



The international community responded to the massive earthquake that struck Northwest Pakistan in 2005 with a flood of aid to help rebuild the devastated region. Unfortunately, three years after the quake little progress had been made to restore housing and critical public infrastructure. The Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation mobilized the people in the Northwest to hold the government to account.

Photo courtesy of the Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation.

The following presents a case study of the impact that civil society budget analysis and advocacy can have on government budget policies, processes, and outcomes, particularly as these relate to efforts to eliminate poverty and improve governance. This is a summary of a more in-depth study prepared by Dr. Pervez Tahir as part of the Learning Program of the IBP's Partnership Initiative. The PI Learning Program seeks to assess and document the impact of civil society engagement in public budgeting.

EARTHQUAKE RECONSTRUCTION IN PAKISTAN: THE CASE OF THE OMAR ASGHAR KHAN DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION'S CAMPAIGN

On 8 October 2005 a devastating earthquake shook the Hazara region and the Azad Kashmir province in Northwest Pakistan, destroying huge numbers of shelters, livelihoods, and lives in an already marginalized region of this poor country. The magnitude of the destruction led to a flood of donor money for reconstruction and rehabilitation in the affected areas. But three years later the slow pace of reconstruction meant that many people were still without adequate housing or critical public infrastructure, despite government pronouncements to the contrary.

It was in this context that a large coalition of CSOs and citizens embarked on a campaign to jump start Pakistan's efforts to rebuild. The campaign was led by the Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation, a civil society organization (CSO) that engages people in the Northwest region in efforts to secure their human and livelihood rights. The

outcome was a rapid increase in the rate of construction in the housing, health, water supply, and sanitation sectors.

THE ISSUES: HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

Managing a disaster of the scale of the 2005 earthquake was beyond the capacity of Pakistan, a resource-starved and badly governed country. Within a month of the disaster, a conference of donors resulted in pledges of US\$6.2 billion. With these commitments, the Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) — the public agency set up to oversee the reconstruction effort — announced in March 2006 a plan to use US\$3.5 billion to complete 80 percent of the rebuilding within three years. The ERRA committed to completing the entire reconstruction and rehabilitation effort within five years.

Among other things, the reconstruction plan targeted education and health infrastructure needs and earmarked the largest allocation, US\$1.5 billion, to build some 600,000 houses. Then President Musharraf presented to donors a

broad plan to give a housing subsidy of US\$3,300 to approximately 400,000 people in the region to help them build “earthquake-proof” houses. The ERRA also launched a public relations campaign to convince donors that an open and accountable system of housing subsidy payments had been put in place, which included an accessible process for redressing grievances.

Even before announcing its overall plan, the ERRA presented four “earthquake-resistant” designs with detailed building instructions. People from the affected area raised concerns about the designs but were disregarded. After continued pressure the ERRA began allowing people in high altitudes to build with wood instead of the heavy material initially recommended, which would have been impossible to transport to the area. The ERRA also accepted local designs using timber and reinforced concrete frames.

Within two years of the earthquake, the ERRA declared “victory” — the chairperson claiming that housing grants had been given to 600,000 people, 99 percent of those eligible. According to the chair, these people were now living a much better life than before the disaster. The ERRA claimed that in only two years it had delivered in full its three-year plan. Reality told a different story.

THE FOUNDATION'S CAMPAIGN

The Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation launched a campaign in 2007 to pressure the ERRA to address critical issues identified by their research. The power of the campaign came from this research, as well as its massive grassroots base — the People's Coalition of Hazara, which brought together over 300 People's Organizations, lawyers, workers, and the media. The campaign's three primary goals were to:

1. realign rehabilitation assistance with people's priorities,
2. adjust federal and provincial budgets so that resources are distributed equitably, and
3. promote voting for candidates based on merit rather than clan loyalty in the impending elections.

