

Profile of district Umerkot

with focus on livelihood related issues



South Asia Partnership-Pakistan

Profile of district
Umerkot
with focus on livelihood related issues

Developed by
Tahir Mehdi, Tauqeer Mustafa, Rashid Chaudhry,
Shafiq Butt, Asif Hoat, Matloob Ali, Khalid Amin and Shoaib Tariq

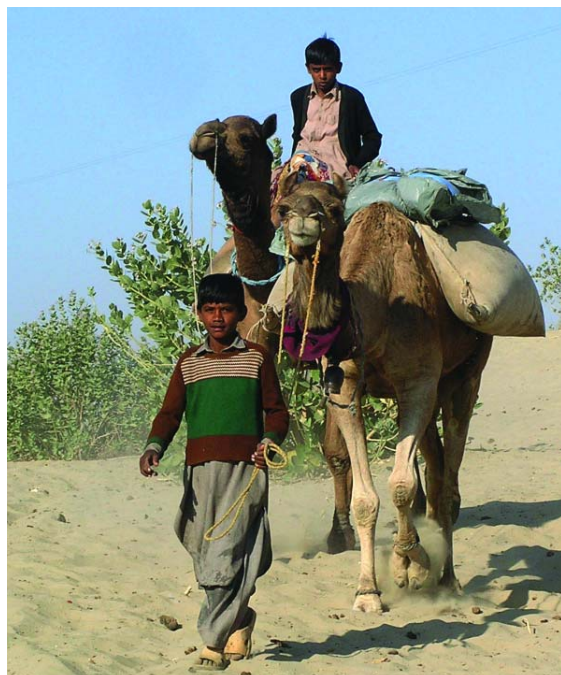
Published by
South Asia Partnership-Pakistan
Haseeb Memorial Trust Building, Nasirabad, 2 km Raiwind Road,
P.O. Thokar Niaz Beg, Lahore-53700, Pakistan
Ph: 92-42-35311701-3, 5-6, Fax: 92-42-35311710
Email: info@sappk.org, Website: www.sappk.org

Printed by
Visionaries Division

Quantity: 500

December 2009

Any part of this publication can be reproduced provided a reference is made to this original publication.

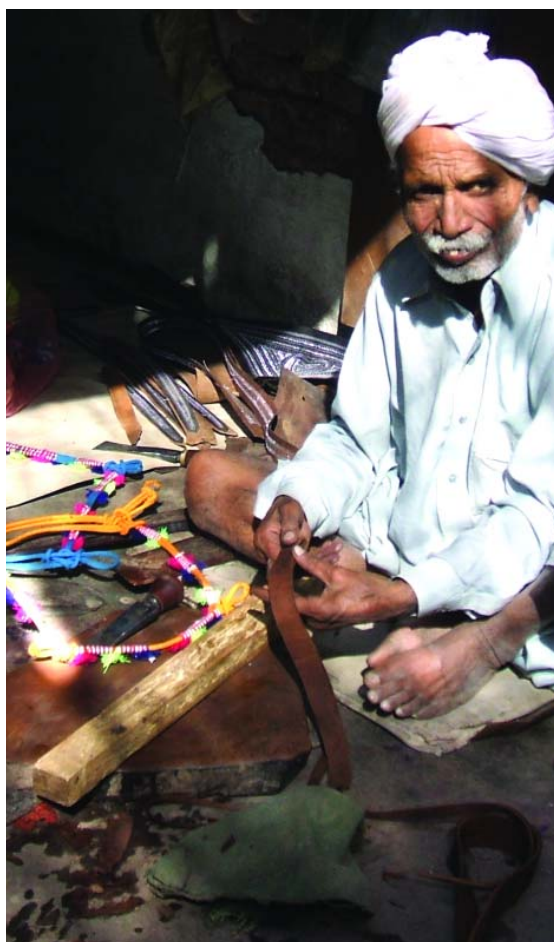


Contents

Foreword ...	4
Brief history of the district ...	6
Geography and demography ...	7&9
Map of the district ...	8
Hindus of Umerkot ...	10
Female population ...	11
Literacy ...	13
A typical household ...	14
Healthcare ...	15
Politics and elections ...	16
Separate electorate ...	19
Agriculture ...	20
Water scarcity in Sindh ...	21
Livestock ...	23
Seasonal labor ...	24
Drought prone Thar awaits a long term solution ...	25
SAP-Pk partner in the district ...	30

This publication is a result of a research exercise carried out to understand and document the current status of different ways and means of earning livelihoods in a group of selected districts of Pakistan and other factors that have an impact on people's capacity to utilize available resources and that of creating new ones. The study is a part of South Asia Partnership, Pakistan's (SAP-PK) strategy to realize its mission of creating an engendered, critical society in South Asia based on the universal principles of human dignity, justice, democracy and peaceful coexistence. As member of South Asian civil society movement, SAP-Pk is striving to empower marginalized sections of society and working to influence policies in their favor.

Data for the study is collected through secondary as well as primary sources. The secondary data is mostly quoted from Population Census 1998, Agriculture Census 2000, Agriculture Machinery Census 2004, Industry Census 2004, Animal Census 2006, Punjab Development Statistics 2008 and other government sources. Information from some departmental studies like Multiple Indicator Cluster Study by Planning Commission 2003-04 has also been used. The figures have been projected to the latest year using growth rates. But growth rates for some parameters are either not available or are generalized for the national or provincial level as their district break-ups are not available. This may have resulted in not very accurate projected figures for the district. We however believe that this is unlikely to undermine the broader conclusions drawn from these.



Livelihood has very rarely been a subject for any scientific research despite its utmost importance. The need to initiate such work was absolutely necessary, as the traditional livelihood sources are rapidly depleting. This situation has pushed a large portion of population, especially those who have been associated with agriculture and traditional sources of earning in rural areas. They are left stranded as far as their livelihood sources are concerned. This factor contributes substantial rise in poverty. The situation is particularly affecting the landless and the farmers with small land holdings and rural workers. The women farmers and tillers belonging to religious minorities are the worst affected as they were solely dependent on traditional modes of earning.

In this scenario the work in hand is a commendable task undertaken and completed by the writers. It is a wonderful effort in the right direction. The work definitely provides a basis for further research on livelihood sources. There is not only occasional analysis included in the profile but the facts and figures provided also stimulate the reader to build up different analysis. The book very clearly shows how the nature and availability of livelihood sources can have effects on poverty and poor people.

This research work was conducted in 15 districts of all four provinces. The districts selected include

where the South Asia Partnership has been working since its inception for the betterment of poorer sections of the society through various initiatives. The publication gives a detail description of demographic factors such as population of male and female in the district and how these differences denote to discrimination and bias against women-folk of the country. The research focuses more on female population of the rural areas with stress on maternity health, literacy, enrollment and drop-out ratio among girl students.

The district profile also notes the changes in pattern of livelihood sources. It also deals with the number of issues such as health facilities, transportation and communication, irrigation, pattern of crops, land ownership patterns, livestock and industrial growth in the district. The work includes the politics of international trade agreements and its implications on Pakistan's industrial and agricultural sectors and especially on livelihood sources of the population. All the facts are substantiated by related data which is another quality of this work.

It is in fact a valuable addition in the efforts of South Asia Partnership- Pakistan spanning over the periods of two decades in the field of research especially on the subjects related to poor farmers and rural workers. And of course livelihood stands high in this list.

I want to conclude by removing some misconceptions prevalent in our 'intellectual' brethren about the efficacy and usefulness of written work. They opine that since the South Asia Partnership-Pakistan is working for the peasant and rural workers, the big majority of those are unable to read so the written work will be fruitless. I wonder if one goes with this approach then the publishing and printing of books should be halted at once, for even the big majority of literate population has no tendency towards reading the books especially on serious subjects. The efficacy of the written work cannot be measured by mere number of souls who have actually read it but by the effects the work has generated. To quote an example "DAS CAPITAL" would have been, most probably, read by some thousand people but the effect it produced and still generating is even immeasurable.

This work will definitely be helpful for the policy makers, for the development experts, for non governmental organization in evolving their strategies to coup poverty and deprivation. The research is capable of organizing peasants and workers both rural and industrial around identified issues.

Mohammed Tahseen
Executive Director



Umerkot is a city that lies at the edge of famous Thar Desert. The great desert spreads over parts of Pakistan and India. The town and the district is known (or spelled) as Umerkot by the Muslims and Amerkot by the Hindus. It was originally named after Amer Singh who founded this city. Later on, Jam Umer, the first Sumra king conquered it and since then, the name changed to Umerkot. The official name of the town and the district is now Umerkot.

Umerkot is one of the oldest cities of Sindh and has much to offer in terms of history, culture and glory. It was once the capital of Greater Sindh Province that included some parts of present day Indian state of Rajasthan. The area has a rich culture and the popular folk love story of Umer and Marvi is set in here. The great Mughal king Akbar was born to Humayun's wife Hameeda Bano in

Umerkot when he fled from military defeat at the hands of Sher Shah Suri. Rana Prasad, a Sodha Rajput ruler of Amerkot, gave refuge to Humayun. The district's headquarter has the magnificent historical fort of Umer.

This area has been ruled by Rajputs, Rathors, Sumras and Mughals. In 1793, Kalhoras took over the control of this area. Talpurs regained Umerkot in 1813 but were unable to maintain their authority. British challenged their power and posted detachments in Nagar Parkar under the control of political agent in Bhoj.

