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INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM OF DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The world historical data on disasters indicate that their number is increasing. The profound increase in the damages of earthquakes, floods and cyclones are inevitable due to population growth particularly in Asian context. In the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, communities in Pakistan were severely affected along with economic and social losses. This event has stimulated the policy makers and planners to establish Disaster Management Policy in the country from the national level to the district and community levels. The prime objective of the paper is to analyze the strengths and weakness of institutional mechanism of disaster risk management. The response to recent natural disasters in Pakistan after the establishment of Disaster Management Authority in country indicates a wide gape between the policy and implementation. Natural disasters are handled at provincial levels and the disaster management institutions are

not yet established at the local levels that exacerbated the people's vulnerability to a considerable level. Without established of these institutions, risk reduction may not take place at local levels.

Keywords: Institutional Mechanism, Risk Management, Strengths, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

The global disaster data base (CRED 2011) shows that the number of reported natural disasters has increased and the number of people affected has followed more or less the same pattern of increase (Bilham 2009). It also emphasis that scientific explanations and evidences indicate that the global climate variability will increase the number of frequent natural disasters such as floods, cyclones and droughts (Guha-Spair 2010). Population growth and inability of the poor to escape from poverty makes this clear that there would be more people vulnerable to natural disasters. A natural hazard only becomes a disaster when it affects a human population that is exposed and vulnerable (Uitto 1998). We have a number of examples around the world where communities suffered from natural hazards. The Indian Ocean tsunami (2005), Bam earthquake (2003), Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (2005) and Kashmir earthquake (2005) show the greater impact of geo- and hydro-meteorological hazards when they interact with vulnerable population (Halvorson 2010). Cities and societies in many regions of the world have experienced disasters throughout the human history. These disasters initially were regarded as punishments of gods in the old ages (Coburn 1992; Gaillard 2010). Disasters around the world are now being understood as the manifestation

of the fact that societies which are experiencing them have gone through development process which have not taken into account hazard related to natural or social phenomena in a proper fashion (Leon 2006).

Pakistan's exposure to disasters and natural hazards could be ranked between moderate to severe. The major hazards such as earthquake, floods, landslides epidemics and glacial lakeoutbursts pose risks to Pakistani society. A variety of human induced hazards also threaten the society, economy and environment (NDMA 2007). Pakistan is situated in a highly seismic active region (Bilham 2006; Halvorson 2007; PMD 2007), which has experienced many disastrous earthquakes during historical times. From 1905 to 2008, five major earthquakes occurred which ranges from 6.4 to 8.0 magnitudes. The last 100 years alone include the 1945 earthquake of Makran, Quetta Earthquake of 1935 and 2008; Muzaffarabad Earthquake of 2005 has shaken the entire nation in many ways. Many active faults exists in Northern and Southern areas of Pakistan and more than half of the total population are living with earthquakes and will have to continue doing that (PMD, 2007).

