

Pakistan (South Asia Earthquake)

AT A GLANCE



Country data *(2005 figures, unless otherwise noted)*

- 2006 Human Development Index: 0.539; ranked 134 of 177 countries
- Population (2006): 159 million
- GNI per capita Atlas method (2006, in current US\$): US\$770
- Life expectancy: 64.9
- Under five infant mortality rate: 99 per 1,000
- Population undernourished (2001–03): 23 percent
- Population with sustainable access to improved water source: 91 percent
- Primary education completion rate: 63.2 percent
- Gender-related development index (2006): 0.508, ranked 107 of 177 countries
- Official development assistance (ODA): US\$1.7 billion
- 2006 Corruption Perception Index: 2.2 score, ranked 142 out of 163 countries

Sources: World Bank; UNDP, 2006a; Transparency International, 2006.

The crisis

- Earthquake 7.6 on Richter scale, centered 95 km NE of Islamabad, 8 October 2005;
- Largest natural disaster, causing 84 percent of 99,425 deaths in 2005 from natural catastrophes;
- 73,000 died (incl. 1,300 in India, 4 in Afghanistan); 128,000+ injured;
- More than 3,500,000 homeless;
- 203,579 homes destroyed; 196,575 damaged or 84 percent housing stock;
- 50 percent health facilities demolished; another 25 percent damaged;
- Economic losses of US\$5.2 billion, equal to IDA in preceding three years;
- Approximately 2.3 million people reliant on food aid;
- 30,000 people remained in camps until March 2007.

Sources: International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), 2006; Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2005; World Bank, 2005; World Food Programme (WFP), 2006.

The humanitarian response

- Estimated 3.2 to 3.5 million people needed immediate relief assistance;
- 11 Oct. UN Flash Appeal for US\$270 million (rev. to US\$550 million) for first six months of operation; after one month Appeal only 12 percent funded; in six months, over two-thirds funded;
- US\$4,195,941 from CERF to International Organization for Migration (IOM) and OCHA; Pakistan third largest annual CERF recipient, or 11.5 percent of 2005 total;
- In addition to UN Appeal, donor reconstruction conference requested US\$5.2 billion; international community pledged more than US\$5.8 billion; France, Germany, UK, and EC pledged US\$100 million+ each; U.S. and Saudi Arabia over US\$500 million each;
- By June 2007, humanitarian assistance reached US\$1,165,589,575, above US\$1.9 billion pledged in grants and aid in-kind; top five donors: private (22.8 percent), U.S. (17.5 percent); UK (9.5 percent); Turkey (5.7 percent); EC/ECHO (5.2 percent);
- The Pakistan government deployed 50,000 troops to assist the relief work.

Sources: OCHA, 2006b; OCHA, Financial Tracking Service.

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Testing Reform of the Humanitarian System

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Introduction*

The October 2005 South Asia earthquake was the largest natural disaster of the year,¹ accounting for 84 percent of the year's 99,425 deaths from natural catastrophes, the vast majority occurring in Pakistan.² The international response—one of the major humanitarian operations of 2005–2006, involving both civilian and military actors—also served as a test site for many new UN reform mechanisms for improved coordination and delivery. The crisis is therefore an excellent case study to review the application of the Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD).

Despite the massive destruction caused by the earthquake, the humanitarian objectives outlined in the *GHD Principles*—saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity during, and, in the aftermath of the earthquake—were largely fulfilled. Indeed, aided by a mild winter, the relief response has been praised for having prevented the much-feared second wave of death and the massive displacement of communities into the cities.³ In this respect, international support for the strong leadership shown by the Pakistan government and the use of military logistical capacity, reflecting GHD Principles 8 and 9, were vital. However, funding delays, shortfalls, and problems implementing the new UN coordination mechanisms raised doubts about the effectiveness and pace of the response and the transition from relief to rehabilitation and development, another key point in the GHD.⁴

Causes and humanitarian impact: The earthquake and encroaching winter

An earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, with its epicentre near Muzaffarabad, 95 kilometers northeast of Pakistan's capital Islamabad, struck at 8:50 local time on 8 October 2005, affecting 30,000 square miles of



treacherous Himalayan terrain. Tremors were felt from Kabul to New Delhi.

