

The Community in Despair of Nilofar!

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Sujawal, formerly a Taluka of the second largest district named Thatta of the Sindh province have very recently acquired a status of the new district after having a split of the district into two equal proportions. The growing population of the district became a concerning issue for the authorities as the existing arrangements were recognized as less effective in fulfilling the administrative affairs. Despite the split both the districts still have a good share of its land besides the Indus River which makes them both susceptible towards rain floods during monsoon and the tropical cyclones that are generated unexpectedly during the year.

Interestingly, the area that is being considered much prone to cyclones and floods it is a gruesome fact that there are still many villages that are situated alongside the sea shore mainly because the villagers have a sole dependency on fish hunting. The hunting is usually carried out throughout the year especially when entering the open sea is considered safe. However, the situation stays volatile for these fishermen as they depend on their communication system and their people for timely communication of hazard related information.

Recalling from the past, the fact cannot be ignored that the metrological department has been efficiently issuing threat alerts for quite a long time now, but conclusively, it never helped in slicing down the devastation brought by disasters. The prime factors that has been hampering the dissemination of information to people living at the coastal areas and the sailors who use to spend weeks in the sea was the absence of a platform at the grass root level on which people could rely during the emergency situations.

Having felt the need, RSPN USAID under one of its initiative named Tahafuz has instigated the process of building disaster resilience at the community level by creating cadre of CBDRM experts through institutionalization and capacity building. RSPN with the support of its implementing partner NRSP established village disaster management committees in various disaster prone union councils. Among these target areas, the RSPN project staff visited one of the settlements named Haji Yousaf Katyar of the

VDMC Palki from the union council Kharo Chan to observe local level preparedness under the recent plight of cyclone alert named “Nilofar”. The village was situated near



the coastal line of the Indus River and was expected to get hit by the unbridled tropical storm.

Interestingly, it was appalling to realize that the member of the VDMC Palki Mr. Ghulam Muhammad and another member named Mr. Imtiaz from its neighboring VDMC Musa along with the local villagers were gathered together to discuss Nilofar cyclone and the preventive measure which they could take to avoid the danger. Members told that they had held one more meeting earlier on 27th October concerning the same issue, the details of which were recorded and verified from the Karwai register maintained by the VDMC.



According to one of the VDMC member, the village approximately had 150 boats in total having the capacity of carrying 15 people each. They added that as of routine matter all of these boats were gone to sea for fish hunting a week before the alert was issued.



Variety of sources involving local newspaper, wireless communication set (for communication with ships) and mobile communication (for receiving disaster relevant updates) is being utilized by VDMC members concerning the recent threat alert issued by Meteorological Department - Picture taken at Settlement Haji Yousaf Katyar of VDMC Palki from Union Council Kharochan, during a field visit to District Thatta, 28th Oct 2014.

While elaborating further they mentioned that majority of the local people are illiterate reason being why they lack understanding about the institutions that trigger alerts for keeping people in the loop. They told that Tahafuz project enabled them to know about variety of information sources for getting updates in relevance with development of any emergency situation. They proclaimed that many people among them got subscribed to a mobile service “40404” that issues threat alerts on regular basis. Adding further they said they also now listen to news on radio, read newspaper and discuss different issues during V/UDMC meetings.

Concerning the “Nilofar” cyclone, they added that during the meeting held on 27th Oct, they created 04 different committees that were assigned a distinctive role to fulfill the following activities:

1. Committee-1: to coordinate with government
2. Committee-2: to coordinate with NGOs

3. Committee-3: to train local people on how to use items of the emergency tool kit
4. Committee-4: to coordinate and timely disseminate hazard related information to the 08 most vulnerable villages that were identified by the VDMC

Also, they added that all people on boats were immediately shared the information either through their mobiles or the wireless communication sets which are available in each boat. As a result, he added many boats returned back to the dock while some temporarily harbored at VDMC Tikko, which is another VDMC inside the river located at about 1 and half hour distance before the deep sea. VDMC members added that as a preventive measure they also transported some emergency kit items to VDMC Tikko so the villagers could make use of items during an emergency situation.