

Rural areas near big cities less vulnerable to disasters

April 28 2020, by Saleem Shaikh

Rural populations living around large cities have better access to resources and are therefore less vulnerable to disasters than rural communities located near small cities, a new study conducted in Pakistan's Punjab province suggests.

Some 70 percent of the population of Punjab, home to 110 million people, is vulnerable to various disasters, but most particularly to riverine and [flash floods](#). [Germanwatch](#), which promotes North-South equity, placed Pakistan 8th in a group of ten countries most affected by climate disasters during 1998—2017.

The study, published this month (April) in the *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, is based on vulnerability-linked data analysis of rural households from the flood-affected [rural areas](#) of Multan (large-sized city), Muzaffargarh (medium-sized city) and Darya Khan (small-sized city) in Punjab.

Ali Jamshed, study author and research scholar at the University of Stuttgart in Germany, tells SciDev.Net that little attention has been paid to how city-size influences the vulnerability of surrounding rural areas and the new study was intended to plug this knowledge gap.

"Having analysed data regarding past flood disaster managements in cities and rural areas of the country's most flood-vulnerable Punjab province, we discovered that... the rural areas around large cities have been able to cope with disasters better thanks to timely delivery of

support with emergency services from the [large cities](#)," Jamshed tells SciDev.Net.

According to Jamshed, small cities throughout the country grapple with such issues such as low human development, poor infrastructure, high dependence on climate-vulnerable agriculture, inadequate health facilities, poverty and unemployment, which limit their abilities to cope and adapt.

The study findings will help draw the focus of urban planners, disaster managers and policymakers towards significance of rural-urban linkages in reducing rural vulnerability, says Jawed Ali Khan, UN-Habitat's country programme manager in Pakistan.

"Rural-urban interconnectedness in the context of disaster resilience can potentially help decrease the vulnerability of rural households to [disasters](#) with enhanced investment in building resources and capacities," Jawed Ali tells SciDev.Net.

Rural areas around small cities can be made disaster-resilient by making the urban areas more economically resource-diverse and ushering in more innovative markets that provide diversified livelihoods, greater institutional capacities, establishing disaster early warning and communication systems, improving health and education, public infrastructures and services, says Ali.

As compared to large and medium cities in the Asia-Pacific region, small cities and the rural areas around them grapple with issues of being the least disaster-resilient, says Indrajit Pal, an assistant professor (disaster management) at the Bangkok-based Asian Institute of Technology.

"The study findings hold true for most of the countries in the Asia-

Pacific and can help in boosting the disaster resilience of small cities and the [rural communities](#) around them," says Pal, author of the recent study, *Disaster risk governance and [city](#) resilience in Asia-Pacific region*.

More information: Indrajit Pal et al. Disaster risk governance and city resilience in Asia-Pacific region, *Science and Technology in Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-12-812711-7.00009-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-812711-7.00009-2)

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