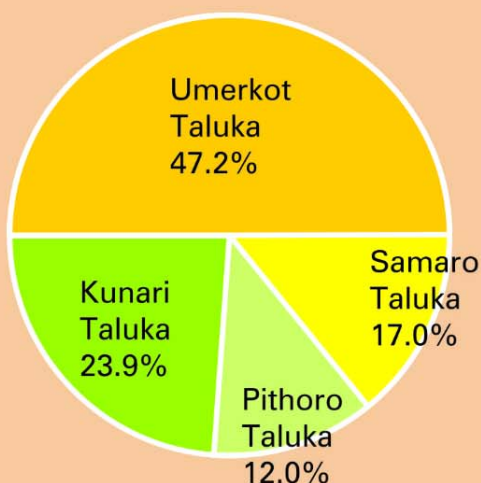
In 1858-59, southern talukas of Thar and Parkar were transferred to Hyderabad district. The desert constituting Tharparkar was later separated from Hyderabad and was given under the control of, first political superintendent in 1860 (the year when municipality was established in the town of Umerkot) and later Deputy Commissioner in 1881. It main-

tained the same status till 1912 when district Nawabshah was carved out of Tharparkar and Hyderabad. It was in 1990 that the district of Mirpur Khas was born out of Tharparkar. The areas that now make district Umerkot were then a part of the new Mirpur Khas district. Umerkot was first given the status of a district in April 1993, but was abolished in 2000 and merged into the District Mirpur Khas again as a Tehsil. Local activists agitated against the decision till Umerkot was restored as district in December 2004.

Umerkot district has two distinct **geographical** portions: the irrigated area in the north and west and the desert in the south and east. The eastern Nara canal is the demarcation line between the two regions. The fusion of the two is clearly marked in the south. One can see the sand dunes spreading towards east with thorny bushes. The ridges are irregular. They can often enclose shelter valleys above which they rise to a height of some forty six meters. Towards west are the alluvial planes with vast stretches of vegetation. There is no river or natural stream in the district.

The district has extreme **climate** in its two portions, which differs considerably. In the irrigated portion the climate is temperate, being neither extremely hot in the summer nor very cold in winter as compared to the eastern desert area. The summer heat is considerably reduced by almost constant blowing of the south western breeze from the sea. The eastern portion of the desert area has a tropical climate,

Umerkot District population
791,984 (2007 estimate)



8 Towns

16.8%

228 Villages

83.2%

Urban

133,130

Rural

658,854

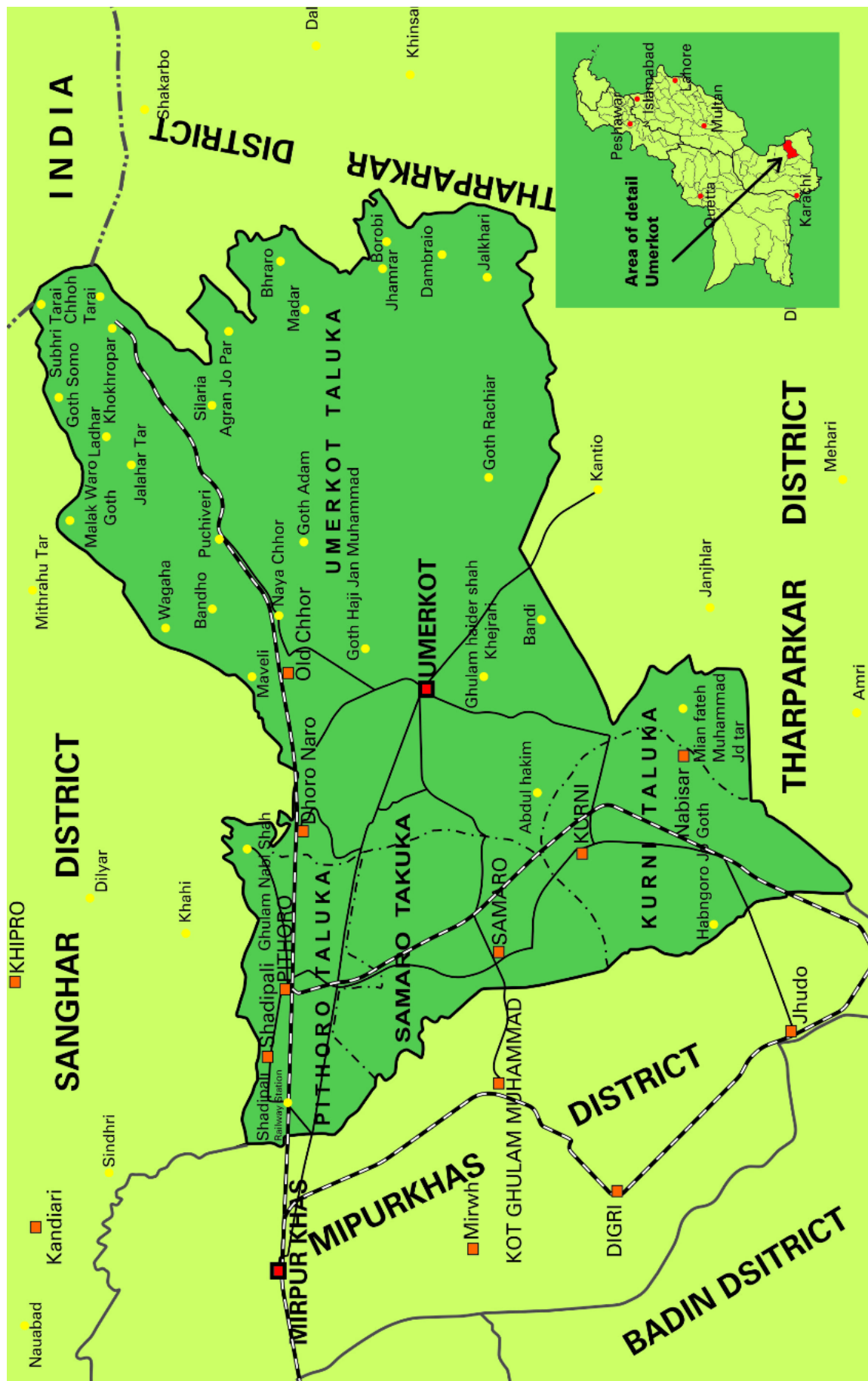
Towns

Population

Umerkot	42,471
Kurni	26,990
Dhoronard	19,954
Chhore Old	16,699
Samaro	8,806
Pithoro	6,562
Nabisar	6,292
Shadipali	5,356

Villages

	No	% share
5000 and above	16	21.8
2000 to 5000	94	54.5
1000 to 2000	69	18.5
Less than 1000	49	5.2
All villages	228	100.0



being more hot and dry, but receives comparatively more rains during monsoon. April, May and June are the hottest months. The mean maximum and minimum temperatures during this period are 41 °C and 24 °C respectively.

December, January and February are the



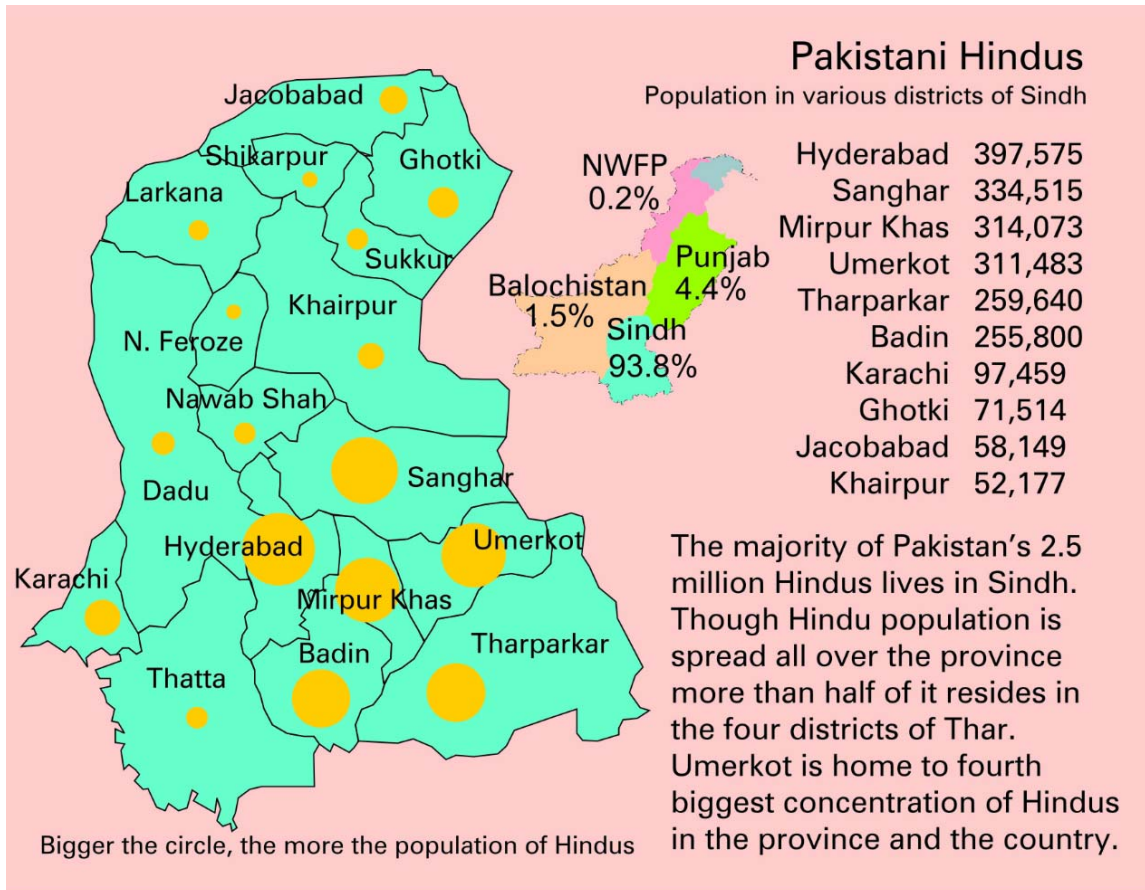
coldest months. The mean maximum and minimum temperatures during this period are 28°C and 9°C respectively. Rainfall varies from year to year. Most of the rain falls in the monsoon months between June and September. The winter rains are very rare.

