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WHEN IT RAINS...

The 2022 Floods and Challenges for Vulnerable Communities in Sindh

A Rapid Assessment

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This rapid assessment has been produced by The Knowledge Forum (TKF) in collaboration with the Sindh chapter of the National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) to document and advocate for the rights of vulnerable communities affected by the floods in Sindh following the 2022 monsoon rains.

In this regard, TKF and NCHR appreciate the support of the Community World Service Asia, a humanitarian and development organisation that seeks to address factors that divide people by promoting inclusiveness, shared values, diversity, and interdependence.

National Commission For Human Rights

The National Commission for Human Rights is a federal statutory body set up in 2015. It is an independent national human rights institution developed under the Paris Principles. The commission's judicial mandate includes role as an inquirer, intervener, investigator, and inspector (of jails). NCHR has the powers of a civil court and the ability to take suo moto action on cases of human rights violations. Its functions also include legal monitoring, policy advise, knowledge production, and awareness and advocacy.

Website: <https://www.nchr.gov.pk/>

The Knowledge Forum

The Knowledge Forum is an independent organisation that seeks to produce knowledge-based resources to assist in interventions and advocacy for communities' rights. TKF has been founded by a group of human rights practitioners, development professionals, activists and legal experts.

Through high quality research and discourse curation, TKF aims to assist in the creation of a more informed perspective on complex themes that have a bearing on communities' access to rights and participation in political, democratic and development processes.

Website: <https://www.theknowledgeforum.org/about-us/>

Foreword

On behalf of the National Commission for Human Rights, with technical partnership from The Knowledge Forum, we are presenting a report seeking to assess the layers of discrimination experienced by the flood-affected communities in the aftermath of the 2022 floods in Sindh.

There is no denying the fact that the 2022 floods in Pakistan were a manifestation of the ongoing climate crisis that has dragged the country into a cycle of extreme weather conditions, be it excessive heat or rainfall. The impact of the 2022 floods in the southern province of Sindh was more pronounced because of the scale of the disaster. Nearly half of the 1,600 deaths recorded in the floods countrywide occurred in Sindh. A significant majority of the two million houses damaged were in Sindh while 64% of all the roads destroyed due to floods were also in Sindh.

Despite the obvious damages of the disaster, what remained unattended was the socio-economic impact of the floods. While the crop damage indicated economic losses for the majority of Sindh's two-third population that is dependent on agriculture for livelihood, damages to small land owners, women family farm workers, and most importantly sharecroppers were never sufficiently accounted for. Moreover, the multiple layers of marginalisation covering gender, religious minorities, asset-less farm workers, persons with disabilities, children and older persons were hardly considered when relief and rehabilitation was organised.

The National Commission for Human Rights has been engaged in the floods discourse since the beginning of the crisis. The member Sindh office of NCHR led the monitoring of the flood situation and relief distribution, while also keeping the Commission's offices open for complaints or suo moto notices regarding relief distribution, as per its mandate. Since its inception, NCHR has been engaged in eco justice cases and policy advocacy. This includes cases on violation of environment and ecological rights including the Thar Coal issue and the Nazim Jokhio case.

In line with its mandate to protect human rights, the NCHR Sindh worked on a set of interventions, with support from the Community World Service Asia (CWS), to advocate the rights of the vulnerable communities affected by the 2022 floods. The engagement sought to focus on highlighting the vulnerabilities before, during and after the floods with a view to generate a human rights-centric discourse around the floods. The current report has been produced under the same programme. Designed as a rapid assessment based on a field survey, the report seeks to investigate the vulnerability profile of the flood affectees and discrimination in flood response (pre-flood, rescue, relief and rehabilitation).

The report complemented outreach efforts with the members of the Sindh Assembly, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority, the civil society and the media. Multiple sessions were conducted with the stakeholders to share the findings from the field and stress the need for designing a relief and rehabilitation framework that is sensitive to the layers of marginalisation experienced by the vulnerable communities in Sindh.

NCHR is grateful to CWS for project support and The Knowledge Forum for technical assistance. The collaboration with these two organisations was aimed at highlighting the gaps in response to climate change events, which are increasingly becoming a reality of the everyday lives of the citizens of Pakistan. As we slip further down the climate risk spiral, a climate change response architecture informed by the fundamentals of human rights is the only way forward.

Anis Haroon,
Member Sindh, National Commission for Human Rights

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OVERVIEW

Experiences of Vulnerabilities

Vulnerabilities of the displaced:



Faced risk of water borne diseases - especially for children- as they had to live close to the areas inundated by large volumes of stagnant water.



Lack of drainage in camps.



Displaced persons who were patients of chronic ailments, diabetes, hypertension and heart diseases had no access to their daily dose of medicines.



No health facilities in most of the camps



No drinking water, making rainwater as the only available option.



Pregnant women had no information or understanding of navigating flood water to get to safer location.



Immense psychological stress as houses and livelihoods were lost or damaged and the displaced persons remained unsure of the future.

Elderlies and disabled:



Elderlies and disabled were dependent on family and fellow villagers to carry them to safety from inundated villages.

Gender experiences:



Domestic violence against women sitting outside their tents for fresh air on the pretext of violating purdah.



Women and young girls struggled with lack of menstrual kits, sanitary pads, toilets and general privacy in tents.



Transgender flood affectees faced harassment and ridicule outside camps on account of their gender.



There were no special measures in place to facilitate pregnant women to reach safety during floods or take care of health in the camps.

Landless peasants and haris:



Landless peasants lived in mud shelters on the farms of the landlord where they provide labour.



With the farms inundated with water, their dwellings were flattened, forcing them to live in open fields.



No timely aid as the routes to their localities were submerged.



Livelihood losses as farmland submerged.

Scheduled castes:



Majority affected people from scheduled castes were dependent on agriculture, working as landless peasants and sharecroppers.



Floodwater had inundated vast tracts of farmland and deprived them of their livelihood.



Their mud houses were brought down by water.



Those working as sharecroppers /tenant farmers lost their investment with the loss of the crop



Little or no aid reached their villages as the rains rendered the roads unusable.

Manifestations of discrimination:



Political discrimination reported as affectees complained of being denied aid on the basis of their political affiliation with less favoured groups.



Some religio-political parties were observed to be extending aid to only their favoured sects.



Displaced scheduled caste families in Shaheed Benazirabad school were reportedly housed in the corridors while Muslim families were given rooms in the school.

Deficits in aid: Observations of flood affectees



No specific measures by the government or aid agencies to assist and protect any vulnerable group, including expectant mothers, women-headed families, physically challenged persons, unaccompanied children or transgender persons, and schedule castes or other religious minorities.



Lack of meaningful consultation by the government or aid organisations with the vulnerable communities to gauge their needs before launching relief and rehabilitation efforts in Sindh.



