

INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION CHALLENGES IN FLOOD DISASTER RESPONSE: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2022 FLOODS IN DERA ISMAIL KHAN, DISTRICT, KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

Ameer Taimur

*Lecturer in Political Science, Government College No.1 Dera Ismail Khan, Higher
Education, Archives and Libraries Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

Email: taimurameer@gmail.com

Ayesha Javed

MPhil Scholar in English

Email: aishajaved2111@gmail.com

Dr. Robina Khan

Assistant Professor

*Department of Political Science,
Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, KP Pakistan*

Email: dr.robina@gu.edu.pk

Abstract

The aim of this study is to discuss institutional coordination challenges in flood disaster response by focusing on the flood challenges that occurred in 2022 in Dera Ismail Khan, KP, Pakistan. There is insufficient coordination between the disaster management institutions, which makes the response less effective and makes people more vulnerable to disasters in the event of a large-scale crisis situation. A qualitative case study approach has adopted. The study is based on secondary data from government reports as well as the UN and humanitarian organizations. The data is analyzed by the thematic analysis to identify the gaps in coordination and institutional weaknesses. The findings reveal broken authority between federal, provincial, and district institutions. Communication between agencies was still weak and inconsistent. Local authorities had capacity and resource limitations. Duplication of relief efforts took place in some areas, and some were neglected. Community actors were not well used. These issues altogether lowered the efficiency and timeliness of the disaster response in D.I.Khan.

Introduction

Pakistan is very susceptible to climate-induced disasters and floods in particular. Extreme weather events have happened and increased in frequency and intensity for over two decades. The monsoon floods of 2022 were among the worst in the history of Pakistan. Heavy rainfall and glacial melt impacted more than 33 million people and destroyed infrastructure, agriculture, and livelihoods on a mass scale (Government of Pakistan, 2022; UNOCHA, 2023). Economic losses were estimated to be over USD 30 billion, discovering the extent of the crisis and the limitations of existing response systems (World Bank, 2022).

One of the badly suffered districts was Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Its geographical location near the Indus River and the Sulaiman Range puts it at a greater risk to suffer riverine and flash floods. During the 2022 floods, vast regions of the district were submerged, resulting in thousands of households being displaced along with damage to important infrastructure (Provincial Disaster Management Authority [PDMA] KP, 2022). The disaster revealed some serious weaknesses in preparedness and response at the district level. Pakistan has put a formal disaster

management structure in place in the form of the National Disaster Management Act, 2010. This framework comprises of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) and District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs). These institutions are responsible for the coordination of preparedness, response, and recovery of disasters (NDMA, 2023). In principle, this multi-tier system is aimed at ensuring effective coordination across the levels of government. In reality, however, coordination is a constant challenge, especially in the case of large-scale emergencies.

Institutional coordination is the key to a proper response to disasters. It ensures a timely need for decision making, efficient utilization of resources, no redundancies. Weak coordination may lead to delays, gaps in the provision of service delivery and uneven distribution of relief (Disasters Emergency Committee [DEC], 2024). Evidence from the 2022 floods indicates that the amount of coordination between federal, provincial and district institutions were spotty. Communication deficit and overlapping mandates resulted in the reduced efficiency in operations especially in peripheral districts such as D.I.Khan (UNOCHA, 2023). From the point of policy issues, these challenges make an important difference as regards the governance of disasters in Pakistan. Existing policies cover coordination at the central level, but there is often little autonomy and capacity at local institutions. This imbalance makes response efforts at the ground-level less than effective. Moreover, coordination with non-state actors such as NGOs and community organizations is weak even though they play an important role in humanitarian response (World Bank et al., 2022). Strengthening institutional linkages and decentralizing the power are therefore key policy priorities.

This paper investigates the difficulties in the institutional coordination process during the 2022 floods in D.I.Khan. It aims to examine the extent to which coordination gaps impacted disaster response as well as to find policy relevant solutions. The findings are intended for contributing towards improving disaster governance and increasing resilience in Pakistan's flood prone areas.

Methodology

In this paper, the researcher adopts a qualitative research approach. The emphasis is upon an understanding of institutional co-ordination in a real situation. The paper is interpretive in nature. It attempts to explain rather than measure coordination challenges statistically. The research design employed in this study is exploratory case study design. This is the correct design where there is not full understanding of the phenomenon. It makes it possible to study in detail a particular case. The selection of the case of Dera Ismail Khan is made because of its high vulnerability during the 2022 floods. According to Yin (2018), case studies are useful because they analyze contemporary events in a real-life scenario. Dera Ismail Khan is chosen as the area of study. The district experienced devastating floods during the rain season in 2022. It has a combination of riverine and flash flood risks. Its geographical location adds to the vulnerability. The case study approach provides for detailed analysis of coordination among institutions. It focuses on interaction between NDMA, PDMA, DDMA and other actors. It also takes into account the role played by NGOs and community organizations. It offers a holistic experience of disaster response.

