ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEMIN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION:A CASE STUDY OF PUNJAB PROVINCE IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT: Disasters whether natural or human induced leave behind a trail of destruction and misery, yet they also provide learning points for disaster risk management. Natural disasters which commonly includes; earthquakes, landslides, floods, wind storms, lightening, drought, etc. and human induced disasters refer mainly to sectarian violence, wars,industrial accidents, and road accidents. In general, during all emergencies people look towards government agenciesfor immediate relief and recovery. Thepast events suggest that government line agencies with meagre financial resources and technical capabilities remain unable to withstand such havocs single handily. The main reason for this low performance of line agencies is the absence of coordination platform at the local levels.As per recently amended Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the local governments and disaster management have been made a provincial subject. Although, The National Disaster Management Act, 2010 has been promulgated with three hierarchical intervention levels including District Disaster Management Authorities but unfortunately, the provincial governments including Punjab have been unsuccessful to introduce a genuine local government system—capable of dealing with frequent disasters at the local government levels in the province.This paper is based on literature review and key informants surveys, and suggests policy interventions for capacity building of the localgovernment system towards disaster risk reduction.

Key word: Disasters, Local Government System, Institutional Set Up, Coordination Mechanism

INTRODUCTION

NDMA (2009) states that when planning for a year, plant corn; when planning for a decade, plant trees; and when planning for life, train and educate people. It has now become a matter of convention that the above planning interventions are more enduring and resilient in their proceeding order. In real world situations, sometimes, planning fails when any area meets unforeseen disaster. The world has witnessed sharp increase in the magnitude and frequency of disasters during last decade. Humanitarian Practice Network (2009) describes that the tsunami disaster in 2004 killed around 167,700 people and displaced hundreds of thousands more. The effects of this incident is not yet ended when a mega earthquake hit Pakistan and where about 73338 people lost their lives and around 3.5 million were displaced and around 800,000 houses were destroyed. Pakistannot only faces earthquakesbut also commonly experience other forms of disasters such as floods, cyclones and drought.

Taking the case of Punjab Province, with a population of more than 74 million (GOP, 2000), with its five mainstream Rivers viz., Ravi, Sutleg, Jhelum, Chenab, Beas and further intensified by mighty River Indus poses very high flood risks. Similarly, there are other human induced disasters which are also quite frequent in the province such as industrial and technological disasters. (Mayo and Aziz 2011) in a disaster risk assessment study categorized different districts of the province with respect to risk levels. They study indicated that Rawalpindi, Lahore, D.G. Khan, and Multan were the most sensitive districts with a value range between 86.67 and 48.11. The second category of most sensitive disaster prone districts included Faisalabad, Gujranwala and Attock with a value range between 48.11 and 28.11. The third category of disaster sensitive districts included Shiekhupura, Kasur, Sialkot and Bahawalpur with a value range between 28.11 and 19.78. While, the 4th and 5th category of disaster sensitive districts include all thosedistricts which are least industrialized, least urbanized, and generally least developed compared to rest of the districts.

In another study, (Farooq and Shahjehan 2011) explained that 91 human settlements and commercial areas in 14 major districts of Punjab have potential to be affected by Technological Disaster and there exist no administrative infrastructure to cater this technological disaster. They warned that Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Lahore, Kasur, Multan, Sialkot, Sheikhupura, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Gujrat, Muzafargarh, Rahim Yar Khan, Minawali and D.G. Khan, having 49.54% of the total population of Punjab, are densely populated districts of Punjab and these districts comprises of 44635 units out of which 2205 units are engaged in dealing with toxic

chemicals and gases. The province is popular mainly because of its fertile land and massive agricultural production. The province faced varied nature of disasters during past years which caused human as well as property losses in the province. The following table narrates the past trends of disasters in the province (table-1):

Table 1. Losses Caused by Natural Disasters in Punjab in Recent Past

Type	Year	Lives Lost	Villages Affected	People Affected
Flood	2001	47	4	202397
	1998	250	161	2085585
	1997	196	5891	1272499
	1996	435	3767	4121010
	1992	234	7435	2881300
Virus Attack	1988	-	4035	-
	2004	-	702	-
	2003	-	144	-
	2002	-	122	-
Cyclone	2002	-	7	-
Drought	2004	-	313	-
	2003	-	31	-
	2002	-	3493	-
	2001	-	3449	-