No real safeguards by the government and aid agencies to prevent discrimination in relief and rehabilitation for vulnerable communities.



No effective complaint mechanism for the affected people.



The government had no data on newborns, persons with disabilities and elderly persons.



The government and aid agencies had no strategy to prioritise help for those with pressing needs in an emergency.



The relief package announced by the Sindh government offering free seeds did not cover landless sharecroppers, majority belonging to scheduled cast.



Kacha/mud houses of landless peasants were not considered for assessment of damage and payment of compensation.



Needs of women were not considered important or at par with the immediate provision of other relief items such as food.

Section 1

Introduction

Pakistan has been no stranger to natural disasters in recent decades. The most devastating one since the turn of the century has been the 2005 earthquake, which claimed nearly 100,000 lives and caused large-scale devastation. Floods in the summer, almost every year, take a toll on human life and infrastructure.

Then there are the more localised disasters, such as Glacial Lake Outburst Flooding (GLOF) in the north, droughts in the plains, and sea intrusion in the south-east. Many of these certainly appear to have become more frequent and intense amid changing climate patterns.

The prevailing disaster management infrastructure in Pakistan largely emerged soon after the 2005 earthquake. First to be created was the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) at the federal level. Its monitoring, coordination and implementation functions were supposed to deliver timely and effective response to disasters as well as long-term disaster risk reduction. Amendments in the NDMA law towards the end of 2010 introduced the disaster management hierarchy in the provinces and the districts, to improve early warning

and delivery. There is considerable difference of opinion on how effectively this infrastructure has managed to pre-empt and respond to disasters.

Against this backdrop and the available weather forecasts, the 2022 monsoon rains and floods should not have come as a complete surprise. Yet they caught almost everyone unprepared, not least on account of their magnitude and impact. The catastrophic floods were accompanied by nearly twice the average rainfall in July and more than double the average in August.¹

According to the NDMA, the monsoon rains and floods killed 1,739 people and injured around 13,000 between June and mid-November 2022.² Nearly eight million people were displaced. The raging waters damaged or destroyed over two million houses. More than 13,000 kilometres of roads, 439 bridges, 23,900 schools and 1,460 health facilities were also damaged or destroyed. The losses also included 1,164,270 livestock perished in the floods.

People with low socioeconomic status are most vulnerable in the aftermath of natural disasters.

1) Pakistan Monsoon 2022 Rainfall Report, Pakistan Meteorological Department, https://www.pmd.gov.pk/cdpc/Monsoon_2022_update/Pakistan_Monsoon_2022_Rainfall_Update.htm#:~:text=August%202022,and%20near%20average%20in%20AJK.

2) Floods 2022 Daily Situation Report No 158, 18 November 2022, National Disaster Management Authority, <https://cms.ndma.gov.pk/storage/app/public/situation-reports/November2022/N2n1eEarMt6q6Rb8ZYwn.pdf>



The damaging impact of the 2022 floods on Sindh was much worse than any of the earlier natural disasters in the last twenty years.

At their height, the floods had submerged a third of the country. Ninety districts across the country were notified calamity-hit.

Beyond immediate impact, the continued submergence of vast areas has complicated recovery and resumption of life for a large majority of the flood-hit population. Restoring the healthcare and education infrastructure has been a challenge while revival of agriculture in many areas may be impossible for several months at least.

Historic high inflation and loss of livelihoods amid a stagnating economy that preceded the floods worsened the vulnerability of the affected population.

It is no secret that the people with low socioeconomic status are most vulnerable in the aftermath of natural disasters. Moreover, inequality can both be a driver and a consequence of a disaster-affected community's heightened vulnerability.

Individuals' gender, religious faith, age, physical disability, displacement, literacy status and poverty are just some of the

factors known to contribute to their vulnerabilities during various stages of a natural disaster cycle.

Proactive protection of human rights of the most vulnerable must be an integral focus of both preparing for and responding to natural disasters.

In Pakistan's own recent experience of mass displacement and post-disaster relief and rehabilitation, accounts of insensitivity or discrimination towards some of the internally displaced, often women, and at times religious minorities, have not been unheard of.

About the Report

This rapid assessment study of the circumstances of some of the marginalised and vulnerable flood affectees was borne out of a shared belief of The Knowledge Forum and the Sindh chapter of the National Commission for Human Rights that proactive protection of human rights of the most vulnerable must be an integral focus of both preparing for and responding to natural disasters.

With neither the time nor the resources at

hand allowing for a more detailed examination, only a few parts of the flood-hit zones of Sindh were chosen for a closer look via this rapid assessment. The reason for focusing on Sindh was swayed by the fact that it had been by far the worst-affected province in the 2022 floods. A brief section of this report presents the details of the post-floods devastation in Sindh.

Profoundly relevant to this context is Sindh's recent and not-so-recent past. Sindh had long been a bastion of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and inter-communal harmony. Numerous incidents of faith-based violence, discrimination and intolerance over the last few years have certainly tarnished that image. Over the past decade, media and rights organisations have regularly highlighted incidents of alleged involuntary change of religious faith and forced marriage of non-Muslim women as well as faith-based violence in the province.

According to the most recent national census, Sindh has the highest non-Muslim population for any province in the country.³ Punjab, which

is home to 53% of the national population, has 2.4 million non-Muslim citizens, compared to 4.6 million in Sindh.

It is against that overall backdrop, that proactively watching out for and dealing with any discrimination in the post-flood assistance and rehabilitation effort gains particular significance.

In terms of the report's structure, the following section offers a snapshot of the impact of the 2022 monsoon rains and floods on the province of Sindh. A quick reference to the manifestations of the climate crisis in Pakistan in 2022 and to factors of vulnerability precedes a brief explanation of the research methodology. Thereafter, a section presents firsthand accounts from the field and captures a range of views, including experiences of those directly affected by the floods as well as stakeholders from civil society, media and district authorities. This is followed by key findings of the rapid assessment. The report concludes with recommendations for a range of stakeholders.

2022 Monsoon Floods: The Toll on Sindh

The monsoon rains and floods caused much destruction across the country. However, by almost every yardstick, Sindh was the worst-affected province.

Part of the reason was the unusually heavy rains and the length of time the floodwaters lingered in Sindh. The rainfall in the province in July and August 2022 was 307% and 726% above average, respectively.⁴

The impact dealt serious blows to Sindh. In terms of casualties, nearly half of the flood

-related deaths nationwide and two-third of the injuries were reported in Sindh.

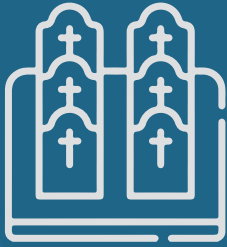
Loss to infrastructure was no less punishing in the province. According to NDMA, a third of Pakistan's bridges destroyed by the floods, two-third of the damaged roads, and over 80% of the houses damaged or destroyed were in Sindh. Out of the total 33 million population directly affected by the floodwaters, 14.56 million resided in Sindh.

