



Strengthening Women Peasant and Rural Workers' Resilience Through Local Governance

Implemented by Hari Welfare Association (HWA)
Location: Shaheed Benazirabad and Mirpurkhas districts, Sindh, Pakistan
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Training workshop on disaster preparedness, conducted by HWA on Early Warning Systems, securing households and protecting livestock.

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2.1 Background

For the last few years, disasters, especially floods and heavy rainfall, have been affecting different regions of Pakistan, including riverine areas in Sindh Province. The recurrent disasters exposed a critical gap between the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and rural communities, where top-down planning and inaccessible communication left peasants and sharecroppers disproportionately vulnerable. Women peasants and rural workers are the most vulnerable to disasters but are often excluded from disaster governance and have limited knowledge of early warning systems, affecting their ability to recover and build long-term resilience. This project aimed to strengthen the capacity of peasant women's trade unions and to sensitise government officials to work collaboratively to build community resilience and protect livelihoods ahead of predicted climate risks.

Project Objectives:

HWA introduced disaster risk management (DRM) programmes to their partner organisations – the Women Peasant Unions and other Special Interest Group (SIGs) in Shaheed Benazirabad and Mirpurkhas districts. The approach focused on enhancing disaster preparedness and boosting their readiness by increasing knowledge and capacity for response among women peasants and rural workers. The project also established a functional disaster response framework for better collaboration and coordination between local government agencies and peasant organisations. The approach focused on empowering the women in the unions to advocate effectively for themselves as community leaders as well as to advocate for meeting the needs of vulnerable groups during disaster response and recovery efforts.

Key Activities:

The project carried out a baseline survey to capture the existing Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) related to disaster preparedness and climate resilience within the target communities; to identify and map key stakeholders for project engagement; and to provide the background for the District Disaster Response Framework (DDRF).

The DDRF was an important activity, as a local-level disaster response framework in the local language (Sindhi) was not available before. It was developed through a collaborative process with key state officials (including the Focal Person for the DDMA), the community, and civil society. This process, facilitated through a series of meetings, helped to bridge the gap between the relevant government departments and communities.

Capacity-building training workshops for communities on DRR were carried out to increase community knowledge and capacity on early warning systems, community-level response mechanisms including livestock protection and household preparedness, and the role of local governance and community responsibility in DRR. All workshop sessions were organised in the village to make them easily accessible and convenient — especially for women with care responsibilities or mobility restrictions. The workshops were delivered in a localised context and language to increase comprehension. Furthermore, visualisation, group work, and presentations were used to engage participants. The project actively encouraged participatory learning and collective decision-making among women leaders.

Disaster simulation drills for multiple hazards (flood, earthquake, fire, heatwave, cyclone, pandemic) were conducted at village level to provide practical, participatory disaster simulation drills to strengthen the disaster preparedness and response capacity of peasant women and rural workers. These drills enabled community members to practice emergency response procedures, test preparedness plans, and improve coordination during potential disaster events.

Project Reach:

This project has been implemented in 12 villages with 12 peasant women's trade unions, a total of 300 women across two districts (Shaheed Benazirabad and Mirpurkhas) of Sindh, Pakistan. Activities mainly included women from Indigenous and minority groups. The indirect benefits included others in the community – who also gained from DRR knowledge transfer and the local level state officials who also gained from increased interactions with the community.

2.2 Realities from the Ground

Ms. Fouzia (37), suffers from polio and lives in a flood-prone village - Hout Khan Laghari, in Union Council Doulatpur, Taluka Shujaabad, Mirpurkhas. Due to her limited mobility, Fouzia and her family are highly vulnerable to natural disasters, especially floods and heavy rains.

During the devastating floods of 2022, Fouzia's house was surrounded by floodwater. She faced extreme difficulty in moving to a safe place, and her family lost essential household items and food supplies. This experience exposed the serious risks faced by persons with disabilities during disasters and the lack of early warning and preparedness. *"It was very difficult for me to walk through flood water for two kilometres to reach a safe place"*, says Fouzia

Recognising the vulnerability of her village, under this project, HWA organised a one-day training workshop on Disaster Preparedness, Early Warning System & Livestock Protection in Fouzia's village. The training focused on practical disaster preparedness, with special attention to the needs of different groups such as women and persons with disabilities.

Fouzia is an active member of Peasant Women's Trade Union and after attending the training she gained confidence and practical knowledge on early warning systems and safe evacuation. She did not keep this knowledge to herself. Fouzia organised 'cascade training' sessions and shared the learning with other villagers, especially women and persons with disabilities, helping them prepare for future disasters.



