



## Kot Nizam - from water blight to social delight

*The construction of a road and a water channel brings social and cultural life back to a small village previously inundated and isolated by floods.*

International Technology  
Development Group  
South Asia  
(ITDG)  
DN.NET@ifdg.sl.lk  
www.itdg.org

Rural Development  
Policy Institute  
Pakistan  
(RDPI)

Kot Nizam - A village in the Hafizabad district of the Punjab province in Pakistan - celebrated last year's monsoon rains after a couple of decades. In the past, rains were rarely welcomed in this village, situated in a low lying location barricaded by water, roads, embankments and spurs in all four directions. The village seemed to be the most convenient storage spot for untamed flood waters gushing in from the mighty Chenab river from west and monsoon rain waters from the upstream in the north. The protective dyke, designed to save neighbouring roads in the east and the mega motorway in the south, multiplied the plight of the farming communities of Kot Nizam.

People of Kot Nizam, largely associated with agriculture-based livelihoods, have been living in the cluster of disadvantages: highly indebted; politically and economically, besieged by water; deprived of health and municipal services, curtailed in mobility, isolated in social life, and encircled in seeming helplessness. Enveloped in dejected hopes and looking forward to a miracle which

could reverse these adversaries, nature stood to be their 'intimate enemy', invariably chasing and cheating them at every harvest.



Village children walking to school by the newly built drainage canal

At times of seasonal rains and floods, Kot Nizam community used to face great difficulties due to their inaccessibility to the nearby graveyard. They had to carry their departed dear ones to the graveyard by crossing a long pool of stagnant water; which was harassing and painful at times of tragedy.

But all of these furies of fate seemed to evaporate with an initiative aimed at addressing flood and rain water-related issues at the community level. The village community gathered under one tree to discuss how the normal life could be brought back to the men, women and children in Kot Nizam.

Long discussions, arguments and counter arguments resulted into a plan. The locals suggested the construction of a 5 kilometre long water drainage channel, 1.7 km brick surface road and a multi-purpose shelter. Groups comprising men and women were formed to execute these activities. Locals volunteered their land, labour and hospitality while the project provided them with the required financial and technical inputs. Later on, local government and adjoining villages joined them in this venture.

It took less than 12 months for things to change. A water diversion channel, a surface brick road, and a multipurpose shelter were constructed as planned. The girls' school in the village, which had been closed for years due to still monsoon waters, was re-opened. A medical dispensary was

Living with Risk  
Turning the tide on  
disasters towards  
sustainable development

2003  
World Disaster  
Reduction Campaign



set up in the shelter centre, and Kot Nizam was linked to its surrounding communities and services. The haunted hamlet turned into a vibrant vista.

"This is the first time in my life that I am walking without pulling my *Dhoti* (traditional cloth used as skirt) up till my knees in the rainy season", said an elderly women, a resident of Kot Nizam.

The construction of the road and water channel brought social and cultural life back to the village. In May 2003, after a five year long gap, a festival was organized by the villagers to commemorate the annual death anniversary of a local saint. People from adjoining villages also participated in the festival and witnessed the change in the village.

Earlier, approximately 1,300 acres of the arable land belonging to various families of Kot Nizam had become barren due to stagnant water. The first immediate harvesting season since the intervention saw about 50 acre of land brought back under cultivation, which is to increase gradually with each coming harvesting season.



Meeting of women group in Kot Nizam

"Our relatives from out of Kot Nizam used to refuse to give the hand of their daughters to the men belonging to our village; they feared that marrying their daughters in Kot Nizam is equal to sending them to hell", said an old man of Kot Nizam. He added with excitement, "But this year a family came in a car to celebrate the engagement of their son."

Some of the small farmers who irrigated their paddy crops from the water channel during the last monsoon, were thrilled with this 'subsidy' given by nature which earlier equalled a calamity for them. They think ahead now: how to bring the rainwater collected in the drainage channel under productive use. It has triggered their imagination; and communities of Kot Nizam rejoice in the life-changing shift: from water blight to social delight.

*The Kot Nizam community-based flood preparedness project was jointly implemented by the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) South Asia, Sri Lanka; and Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI) Pakistan, and financially supported by the Dip ECHO South Asia Flood Preparedness Program.*