

Rebuilding lives: Natural Disasters and Role of a Social Worker in Pakistan

Abstract

Pakistan's geography and its environmental and climatic change conditions make it highly vulnerable to natural disasters. In recent years; especially in 2015, Pakistan faced almost all major types of natural disasters, such as flood, earthquake, heat wave, drought and tornado. This conceptual paper provides an insight about the role of social workers in natural disasters. The social workers can render mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery related services to vulnerable communities and can minimize the losses, recovery time and resources of Government at the time of emergency. Due to non-availability of social workers, Government and International NGOs waste a lot of time and resources to fill this gap, but, unfortunately, due to non-professionalism and no theoretical base of social work, recovery and rehabilitation of affectees become a distant goal in long run. A quick recovery and revival towards normal life can only be possible if professionally skilled social workers are allowed to play their roles effectively.

Key words: natural disasters, Pakistan, social worker, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Disaster is a sudden calamity at wide level which brings extravagant havoc, loss, damage and destruction to lives, infrastructure and overall environment. According to Hartsough & Myers (1987), disaster can be any happening that produces individual trauma and extensive community commotion and that causes injury, death or widespread destruction. Disasters can be natural, such as drought, earthquake, tidal wave, tornado, tsunamis, hurricane, volcanic eruption, flood, storm, fire, pestilences, avalanches, landslides, cyclones and blizzard (American Red Cross, 1991); or they can be manmade, like war, acts of terrorism, violence, kidnapping, riots, nuclear accidents, hazardous water contamination, dam breaks, building collapse, transportation or industrial accidents. The disasters can be sudden or slow, unpredictable or expected to some extent (NDMA, 2013). Natural disasters are most expected to occur and result in mass destruction as compared to man-made disasters. Although, the actual

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occurrence of some disasters is for few seconds, but their impact can be observed among multiple generations.

Pakistan’s geographical location and situation makes it highly vulnerable to disasters (NMDA, 2013). Pakistan is situated in continent of Asia between 23.30 degree and 36.45 degree latitude (North) and 61 degree and 75.45 degree longitude (East). The geography of Pakistan is a profound amalgamation of landscapes varying from plains to deserts, hills to rivers, and extreme hot weather to intense cold climate. Five rivers, Arabian Sea, monsoon season, melting glaciers, global warming, changing climate conditions and intense hot climate becomes invitation for flood and drought almost every year in Punjab and Sindh. While the northern highlands of the Hindu Kush, the Karakoram Range, Koh-e-Suleman range, Himalayas, close border of Afghanistan and overlapping of Indian tectonic plate (Sindh and Punjab), the Eurasian tectonic plates (Baluchistan & KPK) and Gilgit-Baltistan; and Azad Kashmir at the edge of the Indian plate, are prone to violent earthquakes, where the two tectonic plates collide (NMDA, 2013).

Geography tells us and history warns that Pakistan is highly susceptible to variety of disasters. The Global Climate Risk Index 1993-2012 has ranked Pakistan as the 12th most affected by extreme weather events. Global climate risk index (German Watch) has declared Pakistan as 3rd most vulnerable country based on 181 countries ranking (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Global Climate Risk Index 2014



The Table 1 shows the list of natural disasters in Pakistan.

Table 1: Natural Disasters in Pakistan 1935 - 2013

Disaster Type	Year	Affected Population	Death Toll	Disaster Type	Year	Affected Population	Death Toll
Earthquake	1935		60,000	Flood	1992	6,184,418	
Tsunami	1945		4,000	Flood	1992	12,324,024	1,334
Flood	1950		2,900	Wind storm	1993		609
Wind storm	1965		10,000	Flood	1995	1,255,000	
Flood	1973	4,800,000		Flood	1996	1,186,131	
Earthquake	1974	97,000	5,300	Flood	1998		1,000

