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Disaster Management in Pakistan: Challenges and Way Forward.

Outline:

1. Introduction

a. Ravi as a symbol of cultural covenant with nature.

b. Thesis Statement:

Pakistan's disasters are not born from nature alone but from a broken relationship with it - where governance failure, ecological arrogance, and moral neglect turned floods into tragedies; resilience demands not charity or reaction, but a return to stewardship, community power, and the wisdom of global powers models adopted through our own cultural and Islamic lens.

2. Pakistan's Disaster history Reflects Recurring Patterns of Neglect and Repetition Rather than Learning.

a. The 2005 Aftk earthquake revealed a lack of institutional readiness

b. The 2010 floods displaced millions due to poor river management

c. The 2022 Sindh floods exposed climate injustice and governance failure

d. The 2025 floods of KPK and Punjab demonstrate that the lessons were not internalized.

Date: / /

3. The Failure of Structural Governance.

- a. NDMA Act 2010 ; theoretical framework vs. ground reality.
- b. Absence of local government and disaster decentralization
- c. Elite-centered urban policy and: peripheral neglect.
- d. Military led response vs. Civilian disaster planning

4. Ecological Violence and Urban Expansion.

- a. Encroachment on floodplains - Lahore Ravi case
- b. Karachi nullahs and informal settlements
- c. Development projects as ecological erasure
- d. Loss of wetlands, rivers, and natural drainage corridors

5. Climate Change as Force Multiplier.

- a. Pakistan among top climate-vulnerable nations
(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)
report reference

- b. Glacier melt and flashfloods
- c. Heatwaves and urban heat islands
- d. Lack of climate ~~change~~ adaptive infrastructure

6. Economic Fragility and Disaster Capitalism

- a. IMF governance pressure and disaster budgets
- b. Corruption in relief funds and Ibn-e-Khaldun's view on ruling elites.

Date: / /

- c. Media and Political class reduce disasters to spectacle without reform.
- d. Maleeha Lodhi's state fragility argument applies to disaster governance.

7. Social Dimensions of Disaster

- a. class and vulnerability - poor suffer disproportionately
- b. Gendered impact (Women in relief camps)
- c. Disaster as erosion of human dignity (Naomi Klein's critique)
- d. Local community knowledge overlooked.

8. Islamic Environmental Ethics

- a. Quran condemns environmental corruption as moral decay.
- b. Prophetic teachings stress protection of water channels and rights of all creatures
- c. Imam Ghazali speaks of moderation as civic and spiritual discipline
- d. Ibn-e. Khaldun links environmental decline to ethical collapse of rulers.

c

9. Global Case Studies for Pakistan's Learning

- a. Bangladesh Cyclone preparedness programme.
- b. Japan's Disaster preparedness culture
- c. Netherlands "Room for the River" Project.



- d. Integration into Pakistan's context as an adaptation and not blind imitation.

Date: / /

consequence of negligence repeating itself in a cycle that Pakistan seems unable to break.

The history of Pakistan disasters in Pakistan is long and repetitive. The 2005 Earthquake revealed absence of preparedness. The 2010 super floods displaced more than 20 million people and inflicted economic losses exceeding ten billion dollars, the largest in Pakistan's history.

The 2022 floods in Sindh and Balochistan submerged one-third of the country, affecting over thirty million lives. Each time promises of reform filled television screens and reports were written by the NDMA. Yet by early 2025, the same districts in South Punjab and KPK were again under water. The rains were intense without any iota of doubt, but what turned them into catastrophe was the deliberate occupation of river beds, outdated drainage systems, and the absence of local disaster management committees. The tragedy was not in the rainfall but in the repetition.

Governance remains at the core of Pakistan's disaster vulnerability. The NDMA Act of 2010 created a national body responsible for disaster management, but the institution remains centralized, underfunded, and

Date: / /

politically reactive. Rather than focusing on prevention, it operates as a relief distributor, after destruction occurs. District Disaster Management Authorities exist mostly on papers, with no budget or authority. The overreliance on the military for rescue operations further weakens civilian capacity, reinforcing the culture of reaction instead of preparedness. When the 2025 floods hit, local administrations in Dera Ghazi Khan and Swat waited for directives from Islamabad while communities rescued themselves with wooden boats and ropes while some died. In a state where bureaucracy is slower than the flood water, nature inevitably wins.

Urban expansion adds another layer to the disaster equation. Pakistan's cities are growing not by planning but by sprawl. The Lahore-Ravi Urban Development Project (RUDA) designed as a symbol of modernity, ironically exemplifies ecological blindness. Built over flood plains, it disrupted the natural drainage channels that historically absorbed monsoon surges. Similarly, in Karachi, anti-encroachment drives demolished informal settlements along nullahs, displacing thousands of poor while leaving elite housing projects

Date: / /

untouched. This selective environmentalism, where the poor are evicted and the powerful expand, converts governance into an instrument of inequality. Wetlands that once absorbed excess rain have been filled with concrete, turning cities into bowls where water has nowhere to go. Disaster is thus not only natural but political too.

