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# Highlights of Disaster Preparedness at Community Level



**Tahafuz: "Building Resilience through  
Community Based Disaster Risk Management  
in Sindh Province of Pakistan"**

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Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this study. All the information is deemed to be correct as of August 2016. Nevertheless, the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN) cannot accept any responsibility for the consequences of its use for other purposes or in other contexts.

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## Acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CBDRM | Community Based Disaster Risk Management |
| CRP   | Community Resource Person                |
| DIU   | District Implementation Unit             |
| DRR   | Disaster Risk Reduction                  |
| DRMP  | Disaster Risk Management Plan            |
| NRSP  | National Rural Support Programme         |
| PDMA  | Provincial Disaster Management Authority |
| PDRA  | Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment   |
| RSPN  | Rural Support Programmes Network         |
| RSPs  | Rural Support Programmes                 |
| TRDP  | Thardeep Rural Development Programme     |
| UDMC  | Union Disaster Management Committee      |
| VDMC  | Village Disaster Management Committee    |

## 1. About the Project

Every year, natural disasters claim lives of thousands of people and make millions leave their homes and livelihoods. For many, these losses mean a complete catastrophe; they are made to live without basic resources. On a global scale, disasters are significantly increasing in both frequency and impact.

With an aim to empower resource deficient rural communities to withstand disasters, as well as, to create a timely response mechanism for hydro-meteorological hazards like floods, cyclones and droughts, the project “Tahafuz” seeks to enhance capacities of the communities in the four most vulnerable districts of Sindh, namely Thatta/Sujawal, Badin, Tharparkar and Umerkot. The project is funded by USAID/OFDA and is being implemented by RSPN in partnership with National Rural Support Programme in district Thatta & Badin, and Thardeep Rural Development Programme in Tharparkar and Umerkot.

Through project implementation in 682 revenue villages across 60 union councils, an estimated 2,044,791 men, women and children, 350,736 households, have benefited through capacity building and small scale mitigation initiatives under the context of DRR. Through Social Mobilization, 682 VDMCs are formed and capacitated. Also, 60 UDMCs are constituted to organize communities for pre, during and post disaster scenarios.

## 2. Background

Before “Tahafuz” Project initiatives, the rural communities of target districts responded to disasters in an unorganized and conventional manner. Lack of knowledge about emergency preparedness, low literacy rates, and unavailability of community level structures (VDMCs UDMCs etc) were the main challenges that further contributed to their vulnerabilities. Emergency preparedness is actually the actions that are performed prior to alarming situations. These measures may include planning and coordination meeting, training, emergency mock drills and exercises, and prepositioning of emergency equipment. Preparedness activities can minimize the impact of an emergency if performed prior to the event. Through Tahafuz initiatives the community has been provided with an opportunity to get organized, learn, plan and implement. This has helped them to prepare, and these preparations are reflected in the highlighted preparation measures taken by the communities on their own.

## 3. Preparedness through training & drills

During CBDRM training, ten members from each VDMC undertook five days of training on Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment (PDRA) and Disaster Risk Management & Planning (DRM&P). The interactive training design helped participants to learn new skills on conducting disaster risk assessment using tools such as hazard and resource map as well as seasonal and historical calendars for evaluation of risks and developing Disaster Risk Management Plans in order to avert chances of potential damages from disasters that are most likely to strike the target

communities. Additionally, the participants were equipped with Basic Life Support (BLS) and firefighting skills, including search and rescue operations, so that the local community is able to adequately respond to an emergency situation before any external assistance could reach them.

This report highlights few of the many preparedness measures taken by the community before the monsoon, which have also become a part of their everyday life. With increased skills and improved response capacity, they will be able to reduce the losses of life and assets in times of disasters.

The learnings practically demonstrated in these highlighted preparedness actions are purely based upon the training and drills imparted by the project staff. It also reflects the sustainability of the project activities and successful implementation of Social Mobilization that helped in capacitating the VDMCs & UDMCs.

The preparedness actions also depict the skills enhanced by the drills and demonstration sessions conducted by the Community Resource Persons (CRPs) at settlement level. The preparedness was made possible by the availability of the tools which reflects the importance of the toolkits provided by the project and the skill level of community to use these emergency toolkits.

