolled area. But you know what? It worked! There were minimum - minimum - complaints, and they were addressed. The main thing is that this injection of money into the community transformed everything, and it really revived the local economy. People started to get back on their feet and take control of their lives. Most of the recovery and reconstruction will have nothing to do with the military, and in fact, the military now want to get out. They have a reason to be proud of what they have done, but now they are saying goodbye. Job well done.

Q: Humanitarian emergencies sometimes take place in contexts where the government is weak or non-existent. This case was clearly different. To what extent did the Pakistani government take clear leadership of the response coordination?

A: The main lesson from this emergency response is an old story, and we on the international side easily forget it: It is national leadership that matters. The military took charge of this exercise, they delivered, they were competent, they were committed and they listened to other parties – the ones with the experience and the expertise. And that was the magic that worked, because as this thing started to evolve, everyone joined the bandwagon. There were very few partners that went it alone. If that leadership had not been there, it would have been a very different story.

Q: What about the United Nations' role. How did that fit into the combined response and assist with coordination?

A: OCHA was very much critical from day one. I remember when the UNDAC [UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination] team arrived, there was, of course, chaos. There was uncertainty - people didn't know where to start. It was overwhelming and there was a sense of helplessness: How do we begin? And what did UNDAC do? They came in and established a sense of structure and sense of competence and created a feeling this was a doable job after all - it was not "mission impossible". They set up the coordination cells at the airport and in Muzaffarabad, introduced the cluster approach and organised the search-and-rescue teams. That helped give the military a sense of confidence. It showed the military that there was the relevant experience and expertise from elsewhere that was needed. That has been a critical aspect of the process. Right from the beginning, we had OCHA [the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] on the ground with competent people, and they showed the military it was to their advantage to reach out and listen. The OCHA staff worked very well with the military and the NGOs.

Q: Looking forward to the challenge of recovery and rehabilitation, what sort of issues lie ahead?

A: If the next six months are the same as the last three months in terms of preparation for recovery, then I am really worried we could face another emergency in the next winter. The reconstruction is not taking off as it should on the scale needed. If it does not start faster, people will not have shelter in the next winter; the roads will not be accessible. The services that people received in the camps in terms of water, health and education will not be available to them up in the mountains and the rural areas. We could see a return of people from the mountains; we could see a situation like a revolving door, and we will have to set up camps again. Fortunately, the new leaders of the reconstruction authority [Pakistan's Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority; ERRA] have been speeding up progress considerably since they took over in March.

Q: Will the displaced people from urban centres need special treatment in terms of recovery?

A: As for the urban victims of the earthquake, absolutely - we will have to care for them for longer because reconstruction in the town will take at least two years. In fact, the seismic reports say that some of the urban population will have to be relocated. The more one looks into the problems they may face in the future, the more one feels that perhaps the easy part is over. No matter how difficult the emergency response has been so far, we haven't done the difficult part yet. So, if we don't get going a lot faster, we may face another difficult situation next winter.

Maj-Gen Ahmad Farooq , chief of Pakistan's Federal Relief Commission (FRC)



Maj-Gen Ahmad Farooq.

Maj-Gen Ahmad Farooq has been the chief of Pakistan's Federal Relief Commission (FRC) since 8 October 2005, the day a massive earthquake struck Pakistan killing over 75,000 people and leaving over 3 million displaced and homeless. The FRC was formed the same day. In the following excerpts from an interview with IRIN in late March 2006, he discusses the immense challenges Pakistan faced during the crisis and the way he himself, the country and the international community responded.

QUESTION: Can you cast your mind back to 8 October and remember your reactions in the first hours and days?

ANSWER: It was a very bleak day because there was too much destruction. Hour by hour, the situation and the scale of the disaster started to become clearer. Suddenly, I was put in charge of the whole relief response and the FRC was formed. While it was an awesome task to manage the problem without any organisation in place, it also became a challenge. I said to myself, Look, this possibly is the greatest service I will be able to do for my country if I can manage it. That spirit - combined with the realisation that this was the biggest challenge ever faced by this country in terms of national disaster - was a great motivator. It had to be met head-on. The element of fear or the element of failure just doesn't come into focus because so much has to be done.

Q: Was there a particular high point of the experience?

A: I think the high point was that before we put anything into place we got all the stakeholders, like the UN, NGOs, the international organisations, working together, which made the response to this earthquake a unique experience.

Q: How about the low points? Did you ever feel overwhelmed by the task?

A: I think the low point was that we didn't have any organisation to handle such a great disaster. There was no disaster-management authority in Pakistan. Even myself - I was doing another job working under the prime minister. We had to quickly do the firefighting on such a great magnitude. We evolved as we kept on meeting the challenges. But if we had an organisation already in place, perhaps we could have responded even swifter and better. You don't have to evolve; you are already there. You know what your capabilities and limitations are, and you take effective actions accordingly. But when you don't know all this, it is a handicap. We have managed it successfully, such a big disaster relief, with the help of all stakeholders, which is not just the army and the government of Pakistan but also the international agencies.

