

Insight of Umerkot

Living through adversity

Abstract: The document provides a brief introduction of district Umerkot that was selected for the intervention named as Tahafuz: *“Building Resilience through CBDRM in the Sindh province of Pakistan”*. The project was launched by RSPN with the support of USAID. The effort is intended to provide an insight of the hardships faced by the target beneficiaries that lives in the outskirts of Umerkot. The information provided was obtained during a monitoring visit to one of the revenue village naming Kaplore of district Umerkot by interviewing members of the Village Disaster Management Committee (VDMC) that has been especially formed to achieve various objectives of the project.

District Umerkot

Umerkot is a city that lies at the edge of famous Thar Desert. The great desert spreads over parts of Pakistan and India. The town and the district is known (or spelled) as Umerkot by the Muslims and Amerkot by the Hindus (SAP, 2009).

Umerkot is one of the oldest cities of Sindh and has much to offer in terms of history, culture and glory. It was once the capital of Greater Sindh Province that included some parts of present day Indian state of Rajasthan.

The district's headquarter has the magnificent historical fort of Umer. This area has been ruled by Rajputs, Rathors, Sumras and Mughals.

The areas that now make district Umerkot were once a part of the new Mirpur Khas district. Umerkot was first given the status of a district in April 1993, but was abolished in 2000 and merged into the district Mirpur Khas again as a Tehsil. However, local activists agitated against the decision till Umerkot was restored as a district in December 2004 (SAP, 2009).

Umerkot district has two distinct **geographical** portions: i.e. the irrigated area in the north and west and the desert in the south and east. One can see the sand dunes spreading towards east with thorny bushes. Towards west are the alluvial planes with vast stretches of vegetation. There is no river or natural stream in the district (SAP, 2009).



Fort of district Umerkot

The **climate** of both portions i.e. north-west and south-east differs to some extent. The irrigated portion of the land neither gets too hot in summer nor its gets too cold in winter. The temperature remains moderated due to a regular blow of breeze from the south western sea side of the region. However, comparatively the eastern portion which is the desert part gets hot and dry in summer, but during monsoon the area receives heavy rain showers. During the winter unlike the other side the weather remains cold (SAP, 2009).



South East part of District Umerkot

Umerkot district consists of four Tehsils/Talukas namely Umerkot, Pithoro, Samaro and Kunri. According to the 1998 national census, the population of Umerkot was 663,100, as compared to 383,020 in 1981. The population is unevenly distributed among the four Talukas with Umerkot having almost half of total population of the district. 83 percent of the district population lives in rural areas while the rest in urban ones (SAP, 2009).

There are eight urban localities in the district; of which Umerkot town committee, the biggest one, had a population of 36,000 in 1998. Umerkot is the least populated district of Sindh, as it stands at number five in terms of lesser population density. Only 118 persons live in a square kilometer in this district. According to the report produced by SAP district Tharparkar and Thatta that comes under the scope of this project target areas the population density is even more lesser (SAP, 2009). Hindus constitute almost half of the district's population and dominant race among them is that of Sodha Rajputs. Umerkot is the only district in Pakistan with around half of the total population being non-Muslim.

Sindhi is mother tongue of the majority, spoken by 90 percent of the total population in the district. It is predominant in rural areas at 93 percent as compared to 71 percent in urban areas (SAP, 2009).

Meeting with community

To explore about community's problems and their coping capacities in resisting natural hazards that are prone to their area, a general discussion was held with the members of Village Disaster Management Committee (VDMC). The main focus of the Monitoring officer during the discussion remained to learn about their local environment and the techniques they use to counter hazards.

The questions posed were in regards with types of hazards and the community responsiveness, educational facilities, health related problems, means of transportation for commuting to other areas, sources of income and availability of water for irrigation and drinking purposes.

During the visit the major impediment observed that are faced by these communities were the number of settlements that have been widely dispersed comprising very low number of households who cannot be given assistance in due course of time. The other major difficulty was the lacking public transport facility, people has to wait for hours for the only vehicle that runs in between various locations once a day. According to the local people the travelers have to wait till the next day in case the vehicle is missed.

