

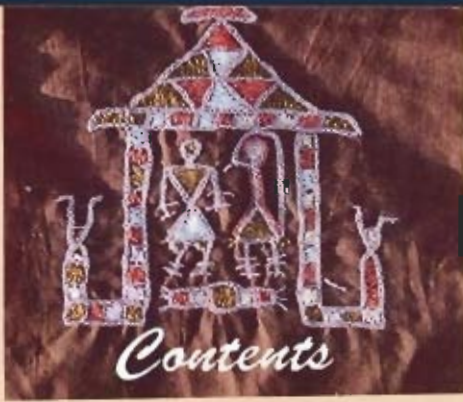
Moving in Moving in Sand and Time

Summer / Ashaad, 1999



URMUL TRUST

URMUL Rural Health Research and Development Trust



Development Challenges in the Thar

URMUL Trust: Mission Statement

URMUL Trust: the path so far

Taking Stock and Setting Sights

Rural Health

Education and Learning

Security: Food, Water & Fodder

Sustainable Livelihoods

Carving Collectives

Growth Strategies

Forging Ties

Research

Advocacy

Costs and Sustainability

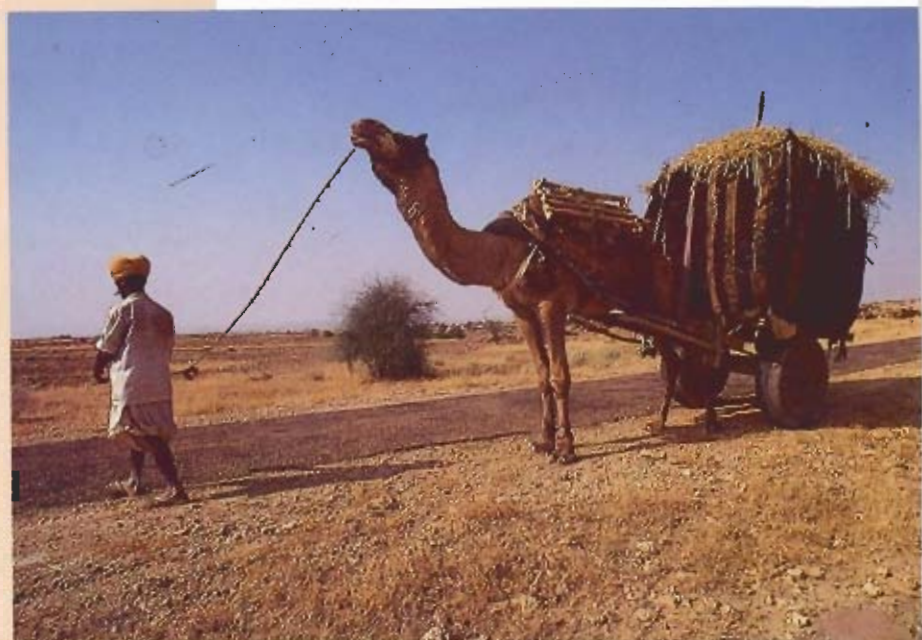
Map showing villages & communities in
URMUL project areas

Inserts

URMUL Trust Family: a brief overview

Setu
Seemant
UMBVS
Vasundhara
Khejadi
Jyoti
Marushakti
SMM
Srjamyaham
GVSTK
AZERC

Lunkaransar
Bajju
Phalodi
Lunkaransar
Jayal
Nokha
Sujangarh
Pugal
Jaisalmer
Pachewar
Bikaner





Western desert districts of Rajasthan: a profile

The state of Rajasthan was formed from the merger of 19 princely states, 3 principalities and the British administered province of Ajmer in 1948. It is situated in north-west India and lies between 23°3' and 30°12' north latitudes and 69°30' and 78°17' east longitudes. The state shares a 1070km long international border with Pakistan, as well as boundaries with Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujrat from north to south. It is the second largest state in the Indian union, with an area of 3,42,239 sq.km. It accounts for around 10% of the total land surface in the country and more than 5% of the total population.