Q: Some observers have been critical of the dominance of the military in dealing with this civilian natural disaster. While recognising that Pakistan is primarily a military regime, how do you respond to this criticism?

A: I am the only military man who was in overall charge of the relief; otherwise, I had civil servants, senior civil servants, working with me. The FRC has two wings. One was the military wing, which was responsible for the execution of the relief - in other words, the blue-collar workers. Then I had the civilian wing, full of civil servants who acted as the go-betweens with the ministries, the international organisations, the foreign agencies and the NGOs. So they were coordinating at a strategic level with these elements. It was the military wing that was executing the relief and rescue activities because the military formations were moved directly to the affected areas.

Of course, some international organisations, because of past experiences, were apprehensive in coordinating the activities with a military-led operation. But we developed a system. It took a while before they really developed that confidence to realise, look - we are not working at cross-purposes, we are assisting each other. We had an open-door policy, and soon we were sharing all manner of data through our meetings and the website we set up. They could meet me any time of day or night. What also helped was that I had an extremely robust mandate. All government agencies that were involved in relief had to work through me. It was a 'single window'. It could have been a great constriction - a bottleneck - or it could be one window able to help everyone. Fortunately, it was the latter.

Q: In fact, there are many others who praise the Pakistan military and suggest that their involvement has made the earthquake response in the last six months an unusually successful undertaking.

A: That's what people say, but I always think it good to be humble and remember it was a joint effort. You need to remember that the Pakistan military is a professional army and it has had experience in various UN peace-keeping operations around the world. But I want to stress that the FRC is a civilian organisation. I happen to be a serving officer, and, of course, the reality was that in the affected area the civilian authorities were nonfunctioning. The government machinery could not work because they themselves were either killed or suffering after the earthquake. All the infrastructure was destroyed. The only machine that could have enacted this gigantic task was the military, and it was working through the FRC - it was not working independently. Even in [hurricane] Katrina, the national guard and the regular military were called in to help. In Pakistan, the military is a very disciplined body and much respected and much liked.

Q: What about the contributions of other countries and agencies? Were you impressed, or did you find them wanting?

A: I would like to comment on the UN bodies, in particular, OCHA [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs], which has been a very proactive body - which had very good relations with us. Our close interaction with OCHA also helped other UN agencies have confidence to work with us. In terms of the foreign contingent, Cuba deserves comment.

We don't even have a diplomatic relationship with Cuba, but on humanitarian grounds, President Castro spoke to President Musharef and offered to send medical assistance. As the medical assistance came, we deployed them in places where the injured were flowing in by the hundred each day. They were here within a week. Initially, they came with only about 80 staff. But as the Cuban government realised that the disaster was far greater than anticipated, they offered a whole medical brigade, and eventually, by the end of November, they had 32 hospitals with close to 2,500 doctors and medics working in the affected areas. This included a large number of female paramedics and female doctors, which made them a very popular medical element because our womenfolk and children are much more comfortable going to the women doctors and paramedics.

For many of the Cubans, who come from a tropical island, it was the first time they experienced the cold of mountains and the first time they saw snow. The fact is, they have been working here for over five months, day and night with no real relief. They left their loved ones and their work in Cuba, and they have really created a very good impression in Pakistan. They are respected, and I think people will always remember their contribution. If they had not come, there would have been very large gaps in medical support for the victims. They have also offered and taken 14 amputees to Cuba for rehabilitation. It is a tremendous effort and incredible story, and the Cubans were one country that was prepared to work in all areas of the country that were affected by the earthquake. They also told us that they will leave all the hospitals, which are state-of-the-art, for the people of Pakistan. They even offered to train our doctors and offered 1,000 seats in the Cuban universities for Pakistani medical students.

Q: Aid agencies have highlighted the challenges facing Pakistan concerning those families that are still displaced. What can they hope for in the future, now that the immediate relief is over?

A: To an extent, the relief will continue for those living in the camps. As the house-building will be owner-driver for those in the country who have the land - and of course I am not talking about those who have lost their land from landslides - they will want to go back as soon as possible. It will be different for those who lived in bigger cities like Muzaffarabad and Balakot - which need to be redesigned and to an extent relocated. Eighty-five percent of those in the camps are rural people. With the compensation and their desire to rebuild their lives, we expect most of these to go back without a problem, especially if they are sure they will get the second tranche of the compensation and if materials are available in the markets to rebuild. As for the others, yes, it will be difficult. They will need assistance up to the point that the towns are redesigned and relocated in the case of Balakot. This will not be an easy time, but it all depends on how the local authorities sell it to the people and make them see that living on fault lines can't be a good way forward. When they see the logic, we hope they will willingly move. It will have to be handled very carefully, keeping in mind humanitarian concerns. It's difficult, but doable.

