

**Briefing paper on flood-displaced women in Sindh Province, Pakistan**



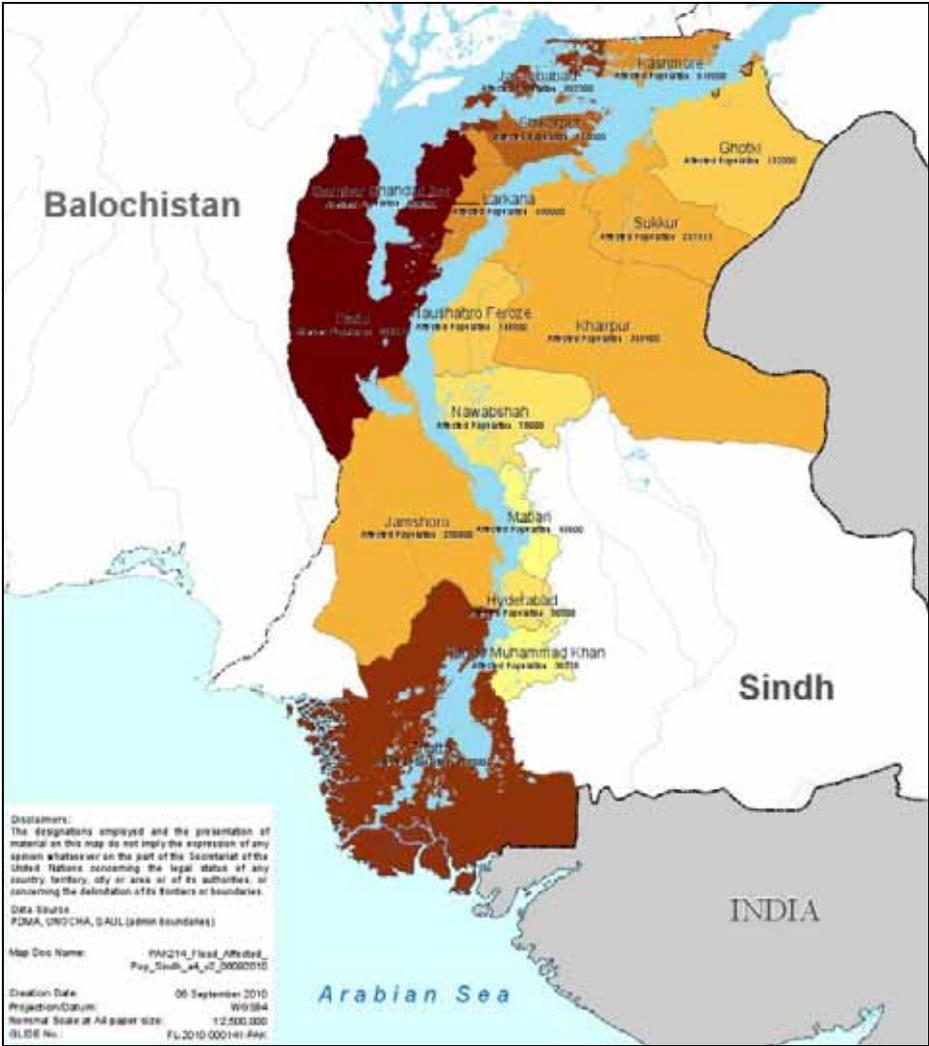
Flood-displaced families in Shahdadkot district, Sindh. (IDMC, April 2011)

**June 2011**

*Presented at the Nansen Conference on  
Climate Change and Displacement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; 5-7 June, 2011, Oslo, Norway*

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Map: Flood affected areas of Sindh Province, Pakistan (as of 21 August 2010). Source: MapAction. Data extracted from Government of Sindh Provincial Disaster Management Authority Situation Report 21 August 2010