Ms. Fouzia, an active member of the peasant women's trade union who trained others in the community on disaster Preparedness.

Photo credit:
HWA project photos

She is also actively involved as a member of the district level SIG and maintains direct coordination with district government departments to seek timely support during emergencies. Today, Fouzia is not only better prepared to protect herself and her family but has also become a source of strength and awareness in her community.

2.3 Changes due to the Project

Sharing Knowledge and Empowering the Community to Build a Risk-Aware Society:

Twelve community capacity-building workshops were conducted in the two districts in Sindh Province. In addition, on the request and interest of the community, HWA facilitated a further 8 'cascade trainings' to spread the message of DRR. These cascade trainings were led by community members who were very keen to share their knowledge and teach other community members about disaster management and reducing risks, with HWA trainers on hand to assist if needed. These trainings included pre-disaster preparedness, safe household construction, livestock protection, early warning systems, and coordination with concerned departments during times of crisis. The trainings were gender-inclusive and participant-centred. HWA observed that community members' understanding of how to handle disasters in real time was enhanced.

For many of the women in Benazirabad and Mirpurkhas, it was their first time learning about DRR — especially how to respond. Very few had previously been aware of how to manage disasters and take measures to reduce the impact on life and livelihoods.

A community member, Habib Khatoon, from the district of Benazirabad, said, *"This [Disaster Risk Reduction] training was a very new thing for us. We had not thought about dealing with floods, droughts and heavy rains."*

The capacity-building workshops helped communities understand the need for pre-disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Household preparedness practices can be evidenced by families adopting multiple risk-reduction measures, including food and water storage, livestock protection measures, house repairs, and protection of important documents.

Ensuring Inclusion through local level delivery of activities: The project carried out all of its activities at village level. This allowed men and women — including peasant women, rural workers, religious minorities, and persons with disabilities — to easily access the awareness sessions, trainings, and meetings. For many whose lives depend on livestock and agriculture, the training offered practical solutions to improve their disaster preparedness. Furthermore, the proactive involvement and engagement of women from the community as trainers shows that the community felt the programmes were useful and that there is interest for the training and awareness-raising to continue beyond the project.



Proactive involvement and engagement of women from the community in the DRR capacity building workshops

Photo credit: HWA project photos

Shanti, a member belonging to a minority group from the Mirpurkhas District, also shared similar views on the training she attended. *“Heavy rains and floods adversely affect our lives. Training about disaster [risk reduction] is new and exciting. We actively participated and learned to save our lives and belongings during disasters.”*

Building Institutional Capacity and Improving Collaboration: The DDRF was discussed and modified based on 6 stakeholder meetings, with active participation from focal persons from the DDMA, Rescue 1122, and other state officials, as well as representatives from peasant women's trade unions and civil society. These meetings helped to shape the framework, while also building a shared understanding of its objectives, structure, and intended outcomes, and reinforcing institutional ownership and collaboration. Government stakeholders appreciated the meaningful role of peasant women's trade union members, highlighting their contribution towards inclusive disaster preparedness and response planning. This recognition is a key outcome towards more collaborative disaster risk management.

The DDRF was subsequently developed and handed over to the DDMA. The DDMA and other district government departments showed ownership by reviewing, providing feedback, and sharing their valuable suggestions on the early warning system and disaster preparedness.

Furthermore, a training manual aligned with the DDRF and the needs of the community was also developed in the local language (Sindhi), increasing accessibility and understanding. Meetings and awareness workshops were carried out to make sure that both community members and district government officials were aware of, and could implement, the DDRF. The DDRF sparked interest among stakeholders, who shared action points during these meetings.

Linking with the State System to Increase Disaster Response Capacity: Beyond this policy-level work on the DDRF, the project also built practical, operational links with the state emergency response system to strengthen disaster response capacities directly. Twelve village level disaster simulation drill workshops were organised in partnership with Rescue 1122, the provincial government agency responsible for emergency and disaster response. These paired state emergency infrastructure directly with community-level preparedness rather than treating the two as separate tracks. Simulating real disaster scenarios such as floods, earthquakes, and fires, the drills moved beyond theory into hands-on demonstration and practice: participants were trained in evacuation procedures, first aid, CPR, fire safety, and basic rescue techniques, with trainers guiding the demonstrations followed by supervised practical implementation, so participants could build confidence and sharpen decision making under simulated pressure. The drills were attended by 319 participants — skewed heavily toward inclusion by design — 275 women, 120 members of minority communities, and 5 persons with disabilities.



