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A mountain to climb

What needs to be done to prevent further deaths following the Pakistan earthquake and to enable survivors to rebuild their lives and livelihoods

19 November 2005

'I sat and spoke to a group of women in one of Muzaffarabad's main parks — once a beautiful green space full of flowers, now a home for people with nowhere left to go. One woman told me how she had lost her two children when her house came down over her head. She had managed to survive because it was God's will, she said: she had been chosen to be kept alive. It was at this point that I noticed her bulging belly — it looked out of place on her fragile frame and I realised that she was pregnant. If three million people are in need in Pakistan as a result of the disaster, how many other women now find themselves in her position — homeless, pregnant, and in mourning? Nothing could have brought home harder the awful scale of this disaster — and of the work that needs to be done.'

— Oxfam aid worker Shaista Aziz

Summary of recommendations

The 8 October 2005 earthquake — Pakistan's biggest ever natural disaster — generated sympathy and support from people around the world. The Government of Pakistan reacted swiftly and with remarkable energy. However, major and immediate challenges remain. Six weeks after the earthquake, the response is not yet being organised in a manner that ensures that peoples' rights and needs are being met, according to international humanitarian principles.

- 1 Donor countries need to provide their fair share of the resources and help required.
- 2 The international response needs to be co-ordinated and led through a properly resourced, empowered, and staffed UN presence.

- 3 The continuing relief and reconstruction effort requires civil authority management and civil society participation, and an early handover, where practical, by the military.
- 4 All those involved in the response have an obligation to ensure not merely the restoration of bearable poverty, but 'reconstruction plus' – i.e. to build back better than before. The accountable management of funds and adherence to proper building standards are key to the reconstruction effort.
- 5 The international community needs to fulfil its obligations not only in the relief phase but in longer-term reconstruction too, through a package of measures on aid and debt.

These are difficult challenges, but they can all be met. The relief operation is now achieving real results. Though the resources need to be substantially and urgently increased from current levels, the overall funding requirement is well within the capacity of the international community. Tried and tested strategies for reconstruction can ensure that the funds available are well spent.

At least 80,000 people have been killed and 3.5 million survivors need help. More than 2,000 people a day are still coming down from the mountains. Some 16,000 schools and colleges have been destroyed. The international donor conference on relief and reconstruction being held on 19 November 2005 in Islamabad will be a test of commitment. If the political will is there, effective relief and reconstruction is possible. If the lives – and the livelihoods – of the Pakistan earthquake survivors are not saved, it will not be because of the earthquake itself. If the commitment to 'build back better' is fully followed through it will both save lives and transform lives, and will demonstrate the effectiveness and value of international co-operation in a fractured world.

1 Providing suitable temporary places to live

By 15 November 2005, despite the obvious need and the continuing flows of people, there appeared to be few or no properly organised camps meeting the internationally agreed Sphere standards.¹ The UN acknowledged that it was not able to play a substantial operational role in the management of camps, in part due to lack of funding.

Where camps are located, and how they are managed, is crucial. If well managed, camps will play a vital role in seeing families through the winter and preparing them to rebuild their livelihoods. If not organised properly, camps could become centres of disease and insecurity for their residents. As a senior UN official in AJ&K (Pakistan-administered Kashmir) explained:

'What worries us most is not just people dying from disease and cold – it's the more scary scenario, which is if people start to move in large numbers out of the valleys, seeking better shelter. Then we may see many more deaths. Already more than 100,000 are in a very weak condition – and dozens of thousands more may move when the snows start in early December.'

Coercing populations to move into camps would be both a breach of international law and an ineffective way to manage population movement. The UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement must be followed, and full information about the options available to them must be given to survivors and to people already displaced. Camps will need to be established where

people want to be. That means that camps should be as close as possible to people's own home locations, enabling clans to stay together and pre-existing social support networks to function. Provision should be made too for people's livestock.

'There was heavy rainfall and snow was approaching. Some survivors have winterised tents but many other families were sheltering under plastic sheets or lengths of cloth held up by sticks. There are not enough organised camps. Many families are sheltering in open fields without clean drinking water or sanitation.'

