



**6 FEBRUARY KAHRAMANMARAŞ EARTHQUAKE:
Situation in Villages After Earthquake
Information Note**

FEBRUARY 2023

Introduction

On Monday, February the 6th, 2023, the magnitude 7.7 earthquake in Pazarcık, Kahramanmaraş and the magnitude 7.6 earthquake in Elbistan, Kahramanmaraş, shook us both individually and socially. Since our country is located in an earthquake zone, the subject is always current. Despite this, the shock we experienced necessitates creating both individual and societal memories vis-a-vis possible future occurrences.

Perhaps the biggest difference of our note, which we prepared according to the findings we obtained from the interviews with 665 community members in the first three days of the disaster that affected 10 provinces on February the 6th, is that it will contribute to the understanding of the situation from the perspective of teachers, teacher candidates and families living or working in rural areas. In this regard, we think it is important to include in this report the opinions and concerns of our community members, especially regarding the future of education. As Rural Schools Transformation Network (KODA) team, we share this report pertaining to this period, which will continue to be effective for many years, knowing the importance of adding the rural perspective to the common memory and hoping for the measures to be taken for the future.

First Day After the Earthquake

The speed of the information flow was not enough to quickly understand the seriousness of the situation on the first day. As KODA we had started our Monday routinely, but our day was out of the ordinary at noon with the news we received from our three teammates from Hatay. At the end of the day, we left the team meeting, which we held as a remedy for individual desperation, tasks shared among the team in order to determine the situation regarding our community members living in the earthquake zone.

For two days, we reached out to teachers, teacher candidates and families who are in our network under four different programs and who we know live / work in the provinces affected by the earthquake.

With the support of our volunteers, teachers, and teacher candidates, we tried to reach our community members living in Adana, Adıyaman, Ağrı, Batman, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Erzincan, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kayseri, Kilis, Mardin, Malatya, Osmaniye, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak and Van via calls and messages, and to be informed about the status of our community members.



We aimed to hear from our 665 community members, including 10 mukhtars, 116 parents, 233 teachers, and 306 teacher candidates. We received responses from 514 people, of which approximately 200 were phone calls. 261 of the people we heard from were "safe". We noted the information that a total of 134 people are already in the villages, and 10 people have returned to the villages from city centers.

What "Safe" Says

Regardless of the method of communication, our first question was "Are you safe?". Without focusing on the content of the question and the answers we will get, out of desperation, we wanted to make sure that everyone is alive first. We learned that one of our parents who attended our family trainings died in the earthquake. Although there is relatively less destruction in the villages due to various technical reasons, such as the fact that the buildings are generally single storey, we heard that some of the villages, such as Ceylanlı village in Kırıkhan, Hatay; or Karakuyu village in Gölbaşı, Adıyaman were almost completely destroyed.

We noted that many of the people we reached and determined to be directly affected by the earthquake had returned to their relatives or, to their villages when possible. We have observed that people were fleeing to villages in an effort to overcome the difficulty of coping alone in the "second" most trusted place after their home and communities. Especially in the interviews we held on the third day of the earthquake, we understood that people who have relatively healed their wounds took part in social solidarity and were ready to spend whatever they have for who is left:

"We are staying at the school in the village with 50 people. We can host 50 more people at the school in the village, there is a vehicle..."

Teacher (Diyarbakır, Sur, Kabasakal Village)



The Most Urgent and Urgent Needs

The main purpose of conducting the interviews was, of course, to be aware of the situation of our community members. In the interviews, we determined that some of our community members, especially living in areas directly affected by the earthquake, have very basic and urgent needs. In order to support the people involved in the KODA network, we categorized our needs and tried to create a support network to meet these needs.

We learned that the most pronounced needs in city centers are very vital needs such as tents, food, blankets, fuel and water. In the villages, we noted that the needs such as food and water were generally abundant in the short term, but commodities such as for providing hygiene or tents stand out as the needs in the first days of the disaster.

We also received the information that the aids were distributed unjustly in some villages where the support of the mukhtars was received in aid distribution. In addition, we understood that people with vehicles and fuel in the village went to the city centers to get “whatever they could find” because the aid did not reach the villages due to difficulties such as transportation and harsh weather conditions in the first days.

Especially in the villages where we work within the scope of the Family Studies Program, we frequently heard the need for psychological support for children from families involved in our training:

“My son was eight years old; he was very affected. I don't know how we're going to talk to him. Will you provide support? Do you know when schools will open again?”

Parent (Hatay, Altınözü, Altınkaya Village)



Rural Schools and Rural School Teachers

From the findings of the interviews, we understood that there were intense concerns about the restructuring process. The first thing that caught our attention was the large number of people who had to move:

“The villagers invited called us to their homes, but today we are planning to go to Istanbul. The houses are not destroyed here, but they are shaking, we are not safe.”

Teacher (Dikmen Village, Derik, Mardin)

In addition to the fact that the schools were damaged, or the unharmed ones were used as a common living space, uncertainties regarding the education calendar were expressed by many as a concern about the use of schools during the term. Teachers and their families also stressed the difficulties such as the rising population density in the villages due to immigration and the sheltering problem of rural school teachers living in the district centers rather than the lodgings provided in villages:

“Last night, we opened our village schools to our teacher friends. Internet and telephone access is available. My spouse has a car, but there is no petrol in some places. There was no bread anywhere yesterday, today they opened the bakeries, but there are very long queues because many people from Antep swarmed into the villages of Suruç.”