Umerkot district consists of four **tehsils** or talukas: Umerkot, Pithoro, Samaro and Kunri.

According to the 1998 national census, the population of Umerkot was 6,63,100, as compared to 3,83,020 in 1981. The population grew by 73.12 percent in 17 years which indicates an average annual growth rate of 3.28 percent. If we go back further, the intercensal increase has been 19.11, 52.80 and 44.16 percents during 1951-61, 1961-72, and 1972-81 respectively. Overall the population of the district has increased three and a half times during 47 years between 1951-1998. The 1998 population propagated at the national annual growth rate gives a total population of 8,76,000 for 2008.

The **population** is unevenly distributed among the four talukas with Umerkot having almost half of total population of the district. 24 percent live in Kunri taluka, 17 percent in Samaro and 12 percent in Pithoro. 83 percent of the district population lives in rural areas while the rest in urban ones. There are eight urban localities in the district; of which Umerkot town committee, the biggest one, had a population of 36,000 in 1998. Umerkot is the least populated district of Sindh, as it stands at number five in terms of lesser population density. Only 118 persons live in a square kilometer in this district. Tharparkar, Thatta, Dadu and Khairpur are the districts where population density is even lesser.

Hindus constitute almost half of the district's population and dominant race among them is that of Sodha Rajputs. They claim to be of 'pure rajput'



origin and are called Thakurs. Other castes of Hindus living in this area include Brahmans, Lohanas (an Indo-Aryan ethnic group mostly living in Indian Gujrat and associated with business), Kohlis (belonging to Khatri sub-caste), Bheels, Sutars and others.

The cultural pattern of the area has not changed much since long and every tribe or race has its own set of customs. In desert, the Tharis are simple and hospitable as compared to their counterpart in irrigated areas. The gathering between castes is largely restricted to men. Women mostly communicate within their own caste, within which they marry exclusively. Rajput women observe strict pardah (veil) while poorer Bajeer, Bheel

women are freer to undertake their field tasks.

Music is a favorite recreation. Hindu and scheduled caste women sing a song in chorus called 'Rasura' accompanied by folk dance. These songs and dances are amusing and reflect the influence of folk-lore of Sindh as well as Rajasthan (previously Rajputana). The musical instruments generally used are dhol (drum), Ghara (pitcher) and Algoza. In irrigated part of the district, usual Sindhi culture prevails.

Umerkot is the only district in Pakistan with around half of the total population being non-Muslim. 48 out of every 100 persons living in this district belong to officially declared minority communities. 39 out of these 48 are Hindus while 8 belong to scheduled

castes. The rest 1 percent are Ahmedis. Hindus and scheduled castes are concentrated in rural areas while Muslims in urban areas. Proportion of Christians is nominal.

Sindhi is **mother tongue** of the majority, spoken by 90 percent of the total population in the district. It is predominant in rural areas at 93

percent as compared to 71 percent in urban areas. The next prominent faction is of Punjabi speakers at 5 percent and is more than three times in urban areas (at 13 percent) compared with 4 percent in rural areas. Urdu speaking community is only 3 percent of the district's population, almost entirely concentrated in urban areas at 12 percents compared to only 1 percent in rural areas. The percentages of remaining languages spoken are quite insignificant in the district.

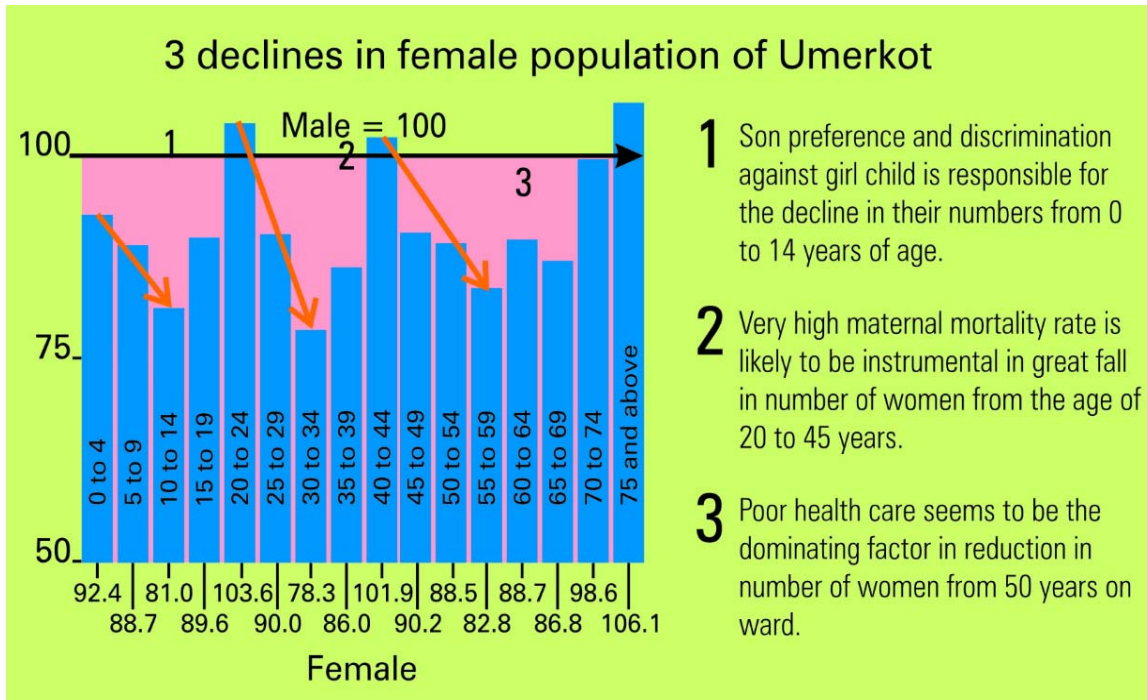
Population of **male and female** is not and has never been equal in most parts of the globe. Females are naturally more in numbers, for a variety of reasons. United Nations figures tell us that there are more females than males in 119 of the total 191 countries in the world. It is equal in 10 and female population is less than that of males in the rest 62.

In the developed countries of Europe, USA,



Australia and Japan, there are 105 women against every 100 men. The figure is 102 in the poor continent of Africa as well as in Latin America. In a sharp contrast, number of females is less than that of males in China, South Asia and Middle East. Pakistan besides falling in the list of countries with negative female to male ratio, is also one of the only four countries where life expectancy at birth of females is less than that of males. In Pakistan, female population per hundred male population is 92. Situation is worst in Balochistan where the ratio is 87, while it is 89 in Sindh, 93 in Punjab and 95 in NWFP.

Number of female per 100 male population in Umerkot district (sex ratio) is 89.6. This is a little higher than the provincial but less than the national average. Rural ratio in the district (90.4) is better than the urban one that is 85.4. Sex ratio is highest in urban areas of taluka Kunri while lowest in urban areas of taluka Umerkot.



If all the districts of Pakistan are arranged in descending order of sex ratio, Umerkot stands at number 82 among 106 districts. Highest ratio is in Chakwal (109.1) while the lowest is in District Malir of Karachi (78.9). There are ten districts where the ratio is 100 or more, and most of them fall in Potohar area and NWFP. 58 districts of the country have a ratio equal to or better than the national average while the other 48 have lower than it.

The age wise breakup of sex ratio in Umerkot district lays bare the three troughs in female life that are typical for all parts of the country. The first decline starts right after the birth and lasts till the age of 15 years as the nutritional and health care requirements of the girl child are not taken care of by the families that prefer sons over daughters. Girls and young women play a very important role in subsistence. There are numerous house and farm chores that are considered solely the job of

women. Women in Umerkot are mainly involved in looking after livestock, fetching water, embroidery and domestic tasks. As they cross puberty, their 'productive value' increases and their ratio improves dramatically. This is also their reproductive age. In Umerkot, the number of women of age 20 to 24 compared with 100 men is 104.

But unfortunately the good luck of the female population starts and stops in the same age group. They start bearing children and suffer heavily from maternal health problems. This is also the age when they become victims of honor related crimes and discriminations. As the graph shows their numbers tumbles sharply till the age of 40. The female population gets a brief respite at the end of reproductive age and their number again climbs up. But this relief is also short lived and their number again falls sharply. At around the age of 50, generally the daughters-in-law take over the charge and the old

women's role in the family shrinks to marginal and complementary jobs. They don't have any social security resources to draw upon for their health care. They neither have ownership of any resources like land. In comparison old men are more likely to be enjoying some pension or might be in possession of a property which makes them more preferable for their children when it comes to expenditure on health care and taking care of other old age needs. The last crest in the graph shows that the ratio increases in the favor of women once again after reaching the age of seventy, which is a little more than the average age in Pakistan. This is purely due to natural reasons since women live longer than men.

