

Consultative Meeting for Communicating the Disaster Risk of Atta Abad Lake, Hunza



Jointly organized by **Radio Pakistan & Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI)**

20th May, 2010

Board Room, Radio Pakistan, G – 5 Islamabad

Background:

The land-slide hitting the Hunza River since January this year, over the months, has converted into a major risk of disaster not only for the neighbouring villages but also for the inhabitants downstream.

The latest figures issued by NDMA reveal following details:

Height of Water surface 332.00 ft (from River bed)

Length of Reservoir 16 Kms

Rise in last 24 hours 0.425 Ms

Seepage of water 136 Cusecs

Free Board 6.32 M

The severity of the situation has further exacerbated due to two important factors - blocking of the water spillway by sliding of a glacier (as has been reported by the media) and the start of rainy season.

This situation requires a coordinated effort by government and non government institutions for a well planned and coordinated response. The timely communication of useful and authentic information has an extremely important place at all stages of disaster management; from pre-disaster preparedness to post disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Within this context Radio Pakistan and Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI), Islamabad jointly organized a consultative meeting. The objectives of the meeting include:

1. To discuss the current situation at Atta Abad/Hunza River and practical recommendations for an effective response.
2. To assist Radio Pakistan with useful suggestions for it's recently launched Emergency Radio Service on Hunza River Situation.

Briefing Session:

The meeting was chaired by Amjad Bhatti, Research and Policy Coordinator, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Mr. Shakoor sindhu from RDPI commenced the meeting with recitation of Quran and asked the participants for their introduction. He thanked the whole participants and invited Chairperson Mr. Amjad Bhatti for his views. He said that in every disaster situation official and people perspective work in isolation. The sketch of disaster is under estimated while it is over estimated by the society. There is a need to bridge between government and people perspective and Radio Pakistan can play a vital role in this regard. Talking about the communication he said that

communication and information must be culturally relevant. He said that the purpose of the risk communication is to inform, educate and empower the affected communities. He said that an interface between the affected population and those involved in the hazard response at Hunza is the need of the hour. He said that although we cannot build concrete bridges but we can surely build information bridges.

Brig. Sajid Naeem, Member Operations, NDMA giving a presentation on the Hunza lake situation said that experts from NESPAK and WAPDA, by using the computer models, have projected that there is no threat to Tarebella Dam even if the artificial dam created by the landslide bursts in a worst case scenario. He said that enough relief supplies are available and there is no need to call for donors help at this stage. He also said that explained that the initially the width of landslide was 300 – 350m while 20 people lost their lives, 54 houses destroyed and 173 families were displaced due to the landslide. He further explained that for searching missing persons and rescuing the affecties of the landslide a quick response was taken. He illustrated that relief was provided to the evacuees in the form of tents, blankets, warm jackets, shawls, plastic mats, medicines and food items while the relief response for the upper Hunza was helicopter sorties and boat operation. There were 6958 locals were rescued through helicopter and 16940 by boat operation respectively. In total 91.5 tons daily use commodities have been imported from china that consist of fertilizers, rice, sugar, cooking oil, vegetable, and candles. About the response of disaster he further articulated that a team of experts including Army Engineers, WAPDA and NESPAK visited the landslide area for further operation and it was suggested to make spillways and FWO was selected to be responsible for this operation. The evacuation plan was done with the help of PRCP, Focus Humanitarian and Federal Emergency Relief Cell. The bridging responsibilities were specified to Army Engineers. While concluding his discussion he described the current specifications of lake that max height of lake is 342Ft and length of reservoir is 18.5Kms.

Kareem Johar – a local resident – of Hunza valley said that the pace of operations to tackle the situation is very slow which is creating panic among the locals. He said that affected population were not timely and properly warned about the potential damages. Giving an example he said that the Ganesh Bridge which is second longest on KKH is submerged in the lake water while people had been asking the officials to inform them about the damages the lake water could cause to the bridges. He said due to the closure of Teh Bridge the local economy of the area is badly affected.