Dr Yusaf Samiullah, head of Britain's Department for International Development (DFID)



Credit: Courtesy of Dr Yusaf Samiullah

Dr Yusaf Samiullah is the head of Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) in Pakistan, and Development Counsellor to the British High Commission there. In the following excerpts from an interview, he tells IRIN about the latest on DFID's funding strategy and priorities in earthquake-affected areas.

QUESTION: How much money is DFID committing to rebuild Pakistan and over what period?

ANSWER: DFID has pledged a UK contribution of £70 million (over US \$130 million) over three years for the reconstruction and rehabilitation effort. This is in addition to the £54 million (over US \$100 million) which has already been spent on relief efforts.

Q: How is this money being channelled to affected areas? Through the government, or NGOs, or both?

A: Of the £70 million for reconstruction and rehabilitation we decided to spend £5 million of that straight away on areas which we felt needed immediate attention. We did this in consultation with international programme partners in Pakistan and the governments of Pakistani-administered Kashmir and North Western Frontier Province. In the light of these consultations, we decided to spend the money on areas like: the reconstruction of critical bridges in order to restore basic road communications; the training of teachers and administrators in order to underpin support for rehabilitation of the education sector; TB prevention services; and mental health support services. All of this was in the earthquake-affected area and done through the Government of Pakistan (GoP) and the United Nations.

The next step for DFID is to plan and programme the remainder of our money and that's what we're doing now. This again, is being done in consultation with the Pakistani government, including departments like the Economic Affairs Division and the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), and with the major donors and NGOs. It is likely that DFID will adopt a 'mixed approach' to our spending which will, therefore, be channelled both through government, at the federal and provincial level, and the UN and NGOs.

Q: What are DFID's reconstruction priorities and why?

A: We firmly believe that reconstruction should be a GoP-led process and are therefore encouraging the government to articulate its demands more clearly, to increase local ownership. So far, the GoP has been asking donors what they are going to do for Pakistan. What would help is a well-structured dialogue between the government and donors to consider key priorities against which pledges made at the 19 November Reconstruction Conference can be prioritised. What we have done in order to assist the government, and specifically ERRA, in planning for reconstruction and setting its priorities, is to provide technical support to draw up a master plan for implementation and monitoring of the overall reconstruction programme.

The GoP and the main seven donors (DFID, the United States Agency for International Development, the European Commission, the UN Development Programme, the Asian Development Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the World Bank) have had regular weekly meetings with the GoP since the earthquake. Meetings have been less frequent as the relief phase has come to an end, but following a recent meeting with the Chairman of ERRA, he agreed that the GoP would continue systematic donor coordination with a regular schedule of meetings to report progress, resolve policy issues and review funding gaps.

Q: Are you satisfied that money being given directly to the government will be spent where it is supposed to be, given Pakistan's record on corruption?

A: DFID always takes issues of corruption and fiduciary risk seriously wherever we work - we are accountable to parliament for how UK taxpayers' funds are used, and we have a duty to ensure that development assistance is used to promote poverty elimination. In the case of Pakistan, whilst corruption is an issue, the government is taking steps to tackle this problem. In October 2002, Pakistan's cabinet approved a National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) that identified areas of pervasive corruption and recommended time-bound measures and reforms to combat corruption.

DFID is working with the Government to strengthen the public financial management system and reduce corruption. We are doing this by carrying out fiduciary risk analysis for the budget support that we provide, assessing potential areas of corruption, and working with government, especially the Audit Commission and the National Accountability Bureau, to review and address these areas.

The point to remember is that by providing aid through the GoP in this way we provide medium-term and predictable funding for the government to use in reducing poverty. Because it goes through government channels, this type of funding helps to improve the ability of recipient governments to plan and manage spending. Because the ultimate responsibility lies with the GoP, it also means that it needs to be accountable to its parliament, citizens and interest groups for progress in poverty reduction.

Q: In the aftermath of the earthquake, donors have been heavily criticised for accepting military directives and not determining their own humanitarian priorities. How do you respond to this criticism?

A: The earthquake in Pakistan was of massive proportions which posed unprecedented logistical difficulties for the humanitarian response, and the Pakistan military did well in leading the national response and engaging with many supporting civilian international agencies. There was strong leadership from the Federal Relief Commission from the outset, which coordinated well with the humanitarian community.

As far as managing reconstruction goes, the GoP has established the ERRA which is headed by Altaf Saleem, a non-military appointee. The staffing arrangements at all levels of ERRA include appointees from democratically elected institutions.

Q: There are reportedly a number of banned militant outfits involved in humanitarian activities in earthquake-affected areas. Donors have been criticised for not pressurising the Pakistani government to stop these activities and disband the networks. Has DFID taken a stand on this issue?

A: The GoP has a firm policy against the activities of banned groups, and where DFID is aware of these organisations, we would refer the matter to the appropriate GoP authorities with whom we have an on-going broad discussion of these issues.

