

COMMUNITY LED RESPONSE TO DISASTERS: A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAMS IN LAYYAH DISTRICT

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Pakistan is situated on such a part of the globe, where climate changes, in the form of glacial melting, and abnormal intensity, frequency and pattern of rainfall, are unfolding amazingly fast compared with other countries. Being a host to the mighty Indus River, monsoons and westerlies from Mediterranean, a substantial proportion of the population suffers from recurrent floods and billions of dollars loss occurs on account of damage to infrastructure, population displacement, loss of assets and institutions and infrastructure of the poor. For example, due to floods there was a loss of US \$ 10 billion in 2010 and US \$ 3.7 billion in 2011. Further, the weather has become unpredictable which results in untimely rains inflicting direct loss to agriculture and sustenance of communities. The Judicial Flood Inquiry Tribunal for Floods 2010 concluded that the main causes of devastating damage of 2010 floods were the absence of flood and hill torrent management plans, weak Irrigation and Power Departments, ineffective role of Federal Flood Commission and gross lack of integration and coordination among the key departments dealing with flood¹.



Figure 1. Crossing of Indus River by the Simulation Team to visit CERT

Before the major earthquake of 2005 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the disaster management infrastructure was underdeveloped. The earthquake caused an estimated \$5.2 billion loss in relief and reconstruction costs, equivalent to 2.6% of the country's GDP. Over 70,000 individuals were killed, more than 70,000 were injured, and over 2.8 million were left homeless. Additionally, 2.3 million people were rendered without adequate food.

Until then the disasters were managed by a small Disaster Management Cell under the Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, and the relief and rescue operation was mainly the responsibility of Pakistan Army and Civil Defense Department to some extent. Such a huge loss realized the need for disaster management structures at the national, provincial and district levels. The post-earthquake efforts also led to the establishment of Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority.

¹ <http://punjab.gov.pk/sites/punjab.pitb.gov.pk/files/Ch2.pdf>

At present the National Disaster Management Authority [NDMA], Provincial Disaster Management Authorities [PDMAs], District Management Authorities [DDMAs] and Pakistan Army provides relief to suffering communities along with several INGOs and NGOs. Often there is a delay in response time as the information flow from the district level to NDMA and then to rescue agencies takes time. Further, the scale of problem is so big² that national level institutions alone cannot cope up with the community needs. It is imperative that as the local communities are the first affectees as well as responders to disasters, community-based approaches seem to work better, if training and equipment is provided to the local communities. Therefore, under The Surge Capacity Project, Plan International-Pakistan and Rescue 1122 and local NGO, Youth Educational Foundation and AAS Welfare Society took a lead to establish Community Emergency Response Teams [CERTs] in 15 most vulnerable Union Councils of Layyah district. The communities were mobilized through extensive mobilization and meetings with the local notables, district authorities and Rescue 1122. Rescue 1122 staff provided training to communities and taught them rescue and recovery in all possible disasters, such as floods, fire, accident, choking, traffic accident and transfer of patients to hospitals. The project also provided equipment to CERTs as well as Rescue 1122.

The present findings are based on the review of project document, interviewing of the YEF, Plan and Rescue 1122 staff. The author also participated in the simulation exercise on May 7, 2017, conducted on a river delta hosting poor communities. The CERT had established a camp there for providing relief to the affected population. At the camp site, community volunteers were allowing anyone to enter the camp after checking his/her identification and investigating purpose of the visit. The camp composed of several components, namely registration area, where youth were registering the incoming affectees, separate camps for males and females, a community based school for primary class where a teacher was teaching about 20 pupils, a health camp where a Lady Doctor was checking patients and providing medicines, a community kitchen, separate toilets for males and females, child friendly space for young children and a water pump to provide drinking water. The camp was managed altogether by youth. The community also took experts [about 20] on boats for



Figure 2. Emergency Relief camp Established by Youth Educational Foundation in Layyah



Figure 3. Story telling by Children in Youth-friendly Space in an Emergency Camp- simulation



Figure 4. A child in Emergency Relief camp with TSCP Pakistan Platform Coordinator. Mr. Shahnawaz Khan and Dr. C. Inayatullah author of this case study. Even the children are motivated to take part in rescue and recovery.

² 17 million acres of land submerged during floods 2010.

crossing the river. All the safety measures were well taken care of, and lifejackets were provided to the passengers.