The impact of the earthquake was severe in terms of loss of human life, infrastructure damage, and economic disruption. According to Pakistan's Federal Relief Commission, 73,338 people died and 128,309 were injured, making it the country's deadliest disaster and the world's seventh deadliest earthquake.⁵

Thousands of mud and concrete buildings collapsed or were damaged, while access roads were blocked and critical infrastructure destroyed. In the worst affected areas, 3.5 million people were left homeless, 600,000 rural homes were damaged or destroyed, 50 percent of health facilities flattened and another 25 percent

* The opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of DARA.

damaged, mills and irrigation channels ruined, water sources diverted or contaminated, and electricity and water supply systems destroyed. According to the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, 203,579 homes were destroyed and a further 196,575 damaged, constituting 84 percent and 36 percent, respectively, of the housing stock in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and the North West Frontier Province.⁶

Economic losses were estimated at US\$5.2 billion, according to the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.⁷ “Estimated damage was roughly equivalent to the total ODA for the preceding three years and equivalent to the amount the World Bank had lent to the country over the preceding 10 years.”⁸

In addition, the quake caused considerable loss of agricultural land and production. Much of the 2005 harvest was buried under the debris, compounding the effects of widespread poverty and two years of drought. Furthermore, since households were still recovering from the disaster and almost none had planted winter wheat, approximately 2.3 million people became reliant on food aid.⁹ The earthquake also caused significant long-term disruption to the traditional economy, stripping people of their livelihoods and assets, including grain, seeds, land, and livestock.

Initial estimates indicated that between 3.2 and 3.5 million people needed immediate relief assistance, including shelter, medical care, food and water, and sanitation facilities. As the crisis took place just before the Himalayan winter, the cold, lack of proper shelter, fuel and food, as well as the threat of snows blocking roads, increased the urgency of relief efforts.

International donor response: System shortfalls and bilateral support

With the number of victims rising daily, the Pakistan government issued an urgent request for international assistance. Traditional international humanitarian actors responded, totalling over 100 organisations, including UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IRCM), NATO and other foreign militaries.

On 11 October, the UN launched a Flash Appeal for US\$270 million (later revised upward to \$561 million), to cover the first six months of the operation. The UN Flash Appeal was produced in only three, as opposed to the usual eleven days. This may have limited the comprehensiveness of the data used and discussion

of the best response¹⁰ and may, in part, explain why the Flash Appeal initially struggled to raise the necessary funds. After one month, the Appeal was only 12 percent funded. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that it took several weeks to realise the scale of the disaster. In defence of what appeared to be the slow reaction from donors, the EC Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, said on 26 October, “I am well aware that the international community is being accused of lacking generosity... But I refuse to go along with the critics. We will not strengthen the international system by blaming the donors... [T]he truth... is far more nuanced.”¹¹ The fact that, initially, donors did not have the complete picture of the scale of the disaster influenced the extent and speed of early funding, and, in turn, the operational capacity of implementing agencies on the ground.

Within six months the Appeal was more than two-thirds funded, sufficient for the bulk of UN relief efforts. Nevertheless, according to then UN Secretary-General, “the lacklustre response by donors to the United Nations Appeal raises issues about the use of the Flash Appeal as well as donor perception of United Nations capacity to respond to disasters.”¹² In essence this reflects the divide between donors’ policy commitment to support the UN system, as set out in the *GHD Principles*, and funding support in practice. However, the Appeal remained the main resource mobilisation tool for UN efforts and gained support as the relief response progressed. As of June 2007, it had received US\$367 million, 65 percent of the total requested.

