

without increasing the overall debt burden. Pakistan rolled over \$4 billion of bilateral deposits in the first half of FY26 alone.

guns jammed. His aircraft could no longer deliver fire effectively. Yet he did not simply turn away from the battle. He remained in the combat zone, continuing to

men who kept the machines -- and therefore the missions -- alive. They were the invisible architecture of every aerial victory. And then there were those who

fire across the September sky. The aircraft are gone, the battles are over, the men have passed into history but the sky still remembers.

From Relief to Resilience: KP's New DRR Policy



The province extends from the high mountains of the Hindu Kush to river valleys and plains, with different districts facing different combinations of hazards

For Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, disasters are no longer distant or occasional events. Floods, flash floods, cloudbursts, landslides, earthquakes, heatwaves, wildfires, droughts and Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) are increasingly becoming part of the province's risk landscape. Climate change is further altering the frequency, intensity and behaviour of many of these hazards making disaster risk more complex and unpredictable.

The question therefore is not longer simply how quickly the government can respond after a disaster. The more important question is how effectively the risk can be reduced before a hazard turns into a catastrophe.

The newly launched Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2026 seeks to answer this question. Developed by the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the support of the German Government and GIZ Pakistan, the policy marks a significant milestone in the province's disaster governance. It is Pakistan's first-ever sub-national Disaster Risk Reduction Policy making Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the pioneer province in establishing a dedicated provincial policy framework for disaster risk reduction.

The importance of the policy lies not merely in the fact that it is a new government document, but in the change in thinking that it represents. For decades, disaster management has largely been associated with rescue operations, emergency camps, relief goods, compensation and rehabilitation after a calamity. These functions will always remain necessary. But experience has demonstrated that responding after a disaster has occurred cannot by itself protect lives, livelihoods and public infrastructure.

The new policy seeks to move Khyber Pakhtunkhwa towards a more proactive culture of preparedness, where disaster risk is identified and reduced before lives are put at risk. It provides a framework for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, early warning, risk-informed development, community resilience, response, recovery and disaster risk financing. The policy therefore attempts to address the entire disaster-management cycle rather than focusing only on the emergency phase.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa geographical diversity makes such an approach particularly important. The province extends from the high mountains of the Hindu Kush to river valleys and plains, with different dis-

tricts facing different combinations of hazards. Earthquakes threaten large parts of the province, while floods and flash floods repeatedly affect communities along rivers and mountain streams. Landslides can destroy roads and isolate settlements, while heatwaves, drought, wildfires and GLOFs are creating additional challenges.

The policy also recognises that risks are increasingly interconnected. A single extreme weather event can trigger multiple hazards. Intense rainfall can produce flash floods and landslides simultaneously while damage to roads and bridges can isolate entire communities and delay emergency response. Such cascading risks require institutions to work together rather than dealing with each hazard in isolation.

The devastating earthquake of 2005 and major floods, including those of 2010, 2022 and 2025, provide painful reminders of the province's vulnerability. They also demonstrate why disaster management cannot remain limited to what happens after a disaster. Poverty, unplanned settlements, population growth, construction in vulnerable areas and weak resilience can turn a natural hazard into a major humanitarian crisis. Women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups can face even greater difficulties in receiving warnings, evacuating safely and recovering afterwards.

One of the most important concepts introduced by the policy is Risk-Informed Development. Disaster risk must be considered before a road is constructed, before a school or hospital is built, before a settlement expands and before public money is invested in infrastructure. Development that ignores existing hazards can create new vulnerabilities and increase future losses.

A road repeatedly damaged by floods should not simply be reconstructed in the same vulnerable manner. A settlement located in a flood-prone area should not continue expanding without considering the risk. Similarly, schools, hospitals and other critical public buildings in earthquake-prone areas must incorporate appropriate safety standards from the planning stage. The policy's "Build Better Before" approach is therefore particularly significant because it seeks to make resilience part of development rather than an afterthought.

Another major area of focus is Early Warning. The policy proposes strengthening a Multi-Hazard and Integrated Early Warning System through technologies such as telemetry, automated weather stations

and data-driven monitoring. But technology alone cannot save lives. A warning is useful only when it reaches the people at risk in a timely manner and provides sufficient time to act.

A river sensor detecting a dangerous rise in water level is only the beginning. The information must move rapidly from monitoring systems to emergency operations centres, district administrations and ultimately to communities. This is the essence of last-mile connectivity: the warning must reach the family that needs to evacuate not merely the office that receives the alert.