## 1. Introduction

Extreme, sudden-onset weather events - primarily floods and storms - displaced more than 38 million people worldwide in 2010<sup>1</sup>. The devastating floods in Pakistan, caused by unusually heavy monsoon rains in July and August, accounted for 11 million. The rains brought flooding to as much as a fifth of Pakistan's national territory, which affected more than 10 per cent of the country's population of 181 million. Fifty per cent of those affected were women. Some 1,700 people died, and the floodwaters caused huge losses of property, infrastructure and livelihoods. The southern province of Sindh suffered worst, with more than seven million people affected and 1.5 million made homeless.<sup>2</sup>

The 2010 floods caused the largest displacements in Pakistan's history. The scale, scope and speed of events posed an enormous challenge for the affected populations, government authorities and the international community in a country where natural hazards have provoked a series of major disasters in recent years. An earthquake killed some 73,000 people, injured around 200,000, and displaced 3.5 million in Assad Kashmir and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in October 2005, and floods in Balochistan displaced another 300,000 in June and July 2007.<sup>3</sup>

Internally displaced people (IDPs) have an equal right to protection and assistance during their displacement and in their search for durable solutions whether they are women or men, and wherever they may be displaced to.<sup>4</sup> Women tend to face particular challenges and discrimination in their gender-defined roles before, during and after displacement. They are not, however, a homogenous group. As this paper sets out, an effective response to displacement and its impacts must be informed by an understanding of Pakistan's varying contexts and the effects of disasters on different groups of women with specific needs in their aftermath.

This paper is based on an IDMC study conducted eight to nine months after the onset of the 2010 floods, in April and May 2011. It involved interviews with local authorities and international agencies working in Pakistan, discussion groups with women and men from Kambar Shahdaktot district in Sindh province, and a review of some 50 assessments and reports. It presents an overview of the context prior to the 2010 floods, highlights the impacts of displacement on women and makes recommendations to strengthen policy and responses to disaster-induced displacement.

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<sup>1</sup> "Displacement due to natural hazard-induced disasters: Global estimates for 2009 and 2010", IDMC, June 2011. Available at [www.internaldisplacement.org/publications](http://www.internaldisplacement.org/publications)

<sup>2</sup> NDMA Situation Report, October 26, 2010; Pakistan Floods 2010 – Preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment. Asian Development Bank, Government of Pakistan and the World Bank, November 2010, P.22

<sup>3</sup> In April 2009, Pakistan also suffered the world's largest and fastest internal displacement for over a decade due to conflict in the north-west.

<sup>4</sup> Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998. Available at <http://www.idpguidingprinciples.org/>

## 2. The pre-disaster context

The southern province of Sindh is the third largest of Pakistan's four provinces. It has a population of 40 million, with a gender ratio of 112 men to every 100 women.<sup>5</sup> As in other parts of Pakistan, the population is predominantly Muslim, but Sindh is also home to nearly all of Pakistan's Hindus, who make up 7.5 per cent of the province's population.

Kambar Shahdadt district is in upper Sindh, and was one of the areas of the province worst affected by the floods. A number of factors made it particularly vulnerable, including its geographical location on the Indus river plain, its flat topography, poor flood defences such as *bunds* or levees, widespread poverty and a deteriorating law and order situation. The area provides predominantly agriculture-based livelihoods both for local communities and migrant workers from other remote areas of Sindh and Balochistan. Degradation of the district's land and water sources due to surface drainage from Balochistan has reduced the area of cultivable land and decreased crop yields over the last 12 years, affecting the livelihoods of thousands of people. Poorly planned development projects, including surface drainage networks and roads, have interrupted natural water flows, reportedly increasing the frequency and impact of floods.<sup>6</sup>

Land ownership in Sindh is feudal. According to the World Bank, about two per cent of Pakistani households control more than 45 per cent of the land, and this trend is particularly prevalent in Sindh where tenants are often deprived of basic rights, including access to basic services such as health care and education. Most Sindhi women work as agricultural labourers or raise livestock with their husbands and other male members of their families. Bonded labour is illegal but widespread, and labourers remain indebted to their landlords for generations. Women also work as care providers of their families and in local cottage industries. They are, however, often prevented from inheriting family property.<sup>7</sup>