The paper is based on secondary data sources. These include official reports, policy documents and humanitarian assessment. Key sources include Office of the National Drug Abatement Administration (NDMA) reports; Public Drug Abatement Administration (PDMA) situation reports and government documents. International organisation reports are also used. Secondary data is appropriate because of the magnitude of the disaster. It has comprehensive coverage of events. It also allows for reliability, with the sources being institutional and peer-reviewed. The

use of multiple sources enables triangle the data. This enhances findings validity. Based on Bowen (2009), document analysis is systematic method to review and evaluate document. The paper is carried out under thematic analysis. This method is used to locate patterns and themes in the data. It is appropriate for qualitative research. The analysis is done following a step-by-step process. The data is first reviewed and familiarized. Second, preliminary codes are produced. Third, codes are grouped into themes. These themes are reflective of the coordination challenges. Themes include the problems of institutional fragmentation, communication gaps and capacity constraints. The analysis connects with these themes using theoretical concepts. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis offers flexibility and clarity in the qualitative research. It allows to interpret in a systematic way complex data.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two theories, i.e., Institutional Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory. These theories explain the interactions between organizations during times of crisis. They also explain the reasons for the continued existence of coordination gaps despite formal structures. The framework provides a link between institutional arrangements and response outcomes. It is helpful for understanding coordination failures during the floods in 2022 in Dera Ismail Khan.

Institutional Theory is a theory of organizational behavior that explains the influence of formal rules, norms and structures on behavior in organizations. Institutions allow for stability and predictability. They define the roles and responsibilities. In the field of disaster management, institutions are involved i.e. NDMA, PDMA and DDMA. These bodies work under the legal frameworks and standard procedure. They are guided by policies and regulations in what they do. However, institutional arrangements do not always have effective outcomes. Organizations may abide by formal rules and fail to coordinate. Scott (2014) states that institutions function through regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive parts. These elements have implications for the way the actors behave in practice. In disaster situations, rigid structures can take time to make decisions. Bureaucratic procedures can be delaying response actions. This causes gaps between the policy and implementation.

Institutional Theory also identifies the issue of fragmentation. The mandates of various organizations may overlap. This creates confusion when there is an emergency situation. Meyer and Rowan (1977) note that formal structures often are there for legitimacy rather than efficiency. In Pakistan disaster management institutions are well defined on paper. However, coordination is still weak in practice. This is representing institutional misalignment. Another important notion is institutional capacity. Organizations require resources, skills, and authority in order to function properly. These capacities are often lacking at the district level institutions. This limits their ability to coordinate with the higher levels. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organizations are driven to become similar in time through institutional pressures. However, this does not ensure effectiveness. In disaster response the local context is important. Uniform structures may not be a fit for various conditions. Institutional Theory explains why coordination problems continue to exist. It illustrates that formal structures are not enough. In order to coordinate effectively, one needs flexibility and capacity. It also requires integration between various levels of organization. Collaborative Governance Theory emphasizes on joint decisions-making among different stakeholders. It highlights the cooperation of the public, private and civil society actors. Disasters call for such collaboration. No individual institution can cope with large scale crises on its own. Effective response is dependent on shared responsibility. Ansell and Gash (2008) define

collaborative governance as a process in which stakeholders participate in decision-making by consensus. This process needs trust, communication and mutual understanding. These are elements which tend to be weak in disaster situations. Time pressure and the unknown make coordination more difficult. This makes the collaboration less effective.

Collaboration is also dependent on institutional design. There should be clear rules and procedures. Leadership plays a key role. Facilitative leadership can enhance coordination. It is helpful to align different actors with common goals. Emerson *et al.*, (2012) believe the key needs in collaborative governance systems are principled engagement, motivation, and capacity together. These components are necessary for good coordination. Power imbalance is another challenge. Government agencies tend to dominate in decision making. Local actors and NGOs are weak in terms of their influence. This reduces inclusiveness. It affects even the quality of response. Community organizations know the area. Their exclusion has a weakening effect on targeting and delivery of aid. According to Agranoff and McGuire (2003), network management is an important need in collaborative environment. This is to provide for the coordination of various actors.