Humanitarian organisations placed the emphasis in their critique of the operation on initial cash-flow issues and funding shortages, despite the levels of “soft” or initial commitments made.¹³ For humanitarian actors engaged in life-saving operations, the sluggish start made it difficult to sustain their efforts and plan for early recovery. Slow funding of the Flash Appeal as illustrated above also temporarily hampered UN efforts, with agencies delaying or scaling down activities until funds became available.

However, from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) US\$4,195,941 was rapidly allocated in response to International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) requests. Pakistan was the third largest annual recipient of CERF, constituting 11.5 percent of the 2005 total.¹⁴ This was useful for the coordination of the relief operation, given the initial underfunding of the UN Appeal.

In addition to the UN Appeal process, a donor reconstruction conference was held in November, requesting US\$5.2 billion, with the international community pledging more than US\$5.8 billion.¹⁵ France, Germany, the UK, and the EC pledged more than US\$100 million each, while the USA and Saudi Arabia each gave over US\$500 million.

As many as 85 bilateral, multilateral, and private donors provided grants and in-kind humanitarian assistance in response to the disaster. As of June 2007, total humanitarian assistance to the South Asia Earthquake amounted to US\$1,165,589,575, in addition to US\$1.9 billion pledged in grants and aid in kind.¹⁶ The largest donors were: private (22.8 percent), the United States (17.5 percent), the United Kingdom (9.5 percent), Turkey (5.7 percent), EC/ECHO (5.2 percent), and Norway (5 percent). The lead taken by private donors illustrates a growing trend in the humanitarian sector. Although this funding is often more flexible, less frequently earmarked, and made available more rapidly than donor funding by states, it is not governed by the GHD *Principles*.

Many donors channelled aid directly to the government, rather than through the UN. The government of Pakistan set up the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) to coordinate and implement the reconstruction process. It was funded up to 82 percent, a level which can be considered sufficient in comparison to the coverage provided in other major emergencies, such as the December 2003 earthquake in Bam, Iran. ERRA was staffed by a mix of civilian, military, and ex-military personnel, and had a range of specialist departments such as rural shelter, transitional relief, water and sanitation, health, and livelihoods. The effectiveness of donor support and of the government's leadership role was crucial to the delivery of the humanitarian response and the saving of lives. This was a good example of Principle 8 of the GHD in practice.¹⁷ However, the humanitarian effort must be linked to building national capacity in disaster risk-reduction and preparedness.

The eventual high level of funds provided by donors in part reflected their response to the enormity of the disaster, the largest natural catastrophe of the year, and to media coverage of the disaster. However, it could also relate to Pakistan's global strategic importance, including its role as a key ally in the US-led war on terror, as well as the influence of the Pakistani diaspora, with the United States and the UK being the two largest donor governments.

At the national level, the humanitarian response resulted in unprecedented attention and support to the poor and remote North West Frontier Province, an area not traditionally considered an economic priority, despite the political sensitivity of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. However, even if the return of internally displaced persons marked an important step in the transition from relief to recovery, by late 2006, it was clear that more people-centred solutions were required to assist long-term recovery. This included better awareness of government initiatives to help the population, and policies directed at the needs of the more vulnerable groups, including women.¹⁸ Furthermore, as reported by the International Committee of the Red Cross, "property issues continued to affect many who returned home. Larger infrastructure projects including new towns in Muzaffarabad and Balakot districts made slow progress."¹⁹ Linking the humanitarian effort effectively with reconstruction is outlined in GHD (Principle 9), necessary not only for rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of the affected population, but also for increasing their capacity to respond to disasters in the future and to reducing their vulnerability.

Implementing the humanitarian response: Clusters, coordination, and leadership

Initially, 900 camps were established by the government of Pakistan, the UN, and NGOs to accommodate the 3,500,000 left homeless. However, while some moved south to Islamabad, Rawalpindi, or Lahore in the weeks following the earthquake, many others stayed and rebuilt their homes, constructing shelters from the rubble. With the arrival of winter, they were in dire need of protection from the elements. Until March 2007, approximately 30,000 people remained in 44 camps. These were closed by the government on 31 May as part of a returnees assistance programme.