There are sharp differences in the sex ratio for the rural and the urban populations. For example, the number of females aged 20 to 24 in rural Umerkot is 107 that means more women than men. But in urban areas their number is only 90.

The **literacy** rate of the district was 24.8 percent according to the district census report of 1998. The male literacy rate (at 36.3 percent) is nearly three times higher than that for the females (11.9 percent). The rate in the urban areas is more than double at 44.8 percent as compared to 20.5 percent in the rural areas. In the rural areas male literacy (at 30.7 percent) is more than three times higher than the female literacy rate that is only 9.2 percent. In urban areas it is 56.2 percent for males and 31.3 percent for females.

Literacy-wise, Kunri taluka stands first at 27 percent (both sexes) followed by Umerkot (26.3 per-



Disparities in literacy

Urban male

Literate: 64.3%

Urban female

Literate: 31.8%

Rural male

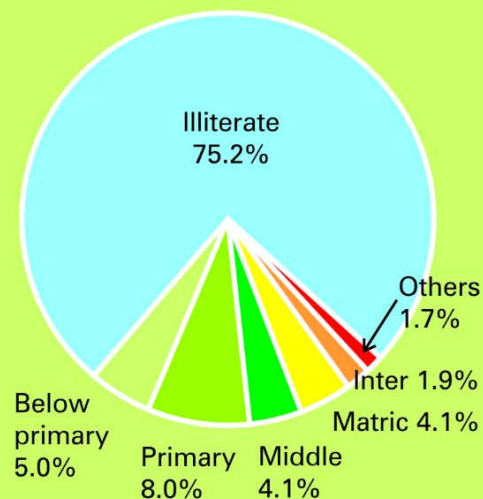
Literate: 30.1%

Rural female

Literate: 7.8%

Education Attainment

by population 10 year and above
1998 Census



A typical household

- Average household size in Umerkot district is 5.4 persons. The rural households are larger with an average of 6.4 persons against the urban average of 5.3 persons.

- Households having four or less family members make almost half (44 per cent) of the total households in the district while the households hosting 8 or more family members are little less than one quarter of the total families.

- The majority (57 per cent) of the families lives in houses which are made of just one room. Every one-room home provides shelter to 4.5 persons, on average. One-room houses are more in number in rural areas (59 per cent).

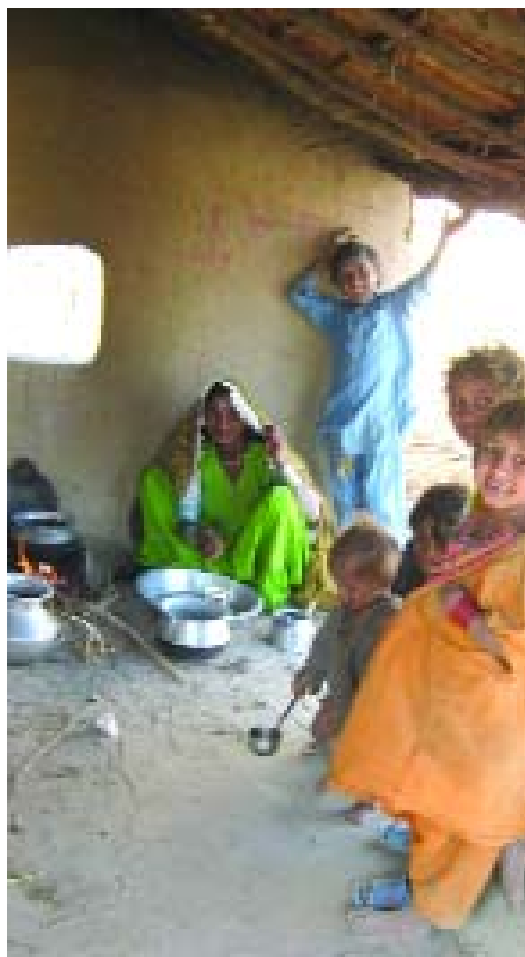
- A typical house of Umerkot, on an average has 1.6 rooms with 3.6 persons sharing each room.

- The houses on rent are found only in urban areas (8 per cent) while less than one percent rural houses are on rent.

- 61 percent of the urban houses were built 10 or more years ago, when documented in 1998 while this figure for rural houses stood at 37 per cent

- The outer walls of majority (58 per cent) of rural houses are made of unbaked bricks while 40 per cent of urban houses also have similar outer walls. 86 per cent of rural and 53 per cent of urban houses have wooden roofs.

- While 71 per cent of urban population have access to tap and/or hand pump water, only 13



per cent of rural households have access to these drinking water sources.

- Two third of rural households are yet to be provided electricity facility, however three fourth of urban population already has it.

- Wood is almost the only source of fuel used by 95 per cent for both rural and urban households in Umerkot district.

- 76 per cent of rural houses while 26 per cent urban houses don't have latrine.

- 39 per cent urban households have TV while this ratio for rural households stands at just 14 per cent

cent), Pithoro (22.7 percent) and Samaro (19.2 percent). The literacy rate for men is higher than women in all cases. Highest disparity among the literacy of the males and females can be seen in taluka Samaro. Ratio among urban males of this taluka is 75 percent while that among rural females is 5 percent.

Umerkot stands at number 17 among the 21 districts of Sindh with respect to overall as well as male literacy rate. It ranks a bit lower in terms of female literacy that is 18th out of 21 districts. When compared with all the districts of country, Umerkot stands at number 73 among the 106 districts.

In 1998, only 23 out of 100 children of school going age (5-9 years) were going to schools. This ratio is extremely low itself as well as when compared to other districts of the province. Out of the 21 districts of Sindh province, only four other districts: Shikarpur, Badin, Thatta and Tharparkar have a school enrollment ratio less than that of Umerkot. When compared with all the districts of country, it stands at number 66 among 106 districts.

The enrollment ratio varies sharply for rural and urban areas as well as for males and females. It is higher for males at 28 percent as compared to 15 percent for females. The enrollment ratio is much higher in urban areas at 37 percent as against 19 percent in rural areas. In rural areas, the ratio of male enrollment is double at 24 percent against 12 percent for females.

In 1999-2000, there were a total of 1,833 schools in district Umerkot. 1,064 schools among these were exclusively for male students while 295 were for females. The rest 474 had both boys and girls.

Of every 100 educated persons in the district, 33 have passed primary, 17 have passed middle, 17 matric and 8 have passed the intermediate. Only 3 persons cross the graduation and 2 the post-graduation levels.

Infant mortality rate in the district is very high. This is mainly due to lack of access to and quality of the health services compounded by socio-cultural practices restricting women's ability to seek timely health care for children and themselves.

Concomitantly, child malnutrition continues to be a problem due to maternal malnutrition, inappropriate infant and child feeding and caring practices, frequent episodes of diarrhea, respiratory infections, infectious diseases and lack of safe drinking water. According to Norway Pakistan Partnership Initiative (NPPI), every 84 out of 1000 children born alive die before reaching their 1st birthday, while 121 children die before reaching their 5th birthday.

Healthcare infrastructure of the district is not sufficient to cater to the needs of a population of 876,000. Umerkot has one district headquarters hospital, three taluka hospitals, three rural health centers (RHCs), one mother and child healthcare centre, five reproductive health centers, 11 family welfare centers, 33 basic health units (BHUs), one eye hospital and 30 government dispensaries. The available health facilities could cater to the needs of 19,075 people, if calculated according to the international standards. The number of healthcare staff in the district facilities is extremely low and gives a ratio of 0.01 doctors for 1,000 people and 0.001 female paramedics for 1,000 women.

The infrastructure, besides being insufficient, does-

n't deliver as is obvious from the basic health indicators for this district. According to the survey carried out by a Sindh based NGO, Health and Nutrition Development Society (Hands), the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in district Umerkot is around 550 per 100,000 live births, that is almost double the national average. The Hands survey that was conducted in 6,000 households revealed that 71 per cent women had no access to family planning facilities, 83 per cent of population was deprived of maternal healthcare facility while 50 per cent had no access to lady health workers. The report also throws light on social aspects of the healthcare system. It states that the reproductive system of 70 per cent women was badly affected due to marriage at young age, which is a tradition in the region. Only four per cent pregnant women visited government hospitals during pregnancy period while delivery of 70 per cent women was carried out at their homes by untrained traditional birth attendants.

