

The IDP-governance link

Dr. Sania Nishtar

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Governance
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There is hardly any problem in the country which cannot be tracked back to challenges at the level of governance. The crisis of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) is certainly no exception. Both the technocratic and political aspects of governance, including policy directions at various levels, to the dynamics and pitfalls of the public management process, have deeply impacted the IDP crisis—right from the manner in which it evolved to the style in which it was managed.

Now that the IDPs are reported to be on their way back to being settled in their home communities, it is opportune to analyse impediments to the relief operations. A careful review will draw attention to most as being linked with limitations at the level of governance. These insights would be valuable not just in relation to disaster preparedness for the future, but would also be critical for rehabilitating the IDPs, and shifting the mode of assistance from humanitarian to development, which is the next imminent step.

First, a humanitarian crisis was clearly inevitable since the theatre of war widened since the end of 2008. According to some experts, the writing was on the wall as early as 2007. The United Nations repeatedly issued warnings since then. Although the scale of the mass exodus—over two million people, equal to the entire population of Kuwait, was displaced—could have been underestimated, the government's emergency apparatus must have envisioned that a significant humanitarian crisis was looming.

Surely, the government must have made some plans to preempt the situation. And if it was unable to do that, it must analyse gaps in its own capacity and the factors, which prevented it from doing so. Although it is acknowledged that establishing relief camps in preparation would have signalled the imminent operation. Nevertheless, adequate measures could have been taken to transport people to safety. If that didn't happen, someone is responsible for the lack of timely decision-making or seeing through that decisions were implemented, if indeed they had been taken. This is precisely what effective governance would call for. In a way, the IDP crisis was a test of the country's institutional capacity to respond with relief measures in a crisis situation. If it didn't perform well in an anticipated situation, the likelihood that it will respond in the event of an unforeseen crisis would be very

slim. With the way things stand, this may not be the last crisis of its kind; we must therefore, review evidence of our intransigency in the given context, with concern.

Secondly, it is important to recall the investments that were made towards creating a National Disaster Management Framework in the aftermath of the October 2005 earthquake; the framework comprised of policy, legal and institutional arrangements and implementing strategies and programs. The National Disaster Management Ordinance, 2006, was promulgated and the National Disaster Management Commission was created to oversee its implementation. The statute mandated the creation of the National Disaster Management Authority. Subsequently, the Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMA) and the District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMA) were created. The National Disaster Management Framework used a holistic definition of "disaster"—one inclusive of man-made catastrophes and therefore is relevant to the situation with reference to the IDPs, even though the framework doesn't refer to war and its consequences.

Contrary to this, however, the role of this framework in the IDP

context was not clearly and fully evident and the creation of other parallel institutional entities raised many questions. For example, why was there the need to appoint a Provincial Relief Commissioner in the NWFP under the National Catastrophes (Prevention and Relief) Act of 1998, despite the existence of the PDMA? Could the latter not "ensure quick response related to matters," as was stated in justification of the creation of the former? Why could the PDMA not deliver on this premise? Which factors led to the creation of the Federal Special Supports Group? Was the performance of the post-earthquake institutions not optimal? Or was it a leadership issue or a question of mandate or capacity? Were there any political hurdles or resource management issues? Or is this yet another example of the country's tendency to create institutional arrangements and hierarchies without appropriate resources to ensure that they can properly function? Was there no evaluation of performance, no process examination, no efforts aimed at drawing on lessons, which could have provided insights into the limitations that "post-earthquake structures faced? If we continue to give performance evaluation—another important at-

tribute of governance—the level of importance we currently do, this pattern of institutions-failing-when-needed will be perpetuated. Nowhere is this more dangerous than in the area of emergency relief.

Thirdly, the IDP crisis should force us to rethink the approach to local governance. The government has postponed local government elections in a major policy decision on July 9. With this decision, the uncertainty which existed about the fate of this initiative has further exacerbated. However, this is not a chapter that can be closed that easily, given that "Promotion of local government institutions" is enshrined in the Principles of Policy of the Constitution and has been stated as a priority in political party manifestos of the ruling parties. Insights into the functioning of the local government system are therefore needed to craft a way forward. Within this context, the relief operations have brought many weaknesses to the fore.

