

## Urmul Seemant Empowered the Women Artisans in Thar Desert (Bikaner)

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### **Abstract**

With the aim to empower village communities towards self-reliance, Urmul Seemant Samiti has been working since 1994 in western Rajasthan to develop a safe and enabling environment for people that ensures that their right to health, education and employment is respected and realized without discrimination and exclusion, with special focus on children and women. Striving for development in the most distant and underdeveloped villages of Bikaner, Jodhpur and Nagaur district to ensure that people are empowered to decide, design, implement and eventually self-finance the package of development services which are made available to them under different projects.

**Keywords:** Thar Desert, Artisans, Empowerment, Livelihood, Discrimination.

### **Introduction:**

In 1984 URMUL Rural Health Research and Development Trust (URMUL Trust) started as a social development initiative for the farmers of cooperative dairy (Urmul Dairy) Bikaner. It draws its inspiration from community based developmental services initiated by AMUL. URMUL for years has been emphasizing on the disadvantaged groups, especially women and children to ameliorate their desolation and advancing their rights. However, as the time passed by, the organization realized that the poor people in this desert area need many more services, especially related to the Health, Education and Livelihood.

In May 1988, Urmul Trust expanded its activities to the command area of the Indira Gandhi Canal area in Kolayat Block of Bikaner district so as to provide community based developmental services to the highly scattered desert population. In 1992, URMUL started decentralizing its activities so that authority and the responsibility can be transferred to the people of areas near the field. Due to this process UrmulSeemant Samiti came into existence on 4th May 1994 and was registered under the Rajasthan Societies Act, 1958.

Urmul Seemant Samiti is now operating in two districts Bikaner and Jodhpur of western Rajasthan and has direct presence in more than 300 villages in both districts. With the aim to empower village communities towards self-reliance, Urmul Seemant Samiti has been working since 1994 in western Rajasthan to develop a safe and enabling environment for people that ensures that their right to health, education and employment is respected and realized without discrimination and exclusion, with special focus on children and women. Striving for development in the most distant and backward villages of Bikaner and Jodhpur district to ensure that people are empowered to decide, design, implement and eventually self-finance the package of development services which are made available to them under different projects.

### **Creating Impact**

#### **Livelihood:**

Ever since the emergence of Urmul Seemant Samiti strived to preserve the traditional livelihood of the desert communities. With constant motivation, support, and partnerships we aim to transform these local communities towards building a sustainable mode of living that is self-reliant and self sufficient



#### **Education**

Work with the most marginalized and the vulnerable children of the Thar to provide them with decent opportunities for education, so that they can learn and explore according to their potential. With decade long programmes and regular ground interventions, our values towards educating every child have been strengthened over the last 25 years.



### Water, Hygiene and Sanitation

In rural India, almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  sections of people don't have access to proper sanitation facilities. Similarly, in a place where there is inadequate access to water, clean water is a long-lost dream for the marginalized section. We are building synergies with other organizations to ensure clean water and sanitation to the vulnerable sections of the Thar Desert.



### Thar Desert of Western Rajasthan and Women Artisans:

The women of Dandkala village in Kolayat administrative block of Bikaner district in Rajasthan are a class apart. Although they are refugees from Umerkot district in Sindh province of Pakistan, they have fought displacement by taking ownership of their traditional embroidery skills, which has enabled them to be breadwinners for their families. Located 140 km from Bikaner city in the Thar Desert, which is harsh, arid and tough with shifting sand dunes and extreme temperatures, the lives of rural women in Dandkala are not easy by any means. But it has not stopped the women artisans to earn a living with dignity. URMUL Seemant Samiti was formed at Bajju in Kolayat block to work in 113 villages.”



URMUL supported the women artisans to upgrade their traditional skills, provided technical support and linked them with national and international markets. The non-profit also freed them from the stranglehold of the exploitative middlemen. Women artisans in Dandkalan, Gokul, Bhaloori Bijeri, Bikendri and other villages of Kolayat and Pugal blocks of Bikaner district started getting organised in self-help groups (SHGs) and further enhanced their skills in *kashidakaari* (embroidery). “Constant orientation by famous designers like Laila Tyabji and graduates from National Institute of Design (NID) and National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) helped women to hone their skills. Now these women earn between Rs 3,500 and Rs 6,000 a month. “The traditional embroidery used for making personal trousseaus is now market linked and kept alive. “rang sutra is now a successful enterprise. “Rangсутra’s biggest buyer is Fab India [a popular chain of stores]. It also exports in small quantities to France, the Netherlands and the UK,” says Sharma Sen. “The global attention means that there is continuous need to augment the strength of the existing groups and increase their capacity by speeding up the work while maintaining the quality. Retaining the cultural identity, the traditional embroidery used for making personal trousseau is now market-affiliated and kept alive.”



### Conclusions:

URMUL emphasizes that women, especially poor rural working women (women artisans in this case), need to be empowered and it will require elaborate strategies and specific programs which will have to be implemented properly. Capacity-building training programs would help women artisans to combat the exploitation they face at home, work, and



in community, to reduce disparities, improving social conditions and gender sensitivity. It will help in creating a society based on equality, equity, and freedom.

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