Disaster Type	Year	Affected Population	Death Toll	Disaster Type	Year	Affected Population	Death Toll
Flood	1976	5,566,000		Drought	2000	2,200,000	
Flood	1977	1,022,000	10,354	Earthquake	2005	2.5 million	78,000
Flood	1978	2,246,000		Flood	2010	20,000,000	
Flood	1988	1,000,000		Flood	2013-14	18 million	1787
Extreme Temperature	1991		961	Earthquake	2013		825

Source: Wikipedia, 2015

Beside the disastrous history, year 2015 has been a point of alarm for Pakistan, in which almost all main types of natural disasters; flood, drought, earthquake, cyclone and heat wave, were faced (Table 2).

Table 2: Natural Disasters in Pakistan 2015

Disaster	Deaths	Injured	Affected
Flood 2015	169	126	917,791
Drought 2014-15	750		259946
Karachi Heat wave	1400		95000
Tornado, KPK	49	267	
Earthquake 26Oct. 2015	279	1820	
Earthquake 26Dec. 2015	04	100	

Source: NDMA, 2015; PDMA, 2015

This paper highlights the need for substantial contribution of social workers in case of disasters in Pakistan, being professionally equipped to manage these circumstances. The paper also examines that how social workers can play an effective role in disaster affected areas and how they can contribute in rehabilitating the affectees. The Government Organizations or International NGOs try to play the role of social workers in disaster hit areas, which results in wastage of time and resources due to lack of professional knowledge and skills.

WHY SOCIAL WORKERS?

Disasters result in extreme stress situations where all kind of socio-cultural and psycho-economic support is required to the affectees. The disasters also affect the people individually and collectively. Depending on their magnitude and enormity, the disasters create trauma for whole community due to infrastructure immobility, colossal disorder and interruption of customary provisions and leadership (Quarantelli, 1985), all of which produce a sense of helplessness and grief in families, small groups and individuals resulting in extreme disruption, losses and exasperated efforts to acquire help and solve problems.

A social worker addresses psychological and social needs of vulnerable groups of people in stressful situations, and helps them to find resources and services and enhance their social functioning by creating relationship between them and their relatives. Social workers work with individuals, groups and communities; and they work in a variety of places, including hospitals, senior citizens homes, institutions for disabled persons, schools, community services, government organizations, as well as with emergency and disaster relief organizations.

Social workers are always keen towards helping needy or deprived individuals by case work, then how social workers can ignore the millions of disaster affected needy and vulnerable individuals? Social worker's areas of interest include social problems as hunger, poverty, unemployment, disable persons, gender discrimination, child labour, and crimes. All these social problems can be observed after disasters, as disasters result in all of these social issues. Social workers are professionally trained to contribute towards organization, development and solution of community problems. Disasters ruin whole of the communities and there is a lot to do for the organization, development, problem solving and resources mobilization on self-help basis for strengthening the local communities.

Direct services, psycho-social support, and rehabilitation measures, which are special tools of social workers, are highly practicable and effective in disaster affected areas. The disaster can be high time, definitely, for social workers to demonstrate their skills and knowledge and put up, what they have studied, into practice. At the 1996 National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Delegate Assembly, the current Disaster Policy Statement (NASW, 2000) was adopted which reads: "NASW supports participation in and advocates for programs and policies that service individuals and communities in the wake of disaster" (p. 71). In 1997 NASW signed a five-year agreement with the American Red Cross to deliver mental health services to the victims of disaster, rescue workers, military personnel and their families, and refugees (American Red Cross, 2000). Social work practitioners are taught to evaluate situations critically and comprehensively while taking all social, physical, environmental and psychological factors into account.

ROLE OF A SOCIAL WORKER IN DISASTERS

Social workers can be engaged in Disaster Management Cycle (Figure 2) at mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery & rehabilitation steps at micro, mezzo and macro level. According to disaster management cycle's four steps, the social workers can contribute at each step.

