



Resilience comes through awareness

Tharparkar is a remote district of Sindh province where poor rural people live in small traditional huts typically called 'Chaunras' in local language. These huts are made of mud walls and rooftops covered with dry bushes and grass to keep houses cool during summers, when mercury crosses 50° Celsius. However, such kind of rooftops are always prone to



catching fire and causing it to spread to surroundings very quickly. That is why fire incidents often occur in this hot and dry terrain of Tharparkar, posing serious threats to communities and their assets. These losses to life and property could only be avoided or reduced if communities were made resilient through awareness and skill development.

Realizing the need to educate people of Tharparkar to withstand havocs like fire eruption and famine, RSPN through its partner Thardeep Rural Development Programme (TRDP) initiated the USAID/OFDA funded Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) Tahafuz project. Communities were then organized into disaster risk reduction centric people's own institutions through RSPN's well acclaimed social mobilization approach. Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs) at village level and Union Disaster Management Committees (UDMCs) at union council level were fostered. Members of these community institutions were capacitated to deal with disasters and emergencies in an organized manner.

Mohan, a member of one such VDMC Malhonar Veena, narrates his story, "It was a hot sunny day of 2017 when suddenly fire erupted in a straw hut in our neighborhood due to short circuit. Since I had attended training sessions under Tahafuz project, I gathered fellow villagers, most of them VDMC members, and we tried to extinguish fire employing bucket brigade technique. But the efforts went futile as there were flames coming up very high and engulfed other adjoining huts. We then formed two teams; one assigned to remove and protect valuables and the other contacted the town committee's fire brigade team, which arrived within a couple of minutes and extinguished fire."

Through timely response and coordinated efforts, Mohan and other VDMC members managed to avert losses to human life, livestock and other assets. They, after rescue operation, approached the UDMC for post incident assistance. UDMC issued tents and other necessary items from the Emergency Toolkits provided them as part of Tahafuz interventions and also committed to help the affected families in rehabilitation and reconstruction of around 15 affected houses.

Mohan says it was only the awareness they gained through Tahafuz interventions that enabled them to employ systemized methods to respond to this terrible fire incident.

