



Working Together for Identifying Disaster Risk in Pakistan

Overview

The inaugural meeting of the National Working Group (NWG) on Risk Assessment was held on 19 November, 2012 under the leadership of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) with the technical support of the World Bank Pakistan. The meeting marked a major shift in the identifying risk in Pakistan, which continues to be affected by various disasters especially earthquakes and floods almost on a yearly basis and has suffered a loss of more than US\$ 16 billion due to natural disasters in the last decade alone.

While the entire country is vulnerable to natural hazards, there has yet to be a national level risk assessment of Pakistan which is considered as the first step to enable the government to prioritize investments for mitigating the risk these hazards pose to the human capital and infrastructure. Moreover, in order for the risk assessment to be owned by the Government and to have its recommendations incorporated in the national development process, this task needs to be undertaken by the national technical entities. Previously there had been some standalone risk assessments undertaken by consultants who prepared their reports which were not used by policy makers and development planners.

The World Bank Disaster Risk Management (DRM) team recommended that the NDMA should take the leadership of disaster risk assessment by creating a forum comprising of technical agencies such as the Meteorological Department, the Geological Survey, the Space Agency and other relevant stakeholders. This was a new concept for the NDMA and the technical agencies but was welcomed by all stakeholders as it provided an opportunity for building their capacity and utilizing the existing expertise and indigenous knowledge in undertaking risk assessments. This was evident by the feedback given by the participants in the inaugural meeting and they were unanimous in the opinion that such an initiative was long overdue and confirmed their commitment to participate in the national working group.

Commitment and ownership of the Government was evident from the from the remarks of the Federal Minister for Science and Technology who opened the meeting and termed creation of the National Working Group as a timely step towards a resilient Pakistan. He further stressed on utilizing local knowledge and expertise to identify risk in order to prioritize and guide mitigation measures considering the limited resources of the government.



Photo: Flooding in Punjab Province, Pakistan, August 2010, UN Photo/WFP/Amjad Jamal

The Chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority also termed the creation of the NWG as a critical step which would serve as the foundation for consolidating disaster risk related interventions in the country.

Capacity building

This initiative is supported through a Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) and Department for International Development (DFID) funded project for “Scaling Up Innovation in Disaster Risk Management” which aims to build robust and nationally agreed evidence on disaster risk to inform investments, policy and programming that will increase the physical and fiscal resilience to natural hazards. Among other interventions, the project will enhance capacity of, and build systems, within Pakistan Government to produce, manage, communicate and utilize data and information on natural hazard risks. Creation of the National Working Group is the first and most important step towards achieving this objective.

The first meeting of the NWG was followed up by creation of technical working groups on earthquake, flood, exposure/vulnerability information and communication. These groups will be driving the risk assessment process forward in Pakistan through the development of work plans, commitment of resources and cross-fertilization of skills, data and knowledge.

The real benefit of the NWG are the technical agencies who were surprised to learn that a huge amount of data is available with other public sector entities and could be shared with them free of cost. An official of the Geological Survey commented, “Our department needed some satellite images and only today I found out in the meeting of the technical working group that the Space Agency has those images and can share them with us free of cost. Our department will save resources by collaborating with the Space Agency rather than

purchasing these images from the market.” This was only one of the benefits that could come out of such collaboration.

To ensure the NWG and the technical working groups achieve the goal of developing risk information for Pakistan, it is aimed to have a shared platform that enables these agencies to share their geospatial datasets and maps on hazards and exposure. Also to ensure that risk information is widely accessible to all decision makers, this platform can also host newly developed datasets, hazard and risk information. For this purpose, a Pakistan Shared Platform for Disaster Resilience Information is being created which aims to reduce the impact of disasters and climate change in Pakistan by providing all levels of government, the private sector, and the public with better information and tools to support their decisions.

During their meetings, the technical working groups identified their capacity gaps and requested for training to address them. The World Bank in cooperation with NDMA arranged comprehensive training courses on earthquake, floods and exposure modeling. The trainings were attended by the relevant technical agencies and were imparted by international experts in the respective fields. Rather than imparting a pre-determined curriculum, the trainers took stock of the expertise and local knowledge and tailored the course contents to take advantage of the existing knowledge and capacities resulting in a two way learning process.

The enhanced capacities of the national level technical agencies would now be put to the test as they jointly undertake a multi-hazard risk assessment of the federal capital. This would be the first risk assessment of its kind in Pakistan which would be led by the national entities with technical support from the World Bank. Once completed, it would form the model for undertaking risk assessment of the entire country. As the risk information is fed into the national platform, it would enable the development planners to take into consideration the risk posed by natural disasters and enable investment in mitigation to increase resilience in Pakistan.

“ I get tremendous satisfaction in helping the Government better prepare for disasters which ultimately saves lives and minimizing the impacts to adverse natural events. ”

—Haris Khan, Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Specialist, South Asia Region, The World Bank

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