4. Personal testimonies - “..a great fear of the houses”



Mohamed Naim Omar poses in front of what remains of his house in Kanog village, Mansehra district. "It was like doomsday, and I felt like the world was opening up and we would all be buried. Of course I was very, very frightened"
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Mohamed Naim Omar, school teacher in Kanog village, Mansehra. Pakistan

I was on the road on my way to school when the earth started to shake. There was a vibrating sound, followed by big bangs like an explosion. It was like doomsday, and I felt like the world was opening up and we would all be buried. Of course I was very, very frightened. Clouds of dust surrounded me and the sky was dark. It was impossible to stand - we were lying on our faces. Mothers were terrified for their children, and everyone was looking for ways to save themselves. Seeing their mothers and other adults so terrified, the children became totally terrorised. The shocks lasted about four hours in total, and so we crawled back to our home, 4km away. I was imagining that everything would be destroyed and everything killed. When I came to the village, I saw many people still alive - although injured - and only a few dead. What I had imagined had happened was so bad that when I saw people still alive, tears of joy fell down my face.

I was especially pleased to see my brother alive, who I love more than my own wife. None of my direct family died, although some cousins and other, more distant relatives were killed by the quake. Friends and neighbours were killed, though. One was killed by a boulder while running down the road. Another, a shopkeeper, rushed out of his own home to escape falling stonework only to be killed by the falling stones of his neighbour's house. In this cluster of villages alone, there were 4,000 injuries or more. There were severed limbs, many fractures, spinal injuries and so many head injuries. It happened during the month of fasting, so most people were in bed, as it was 8:52 a.m. There were huge landslides, and boulders blocked the roads.

For the injured, there was only a small dispensary in another village; but it also collapsed, so there were lots of problems getting any medical aid. People died in the following days from tetanus and blood loss. People were very grief-stricken. There was a great hue and cry - people were wailing to God, praying on all fours and holding the Koran. We just felt that the earth wanted to eat us up. We were isolated for about three days before help came. Our only hope was God. Finally, the army came on day three, by road as they cleared the landslides. The helicopters had started dropping food before that. We desperately needed food, as most had been buried. When the helicopters brought food, the same helicopters took away some of the injured. Some of these died; others have since come back.

We are so proud of the army. God made them a medium to help us in our hour of trial. They performed well. The international community also helped us. We have come to see and developed a sense that there are no divisions between Muslims, Hindus and Christians - of any caste or creed - because everyone came to assist suffering humanity. A man from the UK who came was a doctor. He had only been married for six months, but even his wife had urged him to come out to work here. He was very inspiring to me.

I felt totally sound before and immediately after the earthquake, but now, some months later, I have come to realise that I am mentally disturbed and traumatised by the events. I think everyone has been affected. At least that's what I feel when I talk to them. We never thought we would be like the Afghans, living in tents, and we never imagined that the houses built by decades of hard work by our forefathers would come down. Seeing even the concrete houses collapse has really caused us mental suffering. I won't return to my semi-destroyed home again. We have now a great fear of the houses and have been traumatised by them. Even if they are repaired, we will be frightened to return to them. We don't want to live in tents, but we want structures that won't kill us if they collapse in the future. We used to live in big houses with big courtyards, and now we are in these small tents. We are not happy with the tents and feel they are ridiculing us, giving us such small spaces. They need to take us into their confidence when they plan the recovery. We have local enemies in nearby communities, and living in these exposed shelters makes us vulnerable - not only to the elements but also our enemies. They don't understand this. Living in a tent can be a security risk. It can be torched. We don't even know how we survived the biting chill of winter. We suffered a lot in the cold. Especially the women and children, who suffered a lot without latrines.

In the future, if we are given housing recovery, we will stand on our own two feet as soon as possible. The compensation so far has been very meagre - 175,000 rupees doesn't even build a single room. We have been given 25,000 so far and have been promised 150,000 to come. There is not a problem of corruption or not getting the money - the problem is, it is not enough. Especially in my case: We are five brothers living in one house, but because the one house was affected, they are only giving us compensation for a one-family house, not five. But anyway, something is better than nothing. In the higher altitudes the land itself was destroyed. Here, we didn't have that problem.

“An immense silence in their homes”



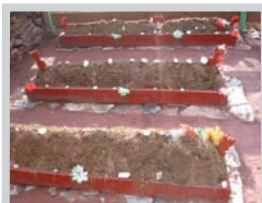
For most Pakistanis and the rest of the world outside the earthquake impact zone the first view of the damage was that of the Towers that collapsed in the city centre, Islamabad.
Credit: Tahira Sarwar/IRIN

Munsil Khan, child-protection assistant in a World Vision project in Boli, Mansehra, Pakistan.

