

25 March 2014 – Tharparkar is geographically situated in the southern region with a population of 1 226 800. On its north is district Umerkot, in the west district Mirpur Khas and district Badin, and on its eastern border Rajasthan (India) and south Gujarat (India). Tharparkar comprise of four *talukas*; (Mithi, Islam-Kot, Chachro, Nagarparkar), with 3 *talukas* hospitals, 2 rural health centres, 32 basic health centres and a DHQ hospital with a nutrition stabilization centre in its pediatrics ward working 24/7.

Tharparkar is a food-insecure district as per the VAM 2009 report and is frequently affected by drought. There is indifferent rainfall in the *talukas* of the district that creates an unequal situation. There were reports in the media that more than 36 children lost their lives to malnutrition during February, as reported by civil hospital Mithi, due to scarcity of food.

After this news was aired all the stakeholders, PDMA, NDMA , federal and provincial government officials rushed to Mithi to help the drought-affected people of Tharparkar. The Chief of Sindh office WHO, along with Provincial Nutrition Officer and Department of Health officials visited the district to assess the situation in close coordination with the district health management team.

Untimely and low rainfall has caused crop failure in Tharparkar, which, coupled with an outbreak of sheep pox in small livestock, may be strongly associated with an increase in child deaths in recent months. To understand the link, it is important to understand the socioeconomic context of the Thari society. Almost half the population of Tharparkar is non-Muslim, poor and with minimal access to social services, including health care.

Households have limited financial resources. Whenever families require cash for essential commodities or services, they take their animals to the nearest market and trade in or sell them to fulfil their requirements. In Thari society, there is no culture of cash savings. They keep their investments in their livestock, which makes households vulnerable to adverse events. The current sheep pox epidemic is wiping out their livestock and ability to survive. It can be expected that life in Tharparkar will become more difficult in the coming days and months.

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