Mr. Allah Dino, President and Mr. Abdul Karim, Manager of the VDMC had a very good understanding of the local area and both of them exquisitely responded towards many of the questions posed to them.

District:	Umerkot
Tehsil/Taluka:	Umerkot
Union Council	Kaplore
Revenue Village	Kaplore

Participants: VDMC members

1. Allah Dino (President)
2. Abdul Karim Kumbhar (Manager)
3. Pancho (Member)
4. Kessar (Member)
5. Kinko (Member)
6. Ityyan (Member)

Dated: 03-01-2013



Members of the VDMC during meeting with MO RSPN PMU

Allah Dino, president described that their area is affected mostly by the rains of monsoon that starts from June and goes till September. He said majority of the people rely on cultivation and reason being the lacking water resources people direly wait for rain falls for irrigation purposes. He added the intensity and frequency of rain fall differs every year which makes them unable to predict about the damages they might suffer from. He added due to financial reasons people construct their houses with mud and bushes that usually get destroyed during heavy rains. He said, prior the beginning of rainy season every year people try to strengthen feeble walls of their houses by applying an additional coat of mud and or by covering them with plastic sheets. He mentioned the strategy works in case no excessive rain fall occurs. To construct a nominal standard round shaped house, the structure commonly used by the local residents named as "Charo" in local Sindhi language render cost of Rs. 15,000 only where a good quality house costs about Rs. 40,000 to 50,000, he added.

While quoting an incident they mentioned last year a fire instigated which burnt almost 26 houses adjacent to each other. He said no loss of life was reported due to the incident. In response to a question regarding the measure that they take in putting off fire, they said it spreads very quickly and they remain incapacitated to extinguish fire due to lack of resources.

They added to deal with such an incident that is beyond their reach they instantly make telephonic call to relevant district government officials. But since the settlements are distantly located in desert areas where the public transport facility exists to none and the time it takes for rescue people to reach the incident area results in maximum loss of assets and lives if any incident of this scale struck the community.

In regards with fulfilling drinking water needs, the members added that there is only one tube-well available in this locality that is not even accessible by all the other settlements. Elaborating further on the water situation they added there are two types of water available in the area. The first source of water is the tube-well that is approachable by their community which has sufficient water bearing capacity but its quality of water is utterly bitter in taste and is undrinkable. The second type is the locally available wells in some of the settlements that yield sweet and drinkable water. However the problem with this type of water is the slow yielding process that takes hours before the water can be retrieved. He said the water from this point of source is collected on first come first serve basis. The person who gets to the well first has the right to get water as much as he desires meanwhile the other has to wait long hours for their turn.

Talking about educational condition one of the member added a school has been opened in their area four years ago, prior to that no schooling facility was available locally. They added majority of the people have obtained matriculation. Few people from this village are government servants who are serving in Army as Sentry and in Police as Constable. Adding further they mentioned that majority of the people rely on agriculture that depends on seasonal rains in addition with dependency on livestock activities during the time when cultivation is not possible.

In regards with medical care and health issues they said no medical facilities are locally available with them. However in case of emergency situation they make use of ambulance/use private cab service that is available on call.



Discussion with VDMC members

Patients have to wait for long hours before the medical assistance reach them. Moreover they added failing to get ambulance/private cab service in time results in loss of life or lead to any other major complication.

Towards the end of the meeting a questionnaire developed by the Monitor was filled to learn about Tahafuz project understanding of the local community. During the interaction it was observed that VDMC members were very active and charged to handle their problems. They said we are seriously looking forward to benefit from this project as the project will make us work in a more organized manner, teach new techniques and provide us a mechanism to fight against hazard. Adding further, President of the VDMC said although members of the VDMC live in different settlements that are distantly located but despite such complications we are considering every possible solution (renting private car) to work this out. They said we already have dedicated a room for our community meetings where we plan and discuss matters.



Members of the VDMC signing off after the meeting

Source Reference:

South Asia Partnership Pakistan SAP, 2009

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Document prepared by:

Zaheer Khan
Monitoring Officer – Tahafuz (RSPN)