

Disaster Management in Pakistan: Challenges and Way Forward

Outline

1. Introduction

1.1. Attention Grabber

(Swat incident which claimed 18 lives)

1.2. Thesis Statement: Disasters either man made or natural - not only wreak havoc on lives and infrastructure - but serve as a true test of govt. ability to respond, adapt and lead and provide governance resilience and future oriented strategies.

2. Understanding Disasters and Disaster Management in Pakistan

2.1. Types of disasters in Pakistan

Earthquakes, Floods, Droughts Landslides etc.

2.2. Disaster Management strategies in Pakistan

Mitigation, Preparedness, Response & Recovery

3. Challenges in Disaster Management in Pakistan

3.1. Political challenges

- Political instability -
- Discontinuity of policies
- Poor governance - lack of local leadership

3.2. Economic challenges

- Loan based economy
- Lack of funds and resources

3.3- Social challenges

- Over population - leading to deforestation - climate change
- Illiteracy - resistance to reforms

3.4- Strategic challenges

- Security oriented policies due to the hostile neighbours - India and Afghanistan
- Water war imposed by India leading to floods and droughts

3.5- Technological challenges

- Pakistan lacks technology to tackle disasters
- Just launched its own satellite with the help of China.

3.6- Environmental challenges

- Most vulnerable nation to climate change
- Many cities are located on the fault lines of tectonic plates
- Droughts and heat waves

4- Way Forward for Disaster Management

4.1- Resolution of political and governance issues to bring stability in policies

4.2- ^{Allocate} Funds for disaster management

4.3- Reform and restructure NDMA, PDMA and DDMA

4.4- Install early warning mechanisms

4.5- Reforestation drive - support and initiate projects like Billion Tree Tsunami

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4.6. Use of Global Best Practices for Disaster Management

- Japan - Early warning mechanism, safety wall, floating infrastructure
- China - Sponge cities to control urban flooding
- Bangladesh - Community alerts, flood tunnels
- Netherlands - "Room for the river" etc.

5. Conclusion

THE ESSAY

It was on early 27th June, 2025 when a family with other tourists was enjoying the scenic beauty of Swat river. Within minutes a sudden wave of flash flood came and swept them away. At least 18 people were killed, most of which belong to the same family, leaving behind a trail of tears. The smiling faces in the picture, just before the incident, was circulating on internet leaving everyone shocked. This incident shows the horrifying reality of climate induced natural disaster, and Pakistan is among the top 10 nations most vulnerable to climate change. Disasters either man-made or natural are becoming a norm of life. Pakistan has witnessed almost all form of disasters whether it is the earthquake of 2005 or the floods in the past fifteen years — Floods of 2010, 2022 and 2025. Heatwaves, glacial lake outbursts are nowhere in the count. The devastation and losses caused by these disasters present a grim picture of Pakistan's preparedness for natural disasters. In the Buner incident of August 2025 which flood caused huge economic, infrastructural and human losses, Prime

Minister of Pakistan said: "Unfortunately, we have learned nothing from the past," which shows the lack of seriousness and irresponsibility of the institutions and governments. A similar incident in ATK happened where a female professor got stuck in her car in recent floods but not rescued by the rescue teams. All these incidents point toward the challenges and ill-preparedness of Pakistan in disaster management. However, disasters prove to be blessing in disguise as they test the government's ability to respond, adapt and lead, and yet also offer an opportunity to reform disaster governance with resilience, accountability and future oriented strategies.

Before discussing the challenges to the disaster management a brief introduction of disasters and disaster management is presented. Disasters is a natural or man-made phenomena which that wreak havoc on lives and infrastructure. Many natural phenomena can be termed as disasters like floods, earthquakes, landslides, cyclones, droughts, heatwaves, wildfires etc. Many man-made phenomena like fire, industrial hazards, terrorist attacks, riots etc can also be termed as disasters. Among man-made disasters

nuclear disaster is the deadliest but it is under the control of man. Natural disasters are the real test of humanity for which it has to be prepared. From the past two decades Pakistan has become prey to the natural disasters like earth quake, floods and droughts.

Disaster management by Pakistan involves four phases. Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery. The first phase "Mitigation" includes the ways to minimize the ^{effect} of possible disaster. The second phase "Preparedness" involves the preparation mechanism. In this phase necessary equipment, planning and strategies are devised to handle the disaster. First two phases are before the disaster occurrence. In the third phase "Response" comes which is during the calamity. It involves the response to the disaster — to save lives of the people, provide them shelter, food medicine etc. The fourth phase is "Recovery" which comes after the disaster. In this phase, estimate of loss is done and ways are devised to reconstruct the infrastructure and rehabilitation of the affected. In Pakistan, mostly third and fourth phase are done and less heed is paid toward the first two phases.

To begin with the challenges in disaster management in Pakistan, first comes the political challenges. Political stability is essential to handle any kind of disaster, either natural or man-made. If the government is smooth, institutions are working properly then nothing can block the path of recovery. In WWII when Churchill the Prime Minister of England was given the news of losses in war, he asked one thing ... "Whether our institutions are working?" When he was told that they were working properly, he said then we will win the war. So if the war can be won through strong institutions and smooth policies then how can disasters not be managed. Pakistan's biggest challenge is discontinuity of policies due to political instability. Local leadership is also not present to handle the situation at local level. So the political challenge is one of the leading challenge in disaster management.

Economic challenges are also causing hurdles in disaster management. Pakistan's economy is loan based. It lacks funds and resources. Even to meet basic needs Pakistan needs funds from IMF and other

friendly countries, whereas disaster management needs proper funds allocation, necessary equipment, staff for emergency situations and advance technology for mitigation and preparedness. However, all this cannot be done on loan basis as loan comes with certain set of instructions as well. In 2005 earthquake, Pakistan could not handle it alone and it was given aid by the foreign countries for development of infrastructure and human relief. Similarly, the floods of 2010, 2022 and 2025 also pose a grim picture of Pakistan's economy and its hurdles in mitigating the disasters.

Furthermore, the social challenges are also there to add misery to disaster management. Overpopulation is the biggest social problem which in itself a disaster as for overpopulation more resources are needed to meet their needs. Overpopulation is the biggest reason for deforestation which is a cause of climate change - human induced disasters. Overpopulation with illiteracy is much bigger challenge in implementing reforms. Overpopulation leads to the encroachment of rivers for residence purposes posing a big challenge to management.