Policy Paper Series # 36

Flooding in Pakistan: Socio-Political and ‘Techno-Nature’ Challenges
A First Glance

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December 2010
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Abstract

The July-August 2010 floods have been amongst the worst disasters that hit Pakistan and its people posing a series of challenges to the country’s citizens, administration, political parties, civil society and academia. In the following sections, we mention just a few of them, being aware that there are many more to be tackled. We start with issues of emergency aid delivery and coordination, moving to challenges of raising funds amidst Pakistani rulers’ ‘bad image’ internationally, then gradually moving towards questions regarding the causes of the disaster, and capabilities to cope with them – especially the institutional arrangement of relief and rehabilitation.

We are also focusing on the underlying issue of governance and whether democracy in Pakistan is under threat due to floods. We feel that research and analysis is missing from the flood relief and rehabilitation phase. This vacuum of research based information in itself is a major challenge that can not only make relief and rehabilitation measures inefficient, but may also turn the reconstruction phase difficult both for the policy makers and implementers as well as for the flood survivors.

Introduction

On 29 July 2010, incredibly intense rainfalls poured over the Karakorum in Northwest Pakistan. The intensity of the rains was beyond the normal rainfall during earlier monsoon seasons. The unusual rainfall led to landslides and initiated a flash flood in the upper reaches of river Swat and its tributaries. Over the coming days, rains continued not only in Northwest Pakistan, but in Baluchistan as well, adding to the flash flood that moved southwards to the plains of Peshawar, Nowshera and Swabi, continuing along river Indus through the Punjab, to reach Sindh. Here, the breaches in dykes by influential landlords and politicians to save their lands made common masses even more vulnerable and increased the losses due to floods. By 24 Sept. 2010, 1,802 people died. According to official figures, 20.2 million people have been “directly affected”, 1.9 million houses damaged or destroyed, and one fifth to one quarter of Pakistan’s land area inundated. The spatial spread of the disaster is well known and is continuously documented by

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1 This paper is a modified version of Urs, Geiser and Suleri, A.Q (Aug. 2010), “Floods in Pakistan: Socio-Political and ‘Techno-nature’ Challenges – A First Glance,” National Centre of Competence in Research North/South, Zurich, Switzerland.
2 This paper was compiled in first week of October 2010
See NDMA “Pakistan – Today’s Situation Report.”
satellite data and maps, for example by the Pakistan Meteorological Department, UNOSAT or the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

1. Delivering Emergency Aid

The sheer size of the affected area, the enormous number of victims and the short time within which aid is required – all these create almost insurmountable challenges. The needs for emergency aid are immense: food, clean drinking water (or water purifying tablets), medicines (for skin diseases, cholera and diarrhoea are already being reported from various relief camps); feed and veterinary care for remaining livestock and shelter. Delivering aid needs infrastructure to reach the affected. But many roads are inundated or damaged, bridges washed away, power lines damaged and there are many areas where the only access is through helicopters.

1a. "Spontaneous Help": The most crucial device during the initial time of the catastrophe, though, is local self-help – affected people’s own efforts at helping and saving their kin, their belongings, but also starting the repair of access roads or local bridges (especially in the upstream regions). Indeed, these local safety nets and their stratifying consequences in the social field are almost unknown beyond the local level.

Within Pakistan, individual philanthropists, professional bodies, chambers of commerce and industries, as well as the corporate sector are also donating money and providing relief goods to the flood affected areas. This solidarity within Pakistan goes almost unnoticed in the international reporting. Usually, these groups take a truck load of relief items and distribute it among flood survivors. Collection sites for donations in kind as well as cash have been established by various governmental as well as non-governmental organizations. The Pakistan media is also playing a positive role in fund collection. There are about 50 independent TV channels in Pakistan. Many of them are running special flood transmissions where various celebrities make appeals for donations and collect funds. The collected funds are handed over to various humanitarian foundations.