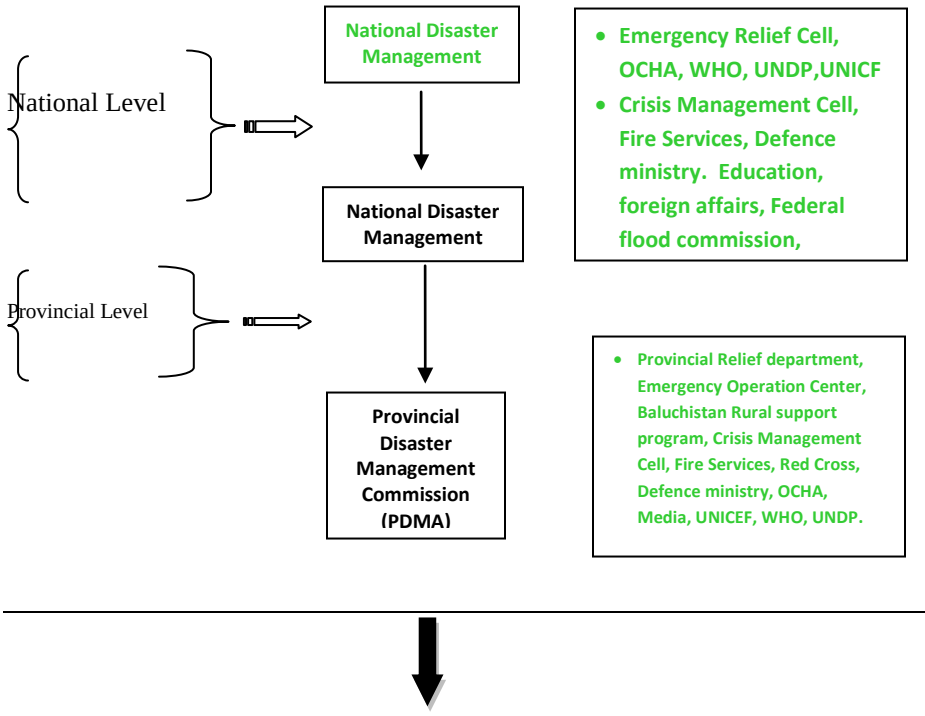
Institutional Mechanism of Disaster Management in Pakistan

The structure of disaster and emergency management in Pakistan was established immediately after the disastrous Kashmir Earthquake in 2005 and has been operational since 2007. It starts from the national to the Union Council levels for the implementation of disaster policies as shown in Figure 1. National Disaster Management Commission (NDMC) was established immediately after 2005 Kashmir Earthquake. The commission is the highest policy and decision making body for disaster risk management in the country. It is also responsible to ensure coordination in

its broadest sense; to oversee the integration of disaster risk management issues into sectoral development plans and also see the implementation of this policy through (NDMA) National Disaster Management Authority. This is chaired by the Prime Minister. Since disaster risk is multi-sectoral activity that requires timely response, hence National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was established to serve as focal point and coordinating body to facilitate the implementation of disaster related mitigation strategies. it directly communicates with all stakeholders, including ministries, departments and other agencies which are likely to participate in disaster risk management. It coordinates the complete spectrum of disaster risk management and develops guidelines and standards for national and provincial stakeholders regarding their roles in disaster risk management.

The provincial government has the authority to form the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) which is chaired by the Chief Minister. The authority lays down the provincial/regional disaster risk management policy and develops the provincial disaster risk management plans in accordance with guidelines laid down by the national commission. It also reviews the implementation of the provincial plans and oversees the provision of funds for risk reduction and preparedness measures. Apart from that it coordinates and provides technical assistance to local authorities for carrying out their function. District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) is established by the Provincial government in the hazard prone areas on a priority basis. This authority is headed by *Nazim* (district chief) of the district. The authority formulates disaster risk management plans and coordinates its implementation. It also prepares guidelines for local stakeholders on disaster risk reduction. In the

event of a disaster, it organizes emergency response through district emergency operation center. It also maintains linkages with the provincial disaster management authority and relief department.Authorities at the town and Tehsil levels are the frontline organizations of disaster risk reduction and response. This is the lowest level of administration where they interface directly with communities. Tehsil and town Nazims lead the risk and response operations with the help of Tehsils and town officers in consultation with District Disaster Management Authority. The other key players include extension workers, police, fire services, community organizations, traditional leaders and NGOs. Union Council is the lowest tier in the governance system. This has important roles in allocation of resources for local development works. Union councils are expected to play advocacy role of the communities and government with the district councils and disaster management authorities.