Sindh's loss of livestock, at 436,435 heads, constituted 37% of the livestock killed in the floods nationwide.

3) Final Results of Census, 2017, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/final-results-census-2017-0>

4) Pakistan Monsoon 2022 Rainfall Report, Pakistan Meteorological Department, https://www.pmd.gov.pk/cdpc/Monsoon_2022_update/Pakistan_Monsoon_2022_Rainfall_Update.htm#:~:text=August%202022,and%20near%20average%20in%20AJK

Sindh: Impact of 2022 monsoon floods:⁵



Deaths: 814



Injured: 8,422



**Roads damaged
or destroyed:
8,463 km**



**Bridges
Destroyed: 165**



**Damaged
Houses:
650,272**



**Destroyed
Houses:
1,436,914**



5) Provincial Disaster Management Authority, Sindh, Daily Situation Report January 12, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/provincial-disaster-management-authority-pdma-sindh-daily-situation-report-january-12-2023>



**Number of
Persons Displaced:
12,356,860**



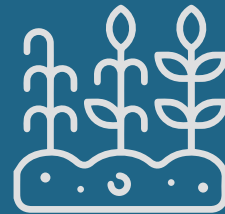
**Population
Affected
12,356,860**



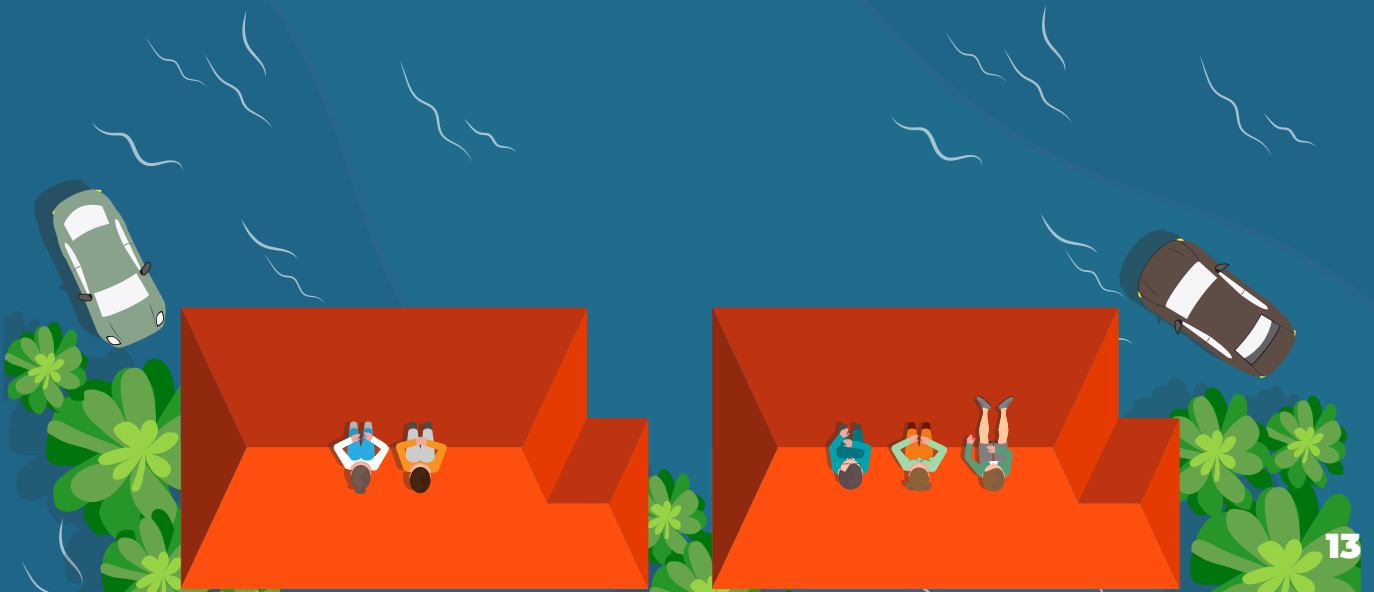
**Households
Affected:
12,356,860**



**Livestock Perished:
87,537**



**Total Crop
Area Damaged
3,777,272 acres**



Sindh accounted for 24 out of 90 districts designated as calamity-hit across the country.

Out of the 90 districts designated as calamity-hit across the country, 24 were in Sindh. In December 2022, nearly six months into the disaster, UN satellite imagery showed large areas still submerged in 10 districts of Sindh, namely Dadu, Kambar-Shahdadt, Khairpur, Mirpurkhas, Jamshoro, Sanghar, Umerkot, Badin, Shaheed Benazirabad, and Naushahro Feroze.⁶

According to the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) in Sindh, 6.5 million people were displaced in the province in early September. By the beginning of January 2023, that number had fallen drastically, according to the PDMA. Yet, over 87,000 people were still displaced in the province.

Devastation across millions of acres of farmland made agriculture impossible, depriving a large number of landless peasant population, often belonging to the Hindu “scheduled castes”, of their livelihood.

Growing Footprint of the Climate crisis

In 2022, the authorities and the population in Pakistan were forced to face multiple climate change issues, which had previously, at best, been on the periphery of the national focus.

During the year, one of the multiple phenomena linked to the climate crisis was

described as the loss of the spring season in the country's plains. In the absence of the spring season, the winter transitioned directly to an intense summer in 2022. Pakistan experienced the hottest months of April and May in over six decades. The extreme heatwave affected crucial crops and fruit production, with some accounts



Rapid deforestation, concrete-led infrastructure development, high emissions, and poor capacity to manage environment degradation are contributing to the climate crisis in Pakistan.

6) Pakistan: 2022 Monsoon Floods - Situation Report No. 12 (As of 5 December 2022) UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/pakistan-2022-monsoon-floods-situation-report-no-12-5-december-2022>

of wheat production falling by 10% and mango by more than 30%.

In May 2022, the federal minister for climate change said that a climate emergency was staring Pakistan in the face and the human and infrastructure costs could be very high.

Pakistan is home to more than 7,200 glaciers, the highest number outside the Antarctic and Arctic polar caps. The Climate Change Ministry anticipated numerous GLOF events, with lakes forming in the mountains due to increasing snowmelt on the glaciers as a result of high temperatures. The Federal Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman said that Pakistan had identified at least 3,044 such lakes, 30 of which were at risk of sudden hazardous flooding, which posed serious risks and vulnerability for the local and downstream population.

Also in May, the prime minister formulated a National Task Force to tackle severe heatwave and GLOF events.

High temperatures did cause a number of GLOF events during the summer, for example in Hunza District, in Gilgit-Baltistan, on May 7, 2022; and in the Laspur Valley in Chitral district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on July 3, 2022.