Figure 2: Disaster Management Cycle



MITIGATION

The term “mitigation” means preventing future emergencies or minimizing their effects. The social workers can play their role in mitigation activities as highlighted below:

- **Disaster Recovery & Rehabilitation Advocate & Practitioner**

Building codes are necessary arrangement in minimizing the earthquake effects; and no residence or construction of houses or buildings is allowed in river planes to avoid flood destruction. But, especially poor families do this. Social worker can raise awareness in those areas and especially for judiciary, legislature and executives to divert their attention in these DRR matters by formulating laws and policies to mitigate the disasters and their effects.

- **Vulnerability Assessment**

Social workers can initiate their research to study the vulnerable areas, vulnerability and risk reduction analysis especially in south Punjab (flood prone), northern areas (earthquake prone) and Cholistan and Tharparkar areas (drought prone). Their contribution in this regard will obviously present an in-depth view to the authorities to focus on specific areas and help to reduce the extent of disaster effects.

- **DRM and Evacuation education**

Social workers as educators can teach the people about their welfare. In disaster mitigation strategies, social workers can educate the uneducated and ignorant masses about evacuation process, ways and strategies in order to minimize casualties. The disaster risk management education for vulnerable communities is an effective step to educate people how to manage before, during and after disasters. This education can prove to be the best resource for people in order to cope with calamities.

PREPAREDNESS

- **Seminars & Workshops**

Disaster types, precautions, measures and awareness are the key points on which seminars & workshops should be conducted by social workers for vulnerable communities as well as for social agencies.

- **Campaigns & Walks**

The flood awareness campaigns in monsoon season, drought walks at the start of summer and earthquake awareness walks and campaigns in September or October, (As 8th Oct. is now celebrated as Earthquake or disaster awareness day) can be organized and launched by social workers in every nick and corner of the country.

- **Specialty and area wise Registration of NGO**

There are number of International and local NGOs working on disaster management, like *Sunghi* development foundation, *Al-Khidmat* foundation, Pakistan Humanitarian Forum (PHF), *Tameer* Pakistan and others. The problem arises when during disaster there is a clash / duplication of services and area. There is a dire need that, before disaster emergence, a complete list of NGOs with their working areas and their nature of services should be prepared in order to avoid duplication of services or to leave some area helpless being not focused. Also that list will enable the authorities to contact requisite agencies at the time of disaster to perform their role in some specific area. Social workers can play a vital role in registration of all concerned NGOs.

- **Volunteers Registration**

Volunteers are source of power for social workers, NGOs and for disaster management. There are many job holders, students or passionate persons who want to render their services in disasters. Need is to identify them and create a log in order to avail their services at time of disaster. Social workers can register them and also train them.

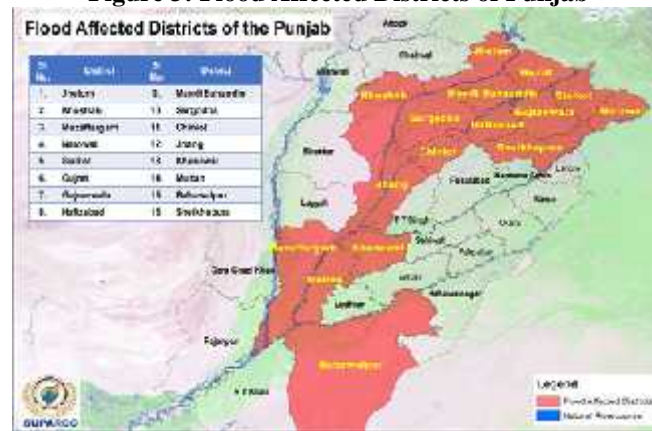
- **Acquiring Training**

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Civil Defense offer training courses on Disaster Management. Social workers can join such training courses in order to combat with disaster efficiently and can train other volunteers or communities.