Umerkot and Mirpur Khas were part of Tharparkar district in the pre-partition days. For the first elections in the area in 1937, Tharparkar district had eight seats of Sindh Assembly, five Muslims and three Hindus. They were won by Akhji Ratansing Sodho, Allahdad Khan Talpur, Arbab Togachi, Pir Ghulam Haider Shah, Khan Bahadur Ghulam Nabi Shah, Partabrai Kaisukhdas, Sitaldas Perumal and Hussain Bux Talpur. Talpurs, Pirs and Arbabs are very much on the political scene even today in Umerkot and adjoining districts. Ghulam Haider Shah was a close aide of GM Sayed

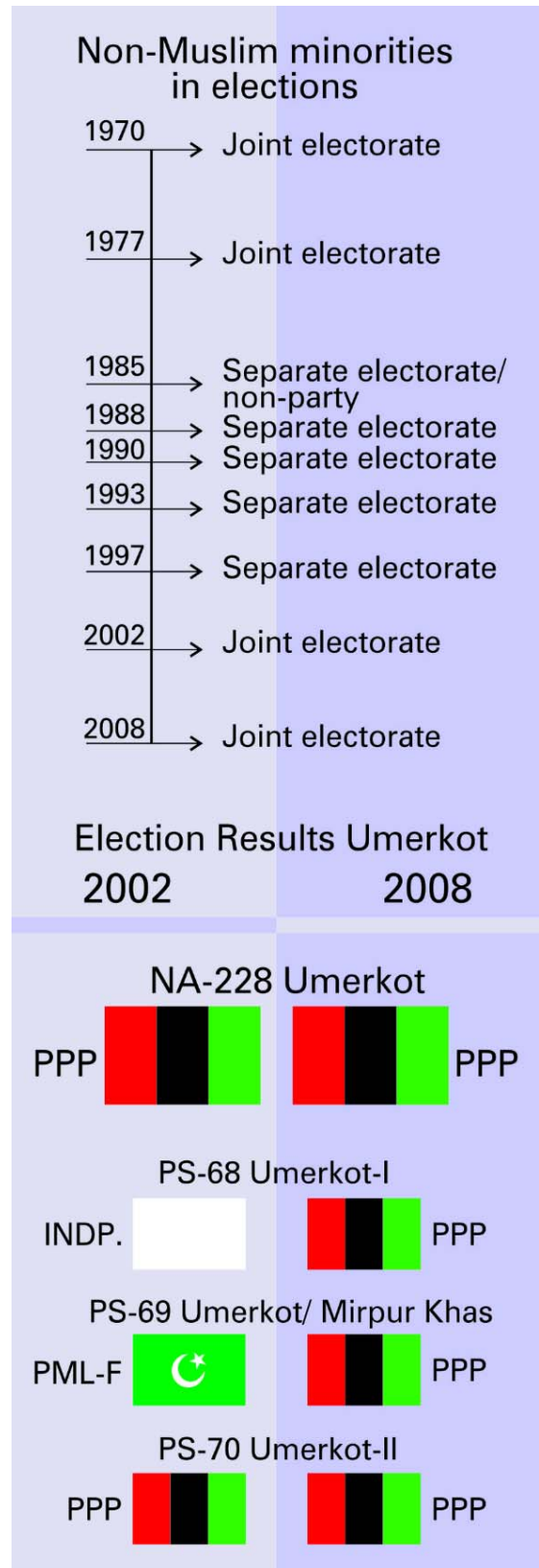
and when Sayed-led politicians joined Muslim League in 1938. He helped Sayed make Muslim League a strong, popular and the largest party of Sindh despite the fact that it could not win a single seat in 1937 elections. Although some members of Tharparkar played a noticeable role in assembly proceedings yet none of them won a ministerial slot in half a dozens provincial governments (ministries) in Sindh from 1937 to 1946. Ghulam Haider Shah however rose to eminence by getting elected General Secretary of Muslim League in 1944 when GM Sayed was elected President of League. All the Muslim members of the district voted in favor of the famous Pakistan Resolution (1943) in Sindh Assembly while the Hindu members of the district abstained. By 1946 elections GM Sayed group had left Muslim League but could not succeed against the party, they had established in the province. All the Muslim seats of Tharparkar went to Muslim League in second of the two consecutive elections held in 1946 in Sindh. The same tribal figures were elected on Muslim League platform in 1946 and 1953 elections for provincial legislature.

Talpurs, Pirs along with Sumras are politically more active in present-day Umerkot. Muslim League continued to dominate the politics of the district in 1962 and 1965 elections. Sindh's traditional political scenario drastically changed with the inception of Pakistan Peoples Party in mid 60's but the feudal political elite of the province proved to be wise enough to join this popular party and avoid losing their share of power.

In the first ever general elections on national level held in Pakistan on adult-franchise basis in 1970,

most parts of the present-day Umerkot district were included in NW-123 Tharparkar II. Elections in this constituency were won by PPP candidate Pir Ghulam Shah Jilani, a renowned landlord of the area. Pirs were previously affiliated with Muslim League. There was no significant resistance as Muhammad Yousaf of Jamat Islami, the runner up could manage to win approval of just 17 thousand voters against the Pir's over 75 thousand votes. On the other constituency of the district, two feudal lords one of PPP and the other of Council Muslim League got a major share of polled votes. Mir Ali Bux Talpur of PPP, previously a Leaguer, edged past his close rival and seasoned politician Ghulam Muhammad Wassan to claim a narrow victory of just 1,900 votes.

In the next elections held in 1977, Tharparkar was allotted one additional seat of national assembly. Of these three seats, the most parts of present-day Umerkot district were included in NA-173 Tharparkar I. All the three seats were easily clinched by PPP. By then Wassan family had joined PPP while their rivals Talpurs had left the party. Niaz Wassan was elected uncontested but Talpurs contested elections from Umerkot constituency on National Alliance ticket against Pirs only to face a humiliating defeat by 43 thousand votes. Pir Ghulam Hussain Jilani had overpowered the Talpur chief Mir Ali Ahmed Talpur. Khadim Ali Shah was the winner on NA-174 with a huge victory margin of 79 thousand votes against Manzoor Hussain. Interestingly, the Wassans who unsuccessfully struggled in 1970 on Council League platform got elected uncontested from NA-175 on PPP ticket, probably due to new party and new





delimitations, which did not suit their traditional rivals, the Talpurs.

The non-party elections of 1985, boycotted by PPP made a successful breach in this PPP fort as it introduced new players in the politics, who challenged the PPP might in elections to come. In 1985 elections most parts of present-day Umerkot were included in NA-175 Tharparkar II. In these elections Bhurgri and Arbab families, the active families of 40's and 50's, re-entered electoral politics from Tharparkar district. Khair Muhammad Bhurgri was elected from Umerkot constituency with a comfortable victory margin of over 35 thousand votes. Arbab Amir Hassan was elected from NA 176. Arbabs, who joined PPP for a while in coming years, have become a serious challenge for PPP in present-day Tharparkar district. Bhurgis also resisted PPP in 1988 elections. The Talpurs did not take part in 1985 elections from any of Tharparkar seat. On NA-174 Bashir Khan and Syed Qurban Ali Shah

contested elections.

Qurban Ali Shah, who became a known leader of PPP before joining and enjoying the peak of his popularity in PML-N afterwards lost the seat to Mr. Bashir by conceding a lead of almost 6 thousand votes.

The boycott of 1985 elections by PPP turned to be a costly decision, at least in Tharparkar, as new

entrants successfully managed their space in political arena of the district to resist the PPP in 1988 elections. The Umerkot constituency of Tharparkar district fell to PPP quite easily as Ali Nawaz Shah of PPP defeated Khair Muhammad Bhurgri with a margin of over 16 thousand votes. Qurban Ali Shah defeated independent candidate Anees Ahmed Khan with a comfortable margin of over 7 thousand votes on one of other two Tharparkar seat. But PPP had to surrender the Tharparkar III seat to emerging Arbabs as Arbab Amir Hassan managed to defeat PPP candidate Gul Muhammad with a lead of under three thousand votes.

The 1990 elections were a nightmare for PPP in Tharparkar as all the three including one of Umerkot constituencies were won by PPP rivals. On Umerkot constituency ex-prime minister Muhammad Khan Junejo of IJI defeated Ali Nawaz Shah with a margin of three thousand votes, characterized by the low turn out in the district. Syed

Qurban Ali Shah had to lose his Mirpur Khas seat to MQM's Anees Ahmed while the Thar constituency was won by independent Arbab Ghulam Rahim, who defeated PPP's Faqir Muhammad Hafeez with a margin of over 11 thousand votes.

By 1993 elections two new districts namely Mirpur Khas and Umerkot were carved out of Tharparkar district. PPP performed well to reclaim its traditional stronghold by winning all the three seats of erstwhile Tharparkar district as Arbabs of Thar joined PPP. Almost entire Umerkot district was included in NA-175 Mirpur Khas-cum-Umerkot constituency. Talpurs re-entered the national electoral politics of the area in these elections from PPP platform to defeat another traditional political family, the Jilani Pirs who had joined PML-N by then. Nawab Yousaf Talpur defeated Pir Noor Shah of PML-N. The party could not win the constituency in 1997 as Talpur lost to Pir Nur Shah Jilani by a margin of over 6 thousand votes. In 2002, Nawab Yousaf Talpur reclaimed his constituency by defeating minority candidate Kishan Chand Parwani with a comfortable margin of 9 thousand votes. Talpur retained constituency in 2008 by overpowering his traditional rival Pir Nur Shah Jilani, who was the candidate of PML-Functional this time. Talpur's lead on Jilani was over 50 thousand votes.

Almost half of the district's population is non-Muslim and mostly belongs to the lower economic class of the society. Between 1977 and 2002 all the elections were held under the separate electorate system. The [separate electorate](#) rule although ensures the representation of minorities in the parliament

through reserved seats yet it divides the electorate along religious lines thus creating political differentiation. As an overwhelming majority of the country is Muslim, the implications of the separate electorate system are less visible in most parts of the country. But in case of Umerkot almost half of the population was forced to stay away from the mainstream political system as they were forced to vote for a candidate belonging to their religion. By 1977 there were many minority candidates on the general seats, who ran for the national and provincial legislature. But the 'separate rule' in 85, 88, 90, 93 and 97 caused alienation among minority community of Umerkot on political front. The representatives they would elect were almost inaccessible for the poor of remote areas of Umerkot as a majority of those representatives belonged to cities like Karachi.