High temperatures also contributed to 2022 being Pakistan's most active year of forest fires and sudden bush combustion events in the summer.

Among the top five risks that the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report 2022 cited for Pakistan, extreme weather events were listed as risk number two.

The excessive monsoon rains and flooding was thus only one of the many manifestations of climate change for Pakistan in 2022.

During his visit to the flood-affected areas in Sindh in September 2022, UN Secretary General António Guterres said he had “never seen climate carnage” on such a scale.

Vulnerabilities — Past and Present

An individual's socio-economic standing, gender, health condition, poverty and displacement are known factors that aggravate post-disaster distress. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the monsoon floods have heightened existing challenges for those affected.

Amid the prevailing high inflation and loss of livelihoods, life was a struggle for the most vulnerable even before the disaster. Even before the devastating floods, more than 40% of mothers in the flood-hit areas suffered from anemia. Half of the children in the flood-affected districts were already stunted — an irreversible condition that inhibits the growth, and physical and cognitive development of children. The flood's

toll on Sindh also included at least 342 children killed and 3,247 injured and countless others being exposed to increasing risk of the spread of waterborne and other diseases.

The disaster hit the already marginalised Hindu scheduled castes hard. According to the last national census, 831,562 (98%) of Pakistan's 849,614 citizens from scheduled castes, an official term for the historically disadvantaged Hindus, reside in Sindh.

The floods had a devastating impact on the marginalised Hindu scheduled castes, who already lived below the poverty line.

Substantial numbers of scheduled caste members work on farms without ownership of the land they till. This section of the population largely lived below the poverty line long before the floods caused loss of income for months, if not longer.

The lot of peasants or Haris in Sindh remains a sorry one despite an important judgment by the provincial high court in 2019. Efforts for a fair mechanism to regulate the interaction between landless peasants and landowners have sadly not been as enthusiastically pursued by human rights groups as several other causes. Nothing demonstrates how completely these peasants are at the mercy of the landowners than the fact that in any given year over a thousand are freed, on court orders, from private jails of landlords. According to a recent report on the state of peasants' rights in Sindh, 1,465 peasants, who were victims of debt bondage, were freed from private prisons of landowners in the province in 2021.

Even worse is the situation and socio-economic status of women peasants, particularly those from religious minorities and scheduled castes, whose work lacks recognition. The 1,465 peasants rescued from these private prisons in 2021 also included 521 women and 445 children. A law for safeguarding women agricultural workers' rights in Sindh was adopted in 2019 but it is yet to be implemented.

Women and girls are affected disproportionately in the aftermath of natural disasters due to unequal socio-economic status, patriarchal power structures, discrimination and lack of education and information. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index report 2022, the only country worse than Pakistan in the world in terms of gender parity was Afghanistan.

On top of all else, displacement itself spawns all manners of deprivation and discrimination, and heightens vulnerabilities. Pakistan's own recent experience includes some instances of insensitivity, or neglect, such as victims of internal displacement being served food prohibited by their religion.⁸

It is against this overall background that numerous instances of the suffering of the flood victims need to be understood. These include the unfortunate flood-displaced family in Sindh's Badin district losing three young daughters when a truck ploughed into them as they slept on the side of a main road in September 2022. In another accident, three displaced flood victims were killed, and six others injured in Thul in August when a tractor ran over them as they slept by the roadside.

At least two men sexually assaulted a minor girl, whose family was displaced from Sindh's Shikarpur district during the floods and found shelter at a footpath in Karachi. The suspects had lured the victim to sit in their car by offering to buy her rations.

Both natural and man-made disasters have regularly led to not just substantial forced migration in Pakistan but also had a direct overall impact on citizens' human rights.

Despite experiencing extensive forced displacement in recent decades, neither the federal nor any of the provincial governments have deemed it prudent to benefit from the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement or adopted any proactive policy in this respect. What has been on display has, in fact, been the typical reactive, firefighting approach at damage control, rather than a human rights centric response.

Despite experiencing extensive forced displacement in recent decades, neither the federal nor any of the provincial govern-

7) "The State of Peasants' Rights in Sindh 2021," n.d. Accessed January 10, 2023. <https://hariwelfare.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/hari-welfare-report-2022.pdf>.

8) "Life at Risk, Report of Working Group on Communities Vulnerable because of their Beliefs", Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), 2011, p. 21. <https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2011-Life-at-risk.pdf>

ments have deemed it prudent to benefit from the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement or adopted any proactive policy in this respect. What has been on display has, in fact, been the typical reactive, firefighting approach at damage control, rather than a human rights centric response.

While it is easy to agree that the impact of climate change spares no one, it is also equally true that natural disasters have not, and would not, affect all victims in the same manner. The poor, disadvantaged and marginalised segments would be among the worst victims.

The vulnerability of the affected population from the recent floods in Pakistan was further compounded as the floods struck at a time of historic high inflation, the most severe cost of living crisis in Pakistanis' lifetime, and growing challenges for businesses and employment prospects amid sustained political upheaval in the country.

The vulnerability of the affected population from the recent floods in Pakistan was further compounded as the floods struck at a time of historic high inflation, the most severe cost of living crisis in Pakistanis' lifetime, and growing challenges for businesses and employment prospects amid sustained political upheaval in the country.

Against this overall backdrop, the floods carry a real risk of further magnifying the existing inequalities by adding to the woes of the marginalised and vulnerable segments, including girls and women, religious minorities, and indeed all displaced persons.



The flood-affected communities pointed out a complete lack of meaningful consultation by the government or aid organisations to gauge their needs before launching the relief and rehabilitation efforts in Sindh.

Section 2

Methodology

The research tools used for this rapid assessment included a survey, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). All participants were assured confidentiality and any identifying information has been omitted from this report in order to address any apprehension of repercussions over frank sharing of views.

Survey and FGDs details

Location:

In Sanghar, the survey was carried out in Tehsils Sanghar, Shahdadpur and Tando Adam.

In Benazirabad, the survey was conducted in Mariam Road, Taj Colony and Pathan Colony.

The FGDs were held in Mirpurkhas and Sukkur. These were attended by civil society organisation representatives, activists, journalists and lawyers, among others.

All data was gathered in the months of November and December 2022.

The survey helped gather the views of the directly affected population which, in view of the time and resource constraints, could not have been ascertained otherwise. It was also considered appropriate to document the views of any individuals through a survey who, due to any apprehension, might be hesitant to frankly share their views on discrimination in a group setting. The survey form, based on structured and semi-structured questions, was translated into Urdu and Sindhi. Native Sindhi speaking enumerators helped the respondents who could not read or write.

KIIs were held with stakeholders from civil society and the administration in the selected flood-hit areas. The KIIs aimed to solicit views of these actors in the districts where the survey was conducted. The views of the civil society and the administration helped broaden understanding of the issues and information collected through the FGDs and the survey.

