

Gender Sensitivity and Floods in Pakistan; A Call to Action

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Pakistan is the one of the top ten countries affected by climate change. Floods started this year in Pakistan from June 2025. Since then, approximately two million people have been displaced and 1000 have died.¹ Gender is an important determinant in disaster planning and management. Unfortunately Pakistan ranked 148 according to the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2025, hitting rock bottom.² This is mainly due to socioeconomic and cultural disparities. Women are usually ignored or discriminated against when it comes to relief activities during disasters.³ Risk factors for gender discrimination among women include lack of education, limited access to health facilities, family system and economic dependency.²

In Pakistan the largest sector which provides employment to women (66%) is agriculture⁴ however their work is usually informal, unpaid and unrecognized. In our patriarchal society women remain at home and fulfill household responsibilities hence they receive no training to cope with natural disasters and are more likely to suffer in such situations. This in turn also makes them more prone to gender based violence, exploitation and child marriages as this issue surges globally during disasters.⁵ Small home based industries post floods should be established where women can get employed so that they become economically empowered.

Women suffer from home based ailments such as anaemia, severe malnutrition, skin and gastrointestinal diseases, dengue, malaria, pneumonia, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder post floods are also common.⁶ An important issue which women face is of menstrual

hygiene. Lack of awareness, inadequate supplies and cultural stigma are the factors which cause menstrual hygiene problems.⁷ Financial constraints post floods make it difficult for women to buy sanitary products due to which they start using washable cloth pads. As they may not have privacy or proper drying areas they use unclean cloths which cause urinary tract infections and bacterial vaginosis which puts them at risk of premature labour and pelvic inflammatory disease.⁷ Lack of segregated toilet facilities for women in flood affected areas is also a problem. During the 2022 floods 95% women reported using the same toilet as men because there was only latrine in the flood relief camp.⁴ In our society menstrual hygiene is a taboo topic and cannot be discussed openly. Majority of the relief workers are men so it is difficult for women to communicate with them. In addition they are also not properly trained. Efforts should be made to create a favorable environment for them to practice menstrual hygiene activities with dignity.

Pakistan's high maternal mortality rate is worsened by inadequate reproductive health services, especially in rural areas, where floods further strain an already fragile health system. During the 2022 floods, around 650,000 pregnant women were deprived of essential antenatal and delivery services.⁸ The displacement of Lady Health Workers disrupted community-level care, forcing women to travel to distant facilities despite limited transport and financial constraints. Many women delivering in relief camps faced complications due to unhygienic conditions, lack of skilled birth attendants and poor postnatal care, increasing risks for both mothers and newborns, including long-term developmental issues. Implementing the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) is crucial in emergencies, as it provides education, hygiene supplies and reproductive health services that reduce maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality.⁹ A multisectoral, gender-sensitive approach involving health, social and education sectors is essential. Strengthening structural and systemic capacities will enhance Pakistan's preparedness for future climate-related disasters.

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