1b. National Government: In principle, the state of Pakistan does have an agency in place at the central level to cope with disasters called the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), housed in the Prime Minister Secretariat, with provincial branches (e.g. PDMA in Peshawar). However, the legal status of this agency is in doldrums due to delays in procedural matters. The National Disaster Management Ordinance 2006 under which the NDMA was constituted is a Presidential Order that needs to be vetted by the Parliament within 120 days. However, this lapsed several months back. Re-promulgation of the lapsed Ordinance is also not possible any longer as the Constitution of Pakistan after the recent 18th Amendment prevents the Government from re-promulgating an ordinance more than once. An important question to be

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3 See Flood Forecasting Division.
4 See UNOSAT/UNITAR “30 Pakistan Maps.”
5 See for example, the Dawn.com “Dawn Flood Relief”;
6 See NDMA website.
7 See PDMA website.
discussed at the national level in terms of being prepared for, and capable of, handling emergencies such as the floods, is whether existing organisational arrangements need to be replaced (or supplemented) by new ones – as envisaged in early August 2010 by the suggestion to establish a National Oversight Disaster Management Council. Would such new arrangements facilitate quick, transparent, effective and target-oriented emergency response, or can the existing ones function, at least in principle – if not: what are the actual reasons for difficulties? The best organised and well resourced player in Pakistan is the Army, and it is no surprise that they do play a crucial role in delivering emergency aid, e.g. through helicopters, army boats etc.

1c. Local Government: A crucial challenge, though, is the often weak decentralised local administration (the ‘local state’) that became even weaker since the tenure of local governments came to an end last year. To recall, a (new) system of local Government was introduced in 2001, giving Union Councils and districts more power, including (at least to some extent) financial, in development affairs. Currently, administrators from the state bureaucracy are running the local administrations and there is hardly any room for local people’s say in emergency aid delivery.

1d. Civil Society: Though still weak in Pakistan as compared to other countries, there are organisations at local, regional and national level that do have links to the grass-roots. Most of the non-governmental organizations are either thinly spread or focusing on relief activities in their base districts. Many of these organizations are collecting donations as well as relief items in kind. Some of them have adopted various relief camps established by district administrations (e.g. various public buildings such as schools are being used to provide shelter and are declared as camps by district administration, plus a few tent cities as well) and are taking care of supply of food and medicines in these camps. Others are simply distributing truck loads of relief items in flood affected areas among flood survivors. Some (especially in non flood affected districts) are handing over their collection to other agencies such as Edhi Foundation 8 or to the World Food Program 9 (WFP, being a UN organisation with high credibility within Pakistan). Civil society organisations include NGOs, but groups as well linked to political parties, and professional associations. 10 Civil society also encompasses groups and charities that take their inspiration from religious ideas. The latter are very quickly associated with fundamentalism or even the Taliban movement. There are widespread reports (broadcast through television around the globe) that emergency relief is being infiltrated by ‘fundamentalists’, providing relief for purely strategic reasons. The most cited example is of Falah-i-Insaniat. 11 Very little, though, is known that would allow a sensitive differentiation between charitable movements that take their orientation and justification from religious arguments, and those that primarily focus on the spread of fundamentalism. Indeed, this is a highly under-researched subject, not only in Pakistan but around the world. 12 How far do these organizations provide altruistic relief in times of disaster, and how far are these efforts solely strategic? We do not seem to know, and this gives

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8 See Edhi Foundation website.
9 See WFP “Pakistan Emergency.”
10 See, for example, Geiser 2006 “Civil Society need not speak English.”
11 Falah-i-Insaniat is considered to be the new name for Jamaatud Dawa, the humanitarian arm of the banned organization Laskar-e-Taiba.
12 See, for example, research by J. Benthall in the Middle East.
room, for example, to speculations that the Government’s recent blaming of ‘Islamic organizations’ is but strategic as well, i.e. to flatter the US.\(^{13}\)

We do not question the crucial role played by civil society under the present emergency conditions. Still, there is a need for a constructive-critical reflection on the nature of civil society in Pakistan, its boundaries, and its practices. Through the contemporary means of internet blogs, for example, images circulate of (urban) civil society members distributing money to selected ‘victims’ (e.g. a ‘widow’) – ceremonies held in nice houses somewhere in the countryside, with huge banners across the ceremony with the group’s name, and some officials around. Critical research needs to ask whether pre-occupation for this kind of performances is adequate under the given circumstances, or whether these are questionable cases of instrumentalising flood affected people to push the image of the good-doers – not much different from the professionally staged pictures showing top state officials distributing something or the other to ‘the deserving’.