For the children, suddenly their entire world was changed. They wouldn't even talk with their parents. There was an immense silence in their homes. One cannot control the entire area - the NGOs are essential for the health and welfare of these people. My mother and father were also killed in the earthquake, so I know how these children feel. We offer them friendship; we work to become their true friends. Before they came to this school, the children were sent on errands, but it's not a job for children to queue for distribution. Children have rights - we are teaching them and their parents child rights.

I was in Islamabad looking for a job when the earthquake struck Pakistan. I heard the news and immediately went to the Margalla Towers. I was there within 15 minutes of the news and pulled out four or five people from the rubble. Then I went home to my village. Of course everyone hopes and thinks that their own people will be alright. When I came to Mansehra, I saw a lot of ambulances. There was no space in the hospitals - even on the hospital grounds. I was out of control. Whenever I asked people about my village, they only said one phrase: Nothing, nothing is remaining there.

I got a taxi and went to my village. My brothers and their wives were all injured. They were in their home when it happened. My father and my mother were both dead. He was outside on the grass when he was hit by falling stones. My mother was in the kitchen. When I found them, they were still covered in bricks. After a lot of work, I managed to find their bodies. My brothers were too injured to help. That was a very painful time. I have never experienced anything like that. Now I feel I have to help others. This is all we have left: to help other people. I have nothing left - all I have from God now is the ability to help other people.



Everywhere in the villages and towns fresh graves give silent witness to the high death toll sustained from the October 2005 quake.
Credit: Christopher Horwood/IRIN

No one came to the village for three days, although the army came and delivered tents on the evening of 9 October. No one else came before that. Even the injured were helping in the village. The army were great. They stood by us, and even though they are poor like us, they helped a lot. I brought out 50 people from collapsed houses. With these hands, these hands, I lifted them out. All dead. We all thought it was the end of the world, like doomsday. We thought the earthquake was global, and we were sure the world was coming to an end.

Working here with parents and children - this is the first time they have heard about the rights of the child. People say the earthquake destroyed a lot, but they feel they have also gained a lot. People just don't know about these things, and people are so poor without education. We have to warn them about kidnapping and trafficking. People can sell children for just 100,000 rupees, for example. That's why they need child rights education. And we give it to them.

As for the future, I have no resources to build our family home. We have all moved to Islamabad. Our village is cracked. The land is cracked, but we cannot live in another village. This is where we grew up. We need to have government help, and we are hard workers. Myself and my brothers, we will rebuild the house. I miss my mother and my father very much. I feel full of sadness, and an immense tension.

“Now I am president of a graveyard”



Iftikhar poses next to a boulder on the road outside Sarli Sacha. One of hundreds of thousands of boulders that crashed down the mountains of northern Pakistan on 8th October 2005 destroying houses, roads, animals and humans.

Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Iftikhar Ahmed. Currently working in a remote village in the earthquake zone, Sarli Sacha, as a medical assistant for the British-based non-governmental organisation MERLIN. At the time of the earthquake on 8 October, Ahmed lived as a student seven 10KM outside Balakot, a town in that was totally destroyed in North West Frontier Province.

“To give you an example of the kind of casualties, there was one school with 350 students killed in it. Another one, where 49 children died, was like a mass grave, where people found dismembered hands and feet and unrecognisable faces. These are some of the hysterical memories for the people of Balakot.

I was a student at the time and living in a third-floor building. I had no shoes for the first three hours because I had to rush from my room. A cobbler sold me a pair of plastic shoes. Everyone was injured and had stitches, but everyone who could was trying to help other people. People were chanting and crying out.

Basically, there was no assistance for the first three days. People were very focused on the Margalla Towers and didn't know the full picture at first. On 9 October, there were rainstorms and thunder. We had to spend two days in the open. There was a lot of weeping and crying while people were busy digging in the debris of their homes for dead bodies. There were collective funeral ceremonies. Normally, imams do these ceremonies, but there were not enough of them and some even got killed in the quake. At that time, people considered themselves lucky if they found the body of a relative.

People were still busy like this on 15 October. Across the river in Balakot, there was the United Bank. More than 25 people were embedded in the ruins. There were very pungent smells, and it was cold and wet. People were desperate for tents. Imagine the mud. We had no doctors or nurses - everything was wet and muddy. It was a very bad situation. “Now I am president of a graveyard,” said the president of Muzaffarabad on national television on 9 October.

It was the first time that I had touched a dead body, and not just one but 28 bodies in total. One of them was a seven-year-old girl - a schoolgirl - with her arms twisted behind her and all her ribs crushed. It was the most influential, the hardest impression, for many people of our generation.

Many people did not trust Westerners before the earthquake, but now even the extremist can see the good they did in our hour of need and are thankful and respectful. In Balakot and Mansehra, people were unfriendly to the West, especially after the Afghan war. There were 50,000 Afghan refugees living in Mansehra District. But now it's different, and I am not surprised that there have been no attacks on Westerners while they have been working here in the last six months. Many feel that the foreigners did even more than their own government.”