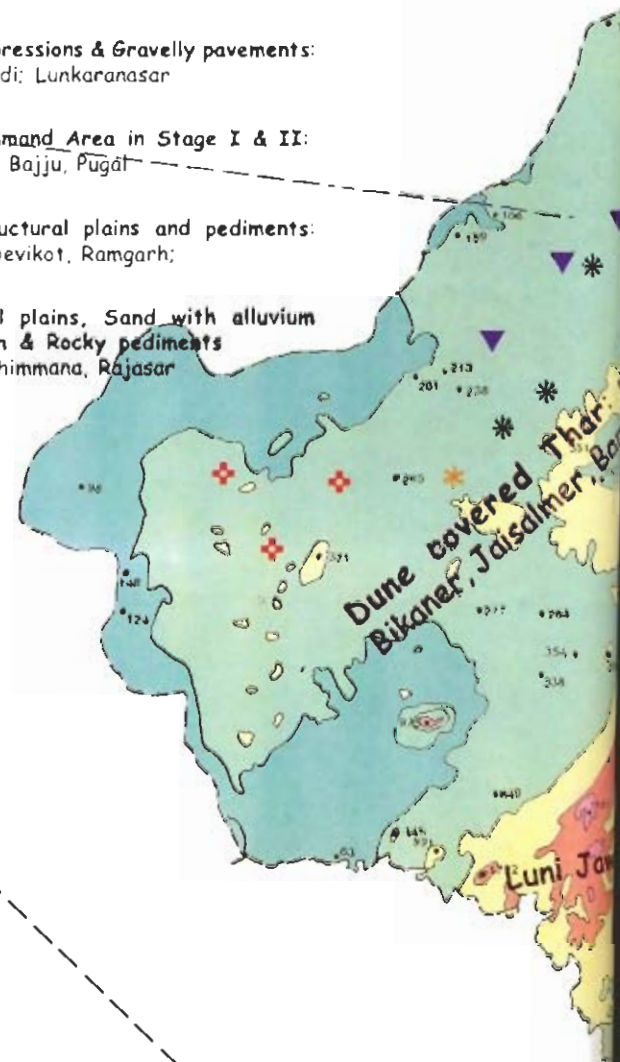
Low dune sandy plains:
Sujangarh, Jayal

Saline Depressions & Gravelly pavements:
Bap, Phalodi; Lunkaranasar

IGNP Command Area in Stage I & II:
465 Head, Bajju, Pugal

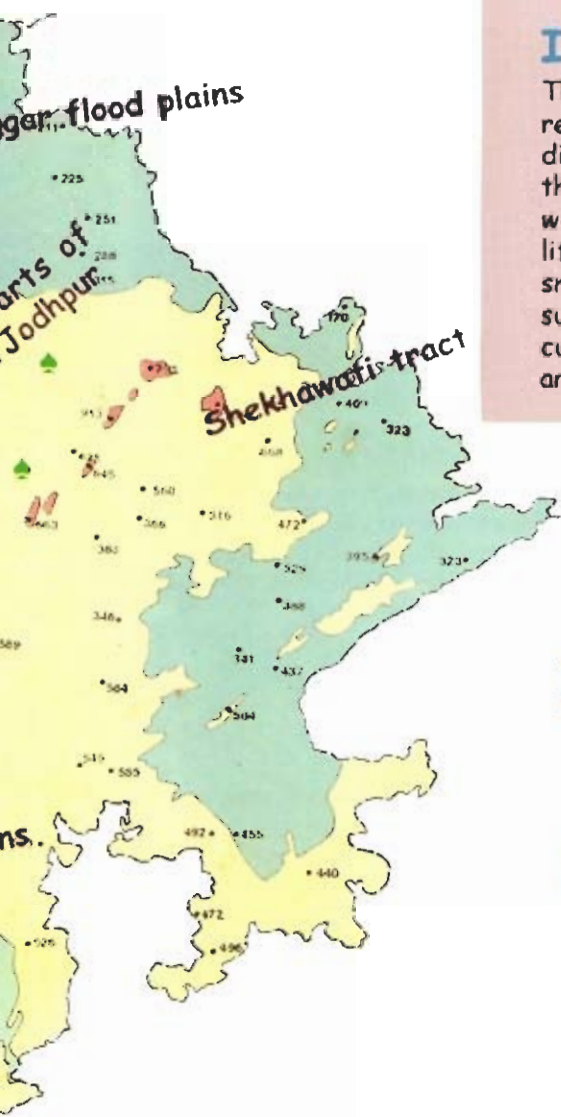
Rocky structural plains and pediments:
Pokaran, Devikot, Ramgarh;

