

HUMANITARIAN AID (SDC-HA) PAKISTAN

RECONSTRUCTION AND LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMME RLP

Institutional Development at Village Level in the earthquake affected areas Transformation of VRCs into Local Support Organizations

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Abbreviations

AI teams	Assessment Inspection Teams (Army)
BHU	Basic Health Unit
CBO	Community based Organization
EQ	Earthquake
ERRA	Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority
HRC	Housing Reconstruction Centre
IP(s)	Institutional Partner(s)
JWO	Jirga Welfare Organization
MT	Mobile Teams
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
ODC	Organization for Development and Cooperation
PO	Partner Organization
RLP	Reconstruction and Livelihood Programme (SDC-HA)
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SM	Social Mobilizer
SRSP	Sarhad Rural Support Programme
UC	Union Council
VRC	Village Reconstruction Committee

1 Background

The devastating earthquake on 8th October 2005 over an area of 30,000 square km across NWFP and AJK killed 88'000 and injured more than 100'000 people. As a result according to the official statistics of government of Pakistan 460'000 houses damaged. Most of the damages occurred in the rural and mountainous areas.

SDC-HA is one of the institutional partners to the governmental Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) in the implementation of the private rural housing reconstruction strategy. SDC operates two out of 11 ERRA Housing Reconstruction Centers (HRCs), one in district Battagram and one in Tehsil Balakot. The HRCs are staffed with a team of technical advisors and trainers.

Since spring 2006 Trainings and technical assistance is provided in the two HRCs on earthquake safer building methods according to the standards of the << **Build Back Better**>> -Strategy. Trainings are conducted at various levels and for different target groups (masons, engineers, self builders, Army, social mobilizers, trainers, NGOs etc).

The HRC's further provide information to everyone on other construction related issues (e.g. technical standards), particularly through the partner organizations (POs). POs pass on the private housing policy to the rural areas in their assigned union councils through so called "mobile teams". Mobile teams are composed of a mason/engineer and a male and female social mobilizer. SDC-HA is itself a partner organization in UC Shamlai (Battagram) and Mohandri (Balakot) where field offices are established and functioning.

ERRA together with its partners adopted owner-based approach in the implementation of housing reconstruction. Community members and local institutions are considered to play a central role in housing reconstruction ensuring that local traditions and social needs are taken into consideration.

Community-based approaches used to complement the payment of grants to individuals in several ways, including: group procurement, group transport, reinforcing training messages regarding standards and norms, resolving conflicts over land, facilitating relocation where necessary, ensuring access to skilled labor for vulnerable groups, linking housing to livelihoods and infrastructure planning and integrating communities in the certification process.

2 Role of Grass root institutions/Committees

2.1 Pre EQ Context

Before earthquake SRSP and SUNGI were active in Union council Mohandri (District Mansehra) and UC Shamlai (District Battagram). SUNGI and SRSP established few community organizations (COs), build their capacity and started savings and implemented some small scale infrastructure projects in both UCs. But in UC Shamlai, due to resistance from Khan's and religious leaders, the COs became in-active. Only one CO was active in the village Shamlai. Whereas in UC Mohandri, SUNGI and SRSP worked for almost seven years according to the local people but due to political and ethnical conflicts none of the COs remain active. The reasons behind in-activeness were backwardness, religious and khan's dominated society and propogandas on NGOs and funding agencies as non muslin, missionary etc.

2.2 After earthquake

With initiation of the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase, SDC established FO in both UCs equipped with technical and social mobilization teams. These teams have started interaction with community members at each village and formed VRCs through motivation and dialogue. SDC-HA MTs formed 198 VRCs in Union Council Mohandri and Shamlai. Out of 198 VRCs, 121 are Male VRCs whereas, 71 are Female VRCs.

During the dialogue process with community members it has been realized that collective approach and social cohesion is even not existing. Individualistic approach to resolve their problems have been seen in the field during visits.

