

## Letter to the Editor

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# Catastrophic Floods in Pakistan: An Urgent Appeal for Action

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## Letter to the editor

Since mid-June, heavy precipitation has caused massive flooding in 116 districts of Pakistan, with Balochistan and Sindh being the most affected provinces. This has led to human and livestock casualties and widespread damage to private and public property and infrastructure. According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO), over 1290 lives have been lost, another 12500 people have been injured and almost 634000 people have been displaced.<sup>1</sup> Overall, 15% of the country's population is suffering in 1 form or the other, a number which amounts to approximately 33 million people and keeps on increasing.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, these floods, especially due to a lack of clean drinking water, put the country at risk of outbreaks such as diarrhea, dysentery, dengue fever, and malaria.<sup>2</sup> Insufficient maternal healthcare and lack of hygienic conditions for childbirth could further lead to an increase in mortality rate. Women's menstrual hygiene is also suffering due to a lack of sanitary pads. Since women are already a marginalized group in Pakistan, increased cases of violence against women and abuse have also been reported.<sup>3</sup>

Climate change has led to drastic changes in weather patterns. The continuous global rise of greenhouse gas emissions and the exacerbation of water-related variables such as rainfall and snowmelt, owing to global warming, has resulted in heat waves, water scarcity, and flooding. Pakistan, this year, received 500% to 700% more than its usual August rainfall.<sup>4</sup> Although developing countries in the global south like Pakistan are the least significant contributors to climate change, they face the brunt of its adverse effects.<sup>5</sup>

This humanitarian crisis is exacerbated by skyrocketing inflation rates due to continuing devaluation of the local currency. The annual inflation rate rose to 27.3% in August 2022, the highest in 47 years.<sup>6</sup> Surging prices for basic amenities such as food, water, and petrol are leading to increased unrest. The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt immeasurable damage to the country's economy in terms of financial uncertainty, unemployment, food insecurity, and loss of lives. Furthermore, political instability due to constant change of governments with varying agendas hampers social and economic progress and makes Pakistan poorly prepared for handling natural disasters. The most vulnerable are those families who are already living below the poverty line.

To mitigate the disaster, the government of Pakistan and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have set up medical camps and designed evacuation procedures. They have also tried to create awareness about the potential diseases flood victims might contract along with preventive strategies.<sup>2</sup> Internationally, WHO is providing emergency medicinal facilities to the affected areas, and diverting mobile medical camps to affected areas.

Considering the given situation, we appeal to the national and international community to draw their attention to the ongoing flooding in Pakistan and amplify already ongoing efforts. Healthcare professionals should volunteer to help individuals in flood-stricken areas. More financial aid, especially from high-income countries that are responsible for most of the excess global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions,<sup>5</sup> is needed urgently to ameliorate this humanitarian crisis. The government of Pakistan should assess its preparedness for future natural disasters and maintain infrastructure essential for their control such as dams. There is also a much-needed call to put in place greater measures for climate change globally so that such disasters can be prevented in the long term.

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