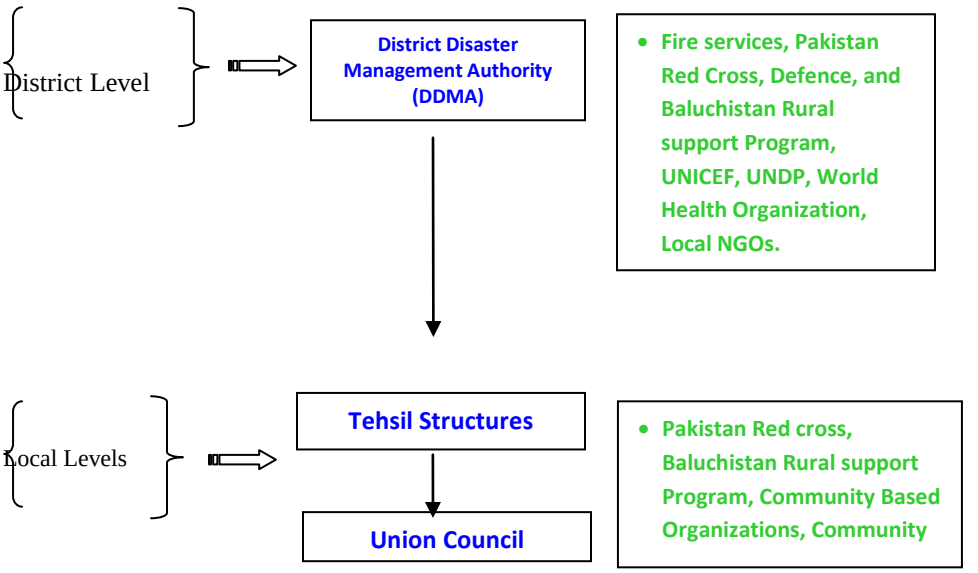


Figure 1: Structure and Mechanism of Disaster Risk Management in Pakistan

Strength and Weaknesses/Gaps of the Existing System

The role of national, provincial and local institutions in disaster management is critical and can play important roles in reducing people's vulnerability. However these institutions in Pakistan have neither learnt any lessons from the past nor can provide professional services in the field of disaster management even though after passing through a number of catastrophic disasters in the last four decades. The Disaster Management Ordinance of 2006 is a well-articulated document at the federal level, but failed to percolate to the lower levels. The ordinance is prepared with

active participation of multiple stakeholders and serves as a vision document for leading the way towards a safer Pakistan. It also provides guidelines to coordinate activities of numerous stakeholders. The ordinance also sets out priorities for mobilization of resources from donors and development partners of Pakistan to implement strategic activities for disaster risk management in the country. But when it comes to its implementation, it has not reflected as it should have been. In order to address the existing gaps, it has been attempted to discuss with key stakeholders involved in the process of disaster emergency management in Pakistan from provincial to union council levels.

The findings relate to their understanding about emergency management, weakness of different institutions, community preparedness and management. Disaster Management Authorities at the district, union council and community levels were not existed yet, therefore disaster preparedness measures were very poor at the district and union council levels. As such community did not take any initiatives in those matters. Most of the community members are ignorant of the measures to be taken during disasters. The NDMA should clearly define the role and responsibilities of various departments and authorities at the district level with stronger institutional coordination mechanism. For example in Kashmir earthquake many issues such as search and rescues and relief operations particularly transporting goods, arranging required number of vehicles, ensuring security of relief convoys and communication infrastructure were cropped up. Rescue operation was extremely difficult because of the lack of professional expertise, specialized machineries, equipments and limited internal capacity and non-availability of foreign

specialists within a short time. Similarly in 2010 floods authorities were once again confronted with similar issues in providing shelters and relief goods particularly food, water, health related provisions, and goods for meeting the immediate needs of the affected communities. In building community preparedness and catalyzing coping strategies, the responsibility lies with the government and disaster management institutions in the areas of disaster preparedness and sharing information for raising the level of community awareness. This requires a well-coordinated mechanism between national and provincial agencies with active participation of the community members. Several problems and issues related to emergency management in Pakistan were pointed out by the key informants such as lack of public awareness, weak emergency management preparedness, poor level of awareness within the organization and above all very weak or no coordination among the institutions involved in the process from province to the union council levels.

