

Chapter 5



Issue Profiling

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Over a Cup of Tea

(The Chief Knowledge Management Cell and the Media Chief interviewed the Chairman ERRA, Mr Altaf M Saleem. Here is an account of the brief encounter).



Mr Altaf M Saleem welcomed us at his office in his usual genial manner. As he speaks, a graceful executive appears to melt into a soft spoken gentleman. His kind yet intelligent eyes seem to reassure a visitor that ERRA is headed by a compassionate person suited to the job of rebuilding lives of millions of people affected by one of world's worst disasters. As we proceeded with the interview, we realized that the Chairman is well aware and appreciative of the work his team is doing. He also appears aware of challenges, but wants his team to focus their energies on the process of reconstruction. He wants his team to celebrate their successes while being critical and honest in their efforts to improve. Following are the excerpt from the interview:

Q.1: The Rural Housing Programme of ERRA has been a great success, lauded by ADB and other International Organisations. Still, the public opinion appears critical. What are the reasons for this in your opinion?

Answer: It is easy to say that people are unhappy but it is important to consider whom you have spoken to i.e. people living in old houses or new. People have better houses now; before the EQ, 83% of the houses were 'katcha' and now 95% of these are seismic-resistant 'pakka' houses. Moreover, easy availability of water has been ensured. Previously, people had to walk for 4-5 kilometers to get water. Keeping in view the ground reality, it is difficult to digest (the view) that people are not happy.

Q.2: There are frequent complaints from the affectees that a large number of people are awaiting housing subsidy and the officials of the Line Departments fleece these people. What has ERRA done about this?

Answer: The compensation was based on the level of destruction, i.e. completely destroyed houses and partially destroyed houses. Some people were trying to get higher amounts of compensation than they deserved. As far as taking bribes is concerned, we have tried to monitor the disbursement process at every step. Effective grievance redressal system is in place to reduce the possibility of corruption.

Q.3. People of Balakot and Muzaffarabad are apprehensive about their displacement. What is ERRA's Communication Strategy? How will the inhabitants be convinced that the new technology and the migration to seismically safer areas will benefit them? Has ERRA devised an effective motivational strategy?

Answer: Displacement is necessary because the area has been declared unsafe for construction. The city is being relocated in consultation with the stakeholders. Economic benefits like developed plots in the new city, prefabricated homes for the interim period and compensation for rebuilding are being offered. Adequate compensation for commercial plots has also been made available. Perceptions of the masses will change once plots are handed over.

Q.4: National and international organisations are concerned about the fate of the facilities after they withdraw from the area as they feel that the line departments and Government agencies are not well equipped to handle them responsibly. How can ERRA help in this context?

Answer: ERRA is cognizant of the fact and has been consistently flagging the issue with the Provincial and State Governments. ERRA is extending full support to the respective Governments. Since ERRA's mandate is limited to reconstruction and rehabilitation, eventually the respective Governments need to take the responsibility of ensuring sustainability and maintenance of the new improved public facilities.

Q.5: We keep on hearing about mid-course corrections. What are these and how do they help in the smooth and effective running of ERRA? Also are we incorporating the lessons being learnt in the new programmes that are launched? Does ERRA have an effective method of dissemination of information?

Answer: There is no benchmark for the kind of work that ERRA is doing and it is the first of its kind. We have an

open mind to understand the ground realities which may be different from thought processes. Whenever mid course correction is required, we embrace it because our primary aim is the welfare of the people of the affected areas.

Q.6: What do you foresee as the legacy of ERRA?

Answer: People all over the world appreciate what Pakistan has done in response to the earthquake and it is an excellent example of post disaster rehabilitation with limited resources. Even the developed countries, with all their resources, could not do as Pakistan did in managing a disaster. This knowledge is a 'great asset' and everyone should have an access to it as it can be used for better response to future disasters in Pakistan and across the globe. This knowledge can be an ideal module for addressing future disasters.

Q.7: What is your opinion about media strategy of ERRA?

Answer: Since disaster management requires public awareness along with projecting the efforts of our organisation, our media strategy caters for information dissemination amongst masses, specifically, people of affected areas and partner organisations. We try to adopt a pro-active approach to project Pakistan's efforts in reconstruction and rehabilitation at National and International Level. ERRA has a well-developed communication strategy for smooth information flow and website is being redesigned to cater for information needs of media and general population.