## 4. Preparedness Actions by Community Institution

### 4.1 DRMP helps in early preparedness

Rural communities, under USAID funded Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) Tahafuz project; developed Disaster Risk Management Plans (DRMPs) for their respective villages. These plans focus on details of various hazards at village level, required resources and different preventive measures. Generally, these plans increase community's resilience through enhanced knowledge about nature of disasters and better preparation against them. As part of disaster risk reduction plan, the members of VDMC Gheri from district Sujawal, recently repaired their mud houses and strengthened rooftops to control water seepage during rains. They also repaired a small culvert in their village for safer passage during rain. These early preparedness measures are expected to protect them from adverse impact of current monsoon season. This also depicts that the VDMC members have keenly participated in developing the DRMP and have rightly identified the hazards at their village level. They have taken timely preventive measure to minimize damages to lives and assets.



4.1 The community members improving their houses at revenue village Gheri district Sujawal.

## 4.2 Identifying hazards complement preparedness

The community members of VDMC Rapper Gujjar, Union Council Belo in district Sujawal organized an awareness event on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) at village level. Since, Sujawal is located in close proximity to River Indus, thus it is more prone to floods during monsoon. The VDMC members, during the session, facilitated local communities in developing hazard map of the village.

The hazard map showed different types of high risk areas, safe evacuation routes and safe places that can be used in case of any emergency situation. The VDMC members also practically demonstrated various DRR measures and early preparedness initiatives.



4.2 The VDMC members highlighting various hazards at village Rapper Gujjar at district Sujawal

## 4.3 Transferring DRR knowledge

Ms. Rashida, Mr. Mashooq Ali and Mr. Faqeer Muhammad, Presidents of their respective VDMCs, participated in a radio program hosted by Indus FM 95.40 in Umerkot city.

They discussed different project interventions and highlighted RSPs approach of organizing communities into their own organizations and providing them awareness on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). They also highlighted the concepts and importance of CBDRM approach, basics of Disaster Risk Management & Planning, DRR advocacy, and basics of first aid and role of government departments prior to, during and after any disaster.



4.3 Officer bearers of VDMCs sharing views about DRR and CBDRM on FM radio station at district Umerkot

## 4.4 Awareness raising campaign

The members of UDMC Kharochan undertook various initiatives to prepare themselves for upcoming monsoon season. For instance, they organized a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) awareness walk at the Union Council level.

The focus of the walk was to spread awareness about potential hazards of monsoon at the community level. The UDMC members also approached Union Council Nazim Mr. Ahmad Jatt to participate in the walk. The participants were holding banners and posters inscribed with messages highlighting the importance of preparedness. Notable number of local community members, including children and men, actively participated in the walk.



4.4 Villagers are taking part in a rally to highlight the importance of disaster preparedness at union council Kharochan, district Sujawal

Mr. Ahmad Jatt appreciated RSPs approach towards building resilient communities through social mobilization and capacity building initiatives.

## 4.5 Caring for livestock

Rural communities usually depend directly on livestock for food, income, transport, status symbol and financial security. If animals are protected, families feel self-sufficient, and stay better prepared for untoward situations. To mitigate losses to animals, Tahafuz project, funded by USAID-OFDA, has included Livestock Management as a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) measure in its training programs. These sessions enable the participants to understand various kinds of animal diseases and importance of vaccinations against such diseases.



4.5 Villagers doing pre monsoon vaccination of livestock at union council Padhrio Farm, district Umerkot

Members of VDMC Tobhan from Union Council Padhrio Farm, District Umerkot, approached the District Government for vaccinating their livestock. This initiative helped them keep their animals protected from different types of diseases during monsoon. The district livestock officer facilitated VDMC members in vaccinating a total of 600 animals, including goats, sheep and cows.

## 4.6 Mitigating the risk

Union Council Garho in district Thatta is located near the coastal belt. People living in Garho suffer due to floods and cyclones during the monsoon season. Keeping in view the threats, UDMC Garho arranged a meeting attended by the Presidents and Managers of the VDMCs. The purpose of the meeting was to check the level of community's preparedness to deal with any untoward situation during monsoon season.

The participants decided to conduct regular mock preparedness drills and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) awareness walks in their villages. They also identified the most vulnerable areas of various revenue villages that could be affected due to coastal flooding. They agreed to distribute tools from Emergency Toolkit amongst identified disaster prone villages. The participants stressed to further strengthen the existing community's early warning system



4.6 Community members practicing earling warning exercise at union council Garho district Thatta

## 4.7 From learning to action

As a part of disaster preparedness initiatives, members of UDMC Mithi III, District Badin, under USAID-OFDA supported Tahafuz project, conducted various mock drills.

