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Child Protection in Disaster Management in South Asia: A Case Study of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Children are the most vulnerable and unprotected segment of any society facing disasters whether natural or man-made. The situation becomes more pathetic for children if the state lacks systems, procedures and mechanism to manage disasters as there is more likelihood of suffering for children. They may have an increased risk of different diseases, malnutrition and they may become prey of abuse, neglect, violence including gender-based violence as well as exploitation and wider range of other violations including injury and death.

South Asia faces huge challenges in providing child protection as the region is highly populous, experiences frequent emergencies and struggles with extreme poverty and political instability. Millions of children across the region suffer from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. Children experience protection issues in a range of settings- at home, in schools, in the community, in their workplaces, institutions or during emergency situations. Almost all the countries of South Asian region has established institutional mechanism and procedures for the protection of children. The systems exist in form of National Commissions, Authorities, Boards and Departments to provide the protective services to the children in emergencies.

In this article an attempt has been made to assess the vulnerability of children in different forms of disasters and efforts of the governments to deal with the protection issues in South Asia in general and Pakistan in particular. It also ascertains the adverse effects on repercussion on the life of children by providing a general overview of the problems that comes up from the presence of children in disasters and emergencies. It is expected that the article will help in identifying the needs of children by examining the existing mechanism for the protection of children in emergencies.

It was a desk-based exercise; researchers have made an effort to take on a systematic overview and analysis of existing available literature. The secondary data was collected from libraries, government and Non-Governmental organizations' offices, through internet and other available sources. Relevant publications, reports and presentations of researchers as well as reports of governmental and civil society organizations were evaluated in this context.

KEY WORDS: Disaster management, Child Protection, Early Preparedness, Community-Based Disaster Risk Management, Capacity Development.

Introduction

An emergency is a situation that causes threats to health, life, property or environment. It is unexpected and unanticipated calamity which generally involves danger and requires an immediate action to be taken. Emergency is normally caused by natural calamities. Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters defines an emergency or disaster as a "situation or event, which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to national or international level for external assistance" (Rodriguez, 2008).

Emergency situations involve disruption of normal livelihood and economic activity, destruction of property, housing and public services; breakdown of industrial, commercial and communications infrastructure; human displacement and loss of life.

Mainly there are three major types of emergency situations:

- I. Natural disasters: These are situations caused by natural phenomena such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, landslides, volcanoes, and crop pest invasions.
- II. Conflicts: These are situations arising from wars, border disputes, civil strife or other political events that cause social and/or economic disruption and hardship.
- III. Accidents: These are situations caused by unforeseeable events resulting in damage to public utilities, services and productive entities like damage from fires and faulty structures etc.

However, the article deals with disasters and their implications on children. These disasters have affected, shaped and modified human behavior. They have changed the way of lives of people. Figures show that from 1900 to 2005, the world faced 9821 natural disasters while from 1991 to 2005, total 960502 people were killed and 34, 701,62,961 were affected by these disasters while total amount of reported economic damages in this period was 1192.95 Billion US\$ (UNISDR, 2006).

In 2009, in totally reported 335 natural disasters, 10655 persons were killed, more than 119 millions population was affected and also caused over US\$ 41.3 billion economic damages (UNISDR, 2006).

The continent of Asia experienced several disasters in 2009 and hold the largest share in reported natural disaster occurrence (40.3%), accounted for 89.1% of global reported natural disaster victims and 38.5% of total reported economic damages from natural disasters (Rodriguez, 2008).

Table No. 1	
Frequency of natural disasters occurred in South Asia from 2006 to 2008.	
Country	Number
Afghanistan	22
Bangladesh	15
India	46
Nepal	7
Pakistan	21
Sri Lanka	7
Total	118
<i>Source: South Asia Disaster Report 2008</i>	

Statistics show that a total of 111 countries were affected by natural disasters in 2009, however, eight Asian countries share 60.4% 87.5% and 34.4% of the global reported number of deaths, victims and economic damages respectively caused by these natural disasters (Rodriguez, 2008).

South Asia is the southern region of the Asian continent comprising the sub-Himalayan countries. This is a region which is sensitive to natural disasters and its population which shares one fifth of world population remains vulnerable to risks of natural disasters.

The region of South Asia has also been declared the most disaster prone region in the world supporting a huge population of more than 1.3 billion (GEO Year Book , 2003).

According to a report the, countries of the South Asian region are vulnerable to different calamities like drought, flood, glacier melting, land sliding, cyclones, earthquakes, windstorms etc (South Asian Disaster Report , 2008).

The statistics given in table number 2 also explain country wise potential of natural disasters in South Asia.