Several community elders were interviewed, and it was informed that Rescue 1122 teams used to visit the area and have trained communities for responding to emergency needs and provided necessary tools and equipment. The communities were taught how to fire fight, rescue a choking victim, handling of persons with disabilities and elderly and respond to major disasters. The CERT also provided live demonstration of conveyance of information to community elders, verification of information about flood from the Government Departments, and the youth had clearly assigned duties for safe evacuation, protection of assets, protection of women and children and convincing elderly to evacuate the area and move to a safer place.

So far, CERTs have been established in 15 vulnerable Union Councils with the membership of 460 persons [310 male, 150 female]. It was informed that Rescue 1122 teams used to come at the sight with the needed equipment and trained the communities to respond within a short time. 43 CERTs meetings were conducted with active participation of 1,586 CERTs members [907 males and 679 females]. Three consultative meetings of CERTs were held at the district level with the District Coordination Officer and District Social Welfare Officer to discuss community preparedness and the role of district government for the upcoming monsoon flooding. As a result, a joint action plan has been developed with role and responsibility of CERTs and Rescue 1122 for upcoming monsoon rains. So far eight trainings on Community Action for Disaster Response



Figure 5. Camp School Established in an Emergency Camp-simulation



Figure 7. Health Camp - simulation



Figure 6. Transferring of a Patient on Stretcher by CERT members

[CADRE] and lifesaving skills were conducted and 352 (Male-215 & Female-137) members were trained. These training sessions were facilitated by the surge and rescue experts from Rescue 1122. The core objectives of these trainings were “to build the capacities of CERTs members for effective, efficient and timely response and use of life saving skills.”



Figure 8. Carrying of Patient for Transfer to the Hospital

“Mrs. Atia, CERT Leader, Union Council Lohanch Nashaib, Layyah District. It is cultural norm that ‘women and girls are counted as most vulnerable’ because of their dependency on males; during normal and emergency days, while women want to come forth and play their role as a member of family and society as well. The pilot has provided a space to women of fifteen union councils of Layyah by engaging them along with men at community level at the platform of CERT”.

“Mrs. Afiya Hayyat is 24 years old belonging to Basti Darkhann, married having two kids, her education is matric, and she has also got a professional certificate on homeopathy, she has been working as trained mid-wife for the last two years. As a CERT member, she was elected coordinator to organize meetings and communicate with CERT members, communities, government officials, civil society, and Rescue-1122. According to Afiya “she and her job was most vulnerable before her involvement in community level activities. Since she started to support her family; she improved her confidence level not only on herself but also on her family. Now she has full support of her family especially her husband who is laborer. She feels much strong economically and socially now and can live her life with her own will. She said that “my cause is greater than my role and skills.” She played a good role for conducting all activities on behalf of her team and arranged a best training on Basic Life-saving skills with strong participation of women of the area. Being a technical lady she has command on life-saving skills after training she got from Rescue-1122 and now she has clear objective to transfer her skills not only to other women but also at family level of her community whom she belongs.”

“Zohra Mai from Union Council, Lohanch Nashaib Council informed that she received training from Rescue 1122 on firefighting. Once, there was a fire incident in the village, she went quickly at the scene, calmed the people and asked them to bring their buckets. She quickly formed a chain of human hands with buckets from the water source to the fire to extinguish it. Very quickly the fire was controlled without any loss. She is thankful to project for training her”.

Due to formation of CERTs in Layyah, PDMA has selected Layyah district as model and decided to register CERTs with District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and PDMA. PDMA will provide comprehensive disaster preparedness training with CERTs and expand the model to other districts in Punjab. It is a breakthrough to have a policy change to

“Abdul Sabhar from Basti Bhand, Union Council Sumra Nashaib reported that once his 4-year baby was choked, and he rescued him by applying anti-choking techniques which he learned from Rescue 1122. His wife and other family members are excited that he has learnt such an important technique”.

“CERTs have proved to be a helping hand for Rescue 1122 in performing its duties, and I am confident that these will play a role in any forthcoming disaster such as flood, and the model will be rolled out in district Layyah- Mr. Anayt Khan, District Incharge Rescue 1122

bring communities upfront to manage emergencies by themselves and to break the dependency syndrome. It is anticipated that in the onset of any disaster, like, floods, the CERTS will play a major role in rescue, recovery and

rehabilitation and would prove as an implementation arm of the government.