Survey Participants

Finalisation of the survey sample benefited from the identification of markers of vulnerability brought out in the FGDs.

A total of 103 respondents were surveyed for this study – 52 in district Benazirabad (formerly Nawabshah) and 51 in Sanghar.

Gender: In terms of their gender, the respondents included 43 women, 55 men and five transgender persons.

Age: The youngest respondent was 19 and the oldest 91. Eighteen of the total respondents were 60 years or older.

Disability: Six respondents were physically challenged.

Religious faith of respondents: Out of the 103 respondents, 65 were from scheduled castes, 16 were Christian and 22 Muslim.

Literacy status: Out of the 103 respondents, 64 said that they were non-literate. Non literacy was particularly pervasive among the respondents who identified themselves as Haris. Fourteen of the 18 Hari men and all 15 Hari women had never been to school.

Displacement status: As many as 97 of the survey respondents were or had been displaced by the 2022 monsoon rains and floods.

Haris: Of the total 103 respondents, 33 were Haris. These included 15 women and 18 men.

All of the 15 women and 16 of the 18 men who identified themselves as Haris were from scheduled castes.

The specifics: Respondents from Benazirabad

Gender: The 52 respondents from Benazirabad included 24 women, 25 men and three transgender persons.

Age: Nine of the 52 respondents were 60 years or older, including four women.

Disability: Three of the respondents, including a woman, were physically challenged.

Religious faith of respondents: Thirty-five of the respondents were from scheduled castes (18 women and 17 men), 15 were Muslim (seven men, five women and three transgender persons) and two Christian (a woman and a man).

Literacy status: Thirty-seven respondents (22 women, 14 men, and one transgender person) described themselves as non-literate. Among the 24 women respondents, 22 did not know how to read or write. Three of the five female Muslim respondents, as well as the only Christian female respondent, also said that they were non-literate. Ten of the 13 Hari men and all 15 Hari women had never been to school.

Displacement status: Out of the 52 respondents from Benazirabad, 46 were or had been displaced by the rains and floods. These included 27 (15 women and 12 men) of the 28 respondents who described themselves as Haris. A 68-year-old Muslim man was the only respondent among Haris who was not displaced.

Haris: Fifteen women and 13 men described themselves as Haris. All 15 Hari women and 11 of the 13 Hari men were from scheduled castes. The two other Hari men were Muslim.

The specifics: Respondents from Sanghar

Gender: The 51 respondents from Sanghar included 19 women, 30 men and two transgender persons.

Age: Five men and four women among the 51 respondents were 60 years or older.

Disability status: Three respondents in the group, all men, were physically challenged.

Religious faith: Thirty respondents were from scheduled castes (21 men and 9 women), 14 were Christian (10 women and 4 man), and seven Muslim (five men and two transgender persons).

Literacy status: Twenty-seven of the total respondents from Sanghar (16 women and 11 men) could not read or write. These included four of the five Hari respondents.

Displacement status: With the exception of the two transgender persons, all the respondents from Sanghar were or had been displaced by the rains and floods.

Haris: Five respondents described themselves as Haris. All Hari respondents were from scheduled castes.



Section 3

Impressions from the Field

This section details input gathered through a survey with members of the affected communities as well as FGDs and KIs with stakeholders from civil society and the administration in the selected flood-hit areas.

The two FGDs were conducted in Mirpurkhas and Sukkur ahead of conducting the survey to reflect on the factors and dynamics that heightened vulnerability, marginalisation and could lead to discrimination amid natural disasters.

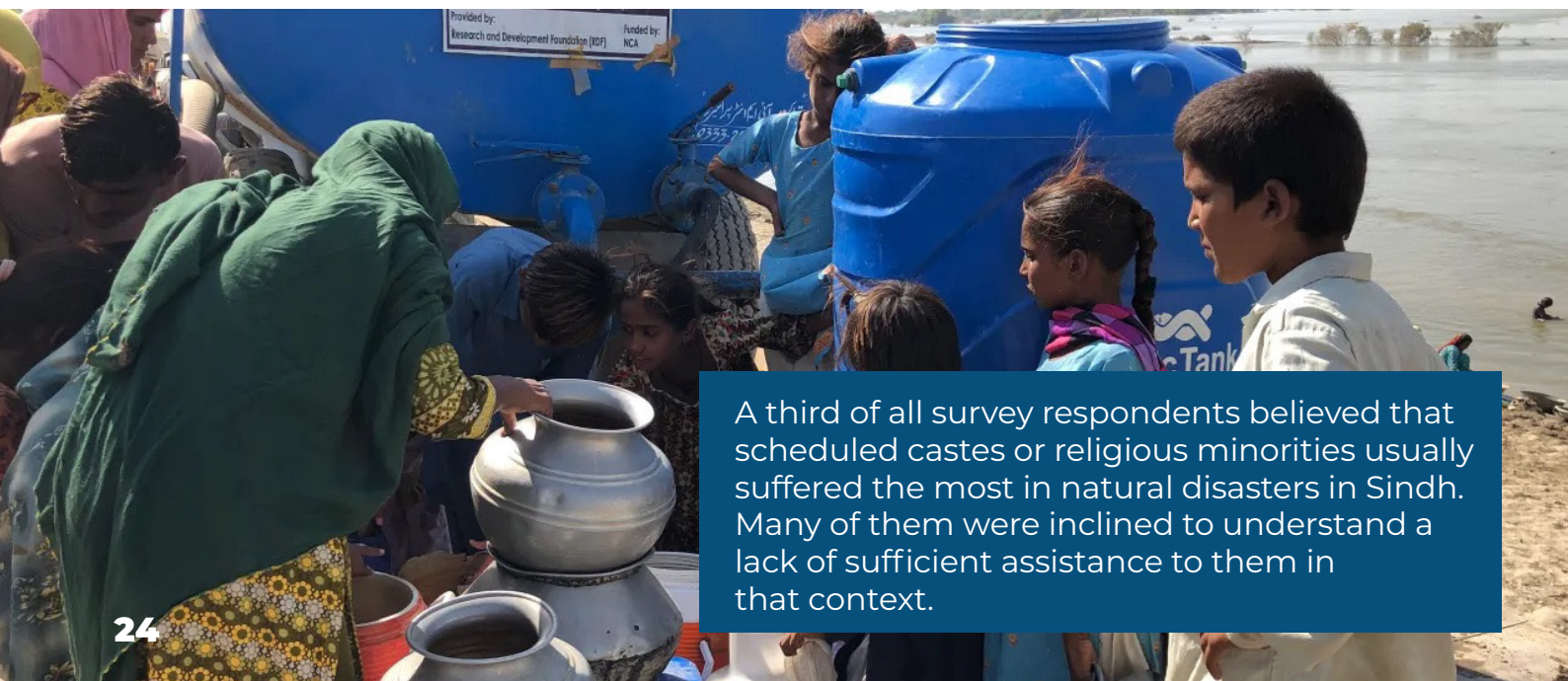


Much of this is a man-made disaster. These lands are still submerged because road construction and structures built by landgrabbers have blocked water's natural flow to the waterways. Ridding areas along natural waterways of encroachment should be the priority, rather than handing out rations among the flood affectees, so that we are spared the ignominy of having to accept handouts after future floods."

