

# Getting our act together



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The furious floods Pakistan is facing have caused more damage than the 2004 tsunami and Pakistan's earthquake in 2005, according to the UN. So far, around 2,000 lives have been lost and 20 million people are homeless. They are heartbroken and hopeless after raging floods of apocalyptic proportions, and even more despondent because of poor governance, disaster mismanagement and a lack of meaningful support from official corridors.

Due to the poor credibility of the government for not maintaining transparency in governance while managing the aid given in the earthquake of 2005, the majority of the donors are channeling their limited aid through the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent — trusting that this way it will reach affected areas. Last week an Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority (Erra) official told the media that “Erra is unable to carry the task of building infrastructure due to non-release of funds by the government”. *The Daily Telegraph* recently reported that £300 million in aid given for the 2005 earthquake was diverted to other projects. Though a Pakistan government official denied the use of funds for other projects, it will clear the air if the ministry concerned provided a detailed account of what was spent from the donor aid and also why, five years on, the promised new Balakot city has yet to be built.

However, poor governance is not a source of discouragement as Pakistanis at large are giving donations to NGOs such as Edhi, The Citizens' Foundation, and several others with a proven track record. At the same time there is continued confidence in sending “in

kind contributions” to the armed forces who are busy carrying out massive rescue and relief operations.

In these testing times there is also growing mistrust among those running the federal government and the provinces. The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government has accused the National Disaster Management Authority of being more generous in dispatching relief goods to Multan, the prime minister’s hometown. Residents of Sindh and Balochistan are accusing those in power that they have saved their lands at the cost of poor farmers. This kind of feeling and statements are alarming and will further divide the provinces.

The calamity is so huge that the entire nation needs to rise and unite. At the same time the government needs to quickly rework all development and non-development budgetary expenditure and in doing so, the leadership of the country must not think of provinces but of Pakistan and re-allocate 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, the military, the media, NGOs, religious leaders, finance institutions, business leaders and corporations.

One of the biggest reasons for the country’s consistent governance disasters is the absence of strong institutions that can prevent or at least limit the circumstances and consequences of corruption. In the midst of natural disaster — there is some man-made hope — at the suggestion of Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister has agreed to set up a “national commission of highly respectable and credible countrymen,” to ensure the transparent and responsible use of rehabilitation resources from Pakistani and foreign donors.

Now the \$64 million question is when the commission will be constituted and whether it will function independently based on good governance principles or be run on Erra’s pattern?

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