Table No. 2	
Country	Country Wise Potential Natural Disasters In South Asia
Afghanistan	Increased drought, glacial melt, fl ash floods, landslides
Bangladesh	Cyclones and storm surges, reduction of mangroves extent due to salinity- loss of natural barrier, heavier flooding leading to more crop loss and displacement, inundation of low lying coastal areas
Bhutan	Glacial lake outburst floods, increased drought episodes, Landslides
India	Longer periods of drought, heavy rainfall leading to fl ash floods, increased cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, inundation of low lying coastal areas, glacial melt
Maldives	Sea erosion, inundation of islands with people and infrastructure, storm surges, long drought periods affecting drinking water supplies

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Nepal	Glacial melt, reduced river flows impacting downstream water availability, landslides, floods and mudslides, Glacial Lake Outburst Floods
Pakistan	Increased drought, flash floods, glacial melt, reduced river flows, inundation of low-lying coastal areas
Sri Lanka	Increased drought, flash floods, increased cyclones in the Bay of Bengal , landslides, inundation of low-lying coastal areas
<i>Source: South Asia Disaster Report 2008</i>	

Situation Analysis

Disasters whether natural or human-made have their severe effects on human life often leave them facing difficult situations, loss and destruction of their lands, damages to the business and other economic activities, displacement, death of family members or disabilities and other catastrophic events that traumatize the members of the family in particular and a society in general.

Children are the most vulnerable in case of disasters and emergencies. They may experience malnutrition and have an increased risk of diseases. They may also become victims of abuse, neglect and violence, gender-based violence, exploitation and a wide range of other violations including injury and death. Separation from family and primary caregivers and deprivation from basic necessities of life are some other outcomes of emergencies.

Natural disasters can affect even more children, causing them to lose their homes, their families, their schools, and their access to adequate food, water and sanitation and even their lives. The Asian tsunami of 2004 and South Asian Earthquake of 2005 are the two major examples of such natural disasters.

The Tsunami after the sea quake in Southeast Asia on December 2004 represents one of the largest disasters in the modern history. About 228,000 people from the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean died in this disaster (EERI Special Earthquake Report, 2005).

According to a report (UNICEF, 2004) children account for a large proportion of casualties because they represent 39 per cent of the overall population in the eight hardest-hit countries. Relief agencies report that one-third of the dead (in 2004 Tsunami) appear to be children (Oxfam annual report, 2004).

In 2005, a horrible earthquake hit North Western areas of Pakistan and took 87,350 lives according to official figures. Approximately 138,000 were injured and over 3.5 million became homeless. The earthquake affected more than 500,000 families. According to official figures, 19,000 children died in the earthquake, most of them in widespread collapses of school buildings (EERI Special Earthquake Report, 2006).

Another earthquake that struck the southwestern province of Baluchistan (Pakistan) on October 29, 2008 killed approximately 200 and affecting some

108,000 people—50 percent of which are children. Almost 19,000 of the affected are under five-years-old (Aziz, 2008).

Pakistan faced the worst floods of its history in 2010 that affected estimated 3.2 million people across the country including an estimated 1.4 million children. The floods began in July 2010 after heavy monsoon rains. Nearly one fifth of Pakistan has been ravaged by floods that killed an estimated 1,600 people and affected more than 17 millions population. As many as three and a half million children in flood-ravaged Pakistan may be at risk of contracting deadly diseases carried through contaminated water and insects reported by Priyanka Pruthi (Pruthi, 2010).

Pakistani Children are already facing numerous challenges particularly Malnutrition, poor access to education and health facilities, exploitation through child labor and different harmful cultural practices like, child marriages. With this state of affairs, the disasters whether natural or man-made increases their vulnerability and cause severe consequences on their survival.

Given facts show that children are the most vulnerable part of the society which need protection measures in these circumstances. The child protection experts have identified the following types of protection needs for children in emergencies:

- a. Protection from physical harm,
- b. Protection from exploitation and gender-based violence,
- c. Protection from psychosocial distress,
- d. Protection from recruitment into armed groups,
- e. Protection from family separation,
- f. Protection from abuses related to forced displacement,
- g. Protection from denial of children's access to quality education.

Institutional Framework and Child Protection and Welfare Systems in South Asia

Child Protection system exists in almost all the countries of South Asia. Both Public and private sector are providing protective services. However, in most of the countries, the governments has retained the major role and functional as a central authority. Most of the efforts and initiatives for child protection have been taken by the legally formed bodies mandated to manage the protective services for children.

- 1) In India, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) was set up in March 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights).