—A participant of Mirpurkhas FGD

When the FGD was held in Mirpurkhas in November 2022, it was among the 10 hard-hit Sindh districts with large swathes still under water. Also among those 10 districts were Benazirabad and Sanghar, where the survey was conducted among the affected population in December. At the time of the survey, many areas were still submerged in both districts and it appeared that they could remain so for months. The districts were selected for FGDs and the survey in view of the impact of the rains and floods as well as the concentration of the vulnerable communities there.

The key takeaways from the FGDs, survey and key informant interviews include the following:



A third of all survey respondents believed that scheduled castes or religious minorities usually suffered the most in natural disasters in Sindh. Many of them were inclined to understand a lack of sufficient assistance to them in that context.

Colossal impact, meagre response

- Irrespective of religious faith, gender or any other identity marker, the entire population affected by the rains and floods had suffered to varying degrees. Lack of timely information about the intensity of the rains and floods contributed to the loss of human lives and the overall suffering of the affected communities. Members of the affected population felt that precise and prompt information on the scale and pattern of rains and floods could have prepared the people better to brace for what followed.

- Many FGD and survey participants understood that the sheer scale of the devastation affected the pace and reach of the post-disaster response. However, many also thought that the official flood response lacked strategic planning. When the floods struck, the government started operating from Karachi. With roads blocked and infrastructure destroyed in the affected areas, it was not possible to tackle such a huge disaster from the provincial capital. It was stressed that until the emergency relief services and empowered decision-making structures were based in each district, effective and timely response to disasters of such magnitude would be impossible.

- Many of the surveyed persons blamed their ordeal during displacement on their financial situation. They said that people of means had moved to cities and safer areas and could afford to rent accommodation and buy whatever they needed, while the poorest were suffering in the formal and spontaneous camps amid absence of basic facilities. What little assistance was made available early on had gradually subsided, even as needs remained unchanged or actually became more acute. Protection against the challenges posed by the winter was direly needed.

- Numerous respondents spoke of the intensity and length of rains as unprecedented. A 91-year-old woman respondent could not

recall a more intense spell of rain throughout her life. The respondents said that mud houses stood no chance against torrential deluge, which lasted seven consecutive days in some places. In severely affected areas, nothing was left standing. Not just houses, but also schools, hospitals and the communication infrastructure was destroyed. The low-lying areas were still under water. Most of the affectees linked to agriculture had lost their livelihoods. On top of the prevailing high inflation, unemployment made putting food on the table a real struggle.

- The survey respondents highlighted a complete lack of meaningful inclusion, participation or consultation by the government or aid organisations with the vulnerable communities to gauge their needs or concerns before launching relief and rehabilitation efforts in Sindh. Not a single respondent replied in the affirmative when asked if any consultation had taken place to ascertain their needs.

- Although the general view was that the flood-affected individuals from vulnerable communities had been more seriously affected, and were certainly more vulnerable compared to the rest of the population, not a single respondent could recall any specific measures by the authorities or aid agencies to assist and protect any vulnerable group, including expectant mothers, women-headed families, physically challenged persons, unaccompanied children or transgender persons, and scheduled castes or other religious minorities

- Around two-thirds of the respondents stated that they did not know if the overall treatment of the vulnerable communities in Sindh in the 2022 floods had been different compared to previous natural disasters. Nearly a quarter were of the view that the treatment was reminiscent of what had happened in previous disasters. Howe-

ver, almost an equal number that stated that the treatment was different essentially pointed to more and better coordinated assistance in the aftermath of the torrential 2011 rains in Sindh. They said that international aid agencies had also extended support back then, which they thought had not been the case following the 2022 rains and floods.

- The plight of the displaced in many of the affected villages was said to be “beyond imagination”. Immediate relief could only address their most immediate needs. A long-term policy for rehabilitation was stressed.



Majority of the respondents from Nawabshah believed that attention and support from NGOs would be the most crucial factor in countering discriminatory attitudes towards the vulnerable communities.

“

When the weather forecast predicted what was coming, why didn't UN agencies and government bodies do timely planning? Once the floods hit, everyone suddenly had ideas and suggestions. Anyone can go and see that there is no NDMA or PDMA in the deputy commissioner's office. Everyone looks towards NGOs. Where is the budget of government departments spent?”

—An activist at the Mirpurkhas FGD

Marginalised minorities left behind

- The survey responses brought forth very few objectively verifiable accounts of discrimination. Several survey respondents genuinely seemed to believe that the absence or paucity of relief provisions for them was rooted in discrimination. This perception of discrimination was particularly vivid regarding provision of edible and other emergency relief, denial or delay in registration for assistance or compensation and the amount of compensation for damages suffered. However, even members of the religious majority among the respon-

dents also had almost identical complaints. Nearly a fifth of the respondents, all Christians or from the scheduled castes, said that the majority considered them ‘inferior’. They perceived absence or inadequacy of assistance for them to be a continuation of the same discriminatory attitude towards them.

- An activist drew attention towards displaced people housed in Govt S.M. Khawaja High School in Benazirabad where all scheduled caste families were reportedly housed in the corridors and Muslim families were

given rooms in the school. Apparently, not a single scheduled caste family was housed in a room in the school.

- A third of all survey respondents believed that scheduled castes or religious minorities usually suffered the most in natural disasters in Sindh. Many of them were inclined to understand a lack of sufficient assistance to them in that context. Around 20% respondents cited the elderly, and 16% the physically disabled as disproportionately affected in such disasters.

- Out of the 103 survey respondents, 101 said that they had not personally faced or known anyone from vulnerable communities who had faced discrimination in camps or outside camps. However, a third of the respondents identified discrimination as a key challenge for vulnerable communities in Sindh during the 2022 floods.

- Reservations were voiced over what was described as 'political discrimination' in relief distribution on the basis of political affiliation. Some FGD participants said that the focal persons tasked with the distribution of ration and other relief by the government favoured affectees who were affiliated with certain political parties or were known to have voted for them. They said that some affected people at times did not approach such focal persons as they believed they would not be given relief for being affiliated with a rival political party. Some religio-political parties had reportedly only targeted affected population from their own sects, or those population groups that

they considered their 'vote bank'. Some members of the Muslim community in Sanghar claimed that they had been denied assistance for affected people on account of being followers of a particular religious leader (*pir*).

