

## Community's Preparedness Level: A Story of Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC)

District Tharparkar is part of great Thar Desert, which is spread across India and Pakistan. In Pakistan, this desert lies on the eastern border of Sindh Province and is extended till southeastern parts of Punjab where it joins the Cholistan desert. District Tharparkar is one of the major parts of this desert area in Sindh. It is spread on an area of 19638 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of almost 0.9 million with 45% being women. This district has four talukas, named: Nagarparkar, Chachro, Mithi and Diplo. It has 44 union councils (UCs) and overall 166 revenue villages with district head quarter at Mithi city. While agriculture and livestock are the main source of income for the rural population of the district, in the urban areas, people are also engaged in various economic activities related to agriculture business and others.

### UDMC Kaloi

Kaloi, a UC of District Tharparkar with a population of just over 20,000 is situated at a distance of about 60 kms from Mithi city. It contains many schools (primary-high level) for both girls and boys. As long as the geography is concerned, Mehrand Lake is situated on its northeastern side, the Hakro River on the northern side, Rann of Kutchh on the west side, and desert on the southern side. The UC is on the border of River Indus and Thar Desert.

Reaching out to communities residing in these remote areas would have been impossible without proper formal structure in place. Therefore, the members are organized into Village and Union Disaster Management Committees at revenue village and UC level. These structures provide a platform to members for interacting with concern stakeholders, government officials, NGOs/INGOs, RSPs and community groups. During Phase-II of Tahafuz, RSPN in collaboration with partner RSP formed 27 such committees across five disaster prone union councils of district Tharparkar.

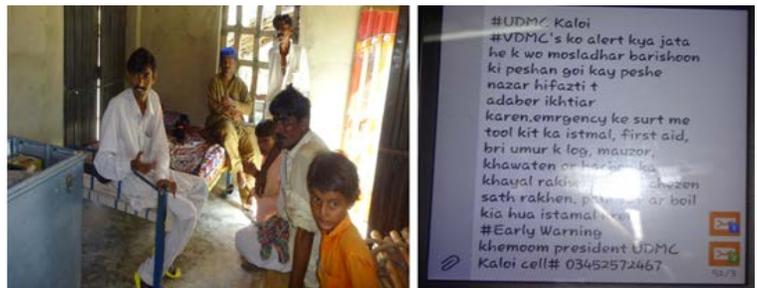
### RSPN's Initiatives So Far

After the successful implementation of first two phases, RSPN with support of USAID/OFDA has recently initiated another launch of Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) Tahafuz on August 7, 2015 in already intervened districts of Sindh province. 'Tahafuz', which literally means 'Protection', sought to enhance capacities of the communities by adopting the CBDRM approach. In other words the aim of project is to create and nurture resiliency within communities to better manage and respond to disasters. Working in flood and drought hit districts; the project is empowering vulnerable communities through capacity building and small scale mitigation and management activities including development of Disaster Risk Management Plans (DRMPs) and provision of one standardized emergency toolkit. Besides these, the organized committees are further linked with relevant Disaster Risk Reduction stakeholders including government officials/departments.

This case study is based on the community's level of preparedness in responding to recent heavy rains which caused havoc in settlements near the drains or located in low lying areas of UC Kaloi District Tharparkar. Broadly speaking, the story focuses on the steps and timely initiatives taken by V-UDMC members that prevented loss of lives and minimized damage to livelihood of residing community.

### Community's Level of Preparedness to Situations

"Community, in fact, is at the forefront to face disasters", said Khemmoon President of UDMCKaloi. "People are therefore required to be aware enough to properly handle any hazardous scenarios. Prior to inception of CBDRM Tahafuz", he explained "we did not have understanding of how to do pre-planning and to react during and after the situations. We acted upon in an unorganized way which sometimes resulted in great loss of our livestock and other valuables, including human lives. We really applaud RSPN's approach of empowering vulnerable communities to face disaster through various component of project"



President UDMC Kaloi Mr. Khemmoon describing the story. The circulated early warning text messages among community members by UDMC can also be shown.

The recent heavy monsoon rains caused havoc in most parts of Pakistan including Sindh province. He added, “The rain also affected the levels of some drains passing across our UC. Mostly, these drains have weak banks that could breach out due to excessive water pressure or sometimes may overflow.” To keep an eye on the situation, we called an emergency meeting of V/UDMC members and decided to form an Emergency Response Team. The members of team were instructed to regularly monitor water levels, weak banks of drain and provide regular timely updates. They were also assigned the task of collecting household data including number of women, children, aged personnel and number of disabled for sharing with concern stakeholders if needed. Mr. Khemsoon said, “We also circulated text messages among community members about precautionary measures to be taken and for further threat relevant updates.”

Muhammad Hisham, a VDMC member, said, “He has never observed such early preparation to the expected situations before.” According to him, “I still remember flood situations of 2010, which caused severe damages to livestock and human lives.” The revenue village received almost 8-10 ft of water during past floods. Community members were trapped due to poor pre planning or having not enough knowledge to deal with such scenarios. When TRDP team visited and briefed about components of CBDRM Tahafuz, he decided to join. Training on CBDRM enabled him in understanding risks and how to do planning prior to unforeseen situations. During current situation, he shifted his children, other family members and livestock to a raised platform rehabilitated under Tahafuz project. UDMC President in consultation with other members issued his family some tents from Emergency Toolkit. He told that although nothing worse happened this time, but still he felt the need to protect his family members without taking any risks.



Mr. Hisham, VDMC member shifted his family to raised platform rehabilitated under CBDRM Tahafuz-II

“Slabs and walls of houses in Tharparkar are very low resistant to water penetration in heavy rains”, said Gul Muhammad another VDMC member. “People normally build houses using straw, bushes or using light weight woods. It was feared, that the recent rains could also affect our houses and will make it unfit for living. Utilizing the polythene sheet from emergency toolkit provided by RSPN, we made structures members more water tight. This initiative helped us in protecting from heavy rain showers and also secured our homes from being damaged.”



Community members of UDMC Kaloi from District Tharparkar utilize items of Emergency Toolkit to safeguard slabs of one room houses against water seepage during recent heavy rains.