In addition to the analysis, outreach, and advocacy described below, the Foundation made a strategic decision to become an executing agency for the ERRA in one union council — the lowest tier of local government — which gave it insights into the

implementation policies of the ERRA, greatly benefitting decisions about the campaign's strategies and tactics.

Research and Analysis

To gather evidence, the Foundation enlisted technical experts to analyze data released by the ERRA. The analysis sought to test the claims made by the ERRA by identifying and pointing out the internal inconsistencies in the data.

The Foundation also engaged 150 activists from the quake-affected communities to help people in 57 villages in the Hazara region to identify their needs and priorities and to check the ERRA's claims against reality on the



OAKDF'S CAMPAIGN TACTICS

Coalition Building

- Foundation's primary partners were the 300 or so People's Organizations (POs) it had helped to form
- The People's Coalition of Hazara – The Foundation and POs joined with workers, the lawyers campaign, journalists, and other citizens groups

Research and Analysis

- Technical experts analyzed the ERRA's claims using the agency's data
- Activists conducted participatory research in the affected villages to assess conditions and identify villagers' priorities
- The campaign conducted cases studies and surveys

Outreach and Advocacy

- Sit-in of around 200 activists in Islamabad in front of the Parliament and Presidential Offices
- Disseminated evidence and demands to the public by protesting, carrying placards, and giving out handbills
- Media outreach that included op-ed pieces, interviews, press releases, and direct action (i.e., the sit-in)

Engagement

- Joined the ERRA as an executing agency
- Directly engaged with government officials to present evidence and make demands

ground and the agency's priorities against their own. The resulting testimonies were analyzed and supplemented with case studies and sample surveys.

The ERRA's data showed that by 31 July 2008 only 175 schools had been rebuilt against the target of 5,344, and only 38 health units were completed against 307 targeted.

The research also allowed the campaign to estimate the net benefit of the housing subsidy to recipients by adjusting the amount received for the transactions costs of securing it and the value lost due to the increased price of building materials over time. The campaign developed demands based on data that showed an average net loss of Rs.23,671 (2008 US\$299) in out-of-pocket expenses related to accessing the subsidy and the loss of income while pursuing it. Moreover, the value of the subsidy promised in 2006 had nearly halved in 2008 due to inflation.

The actual housing subsidy was also less than the amount that had been promised: Rs.175,000 (2005 US\$2,960) for completely destroyed houses and Rs.75,000 (2005 US\$1,269) for partially destroyed.

There also were a number of homeowners whose damages were dismissed as "Negligible Structural Damage" and, therefore, received nothing. The earlier promises to build "earthquake-proof" housing also turned out to be "earthquake-resistant" housing.

The results from the action research and participatory analysis provided solid evidence for the campaign to use with its target audiences: ERRA policymakers and the general public.

Outreach and Advocacy

One way to move a campaign forward in Pakistan, where the government resists input from civil society and the public, is to use the media effectively,



OUTCOMES RELATED TO THE CAMPAIGN

Pace of Work Overall Accelerated After October 2008

- Prior to June 2008, 9 percent of total projects were completed, 12 percent were under construction, and 52 percent were in the tendering/planning stage.
- By August 2009, 28.5 percent were completed, 31.6 were under construction, and 39.9 were in tendering/planning.

Rural Housing

- Third tranche of Rs. 25,000: 72.3 percent of those eligible had received subsidies by June 2008; it rose to 98.6 percent by August 2009.
- Fourth tranche of Rs. 50,000: 39.1 percent of those eligible had received subsidies by June 2008; it rose to 81.2 percent by August 2009.

Health

- Prior to June 2008, only 13 of 307 schemes had been completed, compared to 66 by August 2009.

Water and Sanitation

- Prior to June 2008, only 23.1 percent of schemes had been completed, compared to 59.2 percent by August 2009.

