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Lessons Learned from the 2005 Pakistan Earthquake

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ABSTRACT: As tragic as the recent earthquake in Haiti was, it was not unprecedented. The 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, for example, was also breathtaking in the destruction it caused. While the two countries are vastly different in a variety of ways, the response to the 2005 earthquake provides some potentially useful guidance to the Haiti responders. Some lessons learned from the 2005 earthquake response are provided in this memo.

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Lessons Learned from Previous Disaster Interventions – the 2005 Pakistan Earthquake

Facilitating Development

- Weather conditions can adversely affect the well-being of victims and should be taken into account. In the case of Pakistan, cold weather threatened the health of victims and exacerbated fuel (needed for cooking and heating) shortages. Provisions to make structures that withstand adverse conditions should be utilized. Fuel-efficient stoves and the rationing of wood harvesting should be explored.
- Despite the volatility of disaster environments, regular and comprehensive contractor performance evaluations are vital. They provide the mission with information to make better acquisition decisions, and give contractors the incentive to provide better services and products.
- In Pakistan the civilian government was excluded from the relief and reconstruction programs; this allowed jihadist groups to provide relief and gain credibility. It is important for donors to allow the civilian government (at both the national and local level) to be visible during relief efforts. Also, donors should encourage local partnerships with local NGOs and civil society groups, move away from partnering with the military, and demand that the local reconstruction agencies be constituted by parliament.
- Programming will necessarily evolve, as conditions on the ground change and the needs of stakeholders change. Training may be needed to help officials in various positions to manage programming in a changing landscape more effectively.
- Donors should ensure that the most vulnerable groups, including women, children, and the elderly are participants in the recovery process.
- Helicopters are a necessary resource; they can get aid to locations where other modes of transport may not.
- Psychosocial support is often neglected in disaster response, but is an important activity for those victimized by natural disasters. These programs should be integrated into interventions.

Enhancing Coordination

Within the United States Government

- The USG response should be standardized across agencies before the next disaster occurs.
- The political environments in the aftermath of natural disasters can be especially charged. It is important for USAID and other agencies to maintain transparency in their decision-making processes.

- Every component of the emergency response (lifesaving, rehabilitation, and reconstruction) should begin at the same time.
- USAID should have continuous contact with military decision makers at every level. Preferably, this would be done through liaison officers.
- It is vital to establish early on who controls what area, and who sets priorities. This should be written down and disseminated to all involved.
- Relevant military information should be unclassified, so that those without clearance can review it.

External donor coordination

- Planning for reconstruction should begin even while the emergency response is underway. Decisions made in the immediate aftermath have consequences for the reconstruction process, so the two should be intertwined.
- The military-led regime in Pakistan acted as a bridge between the international community and the Islamic welfare organizations. Consequently, the regime was able to use this setup to further its own political agenda. This arrangement also marginalized Pakistani civil society. While the current government is civilian, donors should seek to engage directly with the various elements of Pakistani society, instead of letting the government act as interlocutor.
- Flexible funding channels are necessary as needs change and the transition from relief to reconstruction begins.
- Coordination mechanisms and processes should evolve in concert with the needs of stakeholders. As the recovery occurs, the focus should shift from providing updates on activities and announcements of numerical targets to more substantial discussions of policy and programming issues. Capacity-building may be needed to help government officials manage the evolving coordination needs.
- When making the transition from emergency assistance to reconstruction, donors should try to move aid from consumption to investment. This will reduce aid dependency. For donors, it is easier to just provide relief instead of helping with the reconstruction process. But without development, stakeholders may be dependent upon donors for the indefinite future. One way to help with the transition is to take into account the area's potential for economic activity and utilizing these natural advantages.
- New ideas can come from talking to the private sector in the host country and NGOs. They should be engaged frequently.
- Stakeholders have a good idea of reconstruction needs and their views should be integrated into the decision-making process. Otherwise, projects may not be as effective.
- Donors need to follow through on their promises. Not doing so not only reduces the effectiveness of planning, but also makes stakeholders wary of the international community's intent.

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