- **Delivering Training**

Social workers can provide evacuation, preparedness, prevention, protection, relief & rescue and recovery training to registered volunteers as well as the vulnerable communities of disaster prone areas; as Provincial Disaster Management Authority, Punjab (PDMA) has declared the 14 district as most vulnerable to floods (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Flood Affected Districts of Punjab



RESPONSE

- **Evacuation**

Social workers can fully extend their services towards the safe evacuation of victims especially to socially vulnerable groups i.e. woman & children, old people and disabled. Mostly people and especially vulnerable groups can be secured just after disaster by providing proper support in safe evacuation, as they are most of the times, not capable to evacuate by themselves.

- **Blood Bank**

After disasters there are a number of severely injured people and disaster further leads to health issues as well. Social workers can donate their blood to maximum, and can motivate others to donate blood in order to secure human lives.

- **Direct Services**

On the wake of calamities, a scarcity of food is usually observed; when suddenly millions of people become homeless, shelterless and foodless. Government and most of agencies focus their attention towards providing food and shelter. In the same, way social workers can provide the direct services such as food items, shelter and, blanket to fulfill emergency basic needs of affectees.

- **Donation / Fund Raising**

Social workers are taught to organize, develop and support individuals and communities by utilizing the community resources and by collection of scattered resources where they are available or abundant. From the early social work practices, fund raising and donation collection are key towards human wellbeing. We can analyze that in the history of Pakistan whenever we faced some major disaster, Pakistani nation donated a lot of funds. Social worker acts as an agent towards mobilizing the communities to support vulnerable people and groups by rendering their valuable support at the time of need. Fund raising campaigns may alleviate the sufferings of sufferers.

- **Volunteer work**

Social work is a profession and discipline which emerged from volunteerism. Without any greed, salary or benefit, only due to the personal urge, motivation and inspiration remedial work is initiated. Social workers can play their role in disasters as volunteer workers by feeling and analyzing the pain of victims and contributing their part in national mainstreaming and development.

- **Working with NGOs**

In the wake of disaster, many local and International NGOs extend their services to disaster affected areas. NGOs are basically products of social work practice. Social workers can organize their efforts and services in collaboration with NGOs, while using their forum to extend response and recovery strategies.

- **Emotional and Psycho-Social First Aid**

When people see death just before them, snatching their dear ones before their eyes, ruining their all life efforts in a while and destroying all their belongings in one moment, all of these situations ruin their mental peace and harmony. All of these circumstances lead the victims toward fear, anxiety, emotional stress, mental and psychological disturbance which can result in some serious phobias or diseases. Especially, the innocent children cannot bear all these happenings. Here, the role of social workers as Case workers emerges. Counseling, interview therapies and medical and psychiatric social work approach of psycho-social (psycho analytical) analysis is used by social workers to understand and minimize the deadly effects of disasters on the minds of victims. Social workers can act as a healer, by minimizing the fears, anxiety, and emotional stress by providing the emotional support and grief counseling to victims. Otherwise, it will become difficult and impossible to rehabilitate them and lead them towards a normal life again.

- **Working with Vulnerable Groups**

In social work practice, mostly the area of interest includes the well-being of socially vulnerable groups as woman, children, disabled and old people. Same in disasters, social worker's focus of attention can be deprived and vulnerable groups of people who demand his attention more than anyone else. The special food, psycho-social, environmental, emotional, protective and shelter needs of each vulnerable group must be considered and fulfilled by social workers.

- **Lost child registration and protection**

In disasters, many children are lost and get away from their family. In huge destruction and big relief camps, it becomes difficult to find a child. The social worker can perform his remedial and moderator role by finding such lost children, making their registration and protecting them from child lifter gangs. Moreover, its also the responsibility of a social worker to interview and assess the child to find out his parents or, in other case, hand over the child under the protection of Social Welfare Department or Bureau of Child Protection.