As in other parts of Pakistan, women enjoy few privileges and freedoms, and those living in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and violence. Political participation is limited. Less than 75 per cent of eligible women are registered to vote and less than 25 per cent turned out to do so in the past two rounds of elections.<sup>8</sup> When women do vote, they do not necessarily do so freely - they are often compelled to choose the candidate favoured by their father, husband or brother. The literacy rate in Sindh is 55 per cent. The rate for women is 42 per cent, but this drops as low as 11 per cent in rural areas.<sup>9</sup> More than 50 per cent of all "honour killings"<sup>10</sup> reported in Pakistan from January to June 2010 occurred in Sindh, and 25 per cent of all reported cases of violence against women nationwide take place there. Polygamy, a common practice in Sindh, makes wives highly

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<sup>5</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sindh>

<sup>6</sup> Rubina Chandio, Pirbhat Women's Development Society, Sindh Pakistan. Article submitted to On the Frontlines of Climate Change, 29 August 2009.

<sup>7</sup> "Women in Sindh", Aftab Hassan Khan, 2011

<sup>8</sup> UN democracy fund 2009

<sup>9</sup> "Sindh at a Glance", Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2008

<sup>10</sup> The practice of honour killing is the killing of a family member, usually a woman or a girl, for having brought shame upon the family name. This may be perceived as a result of behaviour or dress which the family deems contrary to their religious, traditional or cultural practices. According to UNFPA, as many as 5,000 women and girls may be killed by their families every year; "A Human Rights and Health Priority", UNFPA 2007.

vulnerable should a husband choose to withdraw the support upon which each is dependent.<sup>11</sup>

National registration of Pakistani citizens is based on the household unit. Traditionally, the male head of household is registered and provided with a computerised national identity card (CNIC), with accompanying women and children listed on the same document. Divorcees or those otherwise living outside a male-headed household often register as part of their father's household or that of another male relative, rather than as a separate family unit. At the time of the floods, only eight per cent of the heads of household registered in Pakistan, were women, with almost 29,000 women headed households registered in Sindh. Ninety-two per cent of displaced Pakistani women were registered under the name of the family patriarch or the nearest male relative, whether or not that relative was a close family member. Some 5.7 million CNICs were issued to women in 2010, but the scheme's coverage remains limited, especially for poor women.<sup>12</sup> This created fundamental problems in the non-discriminatory delivery of aid following the floods as official assistance mechanisms rely on possession of a CNIC. This was intended to prevent false claims for aid, but it also excluded women, leaving them with only limited access to assistance in their own right.

The practice of *purdah* in Pakistan<sup>13</sup>, which regulates the interaction of unrelated men and women, varies between provinces, communities and families.<sup>14</sup> In the north-west and Balochistan, where women are required to wear a *hijab* or *burqa* in public places, restrictions are generally greater than in Sindh and Punjab. Many women who wear the *burqa*, however, are allowed to go to markets and take on jobs that entail interaction with the general public, while women who wear less conservative dress are sometimes confined to their homes.<sup>15</sup> Restrictions tend to be tighter in rural than in urban areas, and degrees of *purdah* can also vary according to social class. Poor rural women in Sindh are less constrained than those from better-off families as they are involved in livelihood activities outside the home, such as livestock rearing and working in the fields. Understanding the practice of *purdah* is key if humanitarian organisations are to ensure that women's right to participate in decisions related to their needs is respected and their access to assistance assured.

Following the devastating effects of the 2005 earthquake, various efforts have been made to strengthen Pakistan's disaster management apparatus and policy frameworks that relate to natural hazard-induced disasters. These include the establishment of a National Disaster Management Commission chaired by the prime minister, and a National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to plan for and respond to emergencies at the federal level. Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) and District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) have also been set up, as is the case for Sindh province and Kambar Shahdadkot district. The 2007 National Disaster Risk Management Framework sets out a comprehensive structure for response, and several detailed contingency plans for flood disasters were in place prior to 2010.