— Oxfam logistician Tom Burston, Balakot town, 12 November 2005

'Mega-camps' should be avoided, and small camps of less than 5,000 people should be promoted. Larger camps should be organised around existing communities. The involvement of survivors themselves in the organising of camps not only helps traumatised people feel more 'at home' and in control of their lives, but also ensures a more effective operation. It results in people's needs being more accurately identified and effectively met, and in wider participation in public health activities, in registration, and in targeting of resources. These participatory approaches are critical in safeguarding or restoring the human dignity and morale of earthquake survivors in their reduced circumstances.

The Sphere Minimum Standards must be promoted and upheld in the camps. Accountability to beneficiaries is essential. This involves open communication of the responsibilities and plans of the agencies operating in the camps and of beneficiary entitlements, supported by transparent feedback mechanisms.

The privacy of women and girls and their right to safety can be at increased risk in camps. There are simple and effective ways to reduce these risks. Measures demonstrated to be effective by Oxfam's experience in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami and other disasters include:

- involving women residents in the management of the camps, and setting up women's committees;
- employing women staff in important roles in the camps to deter violence against women and ensure a safer environment;
- providing lighting and security;
- locating water sources, toilets, and kitchens at convenient locations for women;
- providing designated washing areas for sanitary cloths used during menstruation;
- setting aside private areas for medical examinations for women;
- setting up screens to ensure privacy.

Indian tsunami survivor Taslim points out the benefits of having bathing cubicles near where she is living:

'Earlier I had to walk about 100 yards away and felt very shy because I had to pass all the houses on the way. Now, away from prying eyes, I feel safe and more comfortable. No-one watches me come and go now.'

Donors must ensure that the UN is adequately resourced so that it can promote good camp management according to agreed international standards that respect the rights of civilians. And the UNHCR needs to get more staff on the ground in the villages and towns now.

Of course, camps are only a short-term, interim solution to take people through the harsh winter. It is vital therefore that both the international community and the Government of Pakistan look now at how to rebuild livelihoods and basic services in the areas affected. This will mean a commitment of several years, lasting long after the television cameras have gone.

2 Humanitarian aid: a challenge to rich countries to deliver their fair share

Despite the generous response by members of the public from across the world, most donor governments have still not provided their fair share of the aid needed, five weeks after the earthquake hit. Overall, only \$128.6m has been committed to the UN appeal (with a further \$34.3m pledged) of the \$550m it requested for the emergency. That is only a quarter of the funding needed up until the end of winter. In contrast, following Hurricanes George and Mitch in Central America in 1998, the UN recorded contributions of \$403m, excluding in-kind donations. The donor conference being held on 19 November 2005 provides an opportunity for countries to fully fund an effort that they claim to fully support.

Outstanding areas of concern include:

- **Shelter:** by mid-November some 370,000 tents had been distributed, but many were not suitable for winter use. There is a pressing need for a secondary distribution of better-quality tents and the provision of shelter repair kits.
- **Health:** only partially funded. An immunisation programme to reach 800,000 children is going ahead, but capacity to deal with major outbreaks of disease in the camps is still inadequate.
- **Water and sanitation:** by mid-November 2005 water had been restored to much of the area's main town, Muzaffarabad. However, virtually no camps yet have access to water or sanitation that would satisfy international standards.
- **Food:** according to the World Food Programme (WFP), 2.3 million people will need feeding over the winter. In mid-November 2005, 800,000 people were receiving food aid, with adequate stocks only until the end of December 2005 and serious shortfalls in funding for the WFP programme through until April 2006.
- **Education:** 16,000 schools were destroyed in NWFP (North West Frontier Province) and AJ&K. By mid-November 2005, just 36 temporary schools had been erected in camps, serving perhaps 250 children per school.
- **Data:** by mid-November 2005 no reliable figures were available on the numbers or the locations of displaced people, or those still in the mountains and in need.

- **UN infrastructure:** funding is insufficient in many areas, including communications and logistics.

The difficulties faced in securing the money needed for the Pakistan earthquake highlights the need for a \$1bn UN global emergency fund (the Central Emergency Response Fund) that would enable the UN to respond to humanitarian crises swiftly and effectively, without having to wait for funding decisions by donor governments, which all too often provide too little or come too late.

3 The need for a co-ordinated, effective response

All countries need to support and facilitate the UN's leading role in the international response. Several of the most powerful donors have refused to fund the bulk of their response through the UN system and some donor country officials have been talking the UN down. Yet despite the validity of some of the criticisms of its initial response, the UN remains the only body with the mandate and expertise to support the Pakistan government in the co-ordination of the international relief and recovery effort. Both the Government of Pakistan and NGOs rely on UN co-ordination and infrastructure to provide an overall assessment of emergency needs, to ensure that the priority needs of people affected by the earthquake are being met (whether directly by UN agencies or through their operating partners), and to avoid duplication of effort.