- **Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM)**

No community can readjust or rehabilitate without its own participation and efforts. Community based disaster risk management is a new emerging area for

social workers. Social workers can prepare the community to actively participate in disaster management and recovery process. The utilization of community strengths, participation and resources in disaster management and recovery process acts a catalyst. The social worker does not restrict his work and community interest to Government support only. Instead, by utilizing own efforts and resources of community, he can move towards recovery, management and rehabilitation.

- **Free medicines and medical camps**

Besides the injured persons, the emergence of diseases, due to polluted environment, poor sanitation and unsafe water and food issues, are serious concern in disasters. Social workers, as trained, arrange free medical camps to check general health of affectees in relief camps and they can also ensure the timely availability of medicines for people.

- **Human rights violations watch**

A primary emergency brings secondary emergencies. Child kidnapping, women protection, women harassment and abuse, secondary consideration to socially vulnerable groups, inequality in providing relief goods and child labour are the human rights violations that can be observed during and after disasters. Social workers can act as a watchdog and check on these violations and takes necessary action against these violation by diverting Government or INGO's concentration towards these issues.

- **Risk assessment**

On the basis of losses / damages data, which presents true picture of victims and losses, Government Authorities or agencies provide assistance to affectees. In this context, Risk assessment is very important as all national and international support depends on it. Social workers can conduct actual research studies / surveys for true and real risk assessment for planners and policy makers for provision of services.

RECOVERY & REHABILITATION

- **Advocate for Services**

Social worker advocates for the needed services for the disaster affectees in the shape of food, sanitation, houses, compensation, shelter and other facilities.

- **Advocate for Policy Making**

There is dire need of policy regarding the disasters i.e. disaster insurance, prohibition of construction and residence in rivers plains and well-being of affectees. Social worker speaks for the need of policy after weighing all pros and cons and suggesting implications.

- **Temporary schools**

Social worker can start temporary schools in relief camps for children in order to minimize their education loss due to calamity. In this way he would also be able to change the minds of innocent children.

- **Role as Educator**

Social worker acts as a teacher and educates the communities about health, sanitation, disaster management and rehabilitation on self-help basis. He can give an insight and the way toward the normalization.

- **Liaison between Government and people**

Social worker, while having analytical and evaluative thinking, can act as a bridge between the Government and vulnerable community. He can communicate the community's voice to the authorities and also informs the people about their actions, response and requirements. He can invite programs and services according to people needs, culture and capacities. He can guide both the sides what to do and how to do.

- **Community Based Disaster Risk Management**

Social worker not just keep the people waiting till Government's support arrival, but also can make them active participants in their recovery and rehabilitation process. By utilizing their own resources and by collecting the scattered resources where they are available, social worker can lead the community people towards sustainability. In resolving health, education, sanitation and reconstruction issues, he can make sure the active participation of community members throughout the whole process. As Government rehabilitation process is restricted with lot of structural and red-tappism, so by community participation and self-help, a social worker can lead a community towards better adjustment in short period of time. Social worker can play his role of mediator, enabler or motivator to involve community members in disaster management as we believe that change is sustainable if we have proper participation and ownership in all processes.

- **Referral services about Government compensation package**

After every calamity, Government announces the compensation package for victims like Rs. 0.5 million for died persons, Rs. 40 thousand for partially damaged houses, Rs. 80 thousand for fully damaged houses and Rs. 5 thousand for one acre of agriculture land damage with limit to a maximum of 12 acres of agriculture land (Flood policy, 2015).

As our most of rural population is ignorant about these policies, so they remain deprived to avail these services. Secondly in disaster, they ruin all their belongings and have no access to media. They cannot avail compensation due to unawareness about the process of application, registration and provision. Social worker can perform a very influential role by giving timely awareness to vulnerable people; how to register and how to avail these compensations. It's better to process and avail timely compensation.

- **Employment opportunities**

Disaster snatches the livelihood of daily bread-winners and private workers. Employment is main issue which leads towards crime, anxiety and even diseases. The social worker can perform his role of case worker and try to solve the employment issues of needy and vulnerable people by utilizing different community, personal, NGOs, INGOs and Government references.