“The community here is more fractured since the earthquake”



Mohamed Farooq, 33, earthquake survivor, says “There are tensions because of the aid and certain families grabbing more than others. Everyone is thinking for themselves”.
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Mohamed Farooq is a 30-year-old shopkeeper and resident of Sali Sacha, a village in the Neelum Valley of Azad Kashmir. He sells small amounts of essential food and other items in a village badly hit by the earthquake of 8 October 2005. In late March 2006, he told IRIN about some of the impact of the quake and relief his village has received.

Apart from the destruction caused by the quake, it was hard to imagine what the local economy could consist of. Most men worked in towns and cities far from these remote mountain villages in construction or as truck drivers. The unforgiving terrain made it impossible for the children even to find a small strip of level ground to practice cricket. Farooq himself was unusual in being able to extract profit from the local yields of walnuts.

“I was up in a tree when the earthquake struck. I was collecting walnuts in the mountain with five friends. When the earthquake hit we all ran off to our homes. It lasted about 60 seconds, I think, but who knows because we were all out of our minds and the aftershocks continued. We could see houses collapsed all around us and so many people were crying. People died and we saw their bodies. We all thought it was the end of the world, the end of our lives.

“The aftershocks continued as I came back to Sali Sacha, and when I got home I saw my own house had also collapsed. Under the roof, I found my mother. I recovered her but she was injured. Her leg was injured but it’s better now. One of my sons was trapped but was unharmed. It was the will of God and a blessing that my family was saved.

“After finding my family, I helped others digging out bodies in the village. We were arranging funerals for four days. I also lost relatives, some cousins and many other relatives in the earthquake. My shop collapsed. This one is new. I built it in a different location. It wasn’t just the houses that were damaged. The earthquake also damaged so many of the things inside the houses, and the fields, and the water sources. There were so many different landslides and the electricity which we had in this village was also cut. The schools were hit and also the government hospital was flattened. Even though MERLIN [the British NGO running a clinic and other programmes in the village] are good, they are only going to stay a few months.



Seven months after the earthquake the access road to Sali Sacha is blocked by new landslides and rockfall. Water and electricity supply is damaged and people struggle to make use of the compensation provided for rebuilding.
Credit: Christopher Horwood/IRIN

“It been more than six months now. I feel some people are getting more aid than they should as they are quite clever at getting aid. Others on the other hand are in a pitiful condition and still badly affected by the earthquake. Certain people with self-respect and high status in the community find it really difficult to ask for aid and they are really suffering. [We] have been getting flour only, but some of the community leaders are getting flour, dates, oil, biscuits and blankets. We did get 25,000 rupees [approximately \$450] from the government and we have to go to Muzaffarabad to open bank accounts to get the other 75,000 rupees they are offering. We have to spend most of the first instalment of 25,000 rupees just to open the accounts! On top of that, it takes five or six days to open the account. If you add that to the cost of transport from here to Muzaffarabad, the food and accommodation there, it make the whole affair laughable.

“My view is that life is a blessing from God and he will take life as and when he wants to. The earthquake was the will of God and maybe because of our misdeeds. Everyone commits secret sin so, who knows?

“Right now everyone is busy getting relief and finding ways of getting relief. They are all thinking about it. Business in my shop was good before the earthquake but now with all the relief it’s not so good; people are buying less. Because of the earthquake I had to abandon over 2,000 kilos of walnuts in the mountains. I sell my walnuts for about 100 rupees [US \$1.70 approx] per kilo so that’s no small amount lost.

“The community here is more fractured since the earthquake. There are tensions because of the aid and certain families grabbing more than others. Everyone is thinking for themselves, and I don’t think it will be a short-term process bringing people back together again. And we don’t know how bad the next shocks will be. Even last night there were tremors.”

“Every household had lost some members of their family”



MERLIN's cluster of clinic tents and living accommodation for their staff is perched high on an outcrop of rock near the Indian border.
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Ahmed Shar Pardis is a medical officer for MERLIN, a British-based NGO, working in Pakistan in response to the earthquake of 8 October 2005. He spoke to IRIN in late March 2006 about his work in Sarli Sacha, close to the Pakistan-Indian Line of Control in the disputed area of Kashmir.

At 1,700 metres, MERLIN's clinic in the village is perched on a narrow outcrop of land just wide enough for the tents. Just below the site of the MERLIN camp, the flattened government clinic lies in ruins, and now cleared of debris, serves as the landing site for helicopters - the only means of access to these remote villages. All around the clinic, the mountains and ravines show signs of rock collapse and landslides. Most houses in the small surrounding villages are in ruins – despite new building taking place. Schoolchildren take their lessons outdoors. The sun is bright and the air crisp and fresh in the Himalayan altitudes.

Previously Ahmed Shar worked for the French NGO, Action Contre La Faim (ACF) in Afghanistan and is Afghani by birth.