Climate change magnifies these vulnerabilities. The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change consistently lists Pakistan among the ten most climate vulnerable nations. Glacial melt from the northern ranges feeds rivers beyond capacity during summer, while erratic rainfall patterns destroy predictable agriculture cycles. Yet Pakistan's infrastructure remains designed for an older climate. Dams, canals and drainage systems conceived in the 1960's no longer align with current hydrological realities. The 2025 floods once again revealed that climate change is not a distant possibility but a daily lived experience. Heatwaves in Karachi and Jacobabad, combined with floods in Punjab and KPK, represent two extremes of the same failure: a lack of adaptation and foresight.

Date: / /

The economic dimension of disaster deepens this crisis. Pakistan's fragile economy, burdened by IMF conditionalities, cannot sustain long-term rehabilitation programs. Relief funds are often diverted, misused, or delayed. Ibn Khaldun's Muggadurah warns that corruption among rulers corrodes not only governance but the land itself, an observation that resonates eerily with Pakistan's reality. After every calamity, a spectacle of charity emerges; donation drives, photo-op relief camps, and promises of "rebuilding better". Yet the cycle persists because the structural reform is absent. As Maleeha Lodhi argued in Pakistan: Beyond the Crisis State, the nation suffers from chronic governance fatigue, a tendency to react emotionally and administratively without rethinking systems. Disasters thus become both symptom and metaphor for a state perpetually managing crisis instead of preventing them.

Social inequality ensures that disasters never strike equally. Floods wash away the homes of farmers and fishermen long before they reach gated colonies. Relief camps often lack privacy and sanitation, disproportionately affecting women and children. Displacement

Date: / /

erodes dignity. Naomi Klein, in *The Shock Doctrine*, described how crises are exploited to reinforce economic hierarchies. Pakistan's post-flood recovery mirrors that pattern - elite contractors profit from reconstruction while victims wait for compensation. Meanwhile, indigenous communities who once possessed traditional flood management knowledge are excluded from policy dialogue. In ignoring these voices, the state silences centuries of wisdom that could have saved lives.

Islamic teachings offer a profound moral lens to reinterpret disaster management. The Quran declares, "Do not spread corruption on the earth after it has been set in order" (7:56), a verse that extends beyond moral corruption to include ecological decay. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) warned against blocking channels of water and harming the environment, calling such acts injustice. Imam al-Ghazali emphasized moderation as both a spiritual and civic virtue, while Ibn-e-Khalduan linked environmental degradation to the moral decline of civilizations. In this tradition disaster management is not merely about response it is about Amanah, the sacred trust

Date: / /

of stewardship. Reintroducing these ethical foundations into governance could transform disaster management from a bureaucratic duty into a collective moral mission.

Several global examples offer practical lessons Pakistan can adapt. Bangladesh, once synonymous with cyclones and tragedy, now stands as a model of community resilience. Through its cyclone preparedness programme Bangladesh trained its local volunteers, built elevated shelters, and established early warning systems that reach remote villages. The result has been a dramatic drop in cyclone-related deaths. Japan, facing frequent earthquakes, has cultivated a culture of preparedness through education, drills and strict building codes.

Disasters are met with discipline not panic. The Netherlands, a country below sea level, implemented the "Room for River" project - restoring natural ^{flood-}plains rather than resisting water through walls. Instead of fighting nature, it learned to co exist with it. Each of these models reflects the principle of adaptation - resilience built not against the nature but with it.

Date: / /

For Pakistan, the path forward must begin with governance reform. The NDMA must be reconstructed to empower provincial and district bodies, ensuring that response mechanisms exist before the next monsoon season, not after. Disaster management should be decentralised, with trained community volunteers, local siren systems, and accessible rescue equipment. Educational institutions can introduce modules on disaster ethics and environmental stewardship. Mosques, historically centres of community mobilization, can be re-envisioned as hubs for awareness campaigns about flood preparedness and environmental responsibility. These actions require political will more than financial aid.

Urban and environmental planning must also change course, as restoring the natural capacity of rivers and wetlands is far cheaper and more sustainable than constructing new barriers. The Netherlands' philosophy of "giving space to waters" could be applied to the Indus Basin by designating no-construction zones along rivers and enforcing strict environmental impact assessments for all housing projects, like because Lahore's Ravi cannot be

Date: / /

resurrected as a luxury waterfront but as a living ecosystem. Likewise, Karachi's drainage system must be rebuilt to respect, not erase, its natural contours, proving that an ecological city is not anti-development but development with foresight. Culturally, Pakistan must rediscover its lost environmental imagination, for from the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai to the folk songs of Punjab, nature was once celebrated as kin, and that cultural memory can be a resource for rebuilding ethics. When the rhetoric and the disaster management will no longer be about heroism during floods but wisdom before them. The 2025 floods have thus offered an unintentional lesson, showing that resilience is not built in the hour of crisis but in the years preceding it, and Pakistan must evolve from a reactive state to a preventive one, from mechanical ~~democratic~~ bureaucracy to moral community. The prophetic models of Stewardship, the scientific insights of climate adaptation, and the global examples of success all point towards the same truth: disasters cannot be managed without managing ourselves, and the River Ravi, now suffocating beneath concrete and waste, stands as a mirror to that truth.

Date: / /

In the end if Pakistan can revive the covenant it once held with its rivers, treating them not as drains but as lifelines it can transform tragedy into renewal. Disaster management will then no longer mean counting losses but preserving futures. The journey from reaction to resilience begins with humility before nature and responsibility before ~~God~~ Allah. To honour that covenant again is to ensure that the next flood finds a nation prepared, united, and wiser than before.