Source: Provincial Disaster Management Authority, (2008)

The historical review shows that the most severe disasters occurred in Punjab province were in form of floods followed by droughts and virus attacks. Floods affected people in form of loss of lives, displacements, etc. Most of the people of this province are associated with agriculture and reside in villages. Thus, they are facing flood disasters in its full severity. In order to reduce the severity of disaster, the governments always tried to use the available resources. In this regard, local government system was focussed and introduced in Pakistan. The main reason for this was the fact that local government system mainly work at the grass root level and communities are particularly involved in all stages of planning and implementation. It was mainly considered that with the active involvement of people the losses due to disasters can be reduced. During the year 2001, the government of Pakistan introduced a new local government system, which replaced the old 1979 local government system. One of the major characteristics of this new system was devolution of powers from top to bottom. The entire country area was divided into four administrative tiers, i.e. Province, District, *Tehsil/Town* and Union Council. Pakistan has four provinces namely *Balochistan, Punjab, Sind and Khyber Pakhtoonkah* along with Northern areas, FATA (Federally Administrated Tribal Areas) and Islamabad Capital Territory. Very recently, a new Local Government Act, 2013 has been promulgated in Punjab. Although the Act considers relief efforts as one of the functions of local government units, namely; union councils, district councils, municipal committees, municipal and metropolitan corporations under Sections 72(o), 77(h), 81 (bb), and 87(ee) respectively, but it failed to institutionalize the District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) as per requirements of the NDM Act, 2010.

Punjab province is the biggest with respect to population and the population is growing at a fast track and sizes of urban areas are increasing at a much faster rate than ever before. Ahmad, *et al*. (2013a) discussed in detail the Punjab Local Government System 2001 administrative structure. Under the new local government ordinance 2001, political and executive systems have been introduced at three tiers, viz. District / City District (City District set up is present in *Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan districts*), *Tehsil* / Town (Town set up in case of City District) and Union Council. Political and executive set up are established to run the state affairs. One Deputy District Officer Civil Defence is working in each District but its role is not clear and could not show any significant performance during the past years. Lately, Punjab Emergency Services (Rescue 1122) was established through PES Act, 2006, whichproposed District Emergency Officer at all districts in Punjab. But, even in the presence of these two departments, there exist no coordination platform at the local levels during disasters and far less arrangementsare visible at the sub district levels in Punjab.

If nature of disaster and dealing department/agency in Punjab province are considered then it is observed that different departments are performing different jobs and in an uncoordinated way. For instance, Rescue 1122 responds and provide relief at the disaster scene but it is not working under the Provincial Disaster Management Authority—a provincial disaster management and coordinating body as per NDM Act, 2010. Similarly, Irrigation and Metrological departments are mainly responsible to monitor and manage floods situation in the province. For droughts, the responsible department is the provincial agriculture department.Similarly, Health and Livestock departments at the provincial level are mainly responsible to address human and animal health issues. Now the question arises:

1. Whether the present local government system is capable to combat any disaster which may arise in any part of the Punjab province in particular and Pakistan in general.
2. Is there exists any coordination mechanism among the departments mainly working to reduce the harmful effects of such disasters?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to explore the myths about coordination mechanism between local government and other departments (provincial, federal) reports published relevant to the topic were consulted. Moreover, in order to verify the ambiguities in reports a key informant'ssurvey was conducted. Ahmad, et. al. (2013b) explained Key Informant Survey Technique in detail and accordingly.Key informants from officials of concerned (related to disasters) departments; i.e. Irrigation, Health and Agricultural departments working at the provincial levels are selected. In this regard, ten (10) persons (key informants) from these line departments were identified and eventually interviewed. A questionnaire was prepared for the respondents and interviews were conducted with officials from the line departments during the month of September 2011. The questionnaire mainly focussed on:

1. Is there exists coordination among the line departments and local government in particular?
2. What types of arrangements are made to combat any unforeseen disaster?
3. Do the departmenthas sufficient resources to combat any disaster?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey results are analysed on the basis of following questions:

Is there exists coordination among the line departments and local government in particular?: On the question, more than 50percentrespondents said that there exists no coordination among the line departments. In case of any disaster, line of action is made on the spot. The high ups of the concerned departments direct theirsubordinates with their own style. Take the example of floods the irrigation department does not have any direct coordination (horizontal) with the local government department. The directions are given from the vertical link (chief minister, secretaries local government and Irrigation, etc.) to the lower end. In case of any guidance the personnel again seeks direction from the departmental head and follow the same. The same situation exists with the metrological department. In most of the cases, delays occurred due to this missing link and it lead to mismanagement. Gull *et al*., (2011) also identified gaps of communications at the individual and community levels especially before rescue teamsarrive, which allows victims to help each other.Thesemissing horizontal links are creating vacuum. Arrangements to combat the situation are made in hustle &bustle and had always proved inappropriate and insufficient. Local government department which is considered to be working at the bottom and close to communities remain unaware of the strategies made for the rehabilitation of affectees. Ahmad, *et al*. (2013a) also explored lack of coordination of local government as one of the main reason with other provincial and local level departments.

What types of arrangements are made to combat any unforeseen disaster?: No respondent say yes to types of arrangements made prior to any disaster. All said that arrangements are made at time of disaster. Resultantly, the departments are not ready to combat the situation and it lead to massive human as well as property loss. Moreover, due to absence of any sort of horizontal link at the lower level the strategies to face any disaster could not be made. The respondents also told that there exists no special cell/section/directorate mainly responsible for making arrangements for any disaster during the year. In local government, although an office with the name civil defence is working but its performance is not satisfactory and could not show any significant role during the past few years. Similarly, DDMAs could not be made functional so far and the new LG Act, 2013 remained inconsiderate about establishing DDMAs along with the establishment of District Education/Health Authorities in the Province.

Do the departments have sufficient resources to combat any disaster?: On the question, overwhelming majority of the respondents has the consensus that resources in the form of finances, vehicles, tents, food items, etc. are available but unfortunately mismanaged. The concerned departments throughout the year do not formulate any plan to combat the disaster situation and as a result when disaster occurs, the available resources become ineffective and insufficient. The departments then seek towards other sources for help and guidance.

The results of the survey show that, although in case of floods, the responsible department is Irrigation and Power which is working at the Province level but it does not have any coordination mechanism (particularly horizontal) with the local government. Agriculture department key informants results revealed that, for droughts, there exists no link with local government system. Thus both Agriculture and Irrigation departments are working independently to cope with the situation. Likewise, the health department is working without coordinating the local government. Unfortunately, there exists no direct horizontal or vertical links between the provincial and local government set up.Both provincial and local governments are working in parallel and could not establish proper coordination mechanism. The result is that in case of any disaster then purely temporary arrangements are made to combat the situation. The rescue and other measures are started randomly at time of incidence.

Conclusions: Based on the above discussion, following conclusions are drawn:

1. The new local government system 2013has been introduced which revives the old Local Government Ordinance of 1979—proposing again the setup of municipal committees, municipal and metropolitan corporations, and district councils along with their corresponding urban and rural union councils. Although, the Act marks disaster relief as one of the functions of all local government units but remains response centric rather than risk reduction centric.
2. Unfortunately, the local government system lacks sufficient arrangements to cope with disasters. Local government remains dependent on other department/s(federal and provincial)—without effective coordination platform at the local level to reduce the effects of disasters.
3. There exists a very weak coordination between the local government and other departments working at national/provincial levels. Moreover, the new Act also failed to institutionalize DDMAs at the district levels to enhance the scope of disaster management from response centric to risk reduction/management.

Recommendations: Gull, *et al*. (2011) pointed out lack of communication facility as one of the critical problem in any disaster. Based on this following more recommendations are made in order to avoid big disaster in the province:

1. There is a severe need to strengthen and improve local government system both in terms of administration, coordination and disaster management.
2. The line agencies working at federal and provincial levels should establish separate cells for disasters and make all these responsible to establish coordination with the NDMA/PDMAs and DDMAs for effective coordination and management of disasters.
3. The DDMAs should be made functional under the new local government set up. The DDMAs should formulate policies and strategies to combat disasters especially at the grass root level so as to avoid disasters and to minimize the losses occurred due to any disaster.

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