With passage of time, through extensive public dialogue, information dissemination and trainings the community members started playing active role in their respective villages to ensure and advocate on Earthquake Resistant Techniques according to ERRA guidelines.

3 What is Village Reconstruction Committee (VRC)

According to ERRA Housing Strategy, ensuring owner driven approach in housing reconstruction, VRC is the representative body of ERRA at grass-root level with the following function:

- Inform communities about housing reconstruction policies
- Assist mobile team in organizing assessment, training and inspection
- Lead housing reconstruction planning activities
- Promote earthquake resistant building techniques
- Contribute to data collection on the community
- Organize collective building material procurement, material quality control and logistics
- Contribute to compliance through advising beneficiaries
- Organize community environmental management activities in relation with housing reconstruction
- Support community based land dispute resolution
- Assist vulnerable families

A VRC comprises of a president, General Secretary, Treasurer and five members nominated by families/tribes. The President and Secretary are either elected or selected with mutual consensus within the community members.

3.1 An effective role of VRC Clusters

Lack of active activists, resources and capacity has limited the activities of some VRCs after six month of formation. SDC MT intensified their follow up visits in those villages in order to keep the VRCs functional. To keep all VRCs functional and sustained, an initiative has been taken through SDC MT to strengthen VRCs on cluster level according to their geography and mutual acceptance. This approach enabled the weak and non functional VRCs to join and get support from the active and functional VRCs.

In Mohandri, Hamdard Coordination Council is the first success story of joint venture between VRCs. (See field story 1: VRC Cluster Champion)

4 Activities undertaken with VRCs in UC Shamlai and Mohandri

4.1 Social Mobilization Training

After formation of VRCs, Leadership Management Skill Training as part of Social Mobilization Training has been given to VRC members through SDC Mobile Teams. This helped the VRC members to learn some basic management skills; for example maintaining social cohesion, conducting an effective VRC Meeting, proper record keeping, identification of projects/ vulnerables, saving and financial management, how to work with NGOs and donors etc.

4.2 Village Data Collection

SDC MTs together with VRCs members collected village data on pre-structured format. The data helped in making strategy and action plan for the implementation of rural housing reconstruction programme, livelihood and for other stakeholders intended to work on different projects in both UCs. Village and Dream maps were also made through Participatory Rural Appraisal.

4.3 Technical orientation/Trainings

Technical staff of SDC conducted orientation sessions with VRCs on ERRA Housing Strategy. A comprehensive technical training on each construction designs (Load Bearing Masonry Structures, RCC-Frame Structures, Confined Masonry, Dhaji (Timber), Bhatar (Timber) has been given to each VRCs in the both UCs (Shamlai and Mohandri).

Refresher trainings have also been conducted on request and/or need basis.

4.4 Grievances and compliance redressal

Apart from the direct door to door assistance in the villages, SDC MTs collected issues related to grievances and compliance (survey, grant problems, owner-tenant issues, wrong account, NIC or MoU number, No work started etc.) through VRCs and referred to ERRA and Army for immediate remedial measures.

4.5 Vulnerable identification

During visits in the villages SDC MTs collected data on vulnerable individuals and families with the help of VRCs. As most of them were Female headed household and individuals with severe medical problems. These vulnerables have been supported through SDC livelihood component (see report on Gender dimensions in Housing Reconstruction). The individuals with medical problems were referred to Social Protection Unit of ERRA.

4.6 VRCs Cluster formation

With the passage of time VRCs became more active and organized but VRCs in the remotest and on the high altitudes failed to survive and/or sustain due to many reasons. For example lack of active activists, lack of resources, inaccessible for frequent visit of MTs etc. Through mutual consensus and motivation, SDC MTs formed VRC Clusters according to geographic location and acceptability and accessibility within the VRCs. So that, all VRCs are strengthen each other by using one umbrella platform for their common interest and sustainable development.