The members demonstrated extinguishing fire using bucket brigade technique. They also exercised safe shifting techniques of victims during emergencies and disastrous situations. The UDMC members utilized Emergency Toolkit provided by RSPN, during mock exercise. Such early preparedness initiatives can help avoid losses to lives and damages to assets during emergencies.



4.7 Villagers conducting exercise on safe shiting technique of victims at union council Mithi-III, district Badin

## 4.8 Empowering women to face emergency

Women are among the most vulnerable groups during disaster situations. In underprivileged communities, they suffer the most due to their limited response capacity, limited access to available resources and, sometimes, exclusion from decision making process. They need special attention during and post disaster situations. The USAID funded Tahafuz project encourages women participation at all stages of CBDRM program. RSPs capacitate them through comprehensive training sessions. As a result women are equally transferring Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) knowledge at grassroots level.



4.8 women members are demonstrating the safe handling techniques of flood victims at union council GM Baran, district Thatta

To prepare for monsoon season, members of UDMC Gul Muhammad Baran in district Thatta conducted a meeting at community level. During this meeting, women members practically demonstrated utilization of different tools and equipment of the Emergency Toolkits. They also exercised water crossing techniques during floods and safe handling of flood victims.

## 4.9 Preparing to reduce risks

Communities living near coastal areas are more prone to disasters, especially floods, cyclones and Tsunami. To enhance capacities of these communities, the USAID Tahafuz Project engages them through a number of capacity building initiatives to enable them understand the risks and deal with them in an effective way.

These interventions can potentially decrease losses to human lives and assets. Realizing the scope of community preparedness, VDMC Patiji of Union Council Bhughra Memon, District Badin conducted a mock drill on rescuing a drowning person. The members made optimal use of emergency tool kit provided by RSPN in rescue mission.



4.9 VDMC members conducting mock drill exercise on rescuing drowning person during floods at district Badin

#### 4.10 CRP sessions at the settlement level

Rise in temperature increases vulnerability of the communities living in Sindh to heatstroke. It is a life threatening emergency and can be avoided by adopting simple preventive measures. Trained CRPs under Tahafuz Project delivered detailed sessions in their target settlements.

During the sessions, the CRPs discussed causes, symptoms and necessary preventive measures to avoid heatstroke. Men, women and children participated in these sessions.



4.10 The activist delivering session on preventive measure of avoiding heatstroke at district Tharparkar

#### 4.11 Community efforts for securing themselves

Revenue village 29-Heeral is located in district Umerkot at a distance of 25 kilometers from main city Umerkot. The village faced flood situations during monsoon for past many years. Weak infrastructures, broken access roads and lack of raised platforms increase the miseries of communities during such situations.

As part of DRMP the VDMC members took an initiative to construct their houses at raised places. According to the residents during current monsoon seasons the water didn't enter inside their houses as they were constructed at raised places. Besides that, it was evident that houses built on raised places can be used as temporary shelter, in case of more rains and floods during rainy season. A total of 15 houses out of 25 were constructed on raised points in the revenue village and safeguard a total of 105 individuals from being affected due to floods. The others have also shown interest in constructing their houses at raised places.



4.11 House constructed at raised point at revenue village 29-Heeral, district Umerkot

The practice was the result of learning & awareness provided by Tahafuz Project through training and CRP sessions. The main credit of this initiative goes to Mr. Zahid; he is an active member of the VDMC and a trained CRP.

## 4.12 UDMC collaboration with local administration

In order to deal with disaster situations, the project fostered UDMCs have been linked with various local and district government departments. These communities' own organizations now work in close liaison with concerned DRR departments at local level and chalk out effective strategies to cope any untoward situations.

As precautionary measures for monsoon, 2016, the UDMC members in collaboration with local line departments, formulated contingency plans at Tehsil level. They highlighted different hazards, identify safer points and pinpoint required resources at Tehsil level. Mr. Ejaz Ali Palepoto, Assistant Commissioner (Tehsil Kurneri), instructed them to develop an Emergency Control Room and shared its helpline and contact numbers among communities. Similarly, he also directed to make a total of 04 Emergency Response Teams (ERT) in the most vulnerable UCs of the Tehsil. Each team comprised of 03 UDMC members, trained on CBDRM and DRR, and one government representative. These teams were given tasks to rescue communities residing in the low area if affected by floods.



4.12 UDMC members developed Tehsil contingency plan in collaboration with local authorities at district Umerkot

Regarding the project provided Emergency Tool Kit, the Assistant Commissioner nominated two UDMC members as focal persons and instructed the AC office and Local government departments to contact them and ensure proper utilization of ETKs during emergency situations.

