

Fighting War with Raging Waters: Bad Governance is a Big Stumbling Block

Moin M Fudda

According to UN report, the furious floods Pakistani nation is facing have caused more damage than the Asian tsunami of 2004 and Pakistan's earthquake of 2005. So far, around 2000 lives have been lost and 20 Millions of people are homeless. They are heartbroken and hopeless not only by raging floods of apocalyptic proportions, but also due to lack of disaster management and support from official corridors. This calamity has come after the earthquake of Haiti coupled with other events and there continues to be worldwide recession. At the same time, not to surprise of many, due to poor credibility of the government for not maintaining the transparency and governance in managing the aid given in earth quake of 2005, majority of the donors, rightly so, are channeling their limited aid through United Nation, The Red Cross and the Red Crescent so that it reaches the affected areas. Pakistani media quoted last week ERRA (Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority) official that "they are unable to carry the task of building infrastructure due to non release of funds by the government".

One of the organization studied the 2005 earthquake relief, showed that the most money flowed to the districts least affected by the earthquake whereas the most damaged areas received less rehabilitation support. All this happened despite the fact the government, military, and international donor community spent a great deal of time and effort reassuring people that relief funds would be spent in a transparent and accountable way. Yesterday UK's Guardian Daily reported that 300 million pound sterling aid given for earth quake was diverted to other projects. Though Finance Secretary denied use of funds for other projects, his ministry has not given the detailed account of the amount spent from the donors' aid and the reason for not building the promised new Balakot City when fifth anniversary of the earthquake has just passed, Thus, there is a growing mistrust on the part of donors that bad governance prevalent in Pakistan will miscarry the utilization of funds. The donors' suspicion is two-pronged: either the government is incompetent or lacks character to deliver. Whatever, it is, the final victims are those who are already being marauded by raging waters unleashed by nature.

Due to malaise of bad governance, the Pakistanis at large are giving donations to NGO's such as Edhi and The Citizen Foundations and several others with proven track record. At the same time there is continued confidence in sending "in kind contribution" to Pakistan Armed Forces who besides carrying out massive rescue operation are involved in distribution of relief goods. In these testing times there is also growing mistrust amongst those running the federal government and the provinces, On Friday last, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (North West Frontier Province) Minister the PM for diverting the aid to his city Multan. The feudal and farmers in Sind are accusing those in power that they have managed to save their lands from floods. This kind of feeling and statement are alarming and will create further divide between the provinces. The calamity is so huge that the Government of Pakistan will need to rework all its development and non development budgetary expenditure and in doing so, the leadership of the country must not think of provinces but of Pakistan and allocate the resources where needed.

According to the UN paper titled “What is Good Governance,” international donors and agencies now view governance in any country only in terms of “bad” or “good”; there is no in-between. Bad governance represents “one of the worst features of society, and a major cause of its dysfunction.” A government is the prime actor in good governance but not the only one. There are other actors, such as political parties, military, media, NGOs, religious leaders, finance institutions, business leaders and corporations. Good governance occurs when all actors involved in it are facilitated by government to play their respective inherent or constitutionally assigned roles to the full extent. The primary responsibility for good governance, however, remains with the government, which is something no administration can abdicate, or pass the buck on. Strong and well-functioning institutions not only encourage good governance but also sustain it against corrupt elements. But, one of the biggest reasons for the country’s consistent governance disasters is the absence of strong institutions.

In the above context, it is therefore heartening to learn that at the suggestion of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the sitting PM Gilani has agreed to set up a “National Commission of highly respectable and credible countrymen to ensure the money people of Pakistan and foreign governments contribute for the rehabilitation of flood victims is spent transparently. Now the \$ 64 million question is as to when this commission will start its work and will it function independently based on good governance principles and support from private sector or on the pattern of ERRA, another organization namely FRRA (Flood Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority) will be created.

August 15, 2010.