4.7 Activities with SDC Livelihood Programme

SDC-HA Livelihood component served as an incentive based approach in the smooth implementation of Housing Reconstruction Programme in UCs Shamlai and Mohandri. Based on PRA, SDC MTs and VRCs identified different schemes, list of beneficiaries for seeds, productive assets and tools for SDC Livelihood Interventions in UC Shamlai and Mohandri.

Through close partnership with VRC Clusters in both union councils the Livelihood section distributed different kind of seeds to 11'500 households, completed successfully 30 small and medium scales infrastructure projects, established and running 5 vocational training centers, established 8 karyana shops for vulnerable women (Widows, Female Headed households). Through individual fund support projects, 8 sewing machines distributed among the vulnerable women and girls identified mutually by SDC mobile teams and VRC Clusters. Through productive assets and tools, 2 block machines, 2 saw mills and 600 beneficiaries have been distributed construction tools.

4.8 Model Houses and Vocational Training Centers

SDC-HA constructed 11 Model houses on different construction methods (5 in UC Shamlai and 6 in UC Mohandri). The construction methods were Dhajji, Bhatar and confined masonry. VRC clusters were actively involved in identification of land, participants for hand-on training and in the process of devising strategy for further use of the structure for the community's common interest. Out of 11 Model Houses, 2 are giving to widows, 4 to disabled persons, 3 are using Vocational Training Centers. Whereas, 1 model house the community is using as traditional school and 1 as a kindergarten for approx. 30 girls and boys.

5 Linkage Development

The VRC clusters performed pro-actively in housing specific activities. Based on the activeness and collective approach, SDC Community Development Section planed to facilitate the VRC clusters to work with the same spirit beyond housing reconstruction. Linkages developed with SDC Livelihood, Schools and BHUs and other agencies like UNDP, ILO, Muslim Aid and the Local government in UC Mohandri and Organization for Development and Cooperation (ODC), Jirga Welfare Organization (JWO) and Local Government in UC Shamlai in order to closely work with VRC Clusters.

In UC Mohandri through UNDP and ILO Community Based Livelihood Recovery Programme (CBLRP), All the VRC Clusters got comprehensive trainings on Leadership Management Skills Training, this covers all the required skills, knowledge and attitude to run an organization at village level. Currently VRC Clusters identified projects of large and medium scales and preparation is underway for the implementation as partner of these two UN Agencies.

In UC Shamlai Jirga Welfare Organization is running 2 vocational centers to train male and female of the locality in embroidery and sewing. Organization for Development and Cooperation (ODC) is in the process of identifying projects together with VRC Clusters for the ERRA and FAO Community Based Livelihood Programme (CBLRP).

6 Lessons Learned

1. Owner and community based approach is the key to a successful programme / intervention.
2. Disaster can be a change catalyst in bring social cohesion among different political, ethnic and religious groups, development opportunities and more importantly institutional development at grass level to address and resolve the issues and problems of poorest of the poor.
3. Encouraging and strengthening Village level institutions are must for sustainability of any programme/project. Support both in terms of advancing linkages with other development partners and as well in attaining economic development, thus turning into self-sustaining, participatory development institutions can make a big difference and/or impact.

7 Field stories

VRC CLUSTER CHAMPIONS

VRC Kanar Danna Lower, District Mansehra

Authors: Syed Tariq Nadeem (SDC Social Mobilizer)

Date: September 12, 2007

After three hour grueling walks up a steep mountain, one comes across VRC Kanar Danna Lower. The seven male members of this VRC represent approximately 90 households, which are scattered across the mountainside. This hard and difficult terrain, coupled with the spread of the households posed an immense challenge to the VRC, limiting its ability to convene meetings and coordinate reconstruction activities. The

Circumstances demanded an innovative solution and the community, under the leadership of the President of VRC Kanar Danna Lower, responded adequately.