The policy also recognises communities as an essential part of the disaster management system. During the first minutes and hours of an emergency professional responders cannot immediately reach every village. Local residents are often the first to rescue neighbours, provide first aid, identify missing persons and guide vulnerable families to safety.

Through Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) and Community Emergency Response Teams, the policy seeks to strengthen this first line of response. Trained men and women, equipped with appropriate emergency kits and prepared through regular drills and simulations, can make communities more capable of responding before outside assistance arrives.

But community participation must be practical rather than symbolic. Volunteers need training, equipment, clear responsibilities and regular exercises. A community preparedness programme will have little value if people know the terminology of disaster risk reduction but do not know what to do when an actual emergency occurs.

The policy also gives attention to one of the less visible consequences of disasters: poverty. A financially secure household may be able to recover from damage to its home, livestock or business, but for a poor family a single flood, landslide or drought can destroy its entire livelihood.

This is why the policy links disaster risk reduction with Adaptive Social Protection. By connecting disaster-risk information with social protection systems, government can move towards providing timely assistance to vulnerable households before and after major shocks. The approach recognises that disaster management is not only about saving lives during an emergency; it is also about preventing vulnerable families from falling deeper into poverty.

The policy is built around 13 strategic pillars, covering institutional coordination, climate change adaptation, scientific risk assessment, professional capacity, community-based disaster management, response capacity, risk informed development, essential services, early warning, quality recovery, adaptive social protection, complex emergencies and disaster risk financing.

This broad framework reflects a fundamental reality: disaster risk is not the responsibility of PDMA alone. It is a whole-of-government and whole-of-society responsibility. How cities are planned, where roads are constructed, how forests and water resources are managed, how schools are built, how communities are trained and how vulnerable households are supported can all influence the level of disaster risk.

Science and technology are also central to the new approach. The policy proposes institutionalising Multi-Hazard Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (MHVRA) and establishing a Provincial Disaster Risk Information System. Geographic Information Systems, satellite imagery and other technological tools can help government understand where hazards exist, who is exposed and which infrastructure requires greater protection. The principle is straightforward: public investment should be guided by risk information rather than guesswork.

Disaster financing is another important component. Major disasters place enormous financial pressure on governments, particularly when resources have to be mobilised after an emergency has already occurred. The policy proposes mechanisms including contingency financing, forecast-based financing, insurance and climate financing, while also exploring public-private partnerships and Takaful-based approaches for protecting family assets, livestock and crops.

Institutional coordination will ultimately determine whether these ideas become reality. The policy envisages implementation through PDMA and District Disaster Management Units, while proposing a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Implementation and Oversight Committee under the Additional Chief Secretary. Seven thematic working groups are also proposed to provide technical support.

This district-level approach is important because disaster risk is highly local. The flood risks of Dera Ismail Khan are different from those of Swat, the earthquake

vulnerability of Mardan differs from the drought and heat-related risks of southern districts. Effective disaster risk reduction therefore requires local risk assessments, local preparedness and local ownership within a broader provincial framework.

Yet the most difficult phase of the policy begins after its launch.

A policy launch is not an achievement by itself. The real achievement will come when the policy changes decisions and behaviour on the ground. Does a vulnerable village receive a warning in time? Does a new road account for flood and landslide risk? Does a school become safer against earthquakes? Does a poor family receive assistance before a disaster destroys its livelihood? Does every district have trained community responders? Does development spending actually reflect risk assessments?

These are the questions that will determine whether the DRR Policy 2026 becomes a living governance instrument or remains another document on a shelf.

The policy's greatest strength is perhaps that it recognises disaster risk as a development issue rather than merely an emergency issue. Its success will require sustained political commitment, inter-departmental coordination, adequate financing, technical capacity and meaningful community participation.

PDMA KP deserves recognition for pioneering this effort and for bringing Pakistan's first sub-national DRR policy to the provincial level. But the policy's success cannot rest on PDMA alone. Provincial departments, district administrations, local governments, emergency services, communities, academia, civil society, development partners and the private sector must all become part of its implementation.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cannot stop earthquakes from occurring. It cannot prevent every cloudburst, flood, landslide or glacier from creating a hazard. Nor can it control the global climate crisis. What it can do is reduce vulnerability, improve preparedness, strengthen early warning, make development safer and ensure that vulnerable communities have the capacity to withstand shocks.

That is ultimately what the DRR Policy 2026 is about. It is a shift from relief to resilience, from reaction to prevention, and from managing disasters after they happen to managing risk before they strike.

For a province that has repeatedly paid a heavy price for disasters, this shift is no longer an option. It is a necessity.