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Exploring the role of the mosque in dealing with disasters: 
A case study of the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the 
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Development Studies at Massey University

New Zealand

Abdur Rehman Cheema

2012
Dedication

To the loving memory of my father, may Allah shower countless blessings on his soul. Amin
Abstract

This dissertation explored the role of the mosque, a community-based religious institution, in disaster management by documenting and analysing its role in rural settings in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan. The role of community-based religious institutions has been largely undocumented, underestimated and overshadowed in the development and disaster studies literature. This research was informed by post-development theory. The study addressed two research questions. The first examined the role of the mosque in relation to key actors from the state, civil society and private sector during response, relief, recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake. The second explored the potential roles of the mosque in similar situations in the future. Using qualitative research methods and a case study design (in three villages of Mansehra district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), this dissertation analyses primary data collected throughout five months of fieldwork (in 2009 and 2010).

Socially and culturally, the mosque served as an entry door, facilitating access to communities for private, government, local, national and international organisations during the earthquake response, relief, recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation phases. The mosque building was destroyed but the institution of the mosque remained intact. It continued to function, as men in the surviving community gathered to pray on the rubble or in the open, and served as the collection point of the community. Women did not benefit from the mosque, as a physical place, because of the social, cultural and religious limitations in communities. However, the mosque’s institutional support was critical for the engagement of women in other culturally and socially appropriate development and disaster risk reduction activities.

Religious interpretations of the earthquake lead communities to turn to God, increasing meditation and prayer, fostering psychosocial and spiritual healing and creating resilience. Conversely, however, religious interpretations of the earthquake also promoted fatalistic tendencies, which negatively affected communities’ attentiveness to some of the disaster risk reduction measures advised by the government. Economically, the affected communities exchanged livelihood-related information and coordinated their income generating activities using the institution of the mosque. In the political context, the study questions simplistic pejorative labels attached to the mosque such as it being a centre for preaching radical views in society and argues that such labels belittle and fail to recognise the distinct position of the mosque as a central community institution.

This research suggests that state, civil society and private sector actors and organisations involved in disaster management need to understand the complex relationships involving people and their religious institutions, and their impact on the social environment. This study calls for engagement: acknowledging and valuing the role of community-based religious institutions including churches, mosques, synagogues and temples in building a synergy between secular and religious efforts for disaster risk reduction. This dissertation contributes to
the scarce body of knowledge about the multi-faceted and potential role of a community-based religious institution, the mosque, which could be used to strengthen disaster management to save human lives and reduce the extent of losses from natural hazards in the future.
Acknowledgement

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# Table of Contents

**DEDICATION**.................................................................................................................. I

**ABSTRACT**....................................................................................................................... II

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**...................................................................................................... IV

**TABLE OF CONTENTS** ...................................................................................................... VI

**LIST OF FIGURES** ............................................................................................................. X

**LIST OF TABLES** ............................................................................................................... XI

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**................................................................ IX

**CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION** ...................................................................................... 1

1.1 **BACKGROUND** .......................................................................................................... 1

1.2 **DISASTER MANAGEMENT CYCLE IN PAKISTAN** ....................................................... 4

1.3 **DEVELOPMENT, NATURAL HAZARDS AND PAKISTAN** ........................................... 6

1.4 **THE RESEARCH PROJECT: EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DEVELOPMENT, DISASTER AND COMMUNITY-BASED RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS** ............................................................. 8

1.5 **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS** .................................................................... 9

1.6 **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY** .................................................................................... 10

1.7 **ORGANISATION OF THE DISSERTATION** .................................................................... 11

**CHAPTER TWO DISASTERS AND DEVELOPMENT** ......................................................... 13

2.1 **INTRODUCTION** ......................................................................................................... 13

2.2 **APPROACHES TO DISASTERS** .................................................................................... 13

  2.2.1 **Religious views and approaches** ............................................................................ 14

  2.2.2 **Technocratic views and technical approaches** ....................................................... 16

  2.2.3 **Holistic views and integrated approaches** ............................................................ 18

2.3 **APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT** .............................................................................. 24

2.4 **THE PLACE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE STUDY OF DISASTERS AND DEVELOPMENT** ........................................................................................................................................................................... 28

2.5 **POST-DEVELOPMENT AND DISASTER STUDIES** ..................................................... 30

2.6 **EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES OF POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE WITHIN POST-DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES** ............................................................................................................................................................................................ 32

2.7 **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION** .................................................................................. 35

**CHAPTER THREE DISASTERS AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS** .................................... 38

3.1 **INTRODUCTION** ......................................................................................................... 38