## 4.13 Planning helps in reduction of losses

Union Council Dhabro, located near the Arabian Sea and Rann of Kuch, remains vulnerable to floods during heavy rains. These flood waters not only damage the local communities' houses, but also everything else they own.

The UDMC members developed a plan for the union council, highlighting various hazards and resources of all revenue villages within the UC. They also identified safe areas of the revenue village for vulnerable settlements. The members of UDMC Dhabro shared the map they developed with the Tehsil/Taluka administration and demanded early repair/rehabilitation of the weak banks of the water canals.



4.13 UDMC members developed hazard map for union council Dhabro at district Tharparkar

In order to disseminate the information, the UDMC members developed various pamphlets about different DRR measures to be undertaken during disaster situations. These pamphlets also had contact details of different government departments for community's assistance during untoward situations. The activists displayed these pamphlets at various prominent locations such as school buildings, hospitals, mosque, market etc. of the union council.

To remain safe and mitigate the possible future losses, the UDMC members (integrated into LSO) constructed 100 houses for vulnerable villagers at elevated, safer, points. The initiative will prevent water entering into their houses during flood situations.

#### 4.14 We are safe enough now

Tahafuz project is supporting communities in rehabilitation of Community Critical Infrastructures (CCIs) to serve as key disaster mitigation measures. The schemes rehabilitated under the project are identified by members during disaster risk assessment & planning process. The mitigation measures mainly include repairing of connecting paths, raised platforms, flood protection bunds and water related infrastructure. Once the scheme finalizes in accordance with all specifications, the VDMC members are made responsible for repair & maintenance of the scheme.



4.14 Community members are repairing earthen road at revenue village Rokhar Ali, district Badin.

The project had assisted the VDMC Rojhar Ali in rehabilitation of their earthen road. Being kacha structure it deteriorated with passage of time and caused difficulties for the residents. This road provides a safer evacuation to the villagers and also serves as rescue point during monsoon floods. So the community decided to repair the damaged road at their own expenses. To strengthen the surface, they utilized available soil to raise the main portion of the road. They used different local tools to compact side slopes of the road as well to increase its durability. These community efforts are now providing access for safer evacuation, temporary shelters and protection from floodwaters.

#### 4.15 Communities, adapting early warning system

The support extended to the communities by Tahafuz Project is not only limited to the capacity building through trainings & awareness session but also to give them knowledge and tools related to the importance of Early Warning System (EWS) & its adaptation. An efficient early warning system at local level helps communities to get them prepared, prior to alarming situations. The V/UDMCs under Tahafuz are now equipped with appropriate tools, guidelines and capacities to timely disseminate any threat relevant information within communities. The UDMC Bustaan at district Umerkot, occasionally conduct mock exercises within union council. The purpose of such exercise is not limited to check the functionality of tools provided by project but also to ensure adaptation of EWS amongst villagers.



4.15 Communities are exercising on adapting of early warning system at local level, district Umerkot

#### 4.16 Educating students on DRR assist transferring of knowledge at grass roots level

The Tahafuz Project has provided an opportunity to transfer the DRR knowledge to the younger generation, for the purpose teachers are being trained and are motivated to transfer the knowledge to the younger students in their respective schools. Mr. Inayat Hussain is not only an active Community Resource Person (CRP) under Community Based Disaster Risk Management "Tahafuz" Project at district Umerkot but he also serves as a teacher in a middle school at settlement Nawab Khan. Besides delivering DRR awareness sessions at community levels, he also delivers a session per month at school. These periodic sessions, not only enhance the capacities of the students on DRR but also enable them to learn about safe evacuation at school and different lifesaving techniques. Educating children on DRR can contribute to disseminate knowledge at grass roots level. Their learnings will enable them to question their parents at home and through this the family members will also get motivated to learn and adopt DRR techniques.