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<sup>11</sup> "Human Rights in Sindh, 2010-2011 summary", The Sindh Monitor, presented to the UN Human Rights Council 16<sup>th</sup> annual session, March 2011. Data compiled by the Aurat Foundation Annual Report 2011; Report on Advocacy on Women Rights/Harassment Issues in IDP Camps. Oxfam Novib, Pirbhat, LHDP.

<sup>12</sup> NADRA. Available at <http://nadra.gov.pk>

<sup>13</sup> *Purdah* literally meaning curtain or privacy, intended to shield women from strangers.

<sup>14</sup> "Pakistan gender relations: Men, Women, and the Division of Space", Encyclopedia of Women's History, from Jones Johnson Lewis.

<sup>15</sup> IDMC correspondence with Dr Farhat Taj.

Pakistan has not, however, agreed upon a national IDP framework which covers internal displacement brought about by natural disasters, conflict and other causes. Policy development in this area remains ad hoc, and the above-mentioned frameworks and structures do not address the phenomenon as defined by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.<sup>16</sup> Planning documents, including those initially used by the government during the response to the 2010 floods, use the term “affectee” rather than “IDP”. While this distinction may make sense as part of an attempt to draw a line between those affected by conflict versus those affected by flooding, the Guiding Principles provide a useful framework for efforts to recognise and fulfil the rights of people displaced by disasters.

### 3. The impact of flood displacement

Of Pakistan's four provinces, the 2010 floods are widely acknowledged to have hit Sindh worst. More than seven million people were affected<sup>17</sup>, including around half of the province's rural population, and more than 2.5 million acres of agricultural land were flooded.<sup>18</sup> Nearly 350,000 homes were destroyed, leaving at least 1.5 million people homeless and causing mass displacement. The floodwaters also took longer to recede in Sindh than in other provinces.<sup>19</sup>

Forty-nine per cent of Sindh's IDPs were women, roughly equivalent to the percentage of women registered as IDPs nationally and to their percentage of the national population. More than 1.3 million people took shelter in over 3,500 relief camps<sup>20</sup> while hundreds of thousands more camped along roadsides or were put up by host communities.<sup>21</sup> Around 38,000 people remained in 30 camps in Sindh as of May 2011.<sup>22</sup>

Kambar Shahdadkot was one of the worst-hit districts in the province, with over a million people affected. Around 75,000 homes were destroyed and some 337,000 people left homeless.<sup>23</sup> More than 52,000 people from the district were reported as displaced to relief camps, the majority of whom were still in those camps as of November 2010.<sup>24</sup> By March, the number had dropped to 4,000 people unable to return to their villages because the floodwaters were still to recede.<sup>25</sup>

The lack of reliable data on IDPs living in informal settlements in isolated areas left them excluded from relief responses and susceptible to risk.<sup>26</sup> Addressing that problem has been one of the major challenges for local government, humanitarian organisations and policy makers.

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<sup>16</sup> Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998. Available at <http://www.idpguidingprinciples.org/>

<sup>17</sup> Sindh Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA). Available at <http://www.pdma.gos.pk>

<sup>18</sup> Government of Pakistan and UNHCR. “Profile of the Internally Displaced Persons from the Floods of 2010 in Pakistan”. February 2011. Enterprise for Business & Development Management (EBDM)

<sup>19</sup> Pakistan shelter cluster, 30 March 2011. Figures from the NDMA and PDMA.