Mubashar Majoka, Controller News, Radio Pakistan informed the participants that Radio Pakistan has established a Hunza control room for its 24/7 emergency radio service. He said that in the next

couple of days Radio Pakistan's Hunza station would start working. He requested the participants that they should help Radio Pakistan with useful information and in designing of radio programs.

Closing the briefing session Mr. Amjad Bhatti said that communication and dissemination of information is the major problem in disaster area. He said that technical communication and public education is important.

Questions – Answers Session:

After the presentations from NDMA and local resident of Hunza, Mr. Shakoor Sindhu opened the forum for questions answers session.

Question from Fauzia (Controller News, ATV):

There is a big chaos that Hunza Lake will damage the Tarbela Dam, is it true?

Reply from Brig. Sajid:

It is continuous statements given by NDMA that Hunza Lake will not damage the Tarbela but it is need of hour to bring the experts in front of people so that they explained with more precisions.

Remarks by Mr. Raza kazmi:

The chaos of giant destruction is because of untrained TV reporters. Reporters must be bound to deliver the accurate and authentic information.

Remarks by Mr. Sarwar Bari:

Today's scenario is different from March and people don't believe on dependent media because independent media is raising the voice of common man and it wouldn't be advisable to ignore.

Question from Zahra – tul – Fatima (Aasaan Foundation):

How many actions have been taken after the beginning of disaster and is there any communication policy?

Reply from Brig. Sajid:

Communication policies are present but implementations of policies are by other organizations that are working with disaster affected people and NDMA is working as coordinating body. After the beginning of disaster NESPAK took a study of the disaster area and planning has been started on the basis of that study. NESPAK done computer modelling, they took all the measurements at different

points so in case of water breaching out it will take 6-7 hours to reach the population. They have done the comparison between 67's flood and recent disaster and they have given details for preplanning.

Suggestions:

Abdul Shakoor Sindhu opened the forum for suggestions from participants that can help Radio Pakistan to play role in communication in disaster areas of Hunza valley.

- Mr. Amjad Bhatti suggested that government policies are disconnected with the people and NDMA can organize a daily briefing with Radio Pakistan about the ongoing issues in Hunza. It will bridge the gap between government and common man perspective and exchange of perspective would be dynamic.
- Zahra – tul – Fatima from Aasaan foundation suggested that women and child specific issues must be given attention and Radio Pakistan can organize programs on these issues by inviting experts from different sectors.
- Gulnaz from Sungi Development Foundation offered the support of her organization for documenting the local knowledge of affected population to tackle with emergency situations.
- Mr. Hasnain Kazmi from RDPI proposed that information regarding the disaster area must be completely deliver to people because the targeted area is not only Hunza but it is till Thatha as people living along coastal areas have developed fear of displacement due to breaching out of Hunza Lake. Radio Pakistan can launch programs for delivering the complete information regarding the target of Hunza water.
- Mr. Shakoor Sindhu suggested that a documentary can be arranged in different language to reduce the misinterpretation of Hunza Disaster.
- Mr. Raza Kazmi from Radio Pakistan recommended that experts from NESPAK and WAPDA can be requested to share their experiences at Radio programs.
- Mr. Amjad Bhatti put forward that NDMA can provide a list of experts, study and bibliography and Ministry of Information can provide to all media people for the background of situation and knowledge must be pooled through Radio Pakistan.
- Iftikhar Husain from Concern Worldwide proposed that focal persons from Gilgit Baltistan can be invited for the programs on Radio Pakistan.
- Mr. Shakoor Sindhu volunteered for organizing meetings for Radio Pakistan.
- Mr. Liaqat Ali from Doaba Foundation suggested that rapid need assessment of all things as well as radio sets is necessary before launching any kind of programs.

- Mr. Masub Sham from PID recommended that all the journalists who, wrote columns on Hunza Lake must be call in to share their source of information and their experiences if they visited the disaster area.

Press coverage:

http://epaper.dawn.com/ArticleText.aspx?article=22_05_2010_153_004