

Post-Floods Rehabilitation

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Floods have caused massive devastation by damaging human lives, properties, infrastructure, and crops. With a human loss of nearly 1550 people and injuries of more than 12,000, around 33 million people have been displaced. Approximately, 1.92 million houses are destroyed, with a loss of 375 bridges and more than 12,500 kilometres of roads. Likewise, 3.6 million acres of crops have been damaged, including 65 per cent of Pakistan's main food crops and 70 per cent of its rice crops, as estimated by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). In addition to crop loss and a mammoth livestock loss, a sizable fraction of the storage of various essential commodities like wheat, vegetables, fertilizers etc. has been destroyed. All of these translate into a combined economic loss of around \$40 billion, as is feared by the National Flood Response Coordination Centre (NFRCC). Alternatively, a comprehensive rehabilitation strategy has to be adopted to provide relief to the affected, on the one hand, and reinstate the damaged infrastructure, on the other. In addition, a complete revamping of the existing coping strategies is the need of the hour to enhance our resilience to such climate-led catastrophes in future.

In this regard, the first and foremost concern should be to provide shelter, clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, and food to the affectees on an exigent basis. In the post-flood scenario, the presence of stagnant water usually causes the spread of water-borne diseases like dengue, malaria, diarrhoea, skin infections, cholera, and hepatitis. Alternatively, a hygienic shelter combined with clean drinking water and sanitation facilities would restrict the spread of these diseases.

In addition, there is an urgent need to arrange free medical camps and preventive healthcare sessions to provide first aid, consultations, diagnostic tests, and life-saving medicines to those who have been already affected by such diseases. Second, we must have to ensure the provision of nutritious food to the affectees as Pakistan has already been facing chronic food security issues, with 43 per cent of Pakistanis being considered food insecure as estimated by the World Food Program (WFP).

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In the post-flood environment, food shortages are looming in the country as a sizeable fraction of food storage has been destroyed, along with significant damages to the staple crops. As a corollary to this point, we will have to avoid the malnutrition of children as we have already 82 per cent of children who are deprived of a meal when they need one, with 18 per cent of children under the age of five suffering from acute malnutrition and 40 per cent of children in the same age group suffer from stunted growth.

Third, we need to assist in agriculture, livestock, and post-floods reconstruction to enable

the affectees to resume their lives on a self-sustaining basis. Floods have increased the vulnerability of the affected to fall into poverty as a preliminary assessment report, which has been prepared by the World Bank along with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the European Union, foresees that the poverty rate could increase in the range of 4.5 per cent to 7 per cent, which will drag 9.9 million to 15.4 million more Pakistanis into poverty in the post-floods scenario. In other words, to avoid this susceptibility, the affectees have to be provided with financial bolster.

With regard to infrastructure, as stated earlier, around 12,735 kilometres of roads have been damaged across the country, with 8,398 kilometres in Sindh, 1,850 kilometres in Balochistan, 1,575 kilometres in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, 896 kilometres in Punjab, and 16 kilometres in Gilgit-Baltistan region. Likewise, the floods have destroyed 375 bridges across the country, of which, 165 are in Sindh, 107 are in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, 65 are in Gilgit-Baltistan, 22 are in Balochistan, and 16 are in Punjab.

Similar is the case with health amenities and schools. Approximately 14,000 health facilities have been fully or partially damaged which makes it unapproachable to access health facilities, healthcare workers, and essential medicines. Further, around 19,000 schools have been spoilt, as estimated by UNICEF, leaving millions of children out of school. All these statistics show that we will have to make gigantic investments to reinstate these infrastructures. Making budgetary space for such expenses may widen the government's primary budget deficit up to 2.8 per cent of GDP, as estimated by the World Bank. In this regard, the UN floods emergency plan for Pakistan is encouraging, but other bilateral and multilateral donors will have to come forward as well to pull Pakistan out of the floods-driven infrastructure deficit. Moreover, in addition to static losses, the damages to infrastructure combined with the harm to agricultural crops have downgraded the growth projection of the country from 1.4 per cent to 2.4 per cent, against the target of 5 per cent, in the current fiscal year. All these imply that we will have to redesign our priorities in order to come out of such an uncertain situation.

Furthermore, along with the rehabilitation strategies, we will have to enhance our future coping resilience to such climate-led catastrophes. For instance, controlling encroachments in waterways of the river and monsoon rains in the medium term, and adopting climate-resilient strategies like controlling carbon emissions along with encouraging afforestation or restricting deforestation, in the long term, will go a long way in escalating our resilience to such extreme weather shocks.

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