3.2 **THE IMPORTANT BUT UNDERREPRESENTED ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN DEALING WITH DISASTERS** ............................................................................................................................................................................................ 38

3.3 **INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS** ............................................................................................................................................................................................ 39
4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ........................................................................................................ 84
4.7 DATA ANALYSIS ........................................................................................................................ 85
  4.7.1 Reflecting on the data ........................................................................................................... 86
4.8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ............................................................................................... 87

CHAPTER FIVE DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN .................................................. 89

5.1 INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 89
5.2 APPROACHES TO DISASTERS SINCE THE 1935quetta earthquake ................................ 89
5.3 PRE-2005 DISASTER-MANAGEMENT POLICIES .................................................................. 91
5.4 PRE-2005 DISASTER-MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE ............................................................. 93
  5.4.1 Government ......................................................................................................................... 94
  5.4.2 Private sector ........................................................................................................................ 99
  5.4.3 Civil Society .......................................................................................................................... 100
5.5 PRE-2005 EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM .................................................................... 101
5.6 INFLUENCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORDINANCE 2001 ............................................... 102
5.7 KEY CHALLENGES REGARDING THE PRE-2005 ARRANGEMENTS .................................. 103
5.8 INTERIM DISASTER-MANAGEMENT POLICY AND STRUCTURE ........................................ 105
  5.8.1 Federal Relief Commission ................................................................................................. 105
  5.8.2 Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority .................................................. 106
5.9 POST-2005 DISASTER-MANAGEMENT POLICY ................................................................. 106
5.10 POST-2005 DISASTER-MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE .......................................................... 107
  5.10.1 Government: federal level .................................................................................................... 107
  5.10.2 Government: provincial level ............................................................................................. 108
  5.10.3 Government: district, tehsil and union council levels ........................................................ 108
5.11 POST-2005 EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM ................................................................. 110
5.12 ROLE OF OTHER GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN THE POST-2005 DISASTER-MANAGEMENT
POLICY AND STRUCTURE ........................................................................................................ 111
5.13 KEY CHALLENGES REGARDING THE POST-2005 ARRANGEMENTS .............................. 114
  5.13.1 Private sector ....................................................................................................................... 119
  5.13.2 Civil society ........................................................................................................................ 120
5.14 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ............................................................................................. 123

CHAPTER SIX THE ROLE OF THE MOSQUE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2005
EARTHQUAKE AND ITS FUTURE POTENTIAL ................................................................... 126

6.1 INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 126
6.2 THE ROLES OF MOSQUES IN THE DISASTER-MANAGEMENT CYCLE ............................. 126
  6.2.1 Mosques’ roles during response and relief ......................................................................... 127
  6.2.2 Mosques’ roles during recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation .................................. 131
  6.2.3 Mosques’ roles in influencing disaster preparedness through affecting disaster-risk
 perception ................................................................................................................................. 137
6.3 MOSQUES AND WOMEN IN THE POST-2005 EARTHQUAKE PERIOD .......................... 141
6.4 INTERACTION OF THE MOSQUE WITH OTHER KEY ACTORS .............................................. 145
  6.4.1 Government .................................................................................................................. 145
  6.4.2 Private sector ............................................................................................................... 149
6.5 OVERALL ROLE OF THE MOSQUE IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT ........................................... 151
6.6 POTENTIAL ROLES OF THE MOSQUE.................................................................................. 154
  6.6.1 Potential social and economic roles of the mosque ......................................................... 154
  6.6.2 Potential for educational, health support, political empowerment and advocacy roles .......................................................................................................................... 155
  6.6.3 Potential role of religious institutions helping their followers and followers of other religions .......................................................................................................................... 156
6.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .......................................................................................... 158

CHAPTER SEVEN OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MOSQUE AS A COMMUNITY-BASED RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION .................................................. 162

7.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 162
7.2 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS .......... 162
  7.2.1 The centrality of religious institutions to communities .................................................. 162
  7.2.2 The need for partnership between outside organisations and community-based religious institutions in the face of disasters ........................................................................... 163
  7.2.3 Religious institutions and gender issues ........................................................................ 165
  7.2.4 Moving beyond political sensitivities associated with the mosque .................................. 166
  7.2.5 The influence of religiosity on disaster risk perceptions .................................................. 167
  7.2.6 The role of the mosque in supporting livelihood recovery ............................................... 169
  7.2.7 Summary .................................................................................................................... 169
7.3 IMPROVING DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN .......................................................... 170
  7.3.1 Organisational structure of disaster management .......................................................... 170
  7.3.2 How disaster management structures could work more effectively with the mosque .......................................................................................................................... 171
7.4 DEVELOPMENT, DISASTERS AND THE PLACE OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS: EMPLOYING POST-DEVELOPMENT THEORY ......................................................................................... 172
7.5 LOOKING AHEAD: FUTURE RESEARCH ............................................................................ 175
7.6 FINAL STATEMENT ............................................................................................................. 176

APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL ............................................................................................. 178
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS ........................................ 179
APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET FOR EXPERTS ............................................................... 180
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT ......................................................................................... 181
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES ..................................................................................... 182
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................................ 184
List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Map of the location of the earthquake and the case study district, Mansehra, Pakistan ................................................................. 2
Figure 1-2: Disaster management cycle in Pakistan’s context as used in this dissertation. 6
Figure 2-1: Pressure and Release Model ................................................................................. 23
Figure 3-1: The mosque and the UNISDR connect and convince functions ..................... 60
Figure 3-2: The mosque as a community-based role-player in disaster management ....... 62
Figure 4-1: Typical terrain of the remote case study villages in district Mansehra ............ 68
Figure 4-2: The dilapidated bridge in Banda-1, the only access to the village ................. 72
Figure 4-3: Foodstuffs being carried on the backs of horses in Manshera district ........ 72
Figure 4-4: A focus group discussion in Banda-3 in the mosque ........................................ 83
Figure 4-5: A focus group discussion in Banda-1 in the open ............................................. 83
Figure 5-1: Top 10 disasters in Pakistan by number of people affected until March 2011. 90
Figure 5-2: Post-2005 earthquake disaster-management institutional structure of Pakistan ...................................................................................... 108
Figure 6-1: Actual roles of mosques in different phases of the disaster management cycle ................................................................................... 127
List of Tables

Table 1-1: Disaster cycle as suggested by the Disaster Management Ordinance in Pakistan ................................................................. 5

Table 2-1: Views and approaches to deal with disasters ................................................................. 14

Table 2-2: Explanation of the terms vulnerability, capacity and resilience ......................................... 19

Table 2-3: ‘Dangerous regions’ in Western discourse ............................................................................. 31

Table 3-1: Roles of community-based religious institutions in disasters .............................................. 51

Table 3-2: Influence of the local mosque on water conservation .............................................................. 57

Table 4-1: Comparison of social indicators of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa earthquake affected districts ................................................................................................................................. 68

Table 4-2: Community fieldwork in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ........................................................... 70

Table 4-3: Weak communication links of Banda-1 with the rest of the country ................................... 74

Table 4-4: Disaster management actors included in the fieldwork research in 2009 and 2010 .................................................................................. 79

Table 5-1: Disaster management policies and related major events up until the 2005 earthquake .................................................................................................................................................. 92

Table 5-2: Disaster related federal ministries and provincial departments in the Pre-2005 earthquake disaster-management structure ................................................................. 95

Table 5-3: Pre-2005 earthquake role of federal ministries and provincial departments in the disaster-management cycle ......................................................................................................................... 98

Table 5-4: Role of federal ministries and departments in the disaster-management cycle as per the NDRMF .......................................................................................................................... 112

Table 5-5: Role of provincial departments in the disaster management cycle as per the NDRMF .................................................................................................................................................... 114

Table 5-6: Parallel and horizontal overlapping roles of government organisations in the NDRMF at federal, provincial and district levels ............................................................................. 117

Table 6-1: Comparison of the roles of mosques and imams in disaster response, relief, recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation in their communities .............................................. 152

Table 6-2: Potential roles of the mosque as explored during the fieldwork and suggested by the Council of Islamic Ideology ........................................................................................................ 157
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AJK</td>
<td>Azad Jammu and Kashmir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBDRM</td>
<td>Community Based Disaster Risk Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCO</td>
<td>District Coordination Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDMA</td>
<td>District Disaster Management Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRM</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERC</td>
<td>Emergency Relief Cell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERRA</td>
<td>Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRC</td>
<td>Federal Relief Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFRC</td>
<td>International Federation of the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISDR</td>
<td>International Strategy for Disaster Reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>km</td>
<td>Kilometre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCMC</td>
<td>National Crisis Management Cell</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDMA</td>
<td>National Disaster Management Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDMF</td>
<td>National Disaster Management Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDRMF</td>
<td>National Disaster Risk Management Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBUH</td>
<td>Peace be upon him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDMA</td>
<td>Provincial Disaster Management Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERRA</td>
<td>Provincial Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERRA</td>
<td>State Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNISDR</td>
<td>United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction</td>
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