1e. International Assistance: Last but not least, bilateral as well as multilateral international organizations (among them the World Food Program) became very active, and many of the donors with established programs in Pakistan immediately addressed emergency aid. In many cases, they work through the networks established in the course of their regular project work. Though commendable in this time of crisis, there seem to be very little empirical insights available regarding the nature of these networks. Do they represent local interests? Are they accountable, and to whom (not only to the donor), and are they effective? As a matter of fact, in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake, many questions were asked especially in European countries on the performance of international donors’ local networks.

2. Emergency Aid Coordination

The size of the disaster is gigantic and there is an array of actors involved in and willing to provide support. This raises the challenges of aid coordination to ensure an efficient and effective distribution of aid first to those in need and second in all affected regions.

2a. Domestic Level: On the Government side, NDMA is in charge, with its branches in the provinces. In order to improve coordination among relief activities, the Prime Minister of Pakistan set up three different commissions in six days: a commission constituted for the complete assessment of the damage and especially distribution of relief goods in Punjab was notified but is non functional (13 August 2010); a “clean commission” comprising of honest and credible Pakistanis was publically announced but not officially notified (14 August 2010); and a supervisory committee on the NDMA, the National Oversight Disaster Management Council (19 August 2010). The Council has not taken off yet as fifteen members were announced after a gap of one month (17 September 2010). Thus, none of those commissions are functional so far. However NDMA, despite its institutional and structural limitations, is coordinating the relief efforts with Pakistan Army and Rangers and UN agencies. NDMA is also providing basic information about floods, list of relief items needed, and reports damage on daily basis. Civil society organizations that were organized under the Joint Action Committee (JAC) during the

\(^{13}\) See, for example, the comments by Ezdi 2010.
earthquake disaster of 2005 do not seem to be well coordinated this time. One of the reasons is the enormous geographical spread of the floods that has affected all the provinces.

2b. International Level: On the side of international donors, links established during the 2005 earthquake are providing essential networks this time as well. The focal point of coordination is the Pakistan branch of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).14 Updates on support are also given through the Relief web.15 International non-governmental humanitarian organizations are also actively working in various districts where they have established relief camps.

2c. Overall Coordination: Unfortunately, many of the above mentioned efforts are not very coordinated. NDMA has circulated a list of relief items, yet many of the relief providers (especially civil society groups) are either not aware of this list or simply forward whatever they receive in terms of donations. It is also noticed that camps established along accessible roads are getting more relief goods while camps in remote areas are often getting ignored. It is a challenge to further understand and analyse such processes of transmitting aid from international and national donors through networks of agencies, the processes of defining relief needs and priorities, and the geographical as well as urgent reach of these endeavours.

3. Mobilising Funds, Transparency and Pakistan’s ‘Bad Image’

Emergency aid needs funds. The Pakistan Initial Floods Emergency Response Plan of early August estimates the immediate requirements at 460 million US$. After UN Secretary General Ban Ke Mon’s visit to Pakistan and the special session of UN General Assembly on Pakistan’s flood, the pledges of the international community reached 845 million US$ in August 2010. However, it is pertinent to mention that these are pledges and not the actual amounts received – which raises issues of actual availability and accessibility of pledged funds. Once the flood water recedes, the extent of damage becomes visible. But already it is clear that rehabilitation and reconstruction needs huge funds as well. First estimates are circulating that put the figure at billions of USD.16 The UN launched its fresh appeal on 17 September for US$ 2.1 billion to provide assistance to some 14 million Pakistanis in the next twelve months. However, it is reported that the Government’s inability to raise sizeable amounts locally is creating problems for the United Nations to generate funds from international donors.17

3a. International Scepticism – and Generosity: The Pakistan Government stated that it is not in a position to bear the costs of this disaster, and launched several appeals to the international community to support Pakistan in her time of crisis. International support, though, was forthcoming only slowly. The first days of the disaster in late July, early August coincided with the release of a report by the UK newspaper Telegraph18 on the misuse of funds during the 2005