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- 2) In Bangladesh, the **Bangladesh Council for Child Welfare (BCCW)** came into existence in 14 September 1957 as a federal body of the organizations working with children (BCCW, 1957).
- 3) In Pakistan, On 16th December 1980 the Government established National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD) through a resolution being effective from 1st January 1980, which was amended from time to time finally in 1991 that is effective to date (NCCWD, 1980).
- 4) The National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka of was created in 1998 as the first governmental organization dedicated to work to secure the rights of children in Sri Lanka (NCPA, 1998).
- 5) In Nepal, Central Child Welfare Board under the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare has been established for the welfare, development and protection of children (CCWB, 2004).
- 6) In Maldives, The Child and Family Protection Services (CFPS), formerly known as the Unit for the Rights of Children (URC), work in accordance with the CRC to ensure that children in the Maldives are given adequate protection (CFPS, 1991).
- 7) In Afghanistan, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) is the focal Ministry mandated to work on Child Welfare, Labour Affairs, Social Protection and Welfare and providing services for persons with disabilities and families of Martyrs (MoSLAMD, 1985).
- 8) In Bhutan, the National Commission for women and children (NCWC) established in 2004, is an autonomous institution of the Royal Government of Bhutan. The commission is mandated to spearhead the fulfillment of the country's obligations to the CRC, CEDAW and related regional and international conventions (NCWC, 2004).

Legal Framework for Child Protection in Emergencies

The protection of children has been emphasized by almost every religion of the world and the rights of Children are comprehensively protected by a wide-ranging set of international and regional instruments spanning human rights, humanitarian and refugee law. Children get the benefit from the provisions contained in treaties relating to their rights. A number of legal instruments have also been created to accord extra protection to children according to their particular vulnerabilities and the importance to society as a whole in ensuring the healthy development and active participation of its young members. Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was the first treaty specifically concerned with the rights of children especially in emergencies. There is no doubt that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has played a significant role in increasing the focus on child

protection issues in emergencies. Besides CRC, several other International and regional treaties ensure the protection of children in emergencies.

Legislative Measures for Disaster Management in Pakistan

The National Calamities (prevention and relief) Act, 1958

The Act provides for the maintenance and restoration of order in areas affected by certain calamities and for the prevention and control of and relief against such calamities. Provincial Relief Commissioners (who also happen to be Senior Members Board of Revenue) have been given the responsibility of relief with following powers under section 4 of the Act:

- Evacuate or segregate population;
- Requisition bulldozers, tractors, motor vehicles, carts, carriages, boats, and other means of transport by air, land or water, and beasts of burden;
- Require the residents to declare surplus stocks of food, fodder, fire-wood, clothing and beddings and to requisition all or any of these articles;
- Requisition building materials;
- Requisition any building or land;
- Demolish any building or other structure;
- Conscript labour; and
- Direct any person to abstain from a certain act or to take certain order with regard to certain property in his possession or under his management;

Emergency Services Ordinance, 2002

The (draft) ordinance establishes emergency service to deal with emergencies in an effective manner and encounter threats to public from modern warfare, terrorism and disasters and defines responsibilities at each level. The National Council has also been established to regularly monitor the performance of this service and ensure continuity in the process of rule making in the management of emergencies/ disasters during peace time.

According to the ordinance, the provincial governments shall have the administrative powers. Likewise, the District emergency Officer has been made responsible for the functional management of the service. The Federal government will mainly be responsible for ensuring uniform standards for the service throughout the country, provide advance training to Officers through National Academy and oversee the performance of provinces.

Local Government Ordinance 2001

The Local Government Ordinance (LGO) though, provides new avenues for an effective and context-specific disaster management, but there also exist few legal

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and administrative inconsistencies in relation to disaster response at provincial and district levels.

Pakistan Environmental Protection Act, 1997

The Act is to provide for the protection, conservation, rehabilitation and improvement of the environment, for the prevention and control of pollution, and promotion of sustainable development.

Although the legislative measures have been taken to deal with disaster management in general but no particular provisions have been given for the protection of the children during disasters.

Organizations Working in the Field of Disaster Management

The role of national and international relief organizations in disaster management is substantial, significant and appreciable. European Commission, Save the Children – UK, World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, UNDP, Oxfam, World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Canadian International Development Agency, Department for International Development (DFID), Embassy of Japan, JICA, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Rural Development Policy Institute and Shell Pakistan are organizations dealing with disaster management and providing their technical and financial support to assist Pakistan in disaster management.

Discussion

Pakistan is located in a region which is a disaster vulnerable country. The country's geographical features consist of mountains, river plains, desert tracts and a 960 kilometers coastline increases its vulnerability to disasters. Floods are among the most prominent calamities that repeatedly damage the socio-economic structure of the country. Other forms of disasters like earthquakes, droughts, cyclones, Sea based hazards and land sliding also smash the region frequently.