When this system was abolished in 2002, the minority community of Umerkot responded positively as the turn out rose sharply and minority candidates also took part in elections on general seats. Two minority candidates ran for the national seat and Kishan Chand Parwani, the candidate of National Alliance fell short of just 9,000 votes against the winner Nawab Yousaf Talpur. Parwani was the only candidate, in the history of country to become a non-Muslim runner-up in any elections for a general seat. In 2008 elections, two Hindu candidates also fought elections from Umerkot constituency.

On provincial front, Talpurs, mainly from PPP and Shahs, mainly from Muslim League have traditionally been active in present-day Umerkot district.



56 percent of the total area of Umerkot district is desert while the rest 44 percent is cultivable. There are very few livelihood options - the majority of families depend on **cattle and agriculture**, which in turn are dependent on seasonal rainfall. About 80 percent of the agricultural land of Sindh province is cultivated through controlled irrigation system. The irrigation system of Sindh comprises of three barrages, Sukkur, Guddu, and Kotri, having a gross command area of 15 million acres. However, cultivation takes place on only 8 million acres. Agriculture of the district depends on the Nara and Mithrao canals that irrigate its western and northern agricultural areas. Eastern and southern parts of the district are mostly desert and hence uncultivable. But all the cultivable land is not cultivated. 47 percent of the cultivable farms are not brought under plough mainly due to shortage of water.

Umerkot, after Karachi, is the second district of Sindh province where such a huge proportion of the cultivable land is not cultivated. The phenomenon is a commonality among almost all districts of lower Sindh.

One major factor responsible for **land wastage** is the total dependence of the area on canal water which is in short supply.

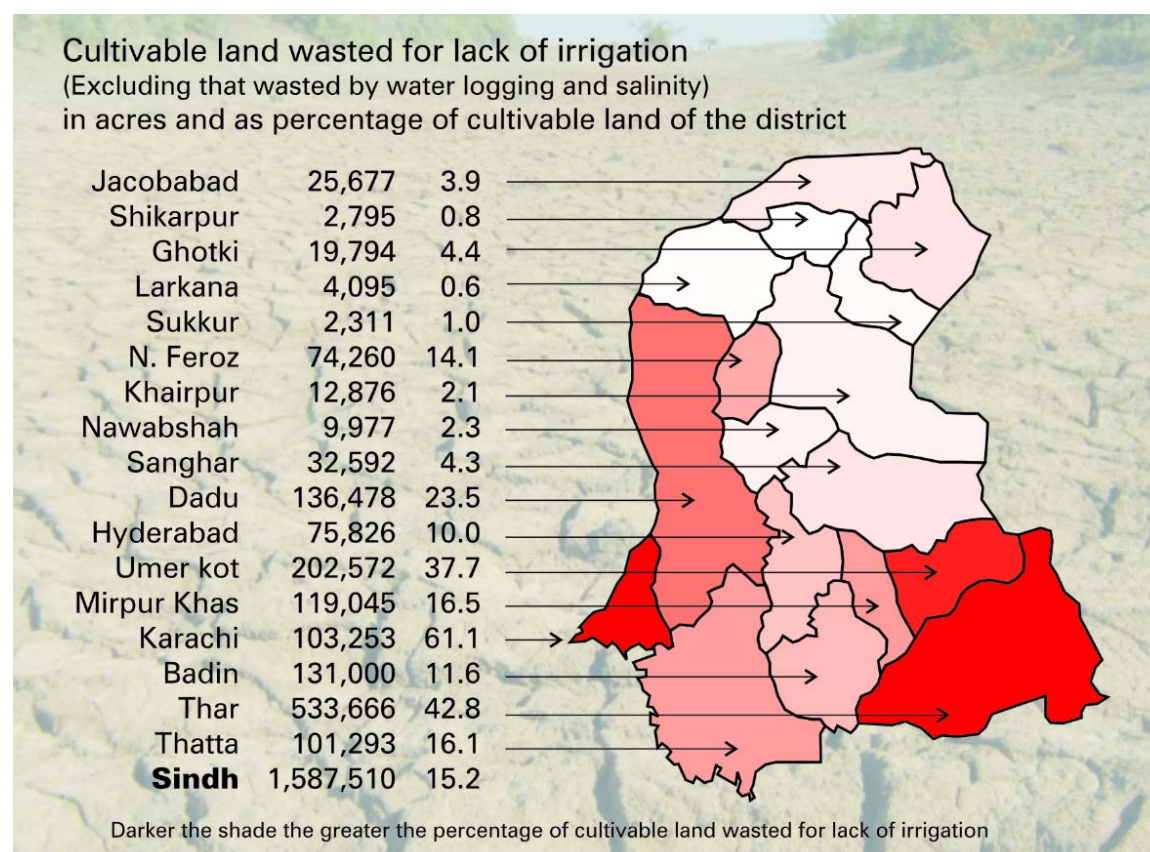
Underground water in most parts of Sindh is not fit for irrigation. This has made the province depend almost entirely on the canals that are getting drier with each passing day. A comparison of the Sindh and Punjab province irrigation systems shows that only 17 percent of the total cultivated area of Punjab is dependent entirely on canal water, while the ratio is 82 percent for Sindh. Punjab enjoys the luxury of supplementing canal water with tube-wells. The dependence on canals is most severer in Umerkot district where 91.2 percent of the total

cultivated area is irrigated through man-made canal system. Only 0.07 percent of the cultivated area is irrigated through tube-well while the rest is irrigated through a combination of both of these sources. Sindh in general and district Umerkot in particular has alluvial soil; therefore, it has great property of water percolation and seepage. In the developed world the irrigation system on such alluvial land is completely lined but in Sindh almost the whole irrigation system is unlined, resulting in great percolation and seepage of irrigation water during its transportation.

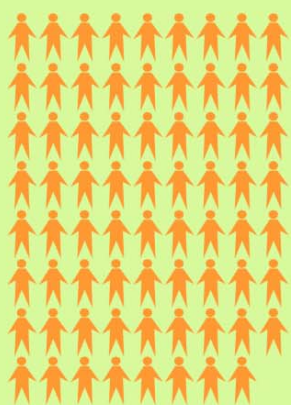
District Umerkot is home to 6 percent of the total farmer population and 5 percent of total cultivable farms of the Sindh province. About half of this area can't be cultivated hence per head share of land

decreases quite significantly. Uneven distribution of land has further aggravated the situation. 71 percent of the farmers of district Umerkot are small farmers, having possession of only 2.5 acres of land on average. Next 23 percent are medium level landlords having 10 acres on average. Collectively both of these categories make 94 percent of the total farming community of the district but they have to survive on only half of the total cultivable land. Rest is in possession of the affluent landlords who make only 6 percent of the total farming community yet occupy half of the total cultivable land. Their average access is 74 acres each.

Farming methods and [crop patterns](#) have changed in the area quite a bit since early 1970s.



Access to land



71% families
have access to



22% of
cultivable land

Average access: 3 acres



23% families
have access to

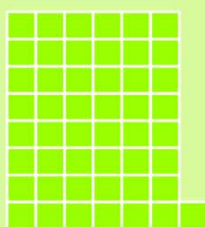


29% of
cultivable land

Average access: 11 acres



6% families
have access to



49% of
cultivable land

Average access: 74 acres

The top 1.1 percent landlords of Umerkot (688 in numbers) own more than a quarter of the districts cultivable land with an average access of 207 acres.

Farmers replaced pair of bullocks with owned or hired tractors and chemical inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides have made in-roads into this area. Farmers have started cultivating cash crops such as cotton, sugarcane and vegetables particularly onion and chilies. Use of machinery for cultivation is now preferred over animals in Umerkot, as in most of the other areas. 83 percent of the farmers use tractors, either owned or rented. Only 2 percent of the farmers are those who still rely on bullocks. The rest 15 percent use a combination of technology and tradition.

Major crops of district Umerkot are wheat in Rabi and cotton in Kharif, cultivated on 47 percent and 38 percent of the total cultivated area, respectively. Minor crops include sugarcane, cereals, fodder, vegetables, fruit etc. Specialty of this district is the red chili. Kunri Taluka of district Umerkot is famous for the production of best quality chilies. In 2006-07 Umerkot contributed 9 percent in the country's total chili production of 69,500 tonnes. Sindh alone contributed 81 percent in national production. Chili cultivation is concentrated in the lower Sindh districts of Thatta, Badin, Umerkot and Mirpur Khas that produce two third of the country's overall production. According to the agriculture census of 2000, there were 1,635 orchards of citrus fruit. Others fruits like guava, pomegranate, banana and peach are also produced in small quantities.

A big part of the district consists of desert where agriculture is not possible. People of this area rear **livestock** for subsistence that graze on sparse bushes. Kachchi and Thari sheep are the famous breeds of this area. The fodder resource of the



desert areas is thin and heavily depends on monsoon rains for replenishment. The monsoon rains are not the same every year and the area has to frequently face drought. Livestock herders have to seek refuge in greener areas in such times. Since the greener areas are mostly under cultivation and have no grazing lands, droughts deplete herds substantially. The herders have to either sell out their assets at throw away prices or slaughter them for home consumption.

According to livestock census of 2006, there were 197,308 cattle, 97,842 buffaloes, 149,006 sheep, 536,387 goats, 6,459 camels, 28,635 asses and 179,945 poultry birds in the district. On average, every household of this district owns two cows, one buffalo, and five sheep and goats. Buffaloes are more common in settled irrigated areas while

the climate-hardy cows are favorite with those living in drier desert areas.

