

Earthquake Reconstruction in Pakistan: Impact Case Study of the Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation

On 8 October 2005 a large earthquake shook the Hazara region of Pakistan. The earthquake destroyed many homes, livelihoods, and lives in a very poor part of this poor country.

Donors promised large amounts of aid to help Pakistan recover from the earthquake. The Government of Pakistan established the Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) to manage the funds and reconstruction.

The largest part of the money – R1.5 billion – was allocated to building houses for families whose homes had been destroyed. President Musharraf said that about 400,000 families would each receive a subsidy of US\$3,300 to help them build “earthquake-proof” houses.

ERRA presented four detailed “earthquake-resistant” designs for the houses. People from the affected region expressed concerns about the designs. Their concerns were at first not acted on but after further pressure ERRA accepted some designs that used more appropriate materials.

Less than two years after the earthquake, ERRA claimed that housing grants had been given to 600,000 people, 99 percent of those eligible. However, the evidence gathered by the Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation and its allies contradicted this claim.

The Foundation’s main ally was the People’s Coalition of Hazara, which brought together more than 300 People’s Organizations, lawyers, workers, and the media. The Foundation worked with these allies to conduct analysis, outreach, and advocacy, the Foundation also decided to become an executing agency for ERRA in one union council (the lowest level of local government). This work gave the Foundation a detailed understanding of ERRA’s approach.

The Foundation also asked experts to help it analyze data released by ERRA. The expert analysis showed that ERRA had achieved much less than claimed.

The Foundation trained 150 community members from the affected communities to help people in 57 villages identify their needs and priorities. It also conducted a small survey of recipients of the housing subsidy to compare the time and money costs of accessing the subsidy with the amount received. The survey showed that on average subsidy recipients’ costs were US\$299 more than the value of the subsidy. In addition, by 2008 inflation had halved the real value of the subsidy. The amount paid was also less than had originally been promised. The Foundation used the media – and especially television – to disseminate the findings of its research.

In October 2008, on the second anniversary of the earthquake, about 200 activists staged a sit-in in front of the Parliament and the President’s Office in Islamabad to publicize the problems in the reconstruction effort. TV coverage of the sit-in pressured ERRA officials to visit the protesters, who demanded to see ERRA’s top official.

ERRA’s top official agreed to meet with three Foundation officials. After the meeting, ERRA agreed 1) to pay all outstanding housing subsidy payments immediately; and 2) to speed up reconstruction of roads, health, education, and water supply facilities. Analysis of subsequent data from ERRA showed that reconstruction started happening more quickly after the protest and meeting.