

Pakistan Trainees Report on Flood Disaster

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Blog set up to host articles written by young people from some of worst-affected regions of Pakistan.

Eyewitness accounts of the devastating floods which have swept through parts of Pakistan are being published by Open Minds trainees on a specially-created [blog](#).

Although most of IWPR's project areas have become cut off by the huge floods which hit Pakistan several weeks ago, some trainees have managed to send IWPR stories of both their experiences and how they have contributed towards relief efforts.

IWPR and its local partner Peace Education and Development Foundation, PEAD, launched the blog to host these stories. In the future, the blog will become the home for all reporting from IWPR's network of young journalists, undergoing training as part of IWPR's Open Minds Pakistan project.

IWPR's Islamabad-based team is also working with our project media partners to publish trainees' flood stories in the national media.

Sajjad Mubarak, a 16-year-old trainee from a rural area of north-western Pakistan, was among the first to have his story published on the blog.

Sajjad's native Charsada district is close to the Kabul river and was one of the first areas to be exposed to the floods. His story provided an insight into the impact of the crisis in this impoverished region, where many villages have been completely destroyed.

"Mothers have lost their little kids; brothers are searching for sisters and many others look for their loved ones in the flood waters flowing through their villages," he wrote.

In these villages, Sajjad reported, "homes have been completely washed away ... [and] many of the affected families have no option other than to live under the open sky in a very miserable condition".

The recent floods have been estimated to be the most devastating in the history of Pakistan. More than 2,000 people have died so far nationwide, and millions have been displaced.

Sajjad also reported that women and children are being hit worst by the flood in his area. "The death toll of children is the highest of all because of their vulnerability; most of those who died did so due to the unavailability of food and water," he wrote.

According to Sajjad, however, the Pakistani government has not done enough to cope with the effects of the flood.

"People firmly believe that [tiny amounts of aid] will reach the deserving and the rest will go into the pockets of politicians and the administration," he reported.

Two other Open Minds trainees living in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan also reported on the ongoing chaos and misery and the authorities' inadequate response.

Nisar Ali and Dauad Ahmad described the onset of flooding on July 28 in their home district of Prang Ghar in Mohmand, part of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA.

"The administration was not able to concentrate on rescuing the people affected," they wrote. "They have no modern equipment or techniques, no helicopters or proper boats. They have no military forces available. If they had enough army troops, boats and skilled rescuers there would have been no destruction of human lives."

The government should prepare an emergency response to such disasters which would save lives in the future, the trainee journalists concluded.

As well as writing a report, Sajjad decided to take further action to help flood victims, so together with a friend he collected hundreds of clothes and shoes and donated them to relief camps set up around the area.

Sajjad attributes this effort to the training he received from IWPR's Open Minds project and from discussion

groups “where we came to know about human rights and were told about social activities and helping people in trouble”.

The Open Minds project teaches students in their own schools about journalism and social activism, and also gathers together students from schools across each of its operational regions in Open Forum discussions sessions.

“When we tell people about our association with IWPR, they are very happy and impressed,” Sajjad told IWPR. “This is helping us to generate positive thinking about NGOs in Pashtun society.”

Many in this conservative region take a negative view of international NGOs, but Open Minds is helping to change this, he said, adding that he was very pleased with the opportunities the project has given him to change this mindset and help publicise the flood relief.

“This is a great achievement,” he said.

The Open Minds blog can be found at <http://pead-openminds.blogspot.com/>

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Location: Pakistan

Topic: Schools

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/pakistan-trainees-report-flood-disaster>