

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND FLOODS IN PAKISTAN

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



**Climate Change has been identified as a threat multiplier since the 2015 Paris Agreement and currently comes under the 13th Sustainable Development Goal. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2022 assessment, the least developed countries are most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. Experts say the climate crisis has made the monsoon rains more intense, causing widespread floods and devastation.<sup>1</sup>**

In the last one month, Pakistan received more than 60% of its normal total monsoon rainfall resulting in heavy rainfall, flash floods and landslides. This has affected 1 million people across the country with Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces affected the most. More than 580 people have died and thousands have lost their homes across Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Current State***

The rains this year have been 87% heavier than the average downpour. Pakistan should prepare for more flooding and damage to infrastructure as its glaciers continue to melt at an accelerated pace, causing flash floods. Hit by devastating flash floods, Pakistan is struggling to rebuild due to foreign aid cuts and inadequate investment in adaptation. Abnormally heavy monsoon rains led to flash

<sup>1</sup> UN, "Climate change recognized as 'threat multiplier', UN Security Council debates its impact on peace," UN Peace building, Accessed August 18, 2022, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/news/climate-change-recognized-%E2%80%98threat-multiplier%E2%80%99-un-security-council-debates-its-impact-peace>

<sup>2</sup> Pakistan floods kill 580 and bring misery to millions, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/aug/17/pakistan-floods-kill-580-and-bring-misery-to-millions>

floods in July which killed at least 550 people across Pakistan. At least 77 children have lost their lives and more than 500 people were injured in the floods. More than 34,000 homes were deluged and 977 km of road infrastructure and 61 bridges were destroyed. Government agencies and the army have set up aid and relief camps in flood-hit regions and were working to help relocate families and provide food and medicine <sup>3</sup>

An estimated 1 million have been affected since July as Pakistan endured more than 60% of its normal total monsoon rainfall in three weeks. Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces have been the worst affected, with heavy rainfall predicted across Pakistan till end August. Among several others, two important road links that the rains destroyed were the main RCD (Regional Cooperation for Development) Highway that links Pakistan's commercial capital of Karachi with Balochistan's capital Quetta, and the Makran Coastal Highway, which links southern Balochistan, especially the Gwadar Port, with Karachi and rest of the country. These roads are important not only for travel but also for bringing in food and other supplies to Balochistan.<sup>4</sup>

While thousands of people across Pakistan have suffered on account of heavy rains and flooding, people in Balochistan, the country's poorest province with minimal infrastructure and where most people in villages and towns live in mud houses, have been the worst affected. In Balochistan, over 150,000 people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. This past month was the wettest in three decades, according to Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). Balochistan received 305% more rain than the annual average, according to the agency. Aid groups are on the ground distributing tents and food packs, but a lack of media coverage and aid cuts means there is little funding available to help communities rebuild.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Pakistan's National Climate Change Policy, 2012 does mention the need to put in place early warning systems; evacuation plans and strategies; ensuring reconstruction of rural housing to reduce risks of floods; and construction of disaster-resilient hospitals, dispensaries, and strong school buildings to be used as designated safe shelters. But none of these plans was ever implemented. In fact, school buildings were one of the first to collapse with the gushing flood waters. Although Pakistan has institutional structures like NDMA at the federal level and the

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<sup>3</sup> Isabelle Gerretsen, "Pakistan struggles to rebuild after deadly flash floods," Climate Home news, August 11, 2022, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/08/11/pakistan-struggles-to-rebuild-after-deadly-flash-floods/>

<sup>4</sup> Shah Meer Baloch, "Pakistan floods kill 580 and bring misery to millions," The Guardian, August 17, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/aug/17/pakistan-floods-kill-580-and-bring-misery-to-millions>

<sup>5</sup> Asif Shahzad, "Flash floods kill 550 in Pakistan in heaviest rains in decades," Reuters, August, 5 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/flash-floods-kill-over-500-people-pakistan-during-heaviest-rains-decades-2022-08-05/>

Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) at the provincial level, disaster preparedness has never been a priority.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Amid the ongoing climate crisis, the frequency of hazards like floods will increase in future as well. The devastation resulting from such hazards will be magnified by poor infrastructure, unprotected housing, and a missing disaster management system. However, it is possible to reduce the risk and damage such disasters bring through measures such as setting up an early warning system. When weather forecasts predict heavy rains that could cause flooding, it is the responsibility of national and provincial institutions to prepare for possible risks. Efficient coordination and planning between these institutions are key to minimising risks and loss.<sup>7</sup>

Pakistan should treat these climate disasters as a full-fledged national security emergency before they stoke conflict that adds further stress amid the country's other numerous challenges. While some subnational government agencies have been more effective in preparing for climate-related disasters, others have not. It is unclear if Pakistan's new climate change task force will carry the same weight as the COVID-19 NCOC. But if it is to succeed, then learning from the successes and failures of the NCOC model is imperative. Addressing climate change in Pakistan truly requires a war-footing and a whole-of-government approach. Otherwise, the consequences of inaction or improper action could foster greater turmoil and strife for all levels of Pakistani society.

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<sup>6</sup> Mariyam Suleman Anees, "Why Do Floods Devastate Balochistan So Intensely?" *The Diplomat*, August 17, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/why-do-floods-devastate-balochistan-so-intensely/>

<sup>7</sup> Elena Shao, "How Is Climate Change Affecting Floods?" *New York Times*, July 26, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/flooding-climate-change.html>