<sup>20</sup> Sindh PDMA, 8th September 2010. Available at <http://www.pdma.gos.pk/FloodFacts.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Inter-Cluster Rapid Needs Assessment. Qambar Shahdadkot. 7 October 2010

<sup>22</sup> Sindh PDMA. <http://www.pdma.gos.pk/>

<sup>23</sup> Sindh PDMA and Pakistan Shelter Cluster

<sup>24</sup> Sindh PDMA, November 8th, 2010

<sup>25</sup> UN General Assembly. “Strengthening Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Prevention in the Wake of Devastating Floods in Pakistan”. Report of the Secretary General. 7 March 2011. 65th Session. P. 2

<sup>26</sup> IDMC observations; Inter-Cluster Rapid Needs Assessment, Kambar Shahdadkot. 7 October 2010.

### *Displacement to different locations and secondary displacement*

Some women and their families were displaced to locations some distance from their original homes, a reflection of their relative freedom and capacity to move. Others, including extremely poor families who did not have the resources or assets to sell to pay for transport further afield, stayed instead on nearby embankments, or *bunds*, above the floodwaters.

In other cases, male heads of household said they feared exposing the women to different clans and communities and so refused to flee far from home. The decision on when, where and how to flee was entirely in the hands of male heads of household or male community elders.

According to the women interviewed by IDMC, people who fled to places near their homes faced serious challenges to their safety and survival, including lack of access to food, shelter, health facilities and clean drinking water, and risks to their personal security. Given the logistical barriers to reaching their isolated locations, humanitarian assistance did not reach these families and they were generally left to fend for themselves.

Those able to reach camps, where the majority of the relief effort was directed fared better. Around 40 per cent of Sindh's IDPs were living in camps at the time of their registration, compared with around 20 per cent nationwide, and 21 per cent were living with host families, compared with 34 per cent nationwide.<sup>27</sup>

IDMC's field research suggests that some internally displaced families who chose to take refuge in host communities may have initially had more resources, but over time they spent most of their income and savings on transport and rented accommodation. Many of them never registered as "affectees" and so were also unable to access official assistance. This weakened their capacity to rebuild their lives.

A large return movement took place in late 2010, but the destruction of property and livelihoods meant that many of those who embarked on a return were forced into secondary displacement nearer to their homes.<sup>28</sup> At the time of their registration, 90 per cent of IDPs said that they wanted to return to their original homes, but the floods destroyed the land and crops of around 75 per cent of them – a figure surpassed only in Punjab where 83 per cent suffered such losses. Infrastructure, including roads, schools, health centres and government offices, was also destroyed. Sixty per cent of surveyed households in the affected areas of northern Sindh said the floods had seriously damaged their homes, while only 11 per cent said theirs had survived relatively intact. Nonetheless, 55 per cent of the survey group had returned to their original homes as of January 2011, while 30 per cent were still living in tents. The remaining 15 per cent were living with host families or in rented accommodation in their area of origin.<sup>29</sup>

Rebuilding livelihoods is a challenge for all IDPs, but particularly for women, whose work in the informal sector and in agriculture is not given official recognition, unlike that of their

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<sup>27</sup> Government of Pakistan and UNHCR. Profile of the Internally Displaced Persons from the Floods of 2010 in Pakistan. February 2011. An Analytical Report by Enterprise for Business & Development Management (EBDM)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR, March 2011, Summary of Findings of the Watan Card Survey in Northern Sindh, Jan 4-7, 2011

male counterparts. Poor earnings - woman's income is on average 25 per cent less than that of men<sup>30</sup> - mean that they have struggled to make a decent living. The women interviewed by IDMC in Sindh said that access to income-earning opportunities was their biggest challenge and a major concern for women heads of household. The slow pace of recovery from the extensive damage the floods caused to the agricultural sector is expected to have a major impact on women's employment.

Women also lack the documentation to prove their property rights. As a result, widows and women heads of household interviewed by IDMC reported great difficulty in claiming inheritances, land and possessions left at home when they fled. For those who had documentation in the first place, there was a lack of witnesses able to substantiate their claims and approaching the authorities for replacements exposed them to further exploitation.