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14 See The Humanitarian Community Web Portal.
15 See Relief Web Country Pakistan.
16 The overall recovery and reconstruction cost associated with the flood is estimated at approximately US$ 8.74 billion to 10.85 billion by Asian Development Bank, Government of Pakistan, and The World Bank in their joint report Pakistan Floods 2010 Preliminary Damage and Need Assessment of November 2010.
17 See Ghumman, Khawar (20 Sept 2010), “UN Unhappy over Govt. Indecision on Flood Tax.”
18 See Nelson, Dean (13 Aug 2010), “£300m Earthquake Aid Misused by Zardari.”
earthquake and their news item was reported globally.\textsuperscript{19} The President’s absence from Pakistan was reported widely throughout the national as well as in international press (for example in Europe). On top of this, the continuous reporting on ‘Talibanisation’ or corruption did not help.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, it took concerned circles enormous efforts to get fund-raising started, and to convince people to differentiate between victims’ needs and the difficulties of Pakistan politics.

It would be worthwhile documenting the ways and means by which this was achieved. During a specific fund-raising day in Switzerland for example, radio and TV stations continuously reported on the flood crisis, getting celebrities to operate telephones where people were invited to donate. School-children offered their pocket money of a few Swiss Francs, workers in a small or medium enterprise collected 5000 Swiss Francs, the main importer for German Volkswagen cars donated 1 million, while an elderly couple forgo its weekend tour and instead donated the 200 Swiss Francs for Pakistan. All this may sound too kitschy, but we argue that it merits a closer analysis. Indeed there seems to exist an enormous potential of people-to-people solidarity, but on what does it depend? After all, and to stay with the same example, under different circumstances people in the same locality vote against the construction of minarets.

\textbf{3b. Fund Allocation within Pakistan}: As mentioned, within Pakistan, many people donated towards the various relief funds that were established. At the Government level, though, it appears as if funds are scarce. Government funding is embedded within budget procedures, and therefore an emergency such as the present floods require re-budgeting. We understand that some quarters within Pakistan are raising more general questions regarding budget priorities, for example: “(...) first, the Government should not be asking the world for more loans and aid but in fact should be making a case for the writing off of debt (or at the very least substantial restructuring of debt repayments). Second, Parliament should revisit the federal budget and re-allocate all non-productive expenditure – particularly defence – towards the flood relief/rehabilitation efforts.”\textsuperscript{21} Here it is pertinent to mention that defence budget has been very quietly increased by 25 percent from Rs. 422 billions to Rs. 520 billions.\textsuperscript{22} Of course the Army’s active role in flood relief was a costly exercise and not budgeted in the federal budget. However, lack of transparency and lack of accountability of tax payers money is what irks many national and international stakeholders. It is debated that hike in defence budget equals the expected revenue to be generated by imposing flood tax in Pakistan over the next year. This debate is sure to gain momentum in the weeks to come.

Related to budgeting is the call for international financial assistance. A very large part of the federal budget is covered by international aid, and to meet the current crisis, the Government launches more appeals for funding – most of which is not grant but credit. Already now, Pakistan's foreign debt is estimated at 54.5 billion US$, which at the same time means huge debt servicing. We argue that there is an enormous challenge to critically re-visit the ways and means of ‘financing Pakistan’.

\textsuperscript{19} For example from Switzerland NZZ Online (17 August 2010).
\textsuperscript{20} And the most recent accusations (though not yet proved) regarding cheating in Pakistan's cricket team do not contribute to improve the country's reputation.
\textsuperscript{21} Dawn.com (20 August 2010) "Post-Floods Rehabilitation: Campaign for 'Foreign Debt Write-off."
\textsuperscript{22} Dawn.com (24 Sept. 2010) "Defense Budget Hike."
4. Food Insecurity

One aspect that seems to be ignored is how this flood has affected the food and livelihood security situation. We are talking of flood in a context where 48.6 percent population was already not able “to secure nutritious food, for all times for everyone.” 61 percent districts were already devoid of prerequisites for food security, i.e., physical availability of food, socio-economic access to food and food absorption. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,23 barring Haripur and Abbotabad, the rest of the 22 districts were categorised as food insecure by an SDPI/WFP/SDC report ‘Food Insecurity in Pakistan 2009’. The northern districts of Pakhtunkhwa are most affected by floods. Upper Dir, Kohistan, Lower Dir, Malakand, and Shangla were the five worse food insecure districts in 2009. DG Khan, Rajin Pur, and Muzaffar Garh were the three worse food insecure districts in Punjab and worse affected by floods too. After the devastating floods all three components of food security have turned even worse.