In the context of Pakistan, civil and military institutions need to work together is critical. However, coordination does not necessarily take an organized form. Differences in organizational culture cause barriers. NGOs and international agencies are also working with different priorities. This is in addition to the difficulty in coordinating. One way of understanding these dynamics is through the Collaborative Governance Theory. It brings out that coordination is not merely a matter of structure. It is also relational. Trust, communication and common goals are important. Without these elements, coordination is, however, still weak.

Application of Theoretical Framework to the Study

The combination of Institutional Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory provides a lens that is comprehensive. Structural constraints is explained by Institutional Theory. Collaborative Governance refers to interaction between actors. Together, they explain problems of co-ordination in disaster response. In Dera Ismail Khan, the institutional fragmentation is the expression of weakness of institutional structures. Mandates overlap and there is a lack of capacity to coordinate. At the same time, lack of effective collaboration makes things ineffective. Communication gap and lack of trust has an impact on joint action. Local actors are not fully integrated. This has the result of restricting response outcomes. The framework also identifies the policy implications. Strengthening institutions is not enough. There is a need to enhance the collaboration mechanisms. Decentralization can be used to strengthen local capacity. Inclusive governance can help in better coordination. These insights provide the basis for the analysis and recommendations of the study.

Disaster Governance and Coordination

Disaster governance can be defined as the institutional arrangements, policies and processes in which societies manage risks and respond to disasters. Coordination is a key component to disaster governance. It allows the different actors to cooperate in emergencies. Effective coordination enhances the allocation of resources and eliminates duplication. Poor coordination causes delays and inefficiency. The literature emphasizes the fact that disasters need to be governed at multiple levels and involve state and non-state actors. These include government agencies, military institutions, NGOs and international organizations. It is through their interaction that response systems are effective.

Scholars go to suggest that coordination failures are more often institutional rather than operational. Kapucu (2006) points out that the main challenge to inter-organizational coordination is the presence of bureaucratic fragmentation and lack of communication channels. Similarly,

Ansell and Gash (2008) stress upon the importance of collaborative governance in crisis situations. They say trust, common understanding and joint decision-making are essential to coordination. In the case of disaster, these elements are frequently weak. This results in fragmented responses. Comfort (2007) goes on further to explain that information flow is critical during disasters. Delays in dissemination of information make response less effective. In large-scale disasters, coordination is more complex because of the number of actors in the disaster.

Empirical research has found that there is a greater challenge to coordination in developing countries. Institutional capacity is, in many cases, limited. There are legal frameworks and they are weakly implemented. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2015), good disaster governance is decentralized and empowering local communities. However, centralization still remains dominant in many countries. This means there are gaps between policy and practice. The literature thus identifies the issue of coordination as being both a structural and governance issue.

Institutional Framework of Disaster Management in Pakistan

Pakistan has made a formal disaster management framework in the wake of an earthquake in 2005. The National Disaster Management Act, 2010 provided for multi-tier system. This includes National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Provincial Disaster Management Authorities (PDMAs) and District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs). These institutions are mandated with disaster preparedness, response and recovery. The framework is aligned to global strategies for disaster risk reduction such as the Sendai Framework. Despite this structure, there remain implementation problems. NDMA is responsible for providing policy guidance at the federal level. PDMAs are coordinated at the province level. DDMAs are in charge of local implementation. However, communication between these levels is often poor. As per the Government of Pakistan (2022), the 2022 floods revealed gaps in the institutional preparedness and coordination. Resources and technical capacity are lacking in the institutions at the district level. This is limiting their ability to respond effectively.

Studies show that disaster management in Pakistan is still reactive in nature instead of being proactive. Mustafa (2003) argues that institutional arrangements are more concerned with response and less with risk reduction. This leaves vulnerabilities in large-scale disasters. Furthermore, the World Bank et al. (2022) points out that overlapping mandates between institutions in the event of emergency lead to confusion. Coordination mechanisms exist on paper but do not function fully well. This leads to a delay in decision making and response. Civil-military coordination is another important feature of Pakistan's disaster management system. The military is important in logistics and rescue efforts. However, coordination between civilian and military institutions is not always organized. According to NDMA (2023), attempts have been made to improve coordination but there are still some gaps at the operational level. These issues are pointing to the need for institutional reforms and improved integration of stakeholders.