Education

- Number of schemes completed rose from 86 by June 2008 to 447 by August 2009 — however, this is still only 7.7 percent of the total schemes planned.

especially Pakistan's fiercely independent electronic media. Learning from the successes of the lawyers' movement, the Foundation adopted a strategy of engaging the media. The media portrayed the protest camp (described below) as the first interaction of ordinary people with the state. Earlier, it had broadcast stories of how many times people had to travel to Peshawar, Abbottabad, and even Islamabad to claim their compensation.

The campaign reached a peak on 6 October 2008, when approximately 200 activists staged a sit-in in Islamabad in front of the Parliament and the President's Office to draw attention to the problems plaguing the reconstruction effort. The protesters

— chanting slogans; waving placards demanding schools, health facilities, and housing reconstruction; and distributing handbills — were determined to stay until October 8, the third anniversary of the earthquake. Live broadcasts of the protests on major TV networks pressured ERRA officials to visit the camp, where they were faced with demands to meet with the head of the agency.

Resolution

Under pressure from the widespread coverage of the protests, which had raised questions from donors, the ERRA head, a lieutenant general in the army, agreed to meet with three Foundation members who represented the protesters. They used the evidence they

had generated to refute the agency's claims of progress and presented a charter of demands, of which the ERRA head agreed to accept three of the campaign's choosing. The campaign chose and the ERRA agreed to the following: 1) the ERRA must make the balance of all housing subsidy payments immediately; 2) the reconstruction of roads, health, education, and water supply facilities must be expedited; and 3) facilities also must be provided to politically unstable areas.

WERE THE CHANGES DUE TO THE CAMPAIGN?

The reconstruction data show a rapid increase in activity in the sectors of housing compensation, health, water supply, and sanitation. These are the very sectors that the campaign's three demands to the ERRA addressed. The data examined are from the June 2008-August 2009 period, which includes data from the period since October 2008. Though it is not possible to disaggregate the data specific to the October 2008-August 2009 period, there was a broad positive trend of improvement in the rate of reconstruction that corresponded with the timing of the Foundation's campaign.

The trend in these specific sectors has been recognized by ERRA officials, but they are quick to claim progress overall and not just in the areas the negotiated demands addressed. It should be noted

that the increase in activity also has occurred despite a growing budgetary constraint due to the flow of aid having slowed.

The increase in the pace of building in the face of budget cuts is some indication of the effect of the pressure the campaign put on the government. Another contributing factor, which may also have been influenced by the campaign, was the creation of a central structure that was established to oversee the reconstruction effort, and is able to spend more effectively than the prior decentralized structure.

The Foundation itself claims a direct relationship between the increased pace of work and its campaign. This claim is supported by the fact that the ERRA's deputy chairperson invited the Foundation to a meeting on 15 September 2009 to present updated data on the areas covered by the campaign's three demands. The deputy chairperson also accepted the Foundation's invitation to attend a People's Assembly on 8 October 2009, the fourth anniversary of the earthquake. Such overtures are an indicator of the importance the ERRA placed on the work done by the Foundation.

As part of the background research for this case study, some of the protestors were gathered in a focus group to reflect on what enabled the change. They stated that mobilization, with the

Foundation acting as the catalyst, produced the basic ingredients — a solid knowledge base and social capital. It also gave villagers the opening to overcome the debilitating clan culture to agree on and campaign for an actionable set of demands. According to one focus group participant, "A state of helplessness and hopelessness made the people understand the significance of organization. The Foundation gave them something to strive for."

CONCLUSION

Governments do not easily concede to demands made by ordinary citizens. This is often true even when those demands reflect a better understanding of the situation and challenge the strength of official assumptions. In light of this expected resistance, the ERRA's agreeing to the campaign's demands and the increase in the pace of reconstruction since October 2008 indicate that the campaign was, indeed, a significant factor in moving the process forward.

In a word, the Foundation facilitated, and the media communicated the voice of the people. Armed with a strong, broad-based coalition and evidence from sound analysis and research, the campaign challenged the claims and policies of the state and, in the process, made a difference.

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