

Pakistan : the Labour Relief Committee (LRC) in its 4th month of activities

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The Labour Relief Committee (LRC) is now in its fourth month of activities and we would like to thank you for supporting it and give you some updates on the work we are doing.

We have committees of volunteers in four provinces, Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab who are organizing all the relief work. Their teams of volunteers are composed in majority of people who are affected by the floods as well as members of social organizations and trade unionists. I am writing to you from Lahore, Punjab (an area that is not affected by the floods) where we have a committee focusing on fundraising and coordinating the distribution of the funds to the different committees.

At the beginning of the floods, we mostly focused our efforts on distributing food, medicine and clothes. Now that the water level has gone down in most of the areas, we shifted our effort towards rehabilitation and reconstruction. Our first step was to conduct surveys in each of the areas, interviewing each family to assess the damages caused to them so that we could identify smaller areas where to work and deliver the aid in a systematic way to those who need it the most. In some area, we are still working on the surveys, in some others areas we have already completed it and it has guided us for the choice of a particular project to conduct. We have now decided to focus our efforts and resources to support larger projects that would be sustainable and income generating. We are all very enthusiastic about the implementation of one of two agro-based cooperatives projects in order to help landless peasants whom the flood has rendered even more vulnerable that they were before.

The great work the volunteers of LRC have been doing since the beginning of this catastrophe lead some international organizations to collaborate with us which gave rise to more ambitious projects in some areas.

Here are some updates from the areas where we are working:

Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa:

*** *Community Kitchen***

In Nowshera district, LRC is working in collaboration with Terre Des Hommes Germany on two community kitchens. They are delivering two meals everyday to more than 750 people. Two cooks have been hired for this project and a team of 10 volunteers is working with them. Food is being cooked according to nutritional requirements for women and children.

The place that has been rented for the community kitchen is also used to conduct weekly study circles on special issues relating to working class politics.

A playing area for children has also been arranged.

*** *Tool kits distributions***

In Nowshera district again, LRC and Swiss Labour Assistance are distributing tool kits to those whose house have been completely destroyed in order to help them cleaning the rubbles and rebuild a shelter. Previous to that, Swiss Labour Assistance had provided damage assessments forms and asked the volunteers to conduct a survey of the area in order to determine who the most deserved families based on their earning power and the damage to their houses. It is the same form that has then be modified by us and provided to the committees of the other areas so that they could operate in the same way.

*** *School/skills center/ cooperative***

Some inhabitants of Pir Sabaq village in Nowshera district are willing to give some of their land in order for LRC to construct a school or a community center. Given our financial limitations we thought of a community center instead of a school that could include a skill center for informal education for children who cannot go to school. The idea was also discussed of renting some land around the land that would be provided to us and use it to create a cooperative of landless farmers. This project might be implemented if we manage to receive long term financial support and the amount of the support we will get will determine the conformation of its implementation.

*** *Agriculture in Swat***

The LRC visited Swat district recently. In an area that suffered the attacks of the talibans militants and the military operations, the floods has now destroyed most of the land. LRC volunteers have visited the area and had thought of several ways of how to help these families who are mostly farmers. The idea of buying land and create a cooperative has been discussed but it was then abandoned when they found out that the price of the land is very expensive. Because our funds are limited and that other organizations are working in this area, we finally decided not to work there for now.

*** *Afghan refugee camps***

We are supporting 80 families in an Afghan refugee camp near the Afghani border that has been destructed by the floods by providing them food, warm clothes as well as other items. We might have some reconstruction project in this refugee camp as well.

Sindh

In Sindh district, relief work is still a top priority as thousand of people are still displaced. We are still distributing relief goods in the refugee camps. We have also been distributing the UN relief good upon their request.

*** *Cooperatives***

Sindh is a province where the land is controlled by few landlords and where landless peasants are working for them almost like slaves. Most of them have been indebted to their landlords since generations and work all their lives to "repay" their debts. The floods has render landless peasant even more vulnerable now and this is why we thought the best thing to do would be to buy land for them so to help them getting out of this very brutal exploitative system.

Some LRC volunteers in Sindh already have the experience of setting up a cooperative in Karachi with home-based women workers. They are at the moment looking into different possibilities of implementing such a project. First of all we have to find out who will be willing to work

cooperatively and what skills in farming they can share. An architect has already helped us making a plan of how we could construct houses for the members of the cooperative along with a community center. The idea is that the community center would be used for the benefit of the all community of the area and not only for the members of the cooperative. The volunteers of LRC Sindh are at the moment working on these questions. They have already identified an area that is amongst the worst affected and where the idea would be to combine poultry, fish and dairy farming. Other areas are being investigated now as well. A foundational amount has been blocked by the LRC in order for this project to be implemented if possible.

Balochistan

Because the road infrastructure as well as the communications networks have been badly affected in Balochistan, the coordination of our efforts in this province has been difficult. Immediate relief goods were first distributed in Sibbi district as some of our comrades were there. Now we have decided to focus our efforts in Kohlu and Barkan districts which are the most badly hit districts in the province and have received very little help from any other organizations. The LRC volunteers in Balochistan have conducted a survey in those two districts and have identified 750 extremely needed families who are in majority farmers and do not have anything to plant this year. It was decided that about 32kg of wheat seeds will be distributed to each family in the week of the 15-21 November as it is the end of the seeding season in the region. The volunteers of Balochistan are facing a very difficult situation as the area where they have decided to work is an area at war where the army is restricting the access to its inhabitants only. They have visited the place in pretending they were visiting family members there and we are hoping that they are not going to face any problems next week when they are going to distribute the seeds. The corrupted government officers of the area have already threatened some of the LRC members if they try to work in the area without bribing them. The roads in the region are also very bad and dangerous, on the way to deliver relief goods 2 weeks ago, 3 of the volunteers had a car accident, two of them got seriously injured and one is still in need for care. Despite all these issues, the volunteers in Balochistan are absolutely committed keep on carrying their relief efforts.

Punjab

The Saraiki Waseed is the southern part of Punjab and has also been devastated by the floods. Unfortunately our team of volunteers there is not very strong and the committee is composed of only 4 members. They are now still in the process of doing a survey to determine what should be done in priority. Committee members from Lahore have gone to the area to strengthen the efforts of our friends in the Saraiki belt. We are now distributing food and warm clothes to 20 families whose members are trade-unionists. It is yet to be decided whether we can help them further.

Apart from the relief work, we have also launched -using separate funds- a political campaign for the cancellation of the external debt of Pakistan in favor of the flood victims. We have organized several rallies in the major cities, have distributed 100 000 leaflets in the street of Lahore and are now working on a street theatre play.

You will find many more information about our work on our blog: _
<http://labourreliefcampaign.blogspot.com>

In Solidarity,

Cindy

For the Labour Relief Committee