The UN must ensure effective leadership and co-ordination and make sure that the resources are used wisely, but it is difficult for it to do this without adequate funds. It is the responsibility of donors who complain of a lack of UN capacity to help fix the problem (not only through secondments but also through reliable long-term funding), and not merely to complain about it.

'If we don't get some funds in the next few days, our communications system will go down and we won't be able to talk to the field and the field won't be able to talk to us. How crazy is that?'

— Senior UN official, Islamabad, 15 November 2005

Donors should urge the UN, in turn, to ensure that it assigns all the high-calibre, appropriately experienced personnel that are required to Pakistan for as long as is necessary. In discussions with Oxfam, the UN acknowledges that there is a shortage of senior humanitarian officials in the affected area, including at the Muzaffarabad and Mansehra HQs and at field offices. It is essential that the response is resourced well, in order to provide optimal numbers of staff who are able to engage in a substantive fashion in support of the Government of Pakistan, and with numerous other operators, in multiple, widespread locations, with constant challenges and dilemmas to be faced and resolved. The UNHCR has a particularly crucial role to play with its global responsibility for the siting, design, and management of camps.

As the UN has pointed out, NGOs too have a role to play as implementing partners in delivering aid. Several UN organisations, such as the WFP, depend on NGOs for delivery of supplies.

4 Humanitarian standards

All humanitarian aid must be distributed on the basis of impartial assessments, according to the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity and impartiality. Three key sets of internationally accepted standards must be promoted and adhered to: the UN Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement, the Code of Conduct for Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, and the Sphere Project's Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.

In particular:

- Humanitarian agencies must involve local communities, especially women, in shaping the response to the disaster and in helping to plan reconstruction. Experience in country after country shows that, where communities are organised, the response is more effective: more lives are saved, and communities are able to rebuild their livelihoods more quickly, more fully, and more sustainably.
- Those responsible for distributing aid must take into account the needs of the most vulnerable people. These include women and children, ethnic and religious minorities (such as Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians), and other marginalised groups. As the evaluation of the Gujarat earthquake by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)² noted, there is a need to be aware of, and alert to, the processes of discrimination and social division that can occur during emergency responses, and to take special care not to reinforce caste distinctions or to discriminate in the distribution of aid. Women and children, especially, must be protected from exploitation.

Survivors need to be empowered and equipped to play their full part in the processes of rehabilitation and recovery. This has implications for the awarding of contracts – for example, to companies who guarantee to train, hire, and employ as many of their workforce as possible from among the survivors, including those who have been injured but who are still able to work.

'We're helping people devise better shelter than our tents. Here in Kashmir we have a small building called a *bandi*, which is insulated with pine needles and straw and blankets in layers. We're helping people with corrugated tin sheets and blankets, and cash for the work, so they can build 640 *bandis* here on this hillside.'

— Khurram Abbasi, aid worker with Sungi Welfare Society, a Pakistani partner of Oxfam, near Bagh, AJ&K

In order to ensure that the relief and reconstruction funds are transparently administered, safeguards need to be put in place, including the tried and tested methods of publication of accounts in local newspapers and the involvement of civil society organisations and local communities in budget tracking. As one Muzaffarabad NGO worker remarked:

'We must be wary when reconstruction starts. Some construction companies become very rich in this area from government contracts: they are political king-makers. We must make this transparent, and for that we must mobilise Pakistani civil society.'

5 Civil authority management and civil society participation

Currently, senior UN officials say that 90 to 95 per cent of humanitarian delivery is, and will continue to be, carried out by the military – Pakistani, US, and NATO.

This level and type of response has been appropriate to the circumstances and the needs of this disaster. The achievements of the Pakistan military in rescue, evacuation, reopening roads, and the delivery of relief goods on behalf of the UN and other agencies have been deservedly praised. However, over the coming months, as the focus of the response moves from the immediate response to the continued relief and reconstruction effort, a response that is managed by civil authorities rather than by the military, and at provincial, district, *tehsil*,³ and union council⁴ levels, rather than at central government level, will be more appropriate.