Interdunal plains, Sand with alluvium underneath & Rocky pediments
Haddan, Chimmana, Rajasar



Arid Indian Thar as a physiographic and human

District	Area (in sq km)	Mean Annual Rainfall (mm)	Mean Aridity Index	Population Density	Area Usable for Agriculture (in %)
Jaisalmer	38401	164	90.7	9	8
Ganganagar	20634	254	85.8	127	85
Barmer	28387	277	84.3	50	73
Bikaner	27244	264	83.1	44	42
Jodhpur	22850	319	79.8	93	81
Churu	16830	325	76.7	91	90
Nagaur	17718	389	80	121	86
Jalore	10640	422	76.8	107	80
Jhunjhunu	5928	445	74.9	264	80
Pali	12387	490	75.1	120	66
Sikar	7732	466	68.7	238	79

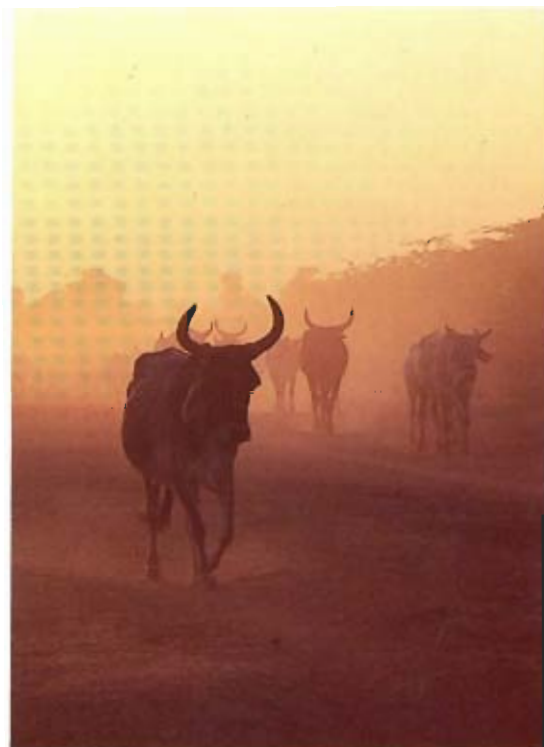


IGNP: the new addition to the Face

The Indira Gandhi Nahar Pariyojna (IGNP) that started in 1958 represents one of the most ambitious endeavour by the modern Indian State to bring the Himalayan waters to the vast stretches of the dominantly dune covered desert. The 8187 sq. km. canal network consists of the 445km long Main Canal, nine branches, seven lift schemes and twenty one direct distributaries apart from the smaller network of water courses. On completion the canal would support a population of around 2 million people and irrigate a culturable command area of around 1.5mha, the largest command area in the world for one single irrigation project.

The Great Indian Thar

More than half of the land of Rajasthan lies in the arid and semi arid districts. Separated by the 550km long Aravalli range and its splinters in the east these western districts from part of the Great Indian Thar. This region comprises of the entire districts of Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur districts and portions of Nagore and Churu districts. Annual rainfall is low ranging from 10cms to 40cms and is very erratically distributed in these parts. Temperatures range



from 48 to 50 degrees in the summers and below freezing points in winters. Even during the rainy months precipitation is high because of sharp sunlight making these western regions arid to extremely arid in climate with perpetual water deficit in all the parts.