Initial needs assessments and identification of priorities were carried out by the Pakistani authorities. In addition, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC) carried out a rapid assessment, followed by multi-cluster rapid air assessments, while the Pakistani military conducted assessments on the ground. Information was subsequently relayed to the Central Command for medical evacuation and delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the Pakistani army and state administration conducted the

search and rescue operation, with the government deploying 50,000 troops to assist the relief work. The military was responsible for coordinating the emergency response and was vital in delivering relief and logistical support, using 60 helicopters to reach isolated communities. The predominant role of the military stemmed from the militarised nature of the Pakistani since the 1999 coup, the sensitivity of the Kashmir border, and their logistical capacity to respond to and reach isolated communities.

Strong, central government institutions were also critical to the effectiveness of the response. The Federal Relief Commission was created on 10 October to coordinate and monitor the government's relief effort. The government also established the Steering Committee for Recovery and Reconstruction, consisting of the Ministries of Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Foreign Affairs, as well as the UN, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and a number of bilateral donors. Overall, the government and army played key roles in the delivery of aid, although even they were hampered by the mountainous geography of the area, the cold weather, and damaged or collapsed infrastructure. As the Inter-Agency Standing Committee stated, "the overall success of the relief effort to the earthquake turned on the competence and adept performance of the government of Pakistan and its military."²⁰ In addition, given the large-scale involvement of foreign troops, the UN deployed civil-military coordination officers and established humanitarian hubs to link with the government.

However, some NGOs considered that the centralised and militarised nature of the earthquake relief process created levels of bureaucracy which have hindered access to information on reconstruction. Traditionally, humanitarians have been wary of working with the military out of fear of compromising the principles of neutrality and impartiality. Yet, in the words of Hilary Benn, then UK Minister for International Development, "for the time being, the international community should recognise that the military has tools that the humanitarian community doesn't have, and sometimes that we need to use these to save lives."²¹

In addition to the Pakistani military, the UN played a key coordination and leadership role. Within 24 hours of the earthquake, an UNDAC team was deployed inside the country and established on-site coordination centres in Islamabad and severely affected areas. To establish geographical coordination, the UN Country Team opened five field offices, creating humanitarian

hubs to provide common services for the humanitarian community. These promptly became focal points for coordination between UN agencies and the Pakistan Federal Relief Commission, the military, institutional donors, and national and international NGOs. Field Assessment and Coordination Teams from the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) coordinated closely with the UNDAC teams.

A UN Joint Logistics Centre was set up in the UN Coordination Centre in Islamabad, together with the UN Humanitarian Air Service antenna, and a Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) was established to produce and update a who-does-what-where database. However, according to the end-users interviewed, the database was time consuming to use and sometimes lacked the relevant information. In addition, 14 international NGOs established the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum to share information and coordinate activities. Lastly, Sphere and Humanitarian Accountability Project support personnel were deployed to the field to support quality and accountability efforts among their implementing agency partners, partly funded by the UK government's Department for International Development.²² These are good examples of the learning and accountability initiatives supported by the GHD and of the efforts made to increase the accountability of relief assistance to beneficiaries.

The Pakistan government announced on 17 October a 12-Point Plan for Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction and presented a National Plan of Action on 1 November. This ensured a coherent response, identifying responsibilities, policies and end-states for stakeholders and key players, and was supported by the international community.²³ Again, the establishment of strong government institutions to respond to the crisis was critically important, as was the support they received from donors, in line with the GHD *Principles*. The UN system undertook further needs assessments in support of government interventions, and these were, in turn, supplemented by a damage and loss assessment by the Asian Development Bank and World Bank to identify long-term reconstruction needs.

The cluster approach: A new way of working

The international response to the earthquake became a test ground for the UN reform process, introducing the cluster approach to improve coordination, service

delivery and accountability. Although this approach was to be introduced in 2006, the response to the earthquake offered an early and important trial opportunity for clusters, because of the urgency and complexity of relief efforts.