A number of displaced families refused to go back to their areas of origin for fear that their landlords would force them either to compensate them for crops that had been washed away or to return money given to them to buy seeds. Faced with the prospect of being forced to return to their work as bonded labourers, some IDPs – both men and women - sought alternative livelihoods near their home areas. A number of poor rural families who had been displaced to urban areas found jobs they considered better than their previous employment in the agricultural sector. Some young women also said that displacement had exposed them to new perspectives through contact with new communities and individuals.

#### *Access to assistance and the specific needs of women*

After the 2010 floods, affected people could only be recognised as such if they held a CNIC issued in an area designated by the national government as a “disaster-affected area”. Most assistance was channelled through the CNIC system, but many genuine IDPs – especially poor and female-headed households - were not registered because they did not hold a CNIC.<sup>31</sup> None of the women in IDMC's discussion groups had been registered as a head of household and were entirely dependent on assistance provided by male relatives.

The assistance programme with the widest coverage was a government cash support mechanism called *Watan*, through which the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) distributed cash cards to households – most of them headed by men - that had been affected by the floods. An initial payment of \$230 (20,000 Pakistani rupees) was meant to meet emergency needs.<sup>32</sup> As of 20 February, 2011, 559,000 families from Sindh had received this support.<sup>33</sup> A January 2011 survey led by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) amongst communities affected by displacement in northern Sindh found, however, that while over 90 per cent of households had a CNIC card, only 43 per cent had a *Watan* card.<sup>34</sup> During IDMC's field research, displaced women complained that they had not received any cash support.

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<sup>30</sup> Save the Children, April 2010

<sup>31</sup> IDMC interview with UNHCR, December 2010

<sup>32</sup> An additional \$930 was to be assigned to rebuild destroyed or damaged houses and invest in income-generating opportunities, but only the first installment had been made as of May 2011.

<sup>33</sup> NADRA, 20 February 2011. Available at <http://www.nadra.gov.pk>

<sup>34</sup> UNHCR, “Summary of Findings of the Watan Card Survey in Northern Sindh, January 4-7, 2011”.

The provision of some services, such as water and sanitation, did not depend on CNIC registration, but the delivery of food assistance, non-food items and cash support generally did. Male heads of the household received the assistance and redistributed it among family members. IDMC's focus group discussions revealed that some displaced women received less assistance than others as the male heads of household would share the bulk of the food and other items with their wives and children while ignoring the needs of other female family members. In particular, it was reported that older women, single women and single women with dependent children whose sons or male relatives had registered as heads of household were discriminated against. Men with more than one wife and family would similarly discriminate against second wives.

Pakistani women interviewed in camps and at other displacement sites during the floods said that the demands of *purdah* made it difficult for them to access showers, latrines, emergency supplies and doctors, with obvious implications for their health and hygiene. An assessment in August 2010 by the Sukaar Foundation in Sindh camps and other displacement sites came up with similar findings, and that the constant flow of strangers also made it difficult to socialise.<sup>35</sup> A March 2011 report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) found that internally displaced women and girls across the country could not venture out to receive emergency food aid without being threatened for violating *purdah*.<sup>36</sup>

According to government officials, most women not accompanied by a male head of the household went about trying to access services in the company of older female family members – on whom *purdah* restrictions are not so strict. Women without someone to accompany them were less able to access services.<sup>37</sup>

Aid workers delivering assistance reported that accessing women was hugely challenging, and qualified local female staff extremely difficult to find. Some agencies were able to use experienced staff from other provinces, but who did not speak the local languages in Sindh. Most were forced to hire a predominantly male workforce, with the awareness that this would limit their ability to access women. As such, women's voices were harder to hear and their ability to participate in key processes and decisions affecting them severely limited. This was particularly true for needs assessments, in which women were greatly under-represented. Displaced women interviewed by IDMC's female researchers complained about not being interviewed by assessment teams while the men were. Some assessments even operated under the assumption that a thorough understanding of women's concerns was beyond their reach, presumably due to a lack of female staff.