Teacher (Şanlıurfa, Suruç, Aligör Village)



Observations from the Earthquake Zone: Hatay

The fact that one of our teammates from Hatay was in Hatay from the first day of the earthquake, participated in the debris and relief works providing us with accurate and direct information from the field prompted us to go to the earthquake area. On the fourth day of the earthquake, we saw off three of our teammates to Hatay with a small vehicle with vital needs:

“The whole road from Hatay to Ankara and from there to Istanbul was full of vehicles that left the area with license plates 46, 02, 31, 27. The heavy load of the cars was obvious both from the plates and from the rear shock absorbers, which had hard time to carry the weight of the vehicles loaded up to the rear windows. Some of this migration we witnessed was towards other city centers and some towards villages.”

“What we saw in our visits to the villages of Hatay's Samandağ and Defne districts is the villages are more resistant to this type of disaster in certain aspects and more fragile in certain aspects compared to the city centers. Our first observation is that there is little destruction in the buildings in these villages, which are generally built on the slopes of mountains/hills. Damage is also less in these villages. However, it is not possible to stay in houses as the shaking continues. They enter and leave the houses quickly, just to get some supplies and clothing. Therefore, the need for clothing is less, but people still need clothing to withstand the cold of the night due to the possibility of staying in the tent for a relatively long time.

In terms of sheltering, solutions were produced quickly. In order to be protected from the rainy and cold weather conditions of the first days of the disaster, many villagers created tents -which can be used in the short term but not suitable for longer periods- with the tarps they use to protect the products in their agricultural activities. Some villagers were able to get some protection from the rain and cold by spending this time in the already installed greenhouses. But of course, these “tents” are not long-term solutions.

In terms of food, villages are more resilient. In the villages we visited around Samandağ and Defne when we asked the households with children whether they needed milk, they said that they do not need milk because they have cows, and it would be better if we deliver the milk to those who need it. Similarly, there were villages that reported they had flour and wood-burning ovens for bread, and that they could bake their bread. Clean water wasn't much of a problem neither. It is encouraging that in the first few days of the disaster villages proved to be more resilient, but it is a question mark how long this



situation can be sustained in the long run. Due to the distance of the villages from the center and the interruption of the already limited means of transportation, access to the supplies and other materials coming to the district and city centers is problematic. In addition, village roads, which are generally narrow and sometimes dirt or unpaved, prevent the access of aid transportation vehicles such as trucks and lorries to the villages. Therefore, when these issues are added to the already broken supply chain, access to essential needs such as hygiene products, tents -that can meet the need for sheltering for longer periods-, and food provisions becomes more difficult than that of in district / city centers. Access to animal feed is also becoming an important problem for producers in the post-disaster period.”

Common sense

After all the interviews and the news from the field, we saw that some uncertainties and question marks stood out. As KODA team, since we closely follow current needs and shape our programs in line with demands from the field, we wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the prominent issues . For each KODA program, we held focus group meetings with our community members, with whom we work closely. In this information note, we wanted to include the common needs and suggestions expressed by teachers, teacher candidates and parents.

The first topic that stood out from the focus group interviews was **the need for psychological support**. In particular it was suggested that children's sleep and eating patterns should be have a healthy routine, meetings should be organized to support the feeling of being together with the members of the community, and activity content should be created for children. Another topic that stood out from the interviews was the **research and analysis of rural areas**. It was discussed that issues such as the physical condition of schools in rural areas, the changes in the village population, the effects of these changes on student-parent-teacher relations, the climate of discrimination that may occur due to internal migration, the appointment of teachers, and the fact that teacher candidates will not have a chance to gain practical knowledge should be examined on a regional and national basis. In addition, it was emphasized that **non-governmental organizations should be involved in the design of the container cities to be created**.



The last issue that stood out from the interviews was that regardless of their profession or position, people did not know where to position themselves in disaster situations. It was discussed in each group that for an effective coordination, **a division of labor should be made for emergencies prior to the disaster.**

Note to the Future, Call to the Present

Although we are suffocating with answers and questions about the future from where we stand now, we believe that our spirit of solidarity, which brings us together as a society in times of crisis, will lift us all up in the best possible way during the spiritual and physical restructuring process. With the experiences we have gained from our activities towards betterment of rural education since 2016 and the encouragement we have from hearing from our disaster-struck community members in rural areas, we owe making a few points for the future, especially regarding restructuring of education.

We are aware that we are entering a restructuring process that will not be limited to the earthquake zone. In this process, we think that it is important to consider the opportunities and challenges of rural areas, especially in the field of education. We know that the features of rural areas such as producing in cooperation, being in touch with nature, being self-sufficient are important opportunities. In addition, we consider it important to consider the difficulties such as existing infrastructure problems, the population density which will be created by post-earthquake reverse migration, the unpredictability of school change demands of teachers and students, and the use of intact village schools as shelters.

As the KODA team, we believe that rural areas, which are durable in themselves but can easily become fragile due to external conditions, can also be areas that strengthen their environment with the right planning. With this belief, we continue to construct our programs for the future. We know the importance of understanding the past and the present for a comprehensive planning, and we hope that our notes, which we share in order to contribute to this understanding, will also mobilize the reader.