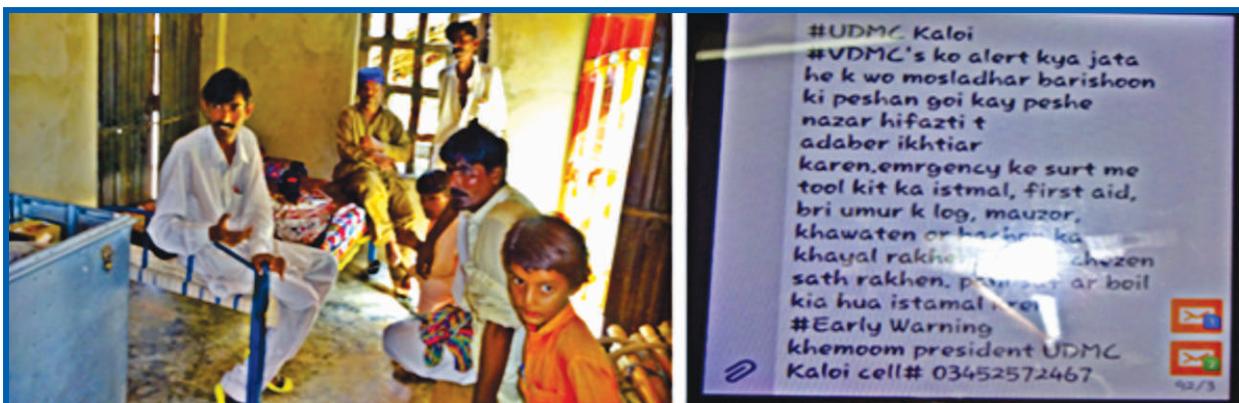


4.16 A CRP is delivering session on disaster risk reduction at school level, district Umerkot

#### 4.17 Alertness to untoward situation, helps in early preparation

Heavy rains during monsoon cause havoc situations in Pakistan including Sindh province. The excessive water affects the full supply levels in many drains passing across most of the villages. Mostly, these drains have weak banks that can breach out due to excessive water pressure or sometimes may overflow.

To keep an eye on the situations, the UDMC Kaloï, district Tharparkar arranged a meeting of members of Emergency Response Team (ERT). During meeting it was decided that the team will regularly monitor water levels, weak banks of drains and share regular updates with UDMC. Simultaneously, the UDMC members also collected household data, comprising of number of women, children, aged and disable persons for sharing with concerned stakeholders at time of need. The ERT also circulated a text messages among villagers about precautionary measures to be taken during possible alarming situations. Now, the UDMC is in better position to regularly monitor the situation, has the baseline information through which they will be in better position to plan the evacuation and circulation of text messages reflects that an Early Warning System (EWS) is adapted.



4.17 Members of UDMC Kaloï are sharing threat relevant information through text messages at district Tharparkar

## 5. Way forward

The successful implementation of the project is reflected in the practical demonstration of the learning adopted by the communities in the field. There is still need to divert the communities from traditional techniques to latest techniques taught by the project through different project initiatives (trainings and awareness sessions).

The efforts in developing DRMPs may get wasted if these plans are not implemented properly and implementation is a more time consuming activity, as mentioned the DRMPs implementation will bring a significant change in the life of the communities. These plans also need to be integrated and aligned with those of local administration/government. Once the plans are properly implemented the communities will feel more resilient, thus level of risk and vulnerability will be reduced.

The highlights provided above reflect that the community is now ready to adopt the change but this can only be possible by un-interrupted hand holding provided by RSPN through RSPs. Leaving the community alone at such point may result in loss of the efforts made for bringing them to this level.

Based on the successful implementation of the project and its proven benefits to the local vulnerable communities in terms of building resilience, RSPN intends to expand CBDRM approach not only in the remaining union councils of the existing target districts but also replicate in other disaster prone districts across Pakistan.

# ABOUT RSPN AND THE RSPs

The Rural Support Programmes Network is the largest development network of Pakistan, with an outreach to over 40 million rural Pakistanis across 125 districts of Pakistan's five provinces, AJK as well as five FATA areas. It consists of 11 member RSPs that espouse a common approach to rural development: social mobilization. RSPN is the strategic platform for the RSPs with expertise in policy advocacy, grant management, networking, monitoring and evaluation, gender mainstreaming, renewable energy and social sector (health, education, and sanitation) programming and implementation.

The RSPN and the RSPs have adopted a three-tiered approach to social mobilization. At the first tier, rural households are organized into community organizations (COs) at the neighborhood level. At the second tier, the COs are federated at the village level into Village Organizations (VOs). At the third tier, VOs federated at the Union Council (UC) level to form a Local Support Organization (LSO). As of May 2016, the RSPs have presence in 3,710 rural Union Council of Pakistan and have mobilized over 6.03 million households (an estimated population of about 42 million) into 379,285 COs of which 48 percent are women COs. A total of 1,235 LSOs at the union council level have been fostered with some LSOs forming networks at the tehsil and district level.

## **RSPN's Vision**

Realising people's potential for social and economic development

## **RSPN's Mission**

Strengthen the Rural Support Programmes to foster institutions of the people

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