The analysis reveals that emergencies in Pakistan are still dealt only at the Federal and Provincial levels, (national and sub-national levels) and the focus of these organizations is more on post disaster relief. This top-down approach does not work effectively and meet the emergency needs at the local levels where people are at risk. The decentralized mode of operation should be adapted from national to regional (provincial), regional to district, and district to local level (union council) in order to follow an integrated framework for bringing all stakeholders and victims together for developing an organized emergency management planning systems and operational framework to reach disaster victims and meet the immediate needs

effectively. A shift from relief to risk reduction is currently focused and practiced by all organizations and agencies at international, national and regional levels. This essentially focuses on proactive approach rather than reactive approach. Most of the stakeholders during emergency in Pakistan work at individual level and at the same time their responses and activities are completely absent at the local (Union & community) levels. Therefore for a well-coordinated emergency management, it is essential that NDMA should lead at the forefront in organizing and monitoring emergency activities at all levels and it is felt necessary that there should be coordination between the national and provincial agencies before and during disasters with proper sharing of information, building capacity and support from the upper level institutions. Institutionalization of disaster management should be made possible at the local levels. On the other hand community based organizations should also be mobilized to bring people and resources together and take interest in disaster preparedness activities. Capacity development should be mandatory at the group and community levels in order to reduce the potential risks.

It is realized that “not even a single leaf on a tree can shake in Pakistan without the army and its dreaded intelligence service” (McGirk 2005) In the past, most of emergency responses were carried out under the military control in Pakistan. Emergency responses in the recent disasters were not free from such controls. There are diverse views on the success and failure of Pakistani emergency response to natural disasters in the recent past. (Keridis 2006)argues that due to military regime, Pakistan missed the opportunity provided by the natural disaster in 2005 for humanitarian assistance and new thinking in foreign policy for regional cooperation. The International Crisis Group states that “The Pakistan government’s ill-

planned and poorly executed emergency response to October 2005 Earthquake highlighted the authoritarian rule. As the government now embarks on three or four years of reconstruction and rehabilitation program, the absence of civilian participation, lack of accountability and transparency could seriously undermine the process. If the religious extremist groups remain active in response and reconstruction, threats to domestic and regional security will increase" (ICG 2006) Pakistan handling the response particularly of Earthquake 2005, the most devastating natural disaster for which national earthquake response was lunched and the numerous challenges that had to be overcome in a short period of time. Pakistan did well (Ahmed 2008) while the United Nations termed this response of the government of Pakistan as swift and exemplary However Cochrane (2008) mentioned that the realistic description lies between these extremes and that the severe challenges which the government of Pakistan faced in responding to earthquake should not be overlooked (Cochrane 2008). He further explains that it is hard to judge the effectiveness of NDMA in practice due to its recent establishment, yet in theory it represents a shift by the government away from the ad hoc disaster response which had been prominent in the last decades to a more comprehensive, coherent and permanent arrangement to address disaster issues with a long term vision. While this drive towards a more decentralized approach to disaster preparedness and response has been widely discussed, it is not yet clear to what extend decision-making powers have in fact been decentralized from the national to local levels.

CONCLUSION

Disaster preparedness plan exists at the provincial level but its implementation is not made possible at the district and union council levels. Programs and projects related to preparedness and mitigation have not yet initiated at the district levels. Disaster preparedness plans either at the district or at Union Council levels have not prepared. According to the concerned authority it is still in the pipeline and its implementation may be possible within one to two years time from now. Disaster management authorities at district, union council and community levels do not exist in the country at present. Therefore preparedness measures are very poor at the district and union council levels. However, the Nazims of the district and Union Council levels are unaware about the disaster policy particularly at the lower level of local government administration. The paper recommends that an integrated and well-coordinated disaster management framework with management plans and revitalized civil defense system is essential in order to fight back against the natural disasters. Activities and programs related to disaster awareness should be initiated at the community and district levels. This will lead to community participation in disaster activities to strengthen the system for emergency management and risk reduction. Top-down and bottom up approach must work simultaneously to catalyze the emergency management and risk reduction policies in order to achieve greater success in future in addressing issues effectively at the local level.

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