There are key lessons to be learned from previous disasters where exceptional needs have required the use of military services. One is that the military should be replaced by civilian agencies as soon as it is practicable, to make the best use of resources. A number of studies have shown that it can cost donors up to six times as much to use military resources as civilian ones. While military forces sometimes have unique logistical and technical resources, they are not trained to assess the special needs of the most vulnerable survivors of disasters, including women, children, and other groups, nor to include affected communities in planning the aid they receive. Asking people what they need and planning for a sustainable effort that links to their long-term development are the keys to the best-quality relief. For that reason, the vital work being undertaken at present by military forces in Pakistan should be scaled down as soon as civilian agencies can manage.

Civil institutions in the affected areas, which suffered a loss of personnel, buildings, and files as a result of the earthquake, remain severely damaged, but they are increasingly getting back to capacity at local and provincial levels. Civil officials such as District Officers and their staff should be encouraged to resume their leadership positions where possible. This would enable the Government of Pakistan to scale down the operational role of the military, and would enable civil authorities responsible for relief planning to resume their normal roles. At senior levels, however, some UN officials appear unaware of the capacity, experience, knowledge, and commitment of civil institutions working right down to village levels.

Participation and monitoring by civil society are crucial to help the government and the international community to revise and improve delivery mechanisms, and will ensure the effective implementation of the reconstruction plan. The international community has a role to play in supporting a response led by civil authorities and civil society. The process for 'Strengthening Pakistan's Disaster Management Capacity at Federal, Provincial, and District Levels', begun before the earthquake by the UNDP, the Government of Pakistan, and NGOs to develop a more participatory approach to disaster management, needs to be restarted.

'The civil institutions and civil society here are much more active and capable than many outsiders assume. When civil society challenges government practice and points out what could be improved, then that helps the government achieve better results. We need to build up these institutions for the benefit of all Pakistanis. It is vital that they have a major role in the relief effort.'

— Oxfam deputy country representative, Iftikhar Khalid

6 Building back better: 'reconstruction plus'

Millions of people's livelihoods have been put at risk by the earthquake, and action needs to be taken soon to ensure that communities are restored to viability.

Tragically, as people leave their destroyed houses to seek shelter and aid, they are having to abandon or slaughter their livestock. For many, their livestock represents their family savings and their means of earning a living. But with the flooding of the markets, the price of a cow has now fallen from 20,000 rupees (\$400) to 5,000 (\$100). These families will find it all the harder to return home after the winter and to restart their lives. Earthquake survivors have told Oxfam that the provision of shelter, fodder, and vaccination for livestock would enable them to retain their source of income. Special shelter areas for livestock should be provided next to camps, so that people coming to the camps do not have to slaughter their animals beforehand.

'We need the technology. We don't know how to build earthquake-proof houses. I am 54, and I have never seen this thing before. People need to be aware and prepared for the future — you must educate them about this.'

— Zaheer Ahmed Abbasi, a retired engineer from Dhirkot, AJ&K, who lost his son in the earthquake

The reconstruction efforts should ensure that living standards and development opportunities are restored to levels better than those before the crisis, and should reduce vulnerability to future disasters. Programmes for rebuilding should take into account the protection of the environment and the need to avoid deforestation. The international community and the Government of Pakistan need to seize the opportunity to 'build back better'. This means not only improved physical infrastructure but social infrastructure too, including improved livelihood options, free and quality health care, education, water and sanitation, and an opportunity for poor women and men to participate in their own development.

Among the first structures to collapse as a result of the earthquake were public buildings such as schools, hospitals, and government offices. The planning and construction of all public buildings, especially schools and hospitals, should be based on the highest, earthquake-resistant standards, with independent monitoring to ensure that this is carried out. Public inquiries, to look at whether standards and obligations were followed by contractors and by those awarding contracts, will help to restore confidence and ensure safer construction in the future.

Many families in the affected areas are dependent on remittances sent by family members working in the cities. Post offices, through which such remittances are usually paid, need to be rebuilt and reopened to enable this

vital income source to be restarted. Rebuilding infrastructure and facilitating communities to take up their normal lives again are the key elements of the reconstruction effort. People will need to regain their livelihoods, and cash-for-work programmes could well facilitate this.

Basic services need urgently to be restored. This means more than reconnecting water pipes. It is essential that schools are reopened as soon as possible. All charges for books and uniforms need to be abolished in order to remove financial barriers to children attending school. Reconstruction is an opportunity to increase the access of girls and women to quality, non-sectarian education. Resources for expanded provision of teacher training by the Government of Pakistan may help to ensure that quality education is available to meet the demand for it.