“The loss of livelihood opportunities directly affects the socio-economic access to food. Loss to physical infrastructure, stored food commodities, and livestock affect the physical availability of food. Prevalence of diseases during floods negatively affects food absorption in human body. It should not be an exaggeration to say that after the floods more than 90 percent of population in the above mentioned districts (extremely food insecure districts where more than 70 percent population was food insecure pre-floods) would have gone food insecure.”24

We are talking of a region where most parts were disconnected from land routes and helicopters are the only reliable means to provide relief to them.25

In a nutshell, one hundred percent crop losses have been recorded in many areas and tens of thousands of animals have been killed. According to FAO, nearly 700,000 hectares of standing crops are under water or destroyed and in many cases surviving animals are without feed.

“The upcoming fall season’s wheat crop is now at risk in a region that is the bread basket of the country. The direct flood survivors, majority of whom were either living below the poverty line or just above poverty line, are facing an acute food insecurity problem,”26 while the areas that were not hit hard by floods are also facing food shortage due to production as well as price hikes.27

5. Questioning the Link between Environmental Degradation and Flood Vulnerability

We now turn to debates on the causes of the disaster. There is agreement that the downpour was exceptional by any means. Still, questions are being raised regarding factors that made Pakistan more vulnerable to such natural events. Forest cover in the catchments areas of river Swat and its

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23 The North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) has been renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
24 From WFP/SDC/SDPI Joint National Seminar on “Post-flood Food Security in Pakistan.”
25 For an update on the other districts of Pakistan see Suleri (15 August 2010) “Basic Instinct.”
26 Ibid.
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tributaries has reduced enormously in the recent past. An intensive debate has started on this – impaired, though, by the very contested debate (national as well as international) on the causal links between rainfall and run-off under vegetation cover. A much more obvious issue is land use zoning. Especially in the catchment region of river Swat, being a narrow valley, a huge amount of houses have been damaged or washed away – many of these buildings were hotels and other infrastructures that serviced growing domestic tourism within Pakistan. Especially during hot summer months, many people from the plains used to travel to upper Swat. This raises the question of land use zoning – a technical matter at first sight, but deeply embedded in, and linked to, governance. There are already, in principle, state laws existing that address zoning, but the core challenge is implementation.

6. The Role of the Irrigation Infrastructure

After leaving its catchment area in the Karakorum, river Swat and river Indus enter into plain areas roughly 1,500 kilometres away from Karachi where Indus reaches the Arabian sea. The river Indus flows through a very flat plain area for hundreds of miles. The whole stretch along river Indus is irrigated through a highly complex and sophisticated irrigation system, consisting of barrages that tap water from the river, main canals that bring water to distributary ones, and a whole network of field canals. Besides a water supply network, a corresponding system of drainage canals exists as well. The spring flood that emerged in North-west Pakistan swept along river Indus, breaching barrages, overflowing into canals, and thus bringing the flood water to areas quite distant from the river as well. An example is the breach of the Tori Bund.28