- Amid reservations over discrimination, one account of indiscriminate assistance from Sanghar was about a local church providing help to the affected Christians as well as scheduled caste families in need.

- The survey respondents were unanimous in stating that neither government authorities nor aid agencies and private charities had put in place any real safeguards to prevent discrimination in relief and rehabilitation for vulnerable communities. Over two-thirds of the respondents definitively said that such safeguards were not in evidence, while nearly a third said that they were not aware if such measures existed. None of the respondents knew of an effective grievance redressal mechanism for vulnerable communities to lodge a complaint against discrimination in relief or rehabilitation activities. During data analysis, it was considered that even if sufficient safeguards and grievance redressal mechanisms existed, the fact that the respondents did not even know about their existence would not inspire much confidence in their utility to counter discrimination.

- Over half of the respondents said that they would feel more comfortable and reassured if they came across fellow community members among the staff of govern-



Lack of timely information about the intensity of the rains and floods contributed to the overall suffering of the affected communities.

ment or aid agencies dealing with relief and rehabilitation work. However, more than two-thirds of the respondents said that they had never seen members from their own communities among such staff. Nine respondents described coming across such staff, albeit rarely.

- Curiously, majority of the respondents from Nawabshah (40 out of 51) believed that attention and support from NGOs would be the most crucial factor in countering discriminatory attitudes towards the

vulnerable communities. An even greater majority of respondents from Sanghar (44 out of 52) stated that the role of the government would be most consequential in countering any discriminatory attitudes. Overall, 11 of the 103 respondents considered the role of religious leaders and madrasas to be most crucial in this respect. An overwhelming majority of the respondents believed that local population from the religious majority could generally play a big part in countering discrimination at times of natural disasters.



Flood-induced displacement aggravated the existing vulnerability of women. FGDs reported a number of instances of violence against displaced girls and young women by male family members.

Peasants rendered helpless

- Landless peasants and haris were badly affected as their dwellings — mostly made of mud — were inundated and flattened during the first spell of the monsoon rains.

- Besides losing their homes, these peasants also lost their livelihood well ahead of the other affected population. During the rains, the peasants were living in open fields and were inaccessible. After the rains, they were the last to get any support as the routes to their localities were submerged. Many respondents were of the view that when official aid did arrive it was acquired by those who

were financially strong, while those living in fields had limited access to relief efforts. Submerged farmland affecting those who were only skilled in farming caused livelihood losses for some of the poorest rural populations

Scheduled castes worst affected

- The landless peasants, who were overwhelmingly from scheduled castes, were among the worst affected as they lived on the farms of the landowners and already did not have much. On top of that, their mud houses were brought down by the water. Their suffering was compounded in the aftermath of the

floods since little or no aid reached their villages as the rains rendered the roads unusable.

- Haris who worked as sharecroppers were cited as being among the worst-hit affectees for other reasons too. These sharecroppers were tenant farmer who bore the entire cost of cultivation and typically gave

50% of each crop as rent to the landowners. With the loss of their crop, they lost everything. The Sindh government had announced that peasants would get free seed. No such relief had been announced for Haris who were landless, who often included Kohli, Bheel, Bagri and other members of scheduled castes.

Gendered misery

- Flood-induced displacement further aggravated the existing deprivation and vulnerability of women. Some journalists at the FGDs shared instances of violence against displaced girls and young women by male family members as houses and livelihoods were destroyed, and uprooted people had to find shelter in camps set up by the authorities or pitch a tent on higher ground on their own. In their homes in the rural areas, male relatives did not allow women to sit outside the four walls of the house. However, the camps were crowded spaces and girls and women sitting outside their tents led to 'domestic violence'.
- Lack of menstrual kits, sanitary pads, toilets and general privacy in tents made the lives of the displaced girls and women

even more difficult. The female respondents did not consider that to be a result of discrimination towards them. However, they did say that such needs of women were not considered important or at par with the immediate provision of food, etc.

- Even as attention was drawn to instances of violence against women by their kin among displaced families, all respondents barring one said that they were not aware of any incident of displaced women from vulnerable communities facing harassment from IDPs from other families or communities. The only exception was a transgender respondent who said that she faced harassment and ridicule outside camps on account of her gender.

Jeopardised healthcare

- A large number of displaced and other affected people had no choice but to live close to the areas inundated by large volumes of stagnant water, which exposed them to water-borne and other diseases. The camps lacked drainage systems. In some areas, people had to drink rainwater, which caused various ailments.
- Most of the displaced camp settings lacked health facilities. This particularly added to the challenges for pregnant women, children and the elderly amid widespread mosquito-borne, water-borne and skin diseases.
- Pregnant women suffered great difficul-

ties. During the floods, it was a challenge for them to get to safe locations. After the floods, they struggled to get appropriate healthcare.

- The FGD and survey participants believed that the government not only lacked data on newborns, persons with disabilities and elderly persons, but also a strategy to prioritise help for those and others with pressing needs in an emergency.
- A physically challenged respondent said that he was on his own as rainwater inundated his village. He had to leave on the shoulders of relatives who waded through waist-high water to reach higher ground.

A 91-year-old woman said that she could leave her village only because fellow villagers had carried her to safety on her cot.

- Several respondents, particularly those in their 60s and above, spoke of losing everything when their houses were submerged. They said that for many days during their displacement they had to do without the medicine they needed

to manage chronic ailments including diabetes, blood pressure and heart disease.

- With their houses and livelihoods lost, people were also suffering psychologically. Many of the displaced were in a limbo, stuck as they were in their tents, not sure of future steps as either their destroyed houses were in areas still inundated, or the compensation amount they received was too meagre to cover the cost of repairing damaged houses.



Section 4



Navigating flood water by foot was particularly difficult for pregnant women, children and the elderly.

Findings

This rapid assessment has benefited immensely from the firsthand accounts of the experiences, concerns and perceptions that the affected population and other stakeholders candidly shared. Based on their views, the key findings are as follows:

- The monsoon rains and floods had caused much distress to all communities in the affected areas. There appeared to be near consensus that challenges were perhaps greatest for those from scheduled castes in the rural areas. Many affected people from scheduled castes were dependent on agriculture and floodwater had inundated farmland and deprived them of their livelihood. Predominantly, they lived in *kacha* mud houses built on land that they did not own. Many were aggrieved that their dwellings had not been surveyed for assessment of damage and payment of compensation.
- Research for the rapid assessment came across very few instances of what could be readily branded as discrimination towards vulnerable communities. Although several individuals from vulnerable communities appeared to be convinced that lack of relief provisions for them or delay or absence of survey of their damaged houses was rooted in discrimination. However, even members from the majority Muslim community in those areas made similar complaints.
- There was a consensus that neither the government, nor aid agencies had held any meaningful consultation with vulnerable communities to assess their needs or concerns before the launch of relief and rehabilitation activities. There was also near unanimity of views that the government authorities and aid agencies had introduced neither any real safeguards to prevent discrimination in relief and rehabilitation for vulnerable communities nor have they established an effective complaint mechanism for the affected people.
- Allegations of discrimination in relief distribution on the basis of political affiliation were aired.
- Most of the people from vulnerable communities consulted for this assessment felt more comfortable dealing with relief and rehabilitation staff belonging to their own communities amid natural disasters. However, the overwhelming majority of them had never seen members from their own communities among such staff.