Being aware of the increased risks and vulnerability, several countries especially developed countries pay special attention to children in disasters and emergencies. They have established appropriate procedures, systems and permanent bodies and institutions to deal with the protection issues faced by the children in emergencies.

In Pakistan, a conventional relief and response oriented disaster management system has always been existed. In devolution plan, district government has been assigned to deal with disasters at local level. "However, Local Government Ordinance (LGO) 2001 in a bid to devolve governance has rendered it weak for

articulating disaster response. While National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) framework proposes a cohesive response structure for the district government, but can it make the devolved governance culture responsive to a crisis situation” (UNOCHA, 2006).

“Pakistan has generally followed a reactive approach to disaster management which is apparent from October 2005 earthquake experience. The 1958 National Calamities Act focuses on relief and compensation. Key disaster management agencies like Emergency Relief Cell working under the Federal Cabinet Division, proved woefully inadequate when confronted with a major disaster” (UNOCHA, 2006).

The field of Disaster Management is given vast importance in developed countries. The facts and figures presented earlier show that the children during emergencies are less harmed in the developed countries as compared to the developing countries. The magnitude of life damages is very high in developing countries and children are the most visible victims of these natural disasters. The reason is visibly the lack of proper Disaster Management System.

The situation regarding children in emergencies discussed earlier clearly shows that the presence of a properly designed/structured/organized system of disaster management helps in reducing the damages caused by the disasters and play a vital role in protecting the lives of the human beings specially the minors.

In Pakistan, government is the only platform to approach, access, and have resources to respond to disasters. All other international humanitarian relief organizations and agencies normally route their inputs through the government structures. Though some systems are in place to handle disasters, yet, need capacity up gradation and policy realignment.

There are few organizations from non-governmental and private sectors rendering their services to deal with the disasters like Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS). However there is great need to connect them with governance structures to emerge as a major disaster response player.

Pakistan, after experiencing a massive devastation in 2005 earthquake has also taken many steps in this direction. Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (EERA) at federal level, Provincial Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (PERA) in KPK (NWFP) and State Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (SERA) in State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir were formed to deal with the devastating earthquake of 2005. Establishment of institutions like National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) are such further steps taken by the government of Pakistan.

After the establishment of these authorities and bodies, it was hoped that the damages to human life and property will decrease and the situation will go towards improvement. However, as discussed earlier, a large number of children died in 2008 Earthquake and 2010 Flooding; show an alarming situation regarding child

protection leaving a question mark on existing system of child protection in emergencies.

Conclusion

Pakistan has a history of frequent disasters in the past. Natural disasters including floods, earthquakes, landslides, cyclones and drought to man-made disasters such as fires, civil unrest, terrorism, influx of refugees from neighboring countries and internally displaced people, health epidemics, transport accidents, industrial accidents and war have always been a threat to the lives and livelihood of its people.

The statistics of the damages to human life and property caused by these disasters are alarming. Disaster Management has recently been given importance in Pakistan. The organizations engaged with disaster management in Pakistan by and large remain under-resourced and untrained and lack sustainability in their initiatives related to disaster management. The situation demands a systematic review of the existing mechanisms for disaster management in the country by focusing on child protective services in emergencies. It has been noted that disaster management bodies in Pakistan either lack knowledge and information about hazard identification, risk assessment and management. The linkages between livelihood and disaster preparedness have no infrastructure, expertise and resources to deal with the emergencies.

The situation can be improved by taking non-structural measures including setting up an improved disaster forecasting and early warning systems, establishing dependable and consistent interaction between all related flood control and relief agencies. The damages to the human life especially children can be reduced by taking these steps.

As children are the most insecure, unprotected and weaker segment of the society, therefore, they need special provisions in the procedures, plans, policies and actions designed for disaster management. They can be protected from the hazards of disasters by making child protection an integral part of every humanitarian response and by incorporating child protection programming into the delivery of all services including food, shelter, health, education, and water and sanitation. Organizations both public and private working for the disaster risk reduction have to initiate community based disaster risk reduction programs and children should be placed in the center while planning and implementing these programmes.

In the light of the above discussion, the following recommendations are made to ensure the safety of the children during disasters in Pakistan.

- By bringing particular and comprehensive legislation covering wide-ranging protection issues of children during disasters..

- By setting appropriate Emergency Response Services guided by uniform rules of business.
- Through capacity building and provision of required physical and technical support to the organizations engaged in disaster management e.g. Civil Defense Department, UPARCO and this must be compatible with international standards.
- By providing support to create flash Disaster Early Warning System (DEWS).
- Community-led disaster management programs must be initiated to ensure the important role and resources of community while managing the disasters.

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