

# A STORY WITHIN A STORY

ADB Helps Women during  
Pakistan's Post-Flood Reconstruction

Asian Development Bank

A photograph of four women in traditional headscarves (sharfas) carrying large bundles on their heads. The bundles are wrapped in white and blue plastic. In the foreground, a young child is visible, looking towards the camera. The women are standing in front of a bus, suggesting they are on a public transport vehicle. The background shows a clear sky and some blurred structures.

In the summer of 2010, Pakistan experienced an extraordinary rainfall that caused massive flooding across the entire length of the country. Cities were inundated, entire villages washed away, and thousands of hectares of crops destroyed. Over 20 million people—more than 10% of the population—endured hardship as a result. According to officials, it was the worst flooding since 1929.

While the disaster was still unfolding, the government called on the Asian Development Bank (ADB), along with the World Bank, to lead an assessment of the flood's impact. ADB and the World Bank worked closely with the federal and provincial governments, the United Nations, and other development partners to examine the devastation and draw up a damage and needs assessment. ADB initially contributed \$3 million for urgent relief and rehabilitation and developed a flood emergency reconstruction project to rehabilitate national and provincial roads and irrigation systems.

But there is a story within the story. The television images and news reports did not dwell on the suffering of one particularly vulnerable group, a group that comprised half of those displaced by the floods: females. As part of the damage and needs assessment, ADB and the World Bank also gauged the effects of the floods on women and girls.

ADB has always understood that women play a critical role in the lives of their families, communities, and in a country's economy. Research has shown that when women live stable and productive lives, their families' lives and economic potential greatly improve. But when natural disasters occur, it is the women who have the hardest time finding the guidance and resources they need to survive.

As Pakistan rebuilds, the government and its development partners should meet the needs of women and girls. To avoid worsening the already serious gender inequality in that country, reconstruction should give women the opportunity to earn a living, get an education, have access to health care, and participate in decision making, all of which would lead to more productive and stable lives for the women, their families, and for the society as a whole.



*Heavy monsoon rains in northern and western Pakistan caused flash and riverine floods. These, in turn, combined into a massive body of water that surged southward, eventually inundating 20% of the country.*





# THE HARD FACTS

## THE HARD FACTS



Over time, the female face of this disaster will emerge. The feminization of poverty has always been a reality, even more so since the floods, as women bear the brunt of the loss of home and livelihood. They are expected to look after the children and elders, and to continue their reproductive and productive roles, even after the floods have blocked their access to food, clothes, potable water, markets, fuel, and health care. The government's National Women's Machinery is an advocate for women's rights but has little clout. Its weakness and the lack of sex-disaggregated data have stymied the inclusion of women's concerns in reconstruction programs, thus further marginalizing women.

Pakistan was struggling with severe problems well before the floods. The country ranks a dismal 141 out of 182 countries in the human development index and 124 out of 155 countries in the gender development index. A Thompson Foundation poll ranks Pakistan as the third most dangerous place in the world for women. An estimated 45 million people suffer severe food insecurity, undernourishment stands at 23%, and almost 40% of children are underweight. The economy has been burdened with government debt and high inflation. From this position of weakness, the government must now face new challenges since the floods have

- killed over 1,980 people and injured 2,946;
- inundated 100,000 square kilometers across 78 districts;
- destroyed the livelihoods of 60% of the people in the flood-affected areas;
- destroyed or damaged over 1.6 million houses;
- destroyed or damaged over 10,000 public schools;
- damaged 10% of the nation's road network;
- damaged the water supply and sanitation facilities in 81 districts;
- caused \$5 billion worth of damage to crops, livestock, and fisheries;
- caused \$12 billion worth of damage to forests and forest nurseries, and to wetlands, mangroves, and other natural environments; and
- caused major soil erosion in some agricultural areas.



# WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Estimates for the total cost of the reconstruction run from \$9 billion to \$11 billion. But these figures do not reveal the indirect effects of the disaster. For instance, the damage to forests and fields destroyed 40% of the forestry and agriculture sector, and with it 5 million jobs. Another example: The population of flood-affected areas includes 9.5 million under the age of 18. The lack of livelihood for the parents, combined with the closure of schools, risk an increase in child labor and, for the girls, sexual abuse, prostitution, trafficking, or forced early marriage.

ADB's gender assessment was based on data collected from focus group discussions with displaced men and women living in relief camps. There were also interviews with key observers, such as teachers, humanitarian workers, village leaders, and representatives from nongovernment organizations. Overall, the research confirmed that preexisting gender inequality in Pakistan has widened after the floods, and that the trend is expected to continue.

## What We've Seen

- A number of women and girls have felt a loss of honor and dignity because of the lack of privacy in the camps.
- Hygienic conditions are poor, and there is often no access to health facilities.
- Many women have no means of communicating with husbands living outside the camps, or with other family members.
- They typically have no money, no assets such as jewelry, and no livelihood.
- Many suffer from severe malnutrition.
- Schooling is often still inaccessible, especially for girls.
- Violence against women and girls has increased.