Crowding of the Thar: In the last quarter of this century the Indian Thar has witnessed one of the fastest demographic growth in the country. The decennial growth rate in the rural areas in the six desert districts of the Thar has been around 32.5 and is much higher than the State average of 25.46 and 20.01 for the entire country. Along with humans livestock numbers on the whole have also increased, especially the sheep and goats that almost doubled itself in the last quarter. This unusually high growth rate poses a threat to the fragile ecosystem of the desert,

izing s (%)	Culturable Waste (in %)	Live-stock density
2.7	77	21
0.78	4.4	111
7.4	12	109
1.9	43.4	73
5.3	3.2	119
2.8	2.42	100
4.3	1.12	157
4.7	2.3	167
7.3	1.14	178
7.4	4	219
5.9	1.8	192

already constrained by lack of arable land, paucity of surface and ground water resources, meager forests, vegetable cover and diminishing grasslands.

Survival and Livelihoods: The rural economy of the Thar is largely pastoral, the majority of the communities practising some form of semi nomadic animal husbandry and often relying on subsistence cultivation of a *kharif* crop of inferior cereals and millet. Incomes from the sale of milk, wool and mutton account for the major part of the household earnings.

The government has over the last few decades instituted wide scale land privatization that has led to the dismantling of a lot of "common property resources" - the village pastures, grazing grounds and sacred groves. This acquisition and redistribution of the village commons has deprived many poor and marginal households earnings worth around 15 to 20 % of their household incomes. The arable expansion has swelled the number of people who have been struggling to make a living off annual crop cultivation on arid lands that can realistically support agriculture for one season. This process of intensification of agriculture has led to widespread destruction of the agricultural soils leading to land infertility and increasing aridity. Due to poor infrastructure and facilities the scope of non-farm economic activities is fairly restricted. Livelihood opportunities for many artisan communities depends upon a range of traditional skills like dyeing, spinning, braiding, weaving, pottery, masonry, brick baking, carpentry, basket making; leather workers, to mention a few of the most prominent ones. The handicrafts of these traditional artisan families have to contest hard and are being increasingly pushed out by the industrial commodities which have penetrated even the small huts and markets near villages. This has reduced the demand for the handmade products in the rural exchange circuits. There is another class of

wage hunters and gatherers who are engaged in seasonal agricultural labour, small time itinerant trade, casual as well as skilled labour in cities and towns in and outside the arid Thar.



Arid Regions of the World

Hot Arid Regions

Sahara - Northwest Africa

Kalahari - South Africa

Great Indian Thar - Western Rajasthan & North Gujarat

Gobi - China

Syrian Desert - Afghanistan

Atacama - South America

Cold Arid Regions

Alaska & Greenland

Ladakh

Simpson Desert, Great Victoria Desert

Takla Makam

Some Peculiarities of our Thar

Our Thar has the highest carrying capacity having a long history of being the most populous deserts of the world

Host to more than 700 endemic plant species that include trees like khejri, kumat; bushes like phog, bui and grasses like sewan make our Thar as one of the best endowed and having an amazing bio diversity among the arid regions.

Thar has a wide variety of distinct communities having their own elaborate dress code and gestures like colour and style of turbans and existence of popular and rich oral bardic traditions make it one of the most colourful and live folk regions.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

Harsh Climate & Fragile Ecology

The physical geography and ecology of the Thar is harsh and inhospitable due to environmental constraints such as grossly impoverished soils, degraded natural watersheds, loss of CPRs, unscientific mining practices. High wind velocity contributing to acute soil erosion, continuously shifting sand dunes covering around 30 to 40 % of the region, and very deep and saline water sources add to the challenge of sustained human settlement in the Thar. The *marusthali* or the region of death is a stalking ground of droughts and famines. Averages for this century suggest that drought cycle has increased from one good year for every three years to only one in six years.