“We came to this village in late November to set up camp. We were not the first as this was some weeks after the quake, in late November, but they had received very little assistance even by then. There are about 14,500 people in these 12 villages around this camp.

“We came in by helicopter and asked the army officers here for a campsite equal distance from all the communities, and close to where they were. There was already an engineer battalion in the area trying to clear the roads.

“When we first came, we had lots and lots of problems. Scabies was the biggest problem. The water supply had been ruptured so there was no washing water and people had a lot of skin diseases. At that time, just two percent of injuries remained in the villages. The army had already taken away the injured with the help of the UN and the ICRC some weeks before. There were so many.

“If MERLIN had not come here, another NGO would not necessarily have come to this area. We have seen 9,484 cases in the last five and a half months. We have had to perform 96 area evacuations by chopper and almost 600 dressings of wounds and injuries in the same period. Many of these are indirectly, rather than directly, related to the earthquake. Some of the cases have been rock fall injuries; there have been hundreds of aftershocks since 8 October.



Initially MERLIN attended numerous earthquake-injured patients. Over 88,000 people died in the earthquake of October 2005.
Credit: Merlin

“This is the first time I have worked in an earthquake area; for me this place is similar to Afghanistan - but the special problem here is the lack of water. We have managed to really reduce scabies here now and the people also understand the problem better. They understand the need to clean themselves carefully and now they know how they get scabies. We have health classes in the morning to teach patients the importance of hygiene.

“This is the first time I have worked for MERLIN and I think they offer good humanitarian assistance despite the very challenging area. I think even MERLIN has surprised itself by working in such a difficult area. We had to look not just at the illnesses but also the water needs of the area, and have been providing water equipment to repair the villagers' tanks. The water there was already hard to come by but the earthquake damaged all their storage areas and channels. We are repairing that now. In about a week we hope they will be connected again to their main supply that they used before.

“I found it really difficult to work here at first. Every household had lost some members of their family and the situation was very sad. Really tragic in fact, but the most rewarding thing is to be able to work here and assist with the villagers' recovery.”



MERLIN'S medical officer Ahmed Shar Pardis attending to a sick child in Pakistan-administered Kashmir close to the line of control between India and Pakistan.
Credit: Chris Horwood/IRIN

Links and References

The following section outlining links and references is divided into several categories.

- International Organisations and NGOs
- UN Organisations
- Government Aid Organisations
- Civil-Military Relations: Articles, Reports and Guidelines
- Scholarly articles
- Reports about the south Asia Earthquake and recovery from Natural Disasters

International Organisations and NGOs

Save The Children USA has a comprehensive site that covers both the emergency phase and the rebuilding phase.

http://www.savethechildren.org/emergencies/south_asian_earthquake/index.asp?stationpub=x_ysm_sae_pr&WT.srch=1&WT.mc_id=yp



The ICRC South Asia Earthquake site has news and photos as well as stories from the field.

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/south-asia-earthquake>



The ECHO site describes the European Union response to the earthquake.

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/echo/whatsnew/earthquake-pak2005_en.htm



Oxfam, UK.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/emergencies/country/asian_quake/

Oxfam, USA.

http://www.oxfamamerica.org/whatwedo/emergencies/earthquake_southasia



Care International.

<http://www.careinternational.org.uk/?lid=4399>



Catholic Relief Services.

http://www.crs.org/our_work/where_we_work/overseas/asia/south_asia_earthquake/index.cfm



The International Rescue Committee.

<http://www.theirc.org/where/page.jsp?itemID=27728099>



Center for International Disaster Information has a useful search engine.

<http://www.cidi.org/default.htm>



The World Bank also has its Hazard Risk Management Programme.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTURBANDEVELOPMENT/EXTDISMGMT/0,,menuPK:341021~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:341015,00.html>



The Disaster Emergency Committee is a British organisation that brings several different NGOs together.

<http://www.dec.org.uk>



Caritas Internationalis South Asia Earthquake Site.

<http://www.caritas.org/jumpNews.asp?idLang=ENG&idChannel=3&idUser=0&idNews=3439>



UN Organisations

The United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre in Pakistan gives a good picture of UN activities in the area.

<http://www.unhic.org/pakistan/>



The World Food Programme site about the South Asia Earthquake.