## An Alarming Reality

*“Nazira belongs to a poor Baloch family that lived in an area straddling Balochistan and Sindh before the disaster. They lost everything to the flood. Nazira’s family hired a truck and driver to travel to the nearest safe area, but when they got there, Nazira’s family couldn’t pay the fare. Nazira’s father offered the driver their belongings instead, but the driver refused and demanded money. They quarreled for hours. Ultimately, the payment of the fare deprived Nazira of her childhood and her future. Nazira’s father and the driver decided that Nazira would marry the driver, who was 35 years old and a total stranger.”*  
—Story of 13-year-old Nazira told by Alam Baloch, from ADB’s field report

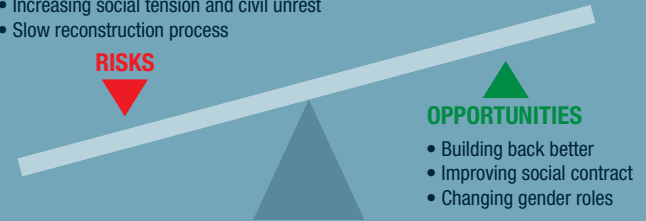
The minimum age for marriage under Pakistani law is 16 years for females and 18 years for males. But early marriages do occur, and over one in five girls between 15 and 19 are married, divorced, or widowed. Although the practice is illegal, marriages are sometimes arranged to settle disputes, particularly in rural areas, and the women or girls who are required to enter into such marriages do not always have a say in the matter.

## WHAT WE NEED TO DO

ADB’s role in helping Pakistan recover from the floods is far from over, and the well-being of women and girls is one of its top priorities. But designing a gender-sensitive program means managing both opportunities and pitfalls. The opportunities include the chance to “build back better lives.” ADB understands, however, that if a program is not attuned to local geography, social relations, and economic conditions, it could worsen inequalities, social tension, and conflict.

## Post-disaster risks and opportunities

- Exacerbating preexisting inequalities
- Increasing poverty
- Increasing social tension and civil unrest
- Slow reconstruction process



To ensure that it meets the needs of women and girls, ADB sets the following goals for post-flood reconstruction:

- Include women in the reconstruction process and support women’s participation in public affairs.
- Create professional jobs for women.
- Construct gender-sensitive facilities, such as vocational schools for women and health clinics.
- Support the legal rights of women.
- Support land acquisition by women.
- Help strengthen the provincial National Women’s Machinery.

When disaster strikes in Pakistan, women and girls are the first to be harmed and the last to be heard. But ADB is listening to them, and ensuring that the story within the story is told.





## What Women Need

*“Infrastructure has been destroyed, which caused women to have psychological problems. Nursing and pregnant women suffered greatly. Clinics are destroyed. Doctors, especially lady doctors, are not available because of the flood devastation.”*  
—A displaced woman in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas



Roads were the most important infrastructure damaged by the floods. The government has since started repairing them, but only the larger ones, which women rarely use. Women generally use local roads for the purpose of family care, subsistence agriculture, and small home-based businesses. So, poor transportation and the lack of link roads force women to continue living without access to health care, schools, markets, and other essential services and facilities.

As a result, women lose the opportunity to sell their homemade wares at local markets. Go-betweens exploit the situation by charging exorbitant rates for private transport, thus diminishing or eliminating women’s incomes. And there is the danger of sexual harassment when women try to travel in this manner. Women also need to get to towns to replace important documents lost in the floods, such as national identity cards, without which they cannot get government compensation, or land titles, or birth and death certificates. They also need to go to banks to acquire badly needed credit.

## What We’ve Heard

*“Yes, women suffer more from the negligence of men. Men can at least demand what they need or want.”*  
—A displaced woman in Balochistan



Collecting fuel and water is considered women's work. But the floods' destruction of forests and livestock depleted the main energy sources for the poor: firewood and cow dung. This, and the frequent contamination of water sources, force women and girls to go farther afield to seek fuel and water. These activities cut into the time that women could have spent earning income and girls could have spent at school. The resulting loss of the women's income has diminished the quality of their families' health and nutrition, and has weakened the women's decision-making power within their households.

Women's home-based businesses involve traditional handicrafts, such as embroidery and sewing. But many women have lost their tools, materials, workspaces, and networks. In agriculture, they have fared no better. Women traditionally raise cattle, sheep, goats, and hens, but many have lost much of their livestock and fodder to the floods, and what remains is often stolen by gangs. Women also typically harvest the cotton, but the floods hit just when the crop was ready for picking, depriving many of earnings their families had counted on for the rest of the year. Even when women own land, they are not better off. Compared to men, many women own smaller plots, and have less access to credit and extension services. Studies have shown that, after disasters, women tend to drop out of agricultural production.

There was a strong case for supporting women's livelihoods before the floods, but the damage and dislocation have made this support even more imperative. A focus on women's livelihoods could ensure that they will be able to reclaim, or even improve, their incomes and their lives.



## **A Story within a Story**

### **ADB Helps Women during Pakistan's Post-Flood Reconstruction**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) seeks to improve the lives of women in Sindh in the aftermath of the 2010 flood. ADB is developing a project that will not only transfer assets and skills to women but also empower them and include them in public life. The project will tailor investment plans for communities, and allow women to become more productive and improve their confidence, abilities, and skills so they can work outside the domestic sphere. A pilot initiative is under development and will be rolled out by 2013.

## **About the Asian Development Bank**

ADB's vision is an Asia and Pacific region free of poverty. Its mission is to help its developing member countries reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of their people. Despite the region's many successes, it remains home to two-thirds of the world's poor: 1.8 billion people who live on less than \$2 a day, with 903 million struggling on less than \$1.25 a day. ADB is committed to reducing poverty through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration.

Based in Manila, ADB is owned by 67 members, including 48 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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