Sharpening inequity and discrimination

Over the last quarter of this century the State has intensified efforts to modernize and open up the hitherto untouched interiors of the Thar. Growing populations, attempts at intensive production, penetration of market and commercial forces, are leading to a greater competition between communities for access to, and control over natural resources. This is leading to increased degradation of resources, decreased productivity, decline in incomes and increasing expenditures for survival. Economic liberalization driven rural development has swelled the ranks of casual labour, stagnated wages and sharpened economic disparities between classes. Rural indebtedness and borrowing on advance is fairly well entrenched in the daily economic life in the rural areas. The cycle of indebtedness that slowly but inevitably clutches the farmer or the shepherd or the seasonal labourer or the dalit is perpetuated by the middlemen / traders who also monopolise the prices for wool, mutton, food grains, commercial crops and other daily necessities in the market.

Acute Water Scarcity

Rajasthan has only 1 % of the total country's ground water resources. The western districts in particular are known for their water scarcity that persists for almost all the year round. More than half of the ground water in the Thar is considered brackish and highly saline. The underground water table continues to fall at an alarming rate even below its current depths of 300-600 feet. Several villages and settlements rely on wells and reservoirs many kilometers away from their homes for their daily water supply. People, especially women have to walk long distances daily to fetch water or buy water at the rate of Rs 30 to Rs 50 per 250 litres.

Inadequate Communication & Infrastructure Facilities

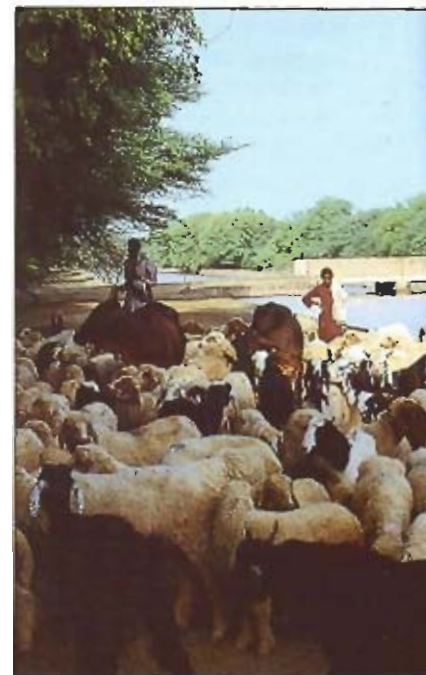
Growth of a road network has enabled a better integration of the arid zone with the surrounding regions. But in the interiors of the Thar the lines of communication are far from sufficient. Communication facilities are practically non-existent for many villages. The main mode of transport is the private camel carts and the crowded private buses. Whatever growth of infrastructure to deliver the essential services has happened is mainly along the metal roads and has not touched the interior pockets at all. As a result, basic health, education and life support services either do not exist or cannot be maintained in the remote villages. To add to it, for around two to three months in an year, severe sandstorms disrupt communication with the villages, making the provisioning of development support services almost impossible.

Scattered and mobile populations

A peculiar feature of the desert demography is its scattered and mobile nature. The scattered communities and their seasonal patterns of mobility make it a challenge to institutionalize any kind of service delivery or development process. There are three major rhythms of migrations: movement in July - August preferably after monsoons to their *dhanis* (hamlets) for agricultural work; distress migration of the poor wage hunters and gatherers to irrigated areas in the IGNP, Punjab and Haryana and to towns and cities in the Thar and even outside, around Holi (March-April) at the onset of the dry season; regular transhumance of semi-nomadic pastoralists to the adjoining states of Punjab, Haryana, MP and Gujarat.