<http://www.wfp.org/english/?ModuleID=137&Key=1847>



The World Health Organisation, WHO, has situation reports and other information both about the emergency phase and the rebuilding phase on their site.

http://www.who.int/hac/crises/international/pakistan_earthquake/en/index.html



The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF.
http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/rosa_28716.html



The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is the focal point in the UN System to coordinate disaster reduction activities of all kinds.
<http://www.unisdr.org>



The United Nations Development Programme has a special bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery.
<http://www.undp.org/bcpr/disred/index.htm>



The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT, has a special Disaster Management Programme.
<http://www.unhabitat.org/programmes/rdmu/>



Government Aid Organisations

The USAID South Asia Earthquake site.
http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/south_asia_quake/



The DFID South Asia Earthquake site.
<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/emergencies/pakistan/default.asp>



The AusAID South Asia Earthquake response site.
http://www.ausaid.gov.au/hottopics/topic.cfm?ID=7971_9253_3488_4613_717



Civil-Military Relations: Articles, Reports and Guidelines

"Civil Military Relations in Afghanistan" in Forced Migration Review Vol. 13 2002.
<http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR13/fmr13.5.pdf>

Caritas Internationalis guidebook for relations with the military.
<http://www.caritas.org/jumpNews.asp?idLang=ENG&idChannel=3&idUser=0&idNews=4164>

"Civil-Military Coordination and UN peacekeeping Operations" in the African Journal on Conflict Resolution Vol. 5 No. 2, 2005.
http://www.accord.org.za/ajcr/2005-2/AJCRvol5no2_pg89-118.pdf

"Civil-Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies" is a Reference Paper from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), June 2004.
The IASC is a UN-committee for inter-agency coordination of Humanitarian assistance with UN and non-UN actors.
<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/products/products.asp?productcatID=8>

"Armed forces as humanitarian aid workers? Scope and limits of cooperation between aid organisations and armed forces in humanitarian aid" from the Association of German Development Non-Governmental Organisations, May 2003.
<http://www.venro.org/publikationen/archiv/position%20paper%20Armed%20Forces%20and%20Humanitarian%20A.pdf>

"Guidelines on The Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets To Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies" from UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, March 2003.
<http://ochaonline.un.org/GetBin.asp?DocID=426>

"Humanitarian Aid is Not a Military Business" from Christian Science Monitor, April 2003.
<http://www.christiansciencemonitor.com/2003/0415/p09s02-coop.html>

"Humanitarian' and 'Military' Don't Go Together" from the International Herald Tribune, 18 October 2001.
<http://www.commondreams.org/views01/1018-06.htm>

"Iraq: Humanitarian-Military Relations" from Oxfam UK.
http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/conflict_disasters/bp41_iraq.htm

Scholarly Articles

"The Responsibility to Reflect: Learning Lessons from Past Humanitarian Military Interventions" in the Journal of Humanitarian Assistance March 2006.
<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a186.pdf>

"Responses to complex humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters: an analytical comparison" from the Third World Quarterly Vol. 21 No. 2, April 2000.

<http://journalonline.tandf.co.uk/link.asp?id=lbrj7rqvt3pc0792>

"Two Steps Back: Relearning the Humanitarian-Military Lessons Learned in Afghanistan and Iraq" in the Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, October 2003.

<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a125.htm>

Reports about the south Asia Earthquake and recovery from Natural Disasters

A UN report that discusses what actions need to be taken within a year from May 2006.

<http://www.unhcr.org/pakistan/uploaddocuments/ERRA-UNEarly0RecoveryPlan.pdf>

Oxfam: Starting on the Road to Recovery: Saving Lives and Rebuilding Livelihoods After the Pakistan Earthquake.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/conflict_disasters/downloads/bn_asian_earthquake2.pdf

Oxfam: Back to Work, How People are Recovering Their Livelihoods 12 Months After the Tsunami.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/conflict_disasters/bp84_tsunami_livelihoods.htm

An article from UNISDR Director, Salvano Briceqo, about disaster awareness.

<http://www.unisdr.org/eng/media-room/point-view/2006/saving-lives-what-are-we-waiting-for.pdf>

The Evolving UN Cluster Approach in the Aftermath of the Pakistan Earthquake: An NGO Perspective.

http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/_tools/download.asp?docID=1582&type=

News coverage of the South Asian Earthquake

The BBC South Asia Earthquake site is broad and includes detailed news coverage, as well as pictures and live stories.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/south_asia/2005/south_asia_quake/default.stm

CNN has a comprehensive South Asia Earthquake site.

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2005/asia.quake/>

Reuters has collected all their South Asia Earthquake stories.

http://today.reuters.com/News/RegionalCrises.aspx?em=SA_EAR

The Asian News.

http://www.theasiannews.co.uk/features/200022_south_asia_earthquake.html

UN News Centre main site for the South Asian earthquake has lots of UN-news and comments from Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as well George Bush Sr., special UN envoy for the South Asian Earthquake Disaster.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=111&Body=Pakistan&Body1=quake>

Other interesting sites

This blog is set up to help victims of the South Asia Earthquake, as well as to work as a tool for relief workers.

<http://quakehelp.blogspot.com/>

The official gateway to the Pakistani government.

<http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/>

The South Asia Earthquake Relief was created by five distinguished private-sector executives to raise awareness and resources to help survivors of the earthquake rebuild their lives and communities.

<https://www.southasiaearthquakerelief.org/>

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