The size of herds keeps varying with weather conditions as people have to adjust it to the available fodder resource by selling out or by slaughtering. According to the data collected in 2006, 44,256 families reported ownership of 1,57,108 milch animals (cows or buffaloes of milk giving age). Herd size with the majority was small as 91 percent (40,000) of these families owned only two animals on average. Number of those having a herd size of 10 on average was 3,400 that makes 7 percent of the total herd owning families. Those possessing a large herd size of around 50 animals were only 2 percent of the herd owning families. Livestock ownership, just like land ownership, is also quite uneven in this district.



Besides these two major sources of livelihood; agriculture and livestock, **seasonal labor** has traditionally been another means of subsistence, chiefly for those living in the Thar (desert) area of the district. Tharis migrate along with their animals to the neighboring agricultural districts and barrage areas in the dry season, or in periods of drought, to work as farm laborers. Migration is generally directed towards the cultivated talukas of Umerkot and districts of Mirpurkhas and Badin. It helps them feed and water their animals, sell dairy products and avail opportunities for labor. At times they exchange labor like wheat harvesting and cotton picking with fodder for their animals and some cash. In a scarce year, animals of upper castes landlords of their area also accompany them as they do not migrate themselves and compensate the care-takers of their livestock with some cash. Employment opportunities in manufacturing and trade sectors are almost non-existent in the dis-

trict. The trade is limited to the sale and purchase of daily use household items. There was no industry in the whole district except one cotton factory till 1998. More recently however an increasing numbers of Tharis has begun to migrate to urban areas to work in construction sector, garment and sugar factories or as domestic servants. This has also led to the introduction of a small scale remit-

tance economy in the district.

Livelihood of the people of Umerkot is extremely vulnerable, depending almost entirely on a single factor - water. This vulnerability is aggravated by the fact that these people have no control over this vital factor. Water reaches Umerkot either through canals or rains.

Being at the tail end of the Indus basin, Umerkot gets water in the canals much less than it requires. The district normally receives its first monsoon showers at the end of June. The showers recur at 15-30 day intervals till mid-September. The average annual rainfall for Tharparkar and Umerkot districts for the period 1971-2000, ranged between 225 to 250 mm (Chhor Metrological Station data). The pattern of rainfall, however, had been erratic with some areas receiving heavy downpours and others not receiving much rain. But generally speaking, the droughts occur here frequently due to no or very less rainfall.



Going beyond declaring the areas as 'calamity-hit' Drought prone Thar awaits a long-term solution

Drought is a period of abnormally dry weather when the average rainfall for a region drops far below the normal amount for a long time. Higher than normal temperatures are also usually associated with drought periods. The severity of the drought depends upon the degree of moisture deficiency, the duration and the size of the affected area.

Umerkot faces at least one drought of one or more seasons every decade. Last drought that started in 1999 and remained for more than three years was one of the worst in known history. It affected every aspect of life in the area. As stated by the officials, a total of 2,664 villages and 1.3 million people in Sindh falling in the arid zone of Tharparkar, Umerkot

and Dadu districts were badly affected by this drought. In the Umerkot district alone, 316 of the total 1,066 villages were declared 'calamity hit'. This area is populated by about 150,000 people and around one million animals.

Demographically most of the region is inhabited by ethnic and religious minorities (Hindus and the scheduled low-castes) that possess little political power and representation in government structures. Scheduled low-castes and minorities in Pakistan have a higher incidence of poverty and the vagaries of drought make them even more vulnerable. The urban centers in the district are not significantly affected, as residents are not exclusively dependent on rain-fed agriculture or livestock rear-



ing. But the impact is harder and more prevalent in rural areas of the district where most of its population lives. Another factor that aggravates the impact of drought on rural populations is the lack of infrastructure.

Drought impacts can be economic, physical, social, and environmental. Lack of rain and increased temperatures cause stress for crops, animals and humans equally. Wells, lakes, and streams begin to dry up. Plants and farm crops wither and eventually die. Animals suffer and may even die because of extreme drought. Absence of moisture and plant life reduction can lead to increased wind erosion. Months and years without sufficient rainfall coupled with wind and sunshine can turn green fields and orchards into desert.

The sector that is first and worst affected by drought and that has the broadest implications is agriculture. Drought adversely affects food security as crops fail and food prices hike. The area being

semi-arid is not covered extensively by the irrigation network; the underground water is brackish and is not fit for agriculture purposes, therefore, the region already suffers from groundwater drought.

The common perception that drought equally affects all segments of the population is not true. In fact drought interacts with the pre-disaster social, economic and political context and leaves differential impact on peo-

ple and income groups according to class, race, age, ethnicity and gender as these factors determine people's vulnerability to disasters. Different segments of population have systematic differences in the command over resources and commodities which are influenced by shocks like droughts.

The economic impact of drought on various categories of landowners is substantially different.

Most of the farmers in district Umerkot are subsistence farmers who sustain themselves by growing mixture of food and commercial crops and rearing livestock. The region's economy being feudalistic in character, surplus production is already being extracted from low-productivity agriculture by a small group of large landowners therefore the economic impact of any disaster has devastating impact on the landless and marginal farmers.

Due to frequent crop-failures, farmers have to face significant production losses which in turn adversely

affect the local tenancy market (share-cropping) and casual laborers as well. Due to uncertain rainfall, tenants return share-cropped land to the owners to avoid predictable future losses as tenants usually share half of the input expenditure at the time of the harvest.

Decreased cultivation results in loss of on farm employment for casual laborers. A shift from agriculture towards other income sources also has a negative impact on already worsening situation. The land is degraded due to over grazing by cattle and indiscriminate use by its inhabitants. People cut the woods and make coal out of it which is later marketed in bigger cities like Karachi and Hyderabad. This also results in land erosion and ultimately decreases post drought vegetation.

The small landowners are also adversely affected by over-all decline in value of land due to prolonged drought. The prices of agricultural lands plummet during drought as increasing number of farmers are willing to sell or lease out their land. Sometimes, the small landowners and farmers are forced to sell part of their lands to buy inputs for fresh crops and to clear the previous debts of money-lenders. The large landowners, in contrast, are not affected by this decline as most of them own lands in assured irrigation areas. Secondly they are not hard pressed for cash as they are not indebted and hence can wait for conditions to improve and prices of the lands to recover. In fact some large land owners get benefit from drought-like conditions as they can buy lands from small landowners at cheaper rates, as the latter are under pressure from the money-lenders to clear their debts.

The existing sharecropping tenancy system, con-

centrated in the canal-irrigated areas of the district, is historically deep-rooted and perpetuates the deeply entrenched poverty of tenants and agricultural labor through a complex system of dependencies. Changes over time, the influx of migrants, and the introduction of modern technologies have altered the relationship to the disadvantage of the hari (tenant). The landlord meets the haris' needs (e.g., for agricultural inputs, consumption, social events, emergencies) through advances, with the accounts of these transactions kept by him, and often not transparent. However, even if these accounts were managed openly, haris' extremely low literacy rate would inhibit their control over the entries. The debt accumulates over the years. Haris cannot leave the landlord without clearing their debt, and become bonded. Besides the historically entrenched jagirdari, sardari and wadera systems, droughts cause extra trouble for the small farmers by reducing agriculture production, thus contributing towards growing poverty and rural exploitation by the influential landowners.

Livestock plays an important economic and ecological role in the lives of the people of district Umerkot. Despite the introduction of a monetary economy, wealth in the region is still gauged by the number of livestock owned. Thus, livestock have a multiple value and represent variable combinations of wealth, prestige, prerequisites of marriage and most importantly subsistence. Livestock, particularly sheep and goats act as a prime capital asset during drought, as it is easily convertible into cash to buy foodstuff and agricultural inputs including seeds and fertilizer. It seems that livestock in

Umerkot district is kept as a buffer stock since people engage in unreliable rain-fed agriculture. Prolonged drought adversely affects the dry fodder storage capacity of farmers and cattle breeders due to successive crop failures, resulting in increase in fodder prices. The cost of dry fodder increases up to 100 percent. The price hike during drought puts tremendous financial strain on small farmers and is termed as the major reason for disposing livestock due to un-affordability factor. Occasional conflicts and tension are also observed over rights to utilize common grazing pastures. Landowners, during the days of drought, even build barriers around their pastures and don't allow other's animals to graze. If they find an animal grazing there, they do arrest it and return only after payment of a fine.

In normal years, animals eat only green shoots but during drought they are forced to eat dry shoots of phog, a wild bitter tasting herb. During dry seasons, the wild grass that normally grows on the common pastures during monsoon disappears. Lack of availability of grass and wild herbage puts great nutritional stress on the livestock as resulting in weight losses and development of physical weakness. The loss of wild herbage is accompanied with inadequate intake of water, adding to physical weakness. Malnutrition due to lack of fodder has contributed to decrease in conception and increase in livestock miscarriages. As a result, there has been a continuous decline in herd size, leading to process of de-capitalization for the cattle breeders.

Another important effect of drought is cattle mortality that tends to widen the gap between the rich and

the poor. It has been observed that large land and cattle owners, to a certain extent, are able to recover and replenish their stocks largely due to the fact that they shift their cattle to assured irrigation areas of neighboring districts where they own lands, and fodder is abundant. Small cattle breeders on the other hand lose part of their stock in drought and utilize the rest for ensuring subsistence.

Social impacts of droughts mainly include public safety, health, conflicts between water users, reduced quality of life, and inequalities in the distribution of disaster relief among various sections of the population. As an indicator of decrease in the quality of life, the number and celebration of marriages greatly decreases. The amounts spent on religious festivals like Diwali, Ram Janam Astmi, Holi and Eids during drought is relatively less than the normal years, due to reduced cash income.

