

# Pakistan's Government Is Failing Flood Victims

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**At COP27, Pakistan's government took credit for the role it played in setting up the loss and damage facility to compensate poor nations for climate change. At home, Islamabad has not done enough to protect flood victims from starvation and eviction.**

Six months after disastrous floods struck Pakistan, promises of an ambitious flood recovery plan ring hollow for flood victims.

Last year's monsoon was exceptionally violent, submerging more than a third of Pakistan's landmass. Much of the water still covers large areas of land today, while thousands remain displaced, living in makeshift shelters on roadsides and camp cities.

Pakistan's government has responded with an ambitious \$16 billion flood recovery plan, the [Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Framework \(4RF\)](#). Most recently, the international community pledged more than \$9 billion in financial support at a Geneva conference. These commitments are a welcome success for the crisis-hit and cash-strapped government.

However, victims on the ground have little faith that the newly committed aid will change their plight.

Since torrential rains hit Pakistan last August, the country's leaders have been busy scoring diplomatic victories. Most notably, Islamabad took credit for the decision of world leaders at [COP27](#) to establish a loss and damage facility for nations suffering from the effects of environmental disaster. Once operational, the scheme will funnel financing from the world's heaviest emitters to the nations hardest hit by climate change.

While Pakistan's leaders basked in the limelight, victims were still waiting for a sign of support from the government.

The largest number of flood refugees are hosted in Malir camp, situated on the outskirts of Karachi, Pakistan's most populous city. The camp city hosted 8,500 flood victims at its height and had to rely heavily on support from local community volunteers, nearby residents, and private hospital facilities.

"Apart from helping us clear the area from bushes and providing tents, we had to completely rely on volunteers and charities to support thousands of flood victims whose houses got destroyed," Imran Soomro, comanager of the camp city, said.

*Photo: Imran Soomro and Hussain Magsi, volunteer camp managers of Malir camp city. (Nadja Sieniawski)*

"We all work here for free. Many of the volunteers are flood victims themselves."

An Islamic NGO provides food in Malir, and private hospital facilities provide free-of-cost medical checkups twice weekly nearby. Clothes, blankets, and sanitary products are donated by locals, but supplies were insufficient, particularly during the winter months. As a result, many children suffered from respiratory illnesses.

Ajeeban and Larkana set off to Malir with their eight children after floods completely destroyed their house in the village of Thatta. They now live in a small tent that they share with ten other people and await government support to build a new house.

“We are grateful for all the support from volunteers, but we cannot keep living like this. We need a roof over our heads, and for our children to return to school. For months, we have been waiting for any sign of support from the government. But there has been nothing.”

Following the floods, Malir camp was growing steadily, with many flood victims arriving from other camps.

In December, however, local authorities sent the Malir encampment a notice of eviction. Imran and comanager Hussain Magsi have been fighting eviction on the basis that the flood refugees have nowhere to go back to.

In Jacobabad, one of the districts worst affected by the floods, volunteers and victims have also been taking rehabilitation into their own hands.

Dr Samra has been fortunate enough that her own house has only suffered minor damage. She invests her time and efforts into supporting her community to settle back by providing food, clothing, medical assistance, and support for reconstruction of permanent housing.

“All this is only possible with the help of volunteers and donations. The government has contributed to the relief efforts, but unfortunately the amount of aid has not been sufficient to ensure proper rehabilitation,” Dr Samra explained.

Dr Samra’s relief efforts are wholly dependent on self-funding and donations. The funding has been sufficient for the construction of forty housing units. These are, however, unlikely to withstand a similar environmental disaster.

Dr Samra believes that her country needs more international aid. “The challenges on the ground are immense, and the government is doing what it can, but with insufficient resources.”

“The aid is very delayed, but ultimately it will reach the people.”

Unlike Dr Samra, people in Malir have little faith that international aid will reach them. Government authorities have since forced the closure of Malir camp city.

“We do not know where the billions donated early on by the international community have gone,” said Soomro.

“The government has closed the camp city but has not communicated where the flood victims should go. The only information we have received is that the government has started the paperwork for the reconstruction of housing, but no timeline has been communicated. In the meantime, the flood victims are in limbo,” Soomro said.

Bahram and Zamira fled to Malir with their two daughters two days after the rains started. Embroiderers by profession, they are hoping to find better opportunities in Karachi.

“Back home, we are indebted slaves under a feudal system. My landowner keeps calling, asking us to come back. The government has even offered us return tickets but without a penny or any idea of where and how we should live. There is nothing to go back to for us,” said Bahram.

Unequal access to land and feudal land ownership are some of the main contributors to rural poverty in Pakistan. Many flood victims are trapped by this system and view the floods as an opportunity to escape. But under Pakistan’s recovery program, there are no plans to address land ownership issues.

Additionally, many fear new climate disasters. “We experience heavy flooding every five years. How can we live in these conditions? We do not see much hope in returning to our lands anymore,” added Bahram.

While climate change is certain to have added to Pakistan’s woes, the government’s disastrous water management and urban planning are also culpable.

*Photo: Shop run by flood victims in Malir camp city. (Nadja Sieniawski)*

Farmers for years have complained about the adverse effects of some of Pakistan’s major irrigation and drainage systems, arguing that they deliver excess water to some areas, intensifying flooding.

Following the 2010 floods, which were similar in severity to recent floods, ambitious flood-prevention plans were drawn up. Ultimately, they failed to prevent a new catastrophe in 2022.

“I have sadly not yet seen any government efforts being made to build resilience against future floods. Up until now, everyone has been preoccupied solely with reacting to the human disaster rather than planning for the next one,” Dr Samra admitted.

According to media reports, Pakistan did present flood prevention plans to partners at the UN conference. Back home, however, the government is leaving people in the dark.

It is the world’s duty to help, especially that of the world’s heaviest polluters. But pledges of financial aid must be followed by a swift transfer of funds, and the use of funds must be tightly monitored. Corruption is entrenched in Pakistan; without increased democratic oversight, the country’s authorities cannot be trusted to direct the money to those most in need.

The ongoing fiscal crisis in Pakistan has only worsened what was an already difficult situation. [Sky-high inflation and interest rates of 20 percent](#) have made daily existence increasingly unaffordable for many Pakistanis.

For the millions of victims of the flood, rising costs and a lack of relief mean that they need support urgently from both the national government and the international community.

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• Jacobin. 03.29.2023:  
<https://jacobin.com/2023/03/pakistans-government-is-failing-flood-victims>

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