Communities need to be enabled to play a leading role in reconstruction, and proper account needs to be taken of local culture and experience. Women should be fully included in this leading role. In this way, survivors will be empowered, rather than made dependent. Pakistani NGOs should be enabled to facilitate these community efforts.

Many people in AJ&K and NWFP lacked access to health care even before the earthquake. Health systems need not only to be restored, but expanded and improved, so that injuries and ill-health do not prevent earthquake survivors from rebuilding their lives. Donors have a crucial role to play in supporting such efforts. Likewise, the ongoing improvements in India-Pakistan relations could help to free up resources by reducing the current high military expenditure. With less money being spent on arms, both countries would be able to increase domestic investment in essential services and reconstruction.

7 The obligations of the international community in longer-term reconstruction

While relief and saving lives remain the immediate priorities, attention is already turning to recovery and reconstruction.

The total bill for relief and reconstruction has been forecast at \$5.2bn, about half of which has already been pledged or given, according to the United Nations. Much of the cost of the earthquake response will need to come from international sources. In order to ensure full accountability, donors should ensure that these funds are distributed through properly accountable channels, down to provincial and local levels. The donor community should promote the inclusion of capacity-building (of civil government and civil society) related to accountable structures in the projects that they fund.

Women MPs in Pakistan have recently called for a reduction in military spending. Arms-exporting countries have a responsibility to ensure that they do not add to the financial burden of developing countries or undermine their ability to recover from natural disasters.

The scale of the need for longer-term reconstruction in Pakistan and other disaster-affected countries contrasts with the meagre resources that have been allocated to overseas development assistance by most rich countries. This once again highlights how important it is for all 22 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries to finally fulfil their pledge to devote just 0.7 per cent of their national incomes to international assistance, to alleviate poverty

and suffering in developing countries. This would allow a proper response to the Pakistan earthquake and similar disasters.

As Pakistan's people face huge economic challenges as a result of the earthquake, the sustainability of the country's considerable external debt needs to be reconsidered, especially in the context of the commitment of donors to the Millennium Development Goals and the promises made at the summer meeting of the G8 to put overcoming poverty at the heart of policy-making. There should be an immediate interest-free moratorium on debt repayments for Pakistan, so that these funds can be channelled to earthquake-affected areas. Donors should also be prepared to go beyond moratoria. The Paris Club should take the lead in commissioning an urgent assessment of debt sustainability, taking into account poverty needs and the impact of the earthquake, with a view to the complete cancellation of Pakistan's debt – provided that guarantees and mechanisms are in place to ensure that the funds released are used to finance 'reconstruction plus' and poverty reduction.

Rich country creditors should endorse the creditworthiness of disaster-affected countries to commercial creditors, citing the specific circumstances of the emergency, to enable them to benefit from moratoria or cancellation of debt without damaging their economies or their access to credit. And just as action is needed on old debts, the new financial support set to be provided to Pakistan to rebuild itself will be more effective if it is provided as grants rather than as loans.

8 Conclusion

Early in the response, one senior UN official warned that the aftermath of 8 October 2005 could bring about as many deaths as the earthquake did itself. Tragically, with hundreds of thousands of people still unable to provide for their basic needs and winter weather rapidly descending, that possibility cannot yet be wholly excluded. However, the relief system is now in place in northern Pakistan and concerns about its performance to date must not weaken the resolve to make it work now.

If the international community undertakes to improve the quality and the delivery of its aid, and follows through on pledges to resource it, the people of northern Pakistan can be saved from further disaster. Then, as we move from relief towards reconstruction, Pakistan must be helped to the full extent of its needs, to build through its civil society and administration a better future for the people affected by this calamity.

Pakistan is a generous country, one that has played host to some 8 million refugees in recent years. Here people live by this saying:

'If you are to give to those that have need, give only the best. Give that which you would wish to receive yourself.'

Notes

- ¹ The Sphere Minimum Standards for Disaster Response are internationally agreed guidelines that delineate best practice and minimum standards in the management of camps and other relief activities. The Sphere Project (2004) *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, Geneva, www.sphereproject.org.
- ² The UK-based Disasters Emergency Committee of fund-raising NGOs.
- ³ An administrative sub-district of about 100,000 people.
- ⁴ The lowest level of civil administration, which is democratically elected.

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