- **Micro finance scheme**

Disasters destroy whole progress. People lose their jobs, houses, property and all of their belongings. After disaster, at the time of helplessness, Microfinance schemes can change the whole scenario. Social worker, while involving the Government Authorities, INGOs or NGOs, can initiate the micro-finance scheme for the poor families on flexible terms and condition. It can contribute a lot in short time towards the sustainability, normality and development of disaster effected people. Micro-finance schemes can support national to local economy in a short period of time. It can be a pronounced step toward recovery and rehabilitation.

- **Recreational Activities**

While marching toward recovery it's better to go ahead with a contented and tension free mind. Social worker can start small level recreational activities for disaster affected people in relief camps, especially for children in order to remove their anxiety and fears. Children's minds are so sensitive; if it captures deep affects, it can ruin whole of their personality and life. To overcome these issues, it's necessary that small recreational activities/games may be arranged for the children and all victims in order to relieve their tension and streamline working toward their recovery.

- **Group work/experiences**

Group work or experiences are quite useful in recovery and rehabilitation. Group formation according to common interests, age and priorities and then suitable and attainable micro goals, are steps towards rehabilitation. Group experiences will also engage the people in healthy activities, adjustment and goal attaining activity.

- **Motivation**

Motivation is the key towards success. Disasters bring disappointment. Mostly people take it as end of life as their all property has been lost; and this disappointment hinders change, recovery and rehabilitation process. Social worker can work as motivator and motivate the people not to stop and develop their life again. Different motivational strategies can be used to raise the people's thinking, aim and inspiration. Motivation stimulates them towards life, betterment, recovery and rehabilitation; going ahead, seeing future while forgetting past.

- **Social Organizer**

Social worker can organize all the community efforts, interests, needs, priorities, strengths and resources at one forum to properly utilize them for recovery.

- **Reconstructing community belongings**

Social worker is always keen toward welfare, community life and community belongings. He can help reconstruct the community belongings with a conjoint struggle for mutual benefits.

- **Revival of new normal life**

Social worker, by collaborating all community, human and physical resources and by centralizing different agency's services, can start a revival of new normal life. Construction of houses on self-help basis, employment and microfinance

provision, temporary education system, motivation and organization leads the whole community towards revival of new normal life.

- **Research Studies**

Social worker is always interested in research studies in order to get a better understanding of realities. Social worker can conduct quantitative research studies by collecting loss and damage facts and figure in disaster, as well as, rescue and relief item provision facts. He can also study impacts of disaster and their cause and effect relationship. In qualitative research studies, he can understand that what sort of living styles of people was before disaster and what is after the disaster? What happened to a farmer after disaster? What happened to a woman after disaster? He can analyze people fears and anxieties as well. Social worker can conduct research studies in order to get facts for policy formulation and also to comprehend the theoretical base of social work.

- **Rebuilding lives**

Social worker in recovery and rehabilitation phase is much concerned in rebuilding social and physical infrastructure of the community with community, by community and for community. He empowers citizens through social development and reintegrates them in normal community life. The initiatives as schools, homes and health center's repair and rebuilding on self-help basis, community participation and by calling the attention of Government and International & National NGOs, are carried by the social worker to rebuild lives and ensure sustainability.

CONCLUSION

The disasters do not kill the people but our poor planning, management, infrastructure, coordination and response kill the maximum number of people. Social workers can sort out disaster management at micro, mezzo and macro levels and at all steps of disaster management including mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Social worker, by following the ethics, can provide equal services to all without discriminating anyone on the basis of colour, creed, cast, religion, religious affiliation, political party, status and reference. Social worker can analyze and response to circumstances from relief to development and from development to sustainability. Social worker can play all these roles in natural and man-made disasters. It's the need of the time that social workers have to play an instrumental role in disaster management and rebuilding lives.

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