One of the main criticisms of the response to the 2010 floods has been the failure by both the government and the humanitarian community to effectively target assistance to those most in need. The scale of the disaster was difficult to measure in its early stages as the situation evolved rapidly, and the delivery of aid tended to prioritise those more easily visible and accessible, rather than identifying those most vulnerable.

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<sup>35</sup> Sukaar Foundation, Flood Affected Rapid Assessment, August 2010. Displaced flood affectees in the camps at Hyderabad, Kotri, Ganjo Takar, Karachi and Bhit-Shah

<sup>36</sup> OCHA Pakistan Humanitarian and Early Recovery Overview (HERO), 17 March 2011.

<sup>37</sup> IDMC communication with AIRRA coordinator Dr Khadim Hussain

Unmarried women, pregnant women and adolescent girls were particularly affected by the lack of easily accessible doctors and health facilities. This was true both in camps and flood-affected communities generally. In the Dadu district of southern Sindh, for example, only 10 deliveries were made to health facilities catering to a population of approximately 1.7 million.<sup>38</sup> Women complained that most health services available in the aftermath of the floods concentrated on primary health care with little specialised focus on reproductive health for women.<sup>39</sup> Women also cited a lack of female examiners; the absence of care and treatment for problems specific to women; inconvenient clinic hours; long distances to travel from home; and their own preferences for traditional methods of health care as reasons for not attending public health centres<sup>40</sup>.

### *Violence against displaced women*

There is little baseline information on the prevalence of sexual violence before the 2010 floods, but conditions in overcrowded camps and host communities put women at significant risk and available data suggest some patterns of violence during displacement. The destruction of walls around homes in flood-affected areas and the absence in displacement of the reassuring ties of tribe and village meant that some communities were reluctant to leave their women alone for fear that they might be sexually assaulted. The fear of sexual violence was particularly heightened for unmarried women and girls.<sup>41</sup> A 2010 assessment by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) quoted women as reporting sexual harassment in camps where different tribes, families and villages were thrown together.<sup>42</sup> NGOs also reported that women in camps were harassed while collecting water.<sup>43</sup> IDMC's interviewees suggested that some younger women felt harassed at distribution points, but were prevented from reporting their experiences by older women who feared losing their food assistance. Shocked by the widespread devastation of the floods, women instinctively stuck closer together for support and safety. When they visited camp latrines, for example, they went at night and in groups.

Official reports of violence against women, however, are scant.<sup>44</sup> This may be due in part to the lack of services such as shelters, legal aid, and health facilities, which would have allowed women to report such incidents. Other factors may be fear and social stigma creating a reluctance to report incidents, a lack of potential redress through the justice system and women's lack of awareness of their rights. Of 125 women who did come forward to report incidents in north Sindh from January to April 2011, only 25 received psychosocial support. Where support was available, the reasons for women failing to access it included threats from family members and stigma surrounding issues of violence<sup>45</sup>. Incidents that were reported included rape, harassment, domestic violence and physical violence.

A discussion group with displaced women from Kambar Shahdadkot district suggested that some younger women were coerced into marriage as a way of avoiding threats to their *purdah*. The IDP camps, meanwhile, provided opportunities for young men and women

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<sup>38</sup> Merlin, "Health Needs Assessment in Dadu and Thatta Districts of Southern Sindh, 28th September to 5th October 2010".

<sup>39</sup> Care International in Pakistan, Women in emergencies "Unveiling the perceptions", 2011

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*

<sup>41</sup> Protection Cluster, "Rapid Protection Assessment, 22-29 September, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa". Sept. 2010

<sup>42</sup> UNIFEM, "Preliminary rapid gender assessment of Pakistan's flood crisis", 2010.