Initially ten clusters were formed: coordination, shelter, nutrition, health, water and sanitation, logistics, camp management, protection, and economic recovery and infrastructure, with education added later. Lead agencies were appointed for each cluster. However, despite increased attempts at coordination, generally assessments were carried out individually and the information was not always shared.²⁴

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has claimed that, “although the early performance of the cluster approach in Pakistan was uneven and sometimes problematic, the comments of the Country Team were generally positive and recognised its potential for an improved response. The cluster approach successfully provided a single and recognisable framework for coordination, collaboration, decision-making, and practical solutions in a chaotic operational environment.”²⁵ However, the communication between the cluster hub and the capital was not considered fluid.²⁶ Moreover, the impetus behind the cluster approach waned during the transition to recovery, in part due to ERRA’s lack of capacity to lead the coordination of the clusters. Lastly, clusters with designated government counterparts, such as health, performed well, while others, such as shelter and camp management, struggled to deliver until counterparts were identified. The national authorities’ buy-in and adoption of the cluster system were therefore crucial to its success.

Conclusion

The international response to the Pakistan earthquake was considered a success, particularly in preventing further deaths. Moreover, many lessons which relate to the GHD *Principles* can be drawn from the experience, in particular regarding coordination with Pakistan’s government and military, and the challenges of the cluster system.

In the event of a sudden onset disaster such as an earthquake, the use of CERF proved crucial in providing adequate levels of un-earmarked seed funding for the organisations coordinating each cluster, facilitating a swift response, especially given that the Flash Appeal was initially underfunded. Once the scale of the disaster was

realised, donor funding levels were good, although private sources provided the bulk of the funds given. Strong and effective coordination with national government institutions and the military was paramount in the response. The existence of an effective government disaster management body was therefore critical, as was the international support given to it. Similarly, given the logistical and coordination difficulties faced, the role of the military should not be underestimated.

Important lessons on the cluster approach and coordination were also learned. For example, joint and coordinated needs assessments are indispensable for making better use of resources and avoiding duplication and contradictions in the relief effort. In this regard, inter-cluster coordination was still a work in progress and communication could have been more fluid. However, despite these weaknesses, the potential of the cluster approach became clear. Lastly, effective coordination and needs assessments must continue into the transition to recovery stage and risk-reduction initiatives. In addition to making better use of local skills and materials and involve more local communities, donors must plan for support for the reconstruction from the early stages of the response to cover the continuum gaps.

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Notes

- 1 According to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies World Disaster Report 2006.
- 2 It should be noted that until the end of 2006 Pakistan hosted the largest single refugee community (over 2.5 million Afghans) in the world, despite not being a signatory to International Refugee Law. However, because of their geographical location this population was on the whole unaffected by the 2005 earthquake.
- 3 See United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2006; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2006; Oxfam, 2006a.
- 4 Oxfam, 2006a.
- 5 Another 1,360 people died in Indian-administered Kashmir and four in Afghanistan.
- 6 Asian Development Bank, 2005.
- 7 World Bank, 2005.
- 8 Independent Evaluation Group, 2006.
- 9 World Food Programme. 2006.
- 10 OCHA. 2006a.
- 11 Michel, 2005.
- 12 Economic and Social Council, 2006.
- 13 DARA, field interview in Pakistan, May 2007.
- 14 OCHA, 2006a.
- 15 US\$1.9 billion consisted of grants and aid in kind, and \$3.9 billion in concessionary loans.
- 16 This includes funds to the UN Appeal and those channelled through other mechanisms.
- 17 Principle 8 reads: "Strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and co-ordinate effectively with humanitarian partners."
- 18 Oxfam, 2006a.
- 19 International Committee of the Red Cross, 2006.
- 20 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2006.
- 21 Benn, 2006.
- 22 Humanitarian Accountability Project (2006).
- 23 This included integrating the UN cluster approach with the overall strategy.
- 24 DARA field interview, Pakistan, May 2007.
- 25 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2006.
- 26 DARA field interview, Pakistan, May 2007.