Coordination Challenges in Humanitarian Response

Humanitarian response involves a number of actors with different mandates and capacities. Coordination between these actors is the key to effective service delivery. However, from the literature it appears that coordination is often weak in practice. One major challenge is a lack of a unified command structure. Different organizations are independent of one another. This results in duplication of efforts. Some areas are receiving too much aid while others are being neglected. The cluster approach introduced by the United Nations, is an attempt to better coordinate humanitarian response. It specifies certain sectors as lead agencies. These include health, shelter and food security. While this approach has made progress in coordination across the world, there are still challenges. OCHA (2023) argues that there is a lot of limit of

sharing information between clusters. This has a bearing on overall response efficiency. Coordination meetings take place but there are still some implementation gaps.

Another challenge is organization competition. NGOs and international agencies are prone to fight for their share of funds and publicity. This reduces collaboration. Donor driven priorities also have an effect on response strategies. These may not be in line with the local needs. The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC, 2024) brings to the attention of the fact that the 2022 Pakistan floods were unevenly coordinated. There were areas that had high levels of coordination. Others had serious gaps. Remote districts suffered particularly due to this. Local actors are usually not involved in coordination mechanisms. Community organizations have local knowledge, access. However, they are not normally made part of formal systems. This makes the response efforts less effective. According to IOM (2023) the community engagement helps to do better aid targeting and delivery. Lack of such engagement results in inefficiencies. The literature therefore emphasizes on the need for inclusive and decentralized coordination mechanisms.

Gaps in Existing Literature

The extant literature provides some useful insights into disaster governance and coordination. However, several gaps remain. The vast majority of studies only focus on the national or provincial scale. Limited analysis is done by districts. Local situations are often neglected. This leaves a void in the knowledge about coordination difficulties at ground level. Empirical research on particular districts of the floods in 2022 is inadequate. Most reports have aggregated data. They do fail to record localised dynamics. There is little integration between the theory frameworks and empirical findings. Studies are often discussion of the problems of coordination without a relation to institutional or governance theories. This has a limiting effect on the depth of analysis. Policy-oriented research is not enough. While the challenges are identified, practical policy solutions are not developed in full. This limits the applicability of research results. There is lack of focus on areas such as Dera Ismail Khan. These areas have special geographical and socio-economic condition. They are at risks from both riverine and flash floods. Yet, they are poorly studied. This work overcomes these shortfalls through a focused case study. It relates theory to empirical analysis. It also provides policy relevant recommendations on how to better coordinate institutions.

Findings and Discussion

The discussion is the connection between empirical evidence and the theoretical insights. It is concerned with issues of co-ordination mechanisms, institutional gaps and policy implications. Pakistan has a formal system of disaster management. It operates using NDMA, PDMA and DDMA. These institutions are expected to coordinate response activities. There are standard operating procedures. Coordination meetings are also included in the system. However, implementation is not yet even. Coordination mechanisms were put in place in the 2022 floods. NDMA has given overall guidance. PDMA coordinated at the provincial stage. DDMA was at the local response level. Despite this structure, coordination did not work completely. There are reports of delays in decision-making and response deployment (Government of Pakistan, 2022). Institutional roles were defined but the clarity of operations was less. This sends a message of a gap between formal design and actual practice.

One of the major findings is institutional fragmentation. Multiple agencies were involved in response activities. These included civil administration, military units, NGOs and international organizations. Their roles were often overlapped. This caused confusion in operations. Overlapping mandates are plagued by inefficient. Some tasks were duplicated. Others were neglected. In the case of the floods, lack of clear role division affected coordination, according to World Bank et al. (2022). This issue is explained by the Institutional Theory. There were formal structures but these did not provide coherence. Organizations acted within their own mandate. This restricted collective action. Fragmentation had diminished accountability, too.

Effective coordination requires information to be shared on time. This was a significant challenge during the floods. Communication among the federal, provincial and district levels was poor. Information flow was sluggish and sketchy. This had an impact on needs assessments and allocation of resources. Field reports have been received that data on affected populations was not updated on a regular basis (UNOCHA,

2023). This left gaps in the planning. There were some areas that received delayed assistance. Others were overlooked. Communication between government agencies and NGOs was restricted, too. Coordination meetings were conducted but information exchange was poor. Collaborative Governance Theory emphasizes the role of communication. Its absence decreases the effectiveness of coordination.

