

Sitrep

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Pakistan: Critical need for relief and recovery as displacement emergency continues

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At the height of the displacement crisis in Pakistan last year, more than three million people sought refuge from the conflict between the Pakistani military and militant groups. While 2.5 million have now returned, an estimated 1.3 million remain displaced in the northwest of the country as a result of past and ongoing military conflict. The humanitarian community remains massively underfunded in its effort to address the relief, recovery and rehabilitation needs of displaced Pakistanis and the host communities that have received them.

With the start of the returns to the Swat valley in mid-July 2009, emergency assistance moved with the population back to their places of origin. In anticipation of the early recovery needs, the government and humanitarian community undertook an early recovery needs assessment in September 2009 to document the multi-sectoral needs of the affected population.

The area affected by severe insecurity resulting from this complex crisis is extensive, with an approximate total population of 7.5 million people (Statistical Office of Pakistan). This crisis has had wide-ranging effects on the lives of local communities and vulnerable segments of the population. The crisis has severely affected livelihoods, social structures, education (particularly girls' education), and increased health risks due to a lack of health, water and sanitation services.

In addition to the large number of returnees in Swat and Buner, hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis remained displaced throughout the winter. Ongoing smaller-scale military operations against militant groups continue to uproot new families forcing them to seek refuge in relatively more secure areas.

While the Pakistani capital of Islamabad has been relatively secure the past few weeks, security challenges have dramatically increased for humanitarian organizations. On March 10, six World Vision staff were killed in a direct attack on their office in Mansehra, Pakistan. On March 13, three staff from CWS-P/A implementing partner LASOONA were killed in a suicide bomb attack on a police checkpoint near a government building in Mingora, the

capital of the Swat district. While this attack did not directly target aid workers, it underscores the great difficulties facing humanitarian operations in Pakistan.

Another suicide blast in Mingora in February forced many aid groups, including ACT Alliance members, to temporarily close their offices and pause recovery assistance as a further precaution. In addition, unannounced road closures, curfews and numerous checkpoint searches in Swat have further slowed down humanitarian operations. Outside the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), four Pakistani staff of an international NGO were abducted with their vehicle in Balochistan province.

Ongoing displacement

While some surge military operations in South Waziristan do continue, media reports suggest that the South Waziristan operation is mostly over. However, approximately 280,000 people chose to remain displaced in Dera Ismael Khan and Tank throughout winter, rather than return home, due to concerns about security. Humanitarian support, including non-food items and water and sanitation, remain urgent.

In Hangu and Kohat, the approximately 135,000 people displaced also require ongoing humanitarian support. In other areas, both in NWFP and Federally-Administered Tribal Areas, spontaneous displacements where small numbers of people seek safety from fighting exist.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of families are caught between various displacement situations. Some families that fled too late to register with authorities are not able to register and qualify to receive government-coordinated assistance. Other families – including highly vulnerable groups like female-headed households, the elderly and disabled – have had difficulty accessing the cash assistance schemes from the government, again, due in part to registration limitations.

Several humanitarian agencies, including Church World Service – Pakistan/Afghanistan, are planning a multi-agency assessment of the needs and intentions of the hundreds of IDPs in the Peshawar valley. The assessment plans to inform programmatic recommendations for durable solutions – voluntary return, local integration or resettlement – for Pakistan's displaced families and host communities.

Critical need for livelihood assistance

In Swat, 95 percent of the millions massively displaced during last year's summer military operation have returned home. Through its assessments in Swat, ACT members have found that the most critical need for hundreds of thousands of families is livelihood recovery. Health interventions are also greatly needed both for those who stayed and those who returned just before winter.

While some in Swat depended on tourism for their livelihoods, tourism is significantly less likely to be revived in the near future given the ongoing security concerns. Agricultural and fruit production support remain the best intervention to help vulnerable families recover. In addition, the economic situation in Swat before the military campaign was complicated by the presence of the Taliban. Now, with price inflation in local markets, every commodity has

become increasingly expensive. For poor families, much-needed agricultural inputs, fertilizer, and tools are inaccessible.

ACT members are prioritizing agricultural and food security interventions for highly vulnerable families in Swat, where districts are declared accessible by the military. Cash grant assistance is also much needed in order to give families the opportunity to prioritize what they need, be it food, agricultural inputs or other household needs, after returning home. In addition, an influx of cash grants, not just distributions, would do much to restore the Swat economy.

A small number of families originally displaced from Swat and now in host communities in Mardan and Swabi lack resources necessary to return and re-establish their homes. However, with most displaced having returned home to Swat, there are now more opportunities for daily wage labourer work for this small number of displaced who have stayed.

Water, sanitation and hygiene priorities

In areas of return, the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) cluster has estimated about 1.7 million people from within the total population need various WASH services. Critical early recovery needs includes immediate restoration of water supply schemes, clearing drainage systems, increasing access to safe drinking water, and community mobilisation for improved and sustained hygiene-related behaviour.

WASH activities are needed for populations in areas of active conflict, where circumstances significantly increase vulnerability to water-borne diseases. Coordinating the WASH early recovery programme through the WASH cluster is also a priority for ACT members to ensure effective, coordinated and timely response to meet the needs of the affected populations.

ACT members are prioritising water, sanitation and hygiene support for the most vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households, as well as schools and community water supplies.

Current ACT Alliance Response

An international ACT appeal has been launched to support the long-term recovery of poor and vulnerable people who have now returned to their villages or who stayed behind during the fighting in the Swat and Buner Districts of the NWFP. Members and their local partners will assist rehabilitating basic water, sanitation and hygiene services, recovering and promoting livelihood opportunities, girls' education and basic health services. This appeal will be revised upwards next week to request approximately US \$4 million.

Meanwhile, ACT members are already been providing the following assistance this year with available resources:

Church World Service – Pakistan / Afghanistan

- Non-food item distributions for 1000 internally displaced families living with host communities in Dera Ismael Khan (funded by World Vision International).
- Emergency water and sanitation assistance for 1000 internally displaced families living with host communities in Dera Ismael Khan (funded by Concern Worldwide / OFDA).

- Primary health care for 40,200 people in Swat for returnees and people who remain, and Swabi for IDPs and host communities (funded by DanChurchAid / ECHO).
- Food security assistance for 2000 small-scale farmers and landless households in Swat (funded by DanChurchAid / ECHO).

Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)

- Renovation of 35 IDP-vacated government schools in the Mardan district of NWFP with a capacity for more than 4000 students; includes 16 primary, 10 middle and nine high schools (funded from DKH Germany).

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)

- Non-food item and winterisation package distribution to 1400 returnee families in Buner; packages are comprised of quilts, pillows, blankets, sweaters, shawls, shoes and clothes (funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway).
- Forty-four health and hygiene, mine awareness and women's rights sessions conducted for communities in Buner.
- Water and sanitation support to seven schools in Buner including hand pumps, school sanitation and health education, benefiting 1723 school children; hygiene sessions will also be conducted for 3500 people (funded by UNICEF).

Funding indications or pledges should be communicated to Jessie Kgoroadira, ACT Finance Officer (jkg@actalliance.org).

Thank you for your attention.

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