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## **A forgotten crisis: the urgent humanitarian needs of disaster-stricken Chitral, Pakistan.**

*Centre for Disaster Risk and Climate*



Courtesy: Dawn News, 2015

Around the world, there are many disasters and related humanitarian crises that go unnoticed or are dealt with haphazardly, communities suffering from poor policies and programmes.

You have likely never heard of Chitral. Located in the remote Khyber Pakhtunkhwa mountain range in north-eastern Pakistan, this region of over 500,000 people has suffered horrendously from ongoing disasters.

Climate change has increased the rates of extreme flooding events, both through the warming of upper valley glaciers and a shift in monsoon rains. These floods followed by earthquake have caused unprecedented devastation. In the past decade, damaged roads, dilapidated bridges, contaminated water and malnutrition have led to the deaths of 300 people, with another 2,500 injured. A majority of these victims were children, women and the elderly.

The circumstances of their deaths are similar and equally traumatic.

A dilapidated bridge at Koshot, upper Chital fell down yesterday evening, when a passenger Mazda Jeep was crossing it. As a result five persons were died on the spot, while no detailed are available about the total passengers and the injured. Dead body of one passenger was rescued from the river, while search for the remaining identified victims is continuing. The people are protesting and agitating on the failure of government to start reconstruction of the critical infrastructure.



Young girls Bibi Sheria, Nasreen Bibi and Atia Bibi died falling from a deteriorating bridge and drowning in a river on their return home from school in the Salandur village. The bridge had been in disrepair for over ten months despite repeated requests from the community to have it strengthened.

A father and daughter from Kushum village also drowned while crossing a bridge that was damaged a year previously from flooding.

Just this April, prior to the most recent flash flood and landslides in April, a massive and unprecedented avalanche took the lives of ten students in Susum Karimabad.

Recent road accidents caused by erosion and landslides have further taken the lives of 40 people, with another 100 injured. These roads and bridges have only just been repaired.

The entire population has faced homelessness as a result of the most recent 2 disasters, including a major earthquake in October 2015. These events have wider implications for the sustainable development of the region. Education has been seriously impacted, with 28 government schools and 12 private schools destroyed.

In total, the economic costs from these disasters in the last year alone exceeded 11.519 billion PKR (\$1.05 billion USD). During one decade (2005-2016) 29 major disaster hit the district and the development investment by both national and international agencies have been lost, with extreme poverty has increased to over 60% from 2005 to 2015.

This level of devastation is attributed to a reactionary rather than precautionary disaster response. A lack of technology and infrastructure, such as early warning systems, has left many vulnerable to flooding. As global temperatures continue to rise, extended monsoon seasons and the increase of glacial lake overflows will be increase in number and severity.

**The region is in desperate need of humanitarian aid, particularly a coordinated disaster response effort and comprehensive and integrated disaster/climate risk preparedness. Despite this urgency, the response to date from government and aid agencies has been slow.**

The remoteness of the region, and the perceived security threats from the Taliban, has left many organizations wary of providing assistance. This has caused unnecessary suffering, particularly following last year's earthquake, where over 21,000 people were left without shelter, food or medication going into the brutal and extended winter. Thousands of people have been without electricity for over a year. Most temporary roads have since been washed away by further flooding, leaving entire villages with no access in or out of their communities.



Abandoned and afraid, villagers have been protesting against the lack of action given to their plight. The international community must come together to support the region.

We have the skills, knowledge and capacity to prevent the unnecessary death and destruction of innocent people blighted by the ills of a world addicted to fossil fuels.

For more information, please contact local NGO JAD Foundation at [harir@jadfoundation.org.pk](mailto:harir@jadfoundation.org.pk) or the Center of Excellence at "Centre for Disaster Risk and Climate (CDRC): [cdrcpk@gmail.com](mailto:cdrcpk@gmail.com). The national and international experts on climate change and disaster risk management will support district government and humanitarian organizations to design and implement effective recovery and monitoring and evaluation program for resilience building of the infrastructure and the community.