Again: the size of the spring flood through river Indus was gigantic, and put enormous stress on the irrigation infrastructure. Still, the quality of this infrastructure to cope with the flood stress depends to a considerable extent on aspects such as how well it is maintained and operated. The irrigation infrastructure is controlled and managed by state authorities who tried many ways to cope with the situation. This ranged from opening sluices to blowing up dams etc. In addition, reports emerge on landlords that took their own measures to avoid their land being flooded. There is an intense discussion emerging regarding, on the one hand, the capabilities of the responsible state agencies to cope with such events, and on the other hand, the feasibility of the physical infrastructure. Much of the infrastructure goes back to colonial periods, and is being refurbished since a few years through World Bank credits, among others. Already before the floods, the feasibility of barrages and the technical procedures of their rehabilitation has been questioned. One of the issues raised is that they lead to siltation and the elevation of river beds; see for example the recent article by Musthaq Gaadi29 who is involved with the case of the Taunsa barrage since long. Similarly, lack of desilting of drainage canals is often mentioned. We argue that there is an enormous challenge for a critical debate in this field. At the institutional level, one also needs to critically look into the role (or failure) of the Federal Flood Commission30 – a body established in 1976.

28 Abdullah (21 Aug. 2010), "Pressure mounts for Inquiry into Embankment Breaks."
29 Gaadi (16 August 2010), "Engineering Failures."
7. **The Challenge of Governance**

Coordinating the delivery of emergency aid; having plans ready beforehand (being ‘prepared’); bringing all the involved stakeholders on board; ensuring the proper operation and maintenance of irrigation structures, creating but also operating and maintaining organizations for disaster preparedness – all these are facets of governance. While ‘government’ refers to planning and decision-making by the state and its institutions, the notion of ‘governance’ takes a societal look. How are decisions made within a certain society or nation? Who is involved in these decision-making processes and who has which powers to decide? On which evidence is planning based and which planning documents are taken as basis for decision-making? How are conflicting views dealt with? To use the definition offered by Torfing (2010)\(^{31}\):

“(...) governance can be defined as the complex process through which a plurality of societal actors aims to formulate and achieve common objectives by mobilizing and deploying a diversity of ideas, rules, and resources. This definition emphasizes three distinctive features of governance. First, governance designates a process rather than a set of more or less formal institutions. Second, the process is driven by a collective ambition to define and pursue common objectives in the face of divergent interests. Third, the process is decentered in the sense that common objectives are formulated and achieved through the interaction of a plurality of actors from the state, the economy, and civil society.”

We start our brief discussion on the premise that Pakistan is a democracy in making, and is thus committed to also practice democracy. In principle, the state of Pakistan is structured along this ambition, manifested for example through its multi-party system, the holding of elections, an independent judiciary, and the devolution of power along principles of subsidiarity. The present floods in Pakistan challenge the Government of Pakistan in an unprecedented manner. Various instances are being reported where people affected by floods are staging protests; national as well as international media continuously report on the absence of ‘the Government’ in many flood-affected areas, and even of the failure of the state; at the federal level, conflicts between various sections of the administration seem to affect the Government’s ability to act. But above all, the catastrophe challenges the whole governance process (as defined above) as it exists in the country. Indeed, the media are full of reports that raise questions on the governance of the disaster. The media are at the forefront of blaming Government\(^{32}\) while at the same time praising NGOs.

Members of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly blame both Government officials and NGOs for mismanaging relief operations while “politicians are insulted in the media.”\(^ {33}\) Why is it that the Prime Minister states that 80 percent of aid will go through NGOs?\(^ {34}\) Is this a confession about the failure of the Government, and a call for new governance?\(^ {35}\)

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31 Torfing (2010).
32 They, for example, ask why lower Sindh was taken by surprise in late August, while floods were expected.
34 See “80 pc of Foreign Aid to be spend through NGOs, says PM.”
One of the many dimensions of this governance crisis is the highly contested nature of local Government and related decentralisation processes. We propose the hypotheses that effective local administrative structures and processes can be an asset in handling not only the emergency phase of a catastrophe such as the floods, but in reconstruction as well. In this regard, though, Pakistan has a very peculiar history. All efforts at decentralisation took place under military rule, and all of them were abandoned (or grossly ‘modified’) once democratic governments came into power. Indeed, there is an enormous scepticism even among academia towards local Government, precisely because they are linked to martial law. Besides this general scepticism, there is very little known on the everyday performance of the local governments. There are a few evaluations by donors, but there is very little independent research. Though decentralisation in Pakistan mainly occurred under military leadership, still one should not shy away from having a close look. What can be learned from these efforts regarding the “practice of citizenship” on the ground, of what Zia and Zaidi (2010) call “(...) working citizenship. By this we refer to the meetings of local actors who attempted some mutual agreement at resolving conflict, implementing schemes and surviving or developing as a community.”