- Many affected individuals felt aggrieved not only by a lack of appropriate provisions but also by an overall diminished scale of assistance compared to previous disasters. The 2011 rains in the upper Sindh districts and the resulting losses were said to be much less compared to 2022. However, it was argued that in 2011 there was greater relief assistance and people had received much support from NGOs and INGOs, which had really helped vulnerable communities, including women and persons with disabilities.

- Even though the vulnerable communities had suffered comparatively more hardships by most accounts, no specific measures had been taken for them despite their additional vulnerabilities. Doctors in the field stated that individuals from vulnerable communities were affected more. However, there had been no additional system to focus on their healthcare needs. They stated that the steps needed to care for expectant mothers had not been taken, causing them great difficulties. The doctors said that was the case for all expecting women in remote areas. The challenges of expectant women were compounded further by the social and financial circumstances, although not by overt

faith-based discrimination.

- At least few women in formal or spontaneous camps had suffered from violence from family members and more generally faced additional problems due to cramped conditions, a general lack of privacy, absence of toilets in camps and a lack of menstrual kits.

- A large number of displaced and other affected people had no choice but to continue living close to the flooded areas. This, in addition to lack of drainage systems in camps, had made water-borne and skin ailments a constant challenge for the displaced population. Pregnant women, children and the elderly were particularly at risk as most of the displaced camp settings had modest or no health facilities.

- The government not only lacked vital data on newborns, persons with disabilities and elderly persons, but also a strategy to prioritise help for those with the most pressing needs.

- The print, electronic and social media had consistently kept the spotlight on challenges faced by the flood victims.

Section 5

Conclusion

Numbers alone can tell only part of the story of Pakistan's worst humanitarian crisis in over a decade. As ever, countless accounts of grief and misery, individual lives halted or forever changed are shrouded by the statistics.

There is no doubt that the devastation caused by the monsoon floods left the entire affected population in Sindh in urgent need of relief and rehabilitation.

At a time when the world is confronting serious consequences of the climate crisis, it should be easy to agree that the impact of climate change would not spare anyone. It is, however, equally true that natural disasters do not, and would not, affect all victims alike. Disasters often place vulnerable groups, such as religious minorities, women and children, at increased risk of abuse and exploitation. The poor and marginalised segments would almost always be among the worst affected.

The vulnerability of the flood-affected population in Sindh has been heightened not only by their displacement and loss of assets and livelihoods but also historic high inflation against the backdrop of the Covid pandemic and mounting economic difficulties in the country.

All stakeholders consulted for this assessment were of the view that the floods and rains had rendered the situation of vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, newborns, persons with disabilities, the elderly, non-li-

terate persons and landless peasants, particularly precarious. There was consensus also that there had been complete absence of any additional measures aimed at supporting the vulnerable groups.

Amid a lack of systematic monitoring of trends, there is real potential for things to rapidly get much worse for the vulnerable communities. Apprehensions about these circumstances exposing the vulnerable to exploitation, including debt bondage, are hardly misplaced.

It is critical to design responses and strategies that not only help those most seriously affected in the current crisis, but also deliver a template for systematically addressing the vulnerabilities at hand.

However, the challenges that the floods have left behind could well be turned into opportunities. For this purpose, it is critical to design responses and strategies that not only help those most seriously affected in the current crisis, but also deliver a template for systematically addressing the vulnerabilities at hand.

A reactive, one-size-fits-all approach to disaster response would not augur well for the most vulnerable in the present crisis, or indeed in any that lie ahead.

Recommendations

The following recommendations may hold value in effectively preparing for and responding to future large-scale natural or man-made disasters:

For the Government

- Facilitate effective linkages among the government, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), federal and provincial disaster management authorities and local and international organisations to efficiently tackle the impact of disasters on the affected population.
- Ensure that the post-disaster relief and rehabilitation endeavours go beyond reactive measures. A template for dealing with various stages of disasters should benefit from international standards, including the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, where applicable.
- Have in place, and share with relevant stakeholders, reliable data on the needs and vulnerabilities of the populace in order to better respond to specific needs amid any disaster.
- Make adequate resources available to NHRIs so they can acquire the capacity to monitor, promote and protect the human rights of the affected population during natural disasters.
- Provide conducive environment for civil society organisations, journalists and rights defenders, particularly amid natural disasters.
- Ensure that the personnel responding to a disaster represent, to a fair degree, the diversity of the vulnerable communities that they are assisting.
- Expedite establishment of local governments at the grassroots in order to more promptly and effectively respond to disasters at the local level.

- Introduce and adequately publicise avenues to lodge complaints about discrimination in relief or rehabilitation activities.

For NHRIs

- Act as a watchdog to ensure greater accountability, transparency and respect for human rights amid the disaster response.
- Enhance own capacity and support and facilitate training for stakeholders from disaster management bodies and civil society with a view to bring human rights dimensions in their responses to disasters.
- Continuously assess the disaster response mechanism from a human rights perspective as well as flag and seek redressal of discrimination on any grounds during any stage of displacement or natural disasters.
- Remain vigilant that deprivations created or enhanced by the 2022 monsoon rains and floods do not lead to further exploitation of victims, including vulnerable communities being trapped in debt bondage or child labour, etc.

For disaster management authorities

- Benefit from best practices to guard against all manner of discrimination in responding to disasters.
- Envisage and deploy, while preparing for and responding to disasters, specific additional measures to protect the individuals and communities who may face

greater vulnerabilities or discrimination on any ground.

- Use specific efforts to reach vulnerable segments — including individuals who are non-literate or lack modern communication gadgets — while publicising information alerts or warnings about any impending natural disasters.
- Establish a dedicated mechanism to monitor and respond to discrimination on any ground during disaster response.

For civil society organisations

- Use grassroots connections to identify and highlight pressing concerns and needs of affected populations during natural disasters and communicate the

needs and concerns to the stakeholders that can address them effectively.

- Be guided by the affected communities, through meaningful consultation, regarding their needs or concerns before launching any relief or rehabilitation measures.
- Cultivate and use allies among various stakeholders in order to push for a human rights centric approach to disaster response.
- Collaborate with media, lawyers, and political parties and leaders to draw attention to any discrimination in the provision of relief/rehabilitation with a view to addressing such discrimination.
- Keep the spotlight on the needs and overall treatment of the affected population from the human rights perspective.





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