



Pakistan: Women Step Up After Earthquake - 2012

The 2005 earthquake in Pakistan created thousands of widows who had to quickly learn to provide for their family and community. ADB's assistance programs included special provisions to help women, especially widows and other heads of household, who suddenly found themselves thrust into new roles of responsibility.



In October 2005, a devastating earthquake in Pakistan killed an estimated 80,000 people, injured more than 30,000, and left nearly 4 million homeless. ADB provided assistance through the Pakistan Earthquake Fund which was enacted in November. The following month, ADB approved a project to rebuild urgently-needed infrastructure and two other projects were approved the following year.

But the longer-term rehabilitation of millions of people in scattered villages across difficult terrain in some of the highest mountains of the world was a task that needed more time. Entire towns and villages had been destroyed in an area that remained seismically active. The most vulnerable of the earthquake-affected families included those now headed by women in a conservative society where females traditionally have limited education and mobility.

The earthquake had overnight created thousands of widows, who now became the breadwinners in their homes. In other families, men suffered injuries that prevented them from working. Women not only had to earn enough to support the whole household, they also needed to care for disabled family members, the elderly, and children, all without the support of a male partner.

The gender action plans objectives were:

- To improve women's access to rights and entitlements of land and home ownership;
- To provide equitable access for women and other vulnerable groups to housing, reconstruction and housing related services, including housing grants;
- To include agreed female targets and provision for training; and
- To provide legal services to help women establish legal ownership.

Rebuilding homes, owning land and houses

In 2007, ADB approved the Earthquake-Displaced People Livelihood Restoration Program, which helped build permanent homes for 2.7 million who had been living in temporary shelters since the earthquake. This included 30,000 people who had weathered the region's cold winters in tents.

The program helped 55,000 women heads of household rebuild their homes. Under the principle of "building back better," the program supported the construction of seismic-compliant houses in an area that remains prone to earthquakes. Through a related technical assistance project, home owners were trained in building houses that would withstand any future earthquakes. More than 20,000 women received such training. Most families did not build the houses themselves but the training helped ensure that their new homes met the recommended standards, including making the homes accessible for disabled family members as needed.

Women gain Identity

The program included special provisions to help women, especially widows and other heads of household, who suddenly found themselves thrust into new roles of responsibility. By 2007, an estimated 27% of households in the two affected provinces were headed by women, requiring drastic social as well as economic changes. Such women had little access to emergency supplies, reconstruction initiatives, and other services due to lack of identity papers, land title documents, and banking experience. Local customs often denied them the right to own or inherit property and limited their access to

information, education, and income opportunities.

The program helped women, orphans, elderly, and people with disabilities, get computerized national identity cards granting them priority assistance to reconstruct their houses. The cards also gave them access to legal aid centers set up under the program.

A mobile service run by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) reached women and other vulnerable groups in remote villages to register requests for the identity cards. A third of those who registered through the mobile service were women. NADRA appointed 13 female lawyers to help these women. Twenty legal aid centers (LACs) were set up to provide representation in court, administrative help, and documentation. Outreach initiatives by the LACs raised public awareness of the importance of basic documentation. Women registered more than 7,600 legal aid cases, nearly 30% of the total. About 90% of the 26,321 cases that were registered concerned documentation. A vast majority have been resolved.

The legal aid, mobile registration service, and information dissemination helped female heads of household and other women gain land titles in areas where these were traditionally held almost exclusively by men.

The program encouraged women's involvement in other ways too. Women made up 30% of the members of the social mobilization teams that reached out to the communities with information and assistance.

The Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA), the main implementation agency of the program, made a small beginning by recruiting some women as senior managers in the earthquake-affected areas. The two provincial agencies followed this example and, by 2010, had made a small dent in what had been an exclusively male domain: women made up 10% of the management and technical staff of the earthquake reconstruction and rehabilitation agencies in the two most affected provinces.

Building back better

More than 320,000 houses that had been completely destroyed in the earthquake had been rebuilt to better standards by 2010 and nearly one and half million people had moved into these quake-resistant homes. More than 200,000 damaged houses had been repaired and, in many cases, modified to improve their chances of withstanding any future tremors.

The new houses also have better sanitation facilities, raising health and hygiene standards among the affected communities. A housing survey conducted in 2010 found a 30% increase in the use of flush systems in reconstructed houses, and a similar increase in the use of septic tanks and soakage pits.

ERRA trained more than 780,000 people in seismic-compliant building design and construction techniques at its training centers in the earthquake-affected areas and through its partner agencies.

The program followed an owner-driven approach, providing training and finance to owners to enable them to rebuild their own homes. This supported the self-confidence and self-reliance of the communities that participated in the program.

Because of the emphasis on helping women and other vulnerable groups, 16% of the newly built houses are owned by women heads of household. In a deeply conservative region, women hold land titles, own homes and, as a result, enjoy a higher status in their communities.

Related

- [39631-013: Earthquake Emergency Assistance Project](#)
- [40563-013: Earthquake-Displaced People Livelihood Restoration Program](#)
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