Capacity at the district level was low. DDMA in Dera Ismail Khan was suffering from lack of resources and technical expertise. It relied upon provincial and federal support. This causes a delay in response actions. Local institutions were not able to function independently. Infrastructure and logistics were also weak. Limited equipment and transport impacted on rescue operations. According to NDMA (2023), capacity gaps are existing at the local level and are a big challenge in Pakistan. Institutional Theory attributes this problem to capacity constraints. Formal authority without resources cannot ensure effective performance. This results in dependency and delays

The military played an important role in flood response. It provided support in logistics, rescue and relief. It is the capacity which led to the increase in the operational efficiency. There was not always good coordination with civilian institutions. However, differences in the organization structure lead to difficulties. Military operations are centralized and fast. Civilian institutions are bureaucratic in their process. This led to gaps in coordination. According to DEC (2024), it was due to lack of integrated planning which made a difference in joint operations. Despite these difficulties the co-operation between the civil and military authorities was, nevertheless, necessary. It filled in critical capacity holes.

NGOs and humanitarian organizations were present in the floods. They provided relief, shelters and medical assistance. International agencies were also behind response efforts. However, they were unevenly coordinated with government institutions. A number of NGOs operated independently. This resulted in duplication in some areas. Other areas continued to be underserved. Community organizations were not completely integrated. Their local knowledge went to waste. According to IOM (2023) it is the improvement of response effectiveness due to community engagement. Its absence decreases the accuracy of targeting. Collaborative Governance Theory has an emphasis on inclusiveness. Effective coordination involves participation of all stakeholders. The exclusion of local actors is a weakening of response systems.

The results point to major policy issues. There is the need for more clarity on institutional roles. Overlapping mandates need to be reduced. The communication systems need to be beefed up. Real-time sharing of data is needed for coordination. There is the need to improve local capacity. District authorities are in need of resources and training. Decentralization can make for better response efficiency. The coordination of civil-military should be institutionalized. Joint frameworks can help to reduce operational gaps. NGOs and community actors must be introduced into formal systems. This will make them more inclusive and effective. These findings work both with the Institutional and the Collaborative Governance theories. Structural reforms are in order. At the same time, relational aspects such as trust, and communication need to be improved. Without these changes, coordination challenges will remain going forward in disasters.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that there is a framework of disaster management system in Pakistan. However, in practice, its effectiveness is still limited. Coordination mechanisms are in existence but are not fully operational. Institutional fragmentation (decreased the efficiency of response). Overlapping mandates produced confusion among the agencies. Communication gaps postponed

decision-making and allocation of resources. Capacity at the district level was weak. This made more dependence on the higher authorities. The paper also identifies loopholes in collaborative processes. Stakeholders did not work in an integrated frame. There was important, although not fully integrated, civil-military coordination. NGOs and community actors were not adequately involved. This diminished the impact of relief distribution. These findings support the Institutional Theory and the Collaborative Governance Theory. Formal structures are not sufficient. Effective coordination requires high levels of relationships, trust, and communication. From a policy point of view, the study suggests that the governance of disaster in Pakistan is in need of reform. Centralized systems have limited capacity for local response. Lack of integration between stakeholders dilutes results. It is very important to strengthen coordination mechanism. The case of Dera Ismail Khan is symptomatic of wider problems in disaster response in the country as a whole. Solve these problems is needed to increase the resilience and preparedness for future disasters.

References

- Agranoff, R., & McGuire, M. (2003). *Collaborative public management: New strategies for local governments*. Georgetown University Press.
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543–571.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Comfort, L. K. (2007). Crisis management in hindsight: Cognition, communication, coordination, and control. *Public Administration Review*, 67(s1), 189–197.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160.
- Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). (2024). *Real-time response review: Pakistan floods appeal*.
- Emerson, K., Nabatchi, T., & Balogh, S. (2012). An integrative framework for collaborative governance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22(1), 1–29.
- Government of Pakistan. (2022). *Pakistan floods 2022: Post-disaster needs assessment*. Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2023). *Pakistan floods response: One year on*.
- Kapucu, N. (2006). Interagency communication networks during emergencies. *American Review of Public Administration*, 36(2), 207–225.
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340–363.
- Mustafa, D. (2003). Reinforcing vulnerability? Disaster relief, recovery, and response to the 2001 flood in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. *Environmental Hazards*, 5(3–4), 71–82.
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). (2023). *Annual report 2022–23*. Government of Pakistan.
- Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). *Flood situation reports: Dera Ismail Khan*.

- Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2015). *Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction 2015–2030*.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). (2023). *Pakistan: 2022 monsoon floods situation report*.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). (2023). *Pakistan: 2022 monsoon floods situation report*.
- World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union, & United Nations. (2022). *Pakistan floods 2022: Post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA)*.
- World Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union, & United Nations. (2022). *Pakistan floods 2022: Post-disaster needs assessment (PDNA)*.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.