<sup>43</sup> OCHA, "Pakistan Humanitarian and Early Recovery Overview (HERO)", 17 March 2011.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>45</sup> Report of the gender-based violence sub-thematic group, Sukkur, April 2011.

from different clans and ethnic groups to intermingle and forge relationships. As cultural norms dictate that marriages be sanctioned by the parents, families sometimes described what had happened to the young women in their household as sexual harassment or forced marriage, even where the relationships had been freely entered into by the couples concerned. IDMC interviews with women and local authorities in Sindh suggest that there may have been an increase in marriages during displacement and that these were mostly voluntary.

Evidence also suggests that growing frustrations with their living conditions and collective trauma in the aftermath of the floods raised tensions within families and with it intra-family violence. According to IDMC's field research, those most affected were older women, widowed women and second wives. IDMC's findings are in line with incidents reported through the main humanitarian coordinating body on preventing violence against women, which rated physical assault by family members as the main form of violence against women between November 2010 and April 2011.<sup>46</sup> IDMC also found that it was common for displaced women from higher classes to harass and intimidate women from poorer families or lower castes.

The official close of the relief period, as determined by the Pakistani government, came at the end of January 2011. This was intended to coincide with mass returns and a move towards early recovery, and the vast majority of camps were disbanded by the end of March 2011. The vulnerabilities of Sindhi women in IDP camps arguably increased during this transition period as it meant the end of assistance from agencies, growing frustration as displacement nevertheless continued. NGOs in Kambar Shahdadkot district reported that when camp management projects were discontinued in February 2011, the women who remained began to face security problems.

OCHA describes a situation in which “the humanitarian community was almost completely silent about the protection concerns of women and girls”.<sup>47</sup> The consensus seems to have been that displaced women often showed great resilience in coping with their situations, but received far too little specialised attention to meet their specific needs for assistance and protection amid the economic and social upheaval caused by the 2010 floods.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made to national and international policy makers and humanitarian organisations to strengthen future responses in assisting and protecting women displaced by natural disasters, as well as their children and families:

1. People forced to flee natural hazard-induced disasters, including floods, should be recognised and protected as internally displaced in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. This recognition should be upheld through the development of a national policy on IDPs, and should cover the rights and needs of populations displaced both by disasters and conflict. Such a policy should complement existing national contingency plans and disaster management policy.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> OCHA, “Pakistan Humanitarian and Early Recovery Overview (HERO)”, 17 March 2011.

2. National registration systems should be adapted to ensure that all women over eighteen years of age are identified and recognised as individuals before the law, and to ensure that they are not marginalised and discriminated against as legitimate recipients of aid.
3. Disaster response plans should contain clear guidance on targeting the most vulnerable people for assistance, including women and those at risk of displacement. Criteria for the impartial selection of beneficiaries should be pre-agreed and based on international standards and best practice. These criteria should guide the work of all national and international partners in Pakistan and should be applied from the earliest stages of disaster response.
4. Substantial time and resources should be dedicated outside periods of crisis to assess and understand the specific vulnerabilities and coping strategies of women at risk of displacement by disasters in their different local contexts, so as to inform effective disaster preparedness and response.
5. Enhanced knowledge of the pre-disaster situation of women at risk of displacement should be incorporated into relevant national and provincial policies and frameworks that guide disaster risk management and response, climate change adaptation and development programmes. Concrete measures and systems should be included to identify and monitor women and men at risk of being displaced, and those in displacement inside or outside camps, and to ensure that women's perspectives are heard and their participation in assessment and monitoring processes guaranteed.

For more information, contact:

Michelle Yonetani  
Senior Advisor Natural Disasters  
Email: [Michelle.Yonetani@nrc.ch](mailto:Michelle.Yonetani@nrc.ch)  
Tel: +41 22 799 07 19

Jacob Rothing  
Country Analyst  
Email: [Jacob.Rothing@nrc.ch](mailto:Jacob.Rothing@nrc.ch)  
Tel: +41 22 799 07 00

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre / Norwegian Refugee Council  
Chemin de Balexert 7-9, CH-1219 Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland  
[www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)