

Pakistan's Devastating Floods – Rebuilding lives and livelihoods

(Peshawar, Pakistan) Sher Hassan watched helplessly through the driving rain as flood water approached his house. Horrified and panicking, and with little time to spare, the 24-year-old managed to take his elderly mother, five sisters and one younger brother to higher ground. Within an hour his home in the village of Masma was submerged under two metres of water.

Three days later, as the waters receded, Mr Hassan realized with dismay that his home, like those of his neighbours, was completely destroyed. The family was devastated as they lost not only their house, but all their belongings including the dowries painstakingly saved for the five sisters.

During July and August – the annual monsoon season – Pakistan witnessed floods of biblical proportions resulting from record downpours in the northern mountains. Masma, in Pakistan's north western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, was among countless villages to bear the full force of the surging waters. At their peak, the floods reached all four provinces in Pakistan. More than 1,200 people died and 20 million were affected by the disaster.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates at least 1.8 million homes were damaged or destroyed and more than 5.3 million people lost their jobs or had their livelihoods threatened. According to the Asian Development Bank it could take two years for the agricultural cycle to return to normal.

Following the floods the ILO immediately mobilized its internal resources and started cash-for-work activities in Peshawar and Nowshera Districts to create 3,200 workdays of employment for flood-affected communities. The ILO's "Cash for Work" (CFW) programme specifically benefits women, men and disabled people by helping them restore critical infrastructure – rebuilding houses, repairing roads and workplaces.

"The Cash for Work project was started to provide quick employment opportunities in affected areas," said Mr Donglin Li, the Director of the ILO's Country Office for Pakistan. "This project provides not just income to those people affected, it also helps individuals rebuild their homes and restore their livelihoods". He added that during the initial relief period the project also organized young people, whose lives have been affected by the disaster, to clean and fumigate the temporary shelters set up for those who lost their homes.

Using ILO resources, flood water and rubble were cleared, houses renovated, and anti-mosquito pesticides sprayed throughout the worst affected communities. Later, activities were expanded to other districts, creating short-term employment for many more. As a result of this initial success the ILO received a grant of US\$200,000 from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to implement Cash-for-Work activities in other severely flood-affected areas, helping to create 43,200 days of work for women and men.

Sher Hassan's house is among those being restored.

The ILO is also initiating a programme to teach local young people some of the skills that will be most in demand during the forthcoming huge reconstruction process.

Training is planned or underway for 300 young men in Peshawar, Nowshera and Charsadda, in brick-laying, carpentry, welding and electrical repairs. In addition the Canadian Government is funding a project on Gender Equality for Decent Employment that will provide skills training for 1,300 women and girls, so increasing their chances of employment. At the same time the ILO Media Project (funded by the Norwegian Government) helped local Pakistani media organizations highlight ways that flooding might affect child labour as well as strategies to counter this.

The Cash for Work interventions are implemented through ILO constituents (government, workers' and employers' organizations and civil society groups

In addition to these large-scale-relief programmes, cash donations also continue to arrive from ILO staff, locally and globally. The ILO has used this money to buy some most-needed daily items, both food and non-food supplies. These have been distributed among the worst-affected communities in the Districts of Sukkar, Peshawar, Nowshera and Multan, in ceremonies attended by Mr Tariq Iqbal Puri, Federal Secretary of Labour & Manpower, Mr Haji Muhammad Javed, President of Employers' Federation of Pakistan (EFP), and Mr Khurshid Ahmad, General Secretary of Pakistan Workers' Federation (PWF).