Floods and Disaster Preparedness in Pakistan: Regional Solution to National Problems

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Pakistan has experienced its worst ever floods during the monsoon of 2010, which has been termed as worse than tsunami. This slow tsunami has adversely impacted every sphere of people’s lives ranging from the loss of their dear ones, livestock, cultivated land, crops to stored grains, etc. An area of about 160,000 square kilometres (almost one-third of the country) is covered with flood water, damaging the infrastructure and agriculture more severely in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Punjab and Sindh Provinces. Moreover, it has displaced about 20 million people. The slow moving disaster has caused deaths of 2,000 people, but the situation may be more devastating as the actual magnitude of the extent of the destruction unfolds. Highly food insecure areas have been adversely affected by this disaster. Children, women and elderly people already malnourished are at high risk. The situation may become worse because of the increased likelihood of diarrhoea and dehydration. Besides the difficulty of accessing these areas, the finances to meet the increasing demand for food, water and healthcare for flood affectees is a huge challenge, both for the government and humanitarian organisations.

Lack of disaster preparedness policies and procedures (especially on flood preparedness) has aggravated the situation. While natural calamities are unavoidable, flawed policies and (in)actions turn those calamities into human disasters and masses have to face the brunt of failed public policy. The government’s flood management response is insufficient and largely unable to address the gravity of the situation. After the floods, Pakistan has to now focus on the rehabilitation process. The rebuilding of the entire infrastructure including the irrigation channels, communication systems, schools, and hospitals, in addition to accommodation of displaced persons is a major challenge ahead. This whole process needs the comprehensive planning and policy measures, which apparently have various missing links.

This panel would not only focus on finding out what was useful and what did not work in South Asia on disaster preparedness, but also its possible reasons so that prerequisites for any disaster preparedness plan may be understood. The panel would also discuss the possible short, medium and long term strategies for reducing the impacts of natural calamities in the region focusing on prepositions to foster regional collaboration and cooperation to cope with disasters and to reduce the vulnerabilities among masses. The panel would discuss the indigenous and community based solutions to enhance resilience at the local level against natural calamities and floods. The output of the panel would be policy recommendations (based on regional experiences) for flood protection and preparedness both for the government as well as local communities.