It is increasingly apparent that there is some level of centralisation of decision-making in the "decentralised system" and that, "empowerment of local communities" as was originally envisaged, hasn't happened across the board. The

District Coordinating Officers are not always seamlessly linked with the sub-district officers, who are in a better position to gauge local requirements and identify those in need. Union councils, which are the lowest tier of local government, were in a better position than provincial governments to identify IDPs that had chosen to settle outside of camps since they are supposed to have better links with the families and schools hosting the IDPs. However, this tier was neglected in relief operations. Moreover, mechanisms were not in place to enable host communities to determine their own needs and priorities and citizens were not empowered to demand greater accountability.

In the fourth place, weaknesses in accountability mechanisms posed additional challenges to implementing relief operations. In an environment where collusion in procurements and pilfering from the distribution chain were endemic, the impact of relief operations, which inherently hinged on stable supply chains, became a challenge. In such an environment, any promising initiative can be undermined. The federal government is currently giving priority to IDPs to get assistance from the Bessir

Income Support Programme—a cash transfer program, which uses a smart card with biometric features embedded—for providing assistance to economically and socially vulnerable women. The use of technology has brought value to this process; however, patronage in selection and tampering with criteria can undermine its usefulness. In a nutshell, therefore, in the absence of effective frameworks of governance, not only can relief operation be jeopardised, the viability of long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and development efforts can also be threatened. Comprehensive governance is not just essential for development and restructuring, it is also critical for targeting assistance beyond humanitarian support in order to catalyse economic activity and support independent economic generation. The ability and capacity to govern also underpin the success of constitutional, legal and political reforms, which are urgently needed to address the underlying causes of conflict, and without which significant success cannot be achieved. If communities cannot be rehabilitated and resettled in their homes where rule of law is enforced, human rights are respected and economic activity renewed, the displaced cannot become constituents of peace.

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There is hardly any problem in the country, which cannot be tracked back to challenges and weaknesses at the level of governance—the crisis of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) is certainly no exception. Both the technocratic and political aspects of governance, inclusive of policy directions at various levels, to the dynamics and pitfalls of the public management process, have deeply impacted the IDP crisis—right from the manner in which it evolved to the style in which it was managed. Now that the IDPs are reported to be on their way back to being settled in their home communities, it is opportune to analyze impediments to the relief operations. A careful review will draw attention to most as being linked with limitations at the level of governance. These insights would be valuable not just in relation to disaster preparedness for the future, but would also be critical for rehabilitating the IDPs, and shifting the mode of assistance from humanitarian to development, which is the next imminent step.

First, a humanitarian crisis was clearly inevitable, ever since the theatre of war widened since the end of 2008; according to some experts, the writing was on the wall as early as 2007. The United Nations repeatedly issued warnings during this time span. Although the scale of the mass exodus—over two million people, equal to the entire population of Kuwait was displaced—could have been underestimated, the government's emergency apparatus must have envisioned that a significant humanitarian crisis was looming. Surely, the government must have made some plans, preempting the situation. And if it was unable to do that, it must analyze gaps in its own capacity and the factors, which prevented it from doing so. Although it is acknowledged that establishing relief camps in preparation would have signaled the imminent operation; notwithstanding, adequate measures could have been taken to provide transport to rescue people to safety. If that didn't happen optimally, someone is responsible for the lack of timely decision-making or seeing through that decisions were implemented, if indeed they had been taken. This is precisely what effective governance would call for. In a way, the IDP crisis was a test of the country's institutional capacity to respond with relief measures in a crisis situation. If it didn't perform well in an anticipated situation, the likelihood that it will respond in the event of an unforeseen crisis would be very slim. With the way things stand, this may not be the last crisis of its kind; we must therefore, review evidence of our intransigency in the given context, with concern.

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