7a. Beyond the ‘Blame Game’? We argue that much of the critique on the inefficiency of the Government, and of the governance system is known. However, there is an uneasy feeling that leads one to take these criticisms with some specific care – and this again has to do with evidence. Pakistan is a highly politised country, which on the one hand is a sign for vibrant debates. On the other hand, and having a system with a ‘ruling party’ versus an ‘opposition party’, the blames raised against the Government need to be assessed carefully. Is it, as Pakistan’s High Commissioner to London states, that “(...) there are some subversive elements that are hell-bent to run down the democratic Government and are busy in casting aspersions on even good intentioned initiatives to make them look with suspicion?” On which criteria, evidence, and against which scale do we blame a Government to be inefficient, or efficient for that matter?

We argue that indeed, the Government can be criticised (even blamed) for inefficiencies. The real challenge ahead though, is to take these insights as starting points, and to develop, propose and discuss feasible alternatives that help to ensure an effective governance system (including decentralisation) suitable for the conditions of Pakistan. Even the Prime Minister of Pakistan had to publically ask those who were talking of a change of Government to come up with a “substitute” that may work in this country.

Indeed, the media in Pakistan are full these days of demands at a very general level, e.g. that the Government should deliver, etc. But how should the Government and the governance system operate – taking into account the experiences made in the past? Is all of what the Government does to be blamed, or are there instances where it was able to deliver? And why was it able to deliver in these instances? What were the ingredients that allowed effectivity? Indeed there is an

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37 Both with allied parties.
enormous challenge not only on the media and its journalists, but on researchers in the country as well to investigate such issues.

8. **Is Democracy Challenged?**

At the very heart of the matter lies the system along which a society or a nation for that matter structures its interactions among the citizens, the related decision-making process, etc. – ‘governance’ in short. As stated above, Pakistan is, in principle, a democracy. Or better: it is a *democracy-in-the-making* (a term we prefer to the popular notion of a ‘failed state’). The country has been created as a completely new entity a few decades ago only, and military rule over extended periods of time prevented the emergence of the key ingredients that constitute a ‘democratic system’: political parties that are accountable to their voters, fair elections that reflect the will of people, an executive and a related bureaucracy that ‘delivers’, people to be ‘citizens’, politicians to bridge their differences at least in moments of catastrophes (such as the present floods), etc. Enormous progress has been made in the recent past (which needs to be documented and analysed by researchers), partly also due to agitation by civil society, vibrant media and a proactive judiciary.

But the material and non-material benefits expected from democracy do not reach most people. This leaves room open for those that challenge this political system. The floods and the way the present state handles the emergency provide these critiques with arguments. They find easy arguments of linking the present governance crisis with the established political system – a system (‘democracy’) that has been (in the eyes of many critiques) been imposed on Pakistan by ‘western interests’; see for example the statements on the incompatibility of democracy and *shariah* by Sufi Muhammad, (former) leader of the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) in Swat.40

To quote S. Akbar Zaidi, “*Whichever way one looks at it, the response by the Government, by its loyal opposition, by Pakistan’s so-called friends, or by aid agencies, all highlight the Pakistani state’s abject failure to govern at a time when it is needed most. It is not surprising then that people seek other alternatives.*”41

Or the editorial of the Dawn (28 August 2010), “*(... there is a peripheral danger, of people losing faith in the system. Democracy must deliver at this critical stage.”*

On a not so different tune, MQM leader Altaf Hussain’s remarks regarding the need for patriotic army generals to act against corrupt politicians and feudal lords.42 Indeed, glancing through the debates one either comes across the ‘blame-game’, or its opposite, the ‘praise-game’, the latter stating that everything will be good. What seems to be missing is analyses. It is the understanding of people’s livelihood concerns, the state’s, civil society’s and international

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41 Zaidi (20 Aug. 2010), “A Drowning State.”
donors’ response, the consequences of these responses, and the competition for the hearts of the people that we consider the utmost challenge.
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