The solution was simple – create a cluster of 14 local VRCs, the activities of which would be coordinated by a core cluster office setup in a central, easily accessible location. This simple yet innovative initiative, underscores the will of the community to bring positive change even when faced with discouraging conditions. A central cluster office was setup along side the main road that connects these 14 villages. The cluster Office, in this remote region of the country, is very well organized; records of all VRC members, including ID card copies, complete contact details, damages incurred during the earthquake etc., are meticulously maintained.

The most noteworthy achievement of the cluster office is its ability to facilitate collective procurement for all member VRCs. The purchased construction material is delivered at the cluster office; from where this material is transported to the respective VRCs. Members of the VRC community assist each other in providing man power and other forms of carriage up the mountains to the individual's doorstep. This VRC is a champion in pioneering a cluster approach to collective procurement and is demonstrating best practices in social mobilization.

The members of the VRC Kanar Danna Lower are sensitized to the broader development issues of the community. They have undertaken the construction of water supply pipelines and disbursement of seeds for crop plantation. The VRC meets once a month and the proceedings of which are well documented.

The VRC members indicate their dejection at being left alone by non-local organizations in the rebuilding of their community. Members are aware that this is mainly because of the harsh terrain of their locality and the associated challenges. Their isolation is perhaps the driving force behind the emergence of this cluster of the 14 VRCs and the resultant consolidated efforts in forming a unified front in battling the challenges of reconstruction.

ESSENCE OF HAMDARD COORDINATION COUNCIL

Authors: Syed Tariq Nadeem (SDC Social Mobilizer)

Date: September 13, 2007

Village Reconstruction Committees (VRCs) has been initiated with an aim to assist Mobile team in its functioning, promoting EQ resistant building technologies, organize collective material procurement and support land dispute resolution at village level. Local community organized themselves in their respective VRCs but with the passage of time the community activists and Mobile Team felt that VRCs sometime do not address problems very effectively due to the absence of leadership and / or resources. They started thinking about partnership with other active VRCs to resolve their basic problems and work for self reliance.

The cluster (Hamdard coordination council) is an example and success story of joint ventures between VRCs.

Hamdard Coordination Council consists of VRCs from Ochri lower, Ochri upper, kanary, Sindhu Baila, Kanhar Dana upper kanhar Dana lower, Butan upper, Butan lower, Tootha anjran, Ganja Baila, Dhogian and Dhong villages of UC Mohandri.

The executive body consists of president, secretary, office assistant and two members of each VRC which are the members of executive body. The executive body works in the coordination office.

Mohammad Nawaz Khan, president of Ochri lower village reconstruction committee is the pioneer to initiate networking of VRCs. MNK said "this is a right approach to join hands without any discrimination to work for our rehabilitation and reconstruction and enable our community for self-reliant and subsequently towards sustainable rural development."

The cluster ensured equal participation of VRCs by nominating representatives of each VRC at Cluster level. The president and General Secretary of each VRC are members of the Executive body of the cluster body. Each representative participates, share and contribute in all affairs of the cluster. Problems are listing down and assigns different member different tasks to undertake with concern organization, individual and / or government departments.

As the network body has become more accepted and trustworthy among the community, so different kinds of disputes and conflicts are handling through executive body and influential individuals. Besides resolving conflicts, the cluster body has a clear sense of gender equality within the local culture and norms. They are in favor of female education and livelihood generation activities. They have set example of camaraderie when a pregnant lady was carried on shoulders by the network president and secretary and carried the lady with their family to the nearest hospital. They set example of self help when they collected money for a person whose grocery shop was destroyed due to fire.

They are trying to establish themselves as self-supporting community organization by introducing membership fee of Rs.200/- per VRC. Every VRC collected data of their concerned village regarding housing situation, school conditions, water supply and link road. They offer services for organizations working on different sectors of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction.

The special feature of this Cluster is the dispute resolution among community members and transparency of the financial system.

There is a need of capacity building in the areas of management, finance and also entrepreneurship.