Women and children are amongst the most vulnerable factions of society and hence are worst affected by any disaster facing the community. During drought there is high probability that most men will out-migrate in search of alternate sources of livelihood, leaving behind women who get mired in greater poverty, as in most of the instances they have to sustain themselves due to uncertain remittances.

Women of Umerkot district are actively engaged in activities like livestock rearing to supplement the income of the household. The women are also responsible for a wide range of agricultural activities ranging from land preparation to harvesting, threshing, kitchen gardening, grinding and making flour which however go unrecognized and is not regarded as "productive labor". Droughts and dry

seasons substantially increase the workload for women as they have to travel further to collect water as nearest wells go dry. They are forced to spend long hours, collecting fuel wood which takes three to eight hours per day in some instances. Lack of fuel wood also deprives women of low-caste communities especially Bheels and Kohlis of additional source of income as fuel wood is sold to high caste households, because their women observe strict Purdah and do not leave their homes. It is customary in the region that women and girls are the last ones to eat. As food is not enough during the drought, they mostly are left with food insufficient and hence frequently suffer from malnutrition. Malnourished women are more vulnerable to complicated pregnancies, ranging from miscarriage, premature labor, still birth and hypo-volumic shock leading to death, as their resistance to endemic-epidemic infections is lowered. The malnutrition in pregnant mothers also affects newborn babies with low-birth weight and having less probability for breast-feed and being more vulnerable to infections. Thus, malnutrition in mothers in this particular context is major contributor towards increased infant and maternal mortality.

With the humans' present mastery over natural forces, disasters are no more natural. Climatic hazards like floods, cyclones, earthquakes, dry spells and volcanic eruptions are geological or meteorological risks those turn into disasters when socio-economic resilience of at risk communities, areas and countries is too low to withstand the danger of death and devastation. During the last decade an average 56 percent of those killed worldwide by

disasters each year, were only in South Asia. State managers always try to portray it as a matter of fate, destiny and discretion of divinity. This may be a serviceable excuse to exploit the folk perception of poor for the shift of responsibility, but for a socially responsible mind it is like a deliberate aversion from the issue of acute public concern.

Droughts especially are different from other disasters. Unlike earthquake, drought always has a slow onset, which is quite observable. It is not an event rather a process which can be understood and predicted quite well before time. Unfortunately, we tend to focus on drought when it is upon us. We're then forced to react - to respond to immediate needs, to provide what are often more costly remedies, which is neither a good policy nor good resource management. A proactive approach should be adopted. The areas where droughts are common are already known. And it is obvious that droughts will come and go in future as well. Hence a comprehensive strategy should be devised and practiced to prevent as well as minimize the impact of drought when it happens.

References:

- Demographic, Social and Economic Changes in Tharparkar (1988-2006) - An Analysis
Rajar, Allah Wasayo, Herani, Gobind and Dhakan, Ali Akbar 2007
- Master's thesis: The economic and social impact of drought on rural poor: The case of Pakistan.
Jam Inamullah, University of Birmingham, 2004
- A candle in the dark
by Thardeep Rural Development Program

SAP-Pk partner in district

Sami Samaj Sujag Sangat (SSSS)

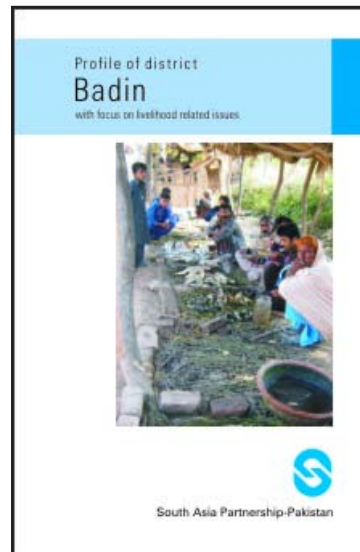
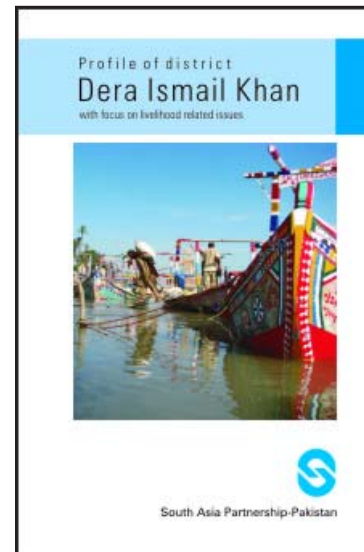
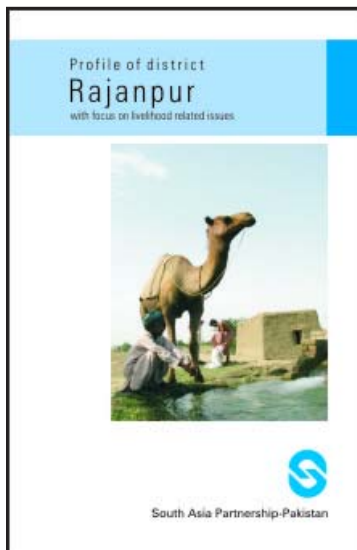
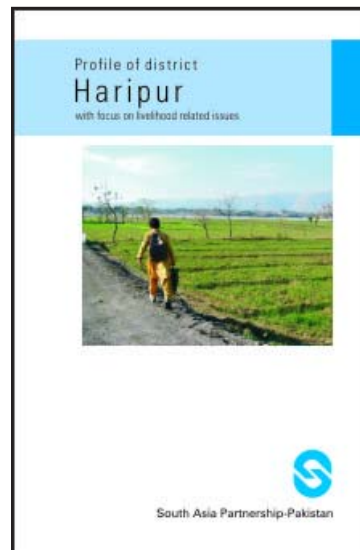
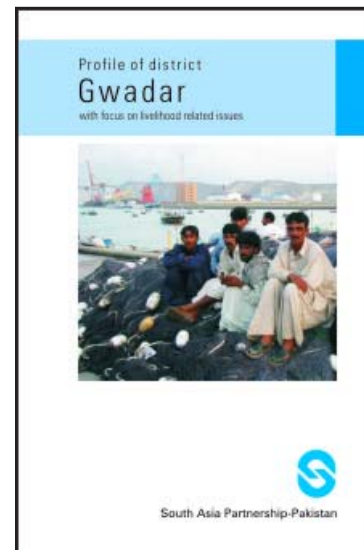
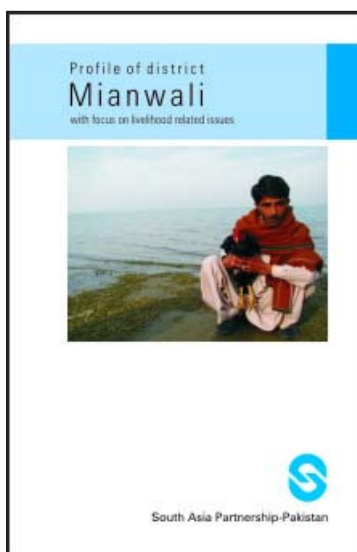
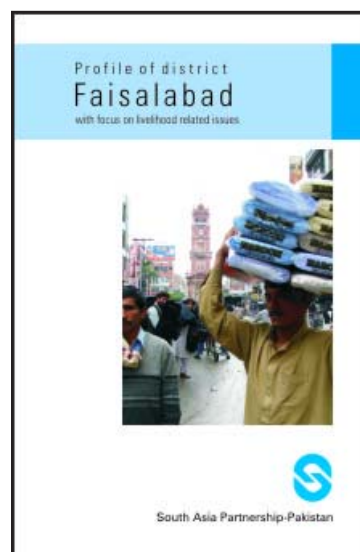
Alive to the problems of the area, some socially active people got together in 1988 and formed SSSS, at Umerkot. This district was once the capital of Greater Sindh. It is also where Mughal king Akbar was born when his father, Humayun, fled from Delhi due to military defeat at the hands of Sher Shah Suri. It is bordered in the north by Sanghar, in the west by Mirpurkhas and in the south-east by Tharparkar districts. The total area of the district is 5608 Square Kilometers. Its population is a little less than one million.

SSSS started off with a community library in 1988. In a few years then onwards, as it gained momentum, the organization started to take up the actual social and political issues of the deprived communities. And now about two decades down the road, SSSS is a mature organization struggling for social justice, economic equity and human dignity, in which all people have equal rights, facilities and opportunities for peaceful living. The thematic areas of the organization include health, education and literacy, agriculture and environment, poverty alleviation, women development and gender development.

It is about a decade since SAP-PK and SSSS are partners. Starting with participation in the Resource Development Program of SAP-PK, SSSS has also been through the process of struggle in Democratic Rights and Citizens Education Program (DRCEP), Pakistan Coalition for Free, Fair and Democratic Elections (PACFREL) and Strengthening Democratic Governance in Pakistan (SDGP) of the SAP-PK. Besides these programs, SSSS has also several other projects in its programmatic portfolio. These programs include Acceleration of Girls Education (funded by UNICEF), Development Area (funded by ActionAid-Pakistan), Creating Assets for Rural Women (funded by World Food Program), Micro-Credit (self initiative), etc.

SSSS has about 50 staff members. The office of the organization is located at Akbar Azam Road, Umer Kot.

Other
publications
in this
series



**South
Asia
Partnership
Pakistan
SAP-Pk**