Community engages in practical DRR drills and get hands-on training in first aid and rescue techniques that can save lives.

Photo credit: HWA project photos

The final evaluation, through a survey covering 72 respondents across both districts, recorded that communities demonstrated a stronger understanding of disaster risks, moving beyond recognition of floods, droughts, heatwaves, and heavy rains to understanding their impacts on livelihoods, food security, health, and displacement. A significant change emerged from the endline, as women's confidence to respond to disasters increased dramatically from around 10% at baseline to over 91% at endline. Another significant achievement was the expansion of access to Early Warning Systems (EWS): awareness of, and access to, disaster warnings increased from 9.1% at baseline to 97.2% at endline. Institutional awareness also improved considerably, increasing from 50% to 76.4%, with community members increasingly recognising the roles of the DDMA, local government, rescue services, and NGOs.

2.4 Challenges

Operational challenges: Low literacy among community members was a major challenge. Language barriers, especially for women, slowed the pace of training. Moreover, the unavailability of concerned government officials posed a challenge for the implementing team, and undeclared holidays due to strikes also hindered project implementation.

Structural constraints: Despite the achievements, important structural challenges remain. Poverty, weak housing structures, inadequate shelter facilities, limited government service delivery, and continued reliance on debt and asset sales during emergencies continue to constrain resilience outcomes. Significant disparities also exist between districts, particularly regarding training coverage, transport availability, and access to safe shelters and clean water.

2.5 Lessons Learnt

Communities have often experienced floods, heavy rains, and droughts, but there has not been adequate awareness built on preparedness or recovery. There is therefore a lot of interest in the topic, in order to protect lives, livelihoods, and productive assets. Furthermore, the community valued the knowledge and was motivated to spread it and participate in disaster preparedness activities.

The fact that all training and workshops were done in the local areas, in local languages, and involved community members themselves as trainers, helped to increase interest in the topic and allowed a range of community members to participate. Women also showed that when given the opportunity, they can take a leading role and actively engage in building resilience.

From the perspective of local government, they appreciated and acknowledged that community-centred awareness-raising can increase behavioural change — and that this is what is required. The local state mechanism also appreciated the contribution of community inputs into developing the DDRF.

In this project, HWA worked with the peasant women's trade unions, who are already registered with District labour departments and already work closely with government departments on various social issues. HWA also have a long-term relationship with these groups and will continue this relationship. This allowed the relatively short-term SIDRRA project to have a mobilised group and structure to work with. This allowed the team to go directly into activities, without having to spend time becoming familiar with mobilising and forming new groups. Given that community groups set up only for a project tend not to continue beyond its duration, the ability to use an existing group was advantageous.

2.6 Way Forward

The communities have taken the initiative to organise similar DRR training sessions for individuals who could not participate in the earlier trainings due to project limitations. In addition, there are a few individuals from the well-established community groups (trade unions) who are motivated and interested in replicating the awareness and training. Thus, it can be expected that the focus on DRR will continue beyond the project.

The peasant women's trade unions members and other minority groups are now part of the district coordination committees, alongside the DDMA, to implement the DDRF. Developed in the local language (Sindhi), the DDRF has reduced the gap between communities and government officials and increased the ease of communication and implementation. The coordination meetings include peasant women's trade union representatives, they have opened up access to decision-making forums for women and community members from minority groups, who remain committed to working with state officials given the potential for DRR actions to save lives and livelihoods. As both community and district government now have a good working understanding of one another, this coordination channel is expected to continue beyond the project.

While the project strengthened disaster awareness, preparedness capacities, early warning access, institutional engagement, and women's leadership, continued investment in infrastructure, livelihood resilience, shelter facilities, and institutional service delivery will be essential to sustain and expand these gains



Coordination meetings with the local level disaster officials and community, including members from the peasant women's trade union.

Photo credit: HWA project photos

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[From Risk to Readiness: Community-Driven Local-Level Disaster Risk Governance](#) compiles case studies and lessons from this work, strengthening the evidence base for inclusive local-level governance and adding to the wider knowledge on what works, for whom, and why.

Each case study is also available as a standalone publication.



Scan for the Document:
From Risk to Readiness: Community-Driven Local-level
Disaster Risk Governance
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by HWA

**From Risk to Readiness:
Community Driven Local-Level Disaster Risk Governance**