Backward and poor status of women

Traditional conservative practices and the persistence of a feudal ethos continually keep the women in the arid zone silenced, exhausted, con-



IN THE THAR

ined to the interiors, veiled and secluded from birth to death. Literacy among the women in the rural areas is abysmally low (around 10%). The arid zone is typical for having one of the lowest (and declining) sex ratios in the State as well as in India. There is a strong emphasis on the need to produce male children that has led to the persistence of the poor health status of women, systematic discrimination and neglect of the girl child, high birth rate and a large family size.

Subaltern losers

Some nomadic and itinerant groups like the bhats, banjaras, kalbelias, nats, bhopas, bijarniyas, gadoliya lohars, bhils, etc are fringe or marginal communities who have been the main losers in the development processes of the last quarter of this century. Most of the policies have bypassed and ignored development concerns and priorities of these groups. What is even more perturbing is that these fringe groups, camping on the outskirts of villages or cross roads of cities and towns do not figure even in the development agendas of the NGOs.

Prevalence of endemic diseases and epidemics

Occupational diseases such as Tuberculosis and Silicosis are fairly endemic in the Thar. These are especially to be found amongst those involved in the mining industry (gyp-

sum, stone, marble), casual laborers, agricultural laborers and account for a large number of deaths, especially among the working males. Recurring epidemics of malaria in the nineties that wiped out thousands of humans has become one of the major threats to human lives in the Thar.

Ecological imbalance by the IGNP Canal

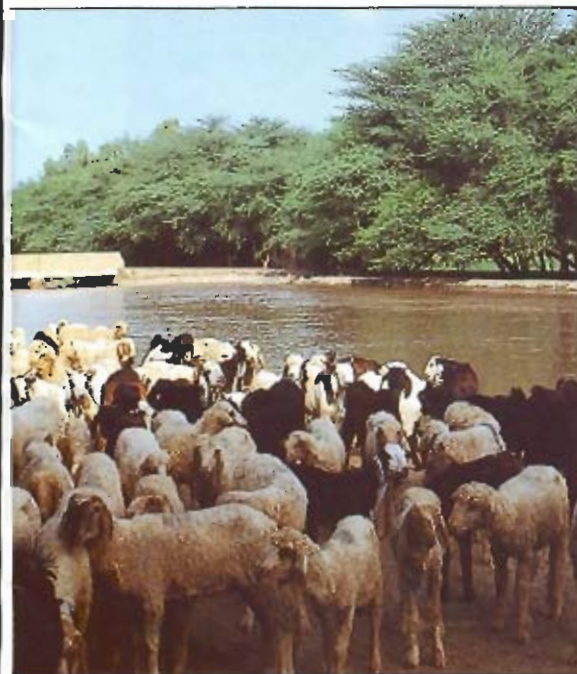
The creation of such a huge canal network like the IGNP has created a serious ecological imbalance in the region. Successive waves of settlers have found it hard to persist in their efforts to settle in an ecologically fragile tract. The struggle for colonisation is often at the cost of abandoning the old practices of survival, destruction of the natural resource base. High resource inputs in irrigated farming, breakup of structures of collectivities at the family and community level, dispersal and fragmentation of families, greater isolation of women, more workload, increased consumption as against incomes have become essential defining elements of the life in the command area. Increased outputs of cash crops like groundnut, cotton have resulted in water logging of vast tracts of land leading to the sudden pauperization and displacement of farmers.

Lack of access to information

The native populations of the Thar rank as having one of the lowest levels of literacy in the country. The society of the Thar continues to be largely a preliterate aural culture where the written word either has a very limited penetration or is understood or monopolized by a few. A large majority of the population relies upon the Hindi daily newspaper that reaches many villages only by late evening or the next day as the sole source of information about the outside world. Daily life in the rural areas is fairly insular and the majority of the villagers still lack even basic information about the welfare schemes and policies of the State. Many schemes of the government are just swallowed by the nexus of the bureaucrat-contractor-politician and thus fail to benefit the common masses.

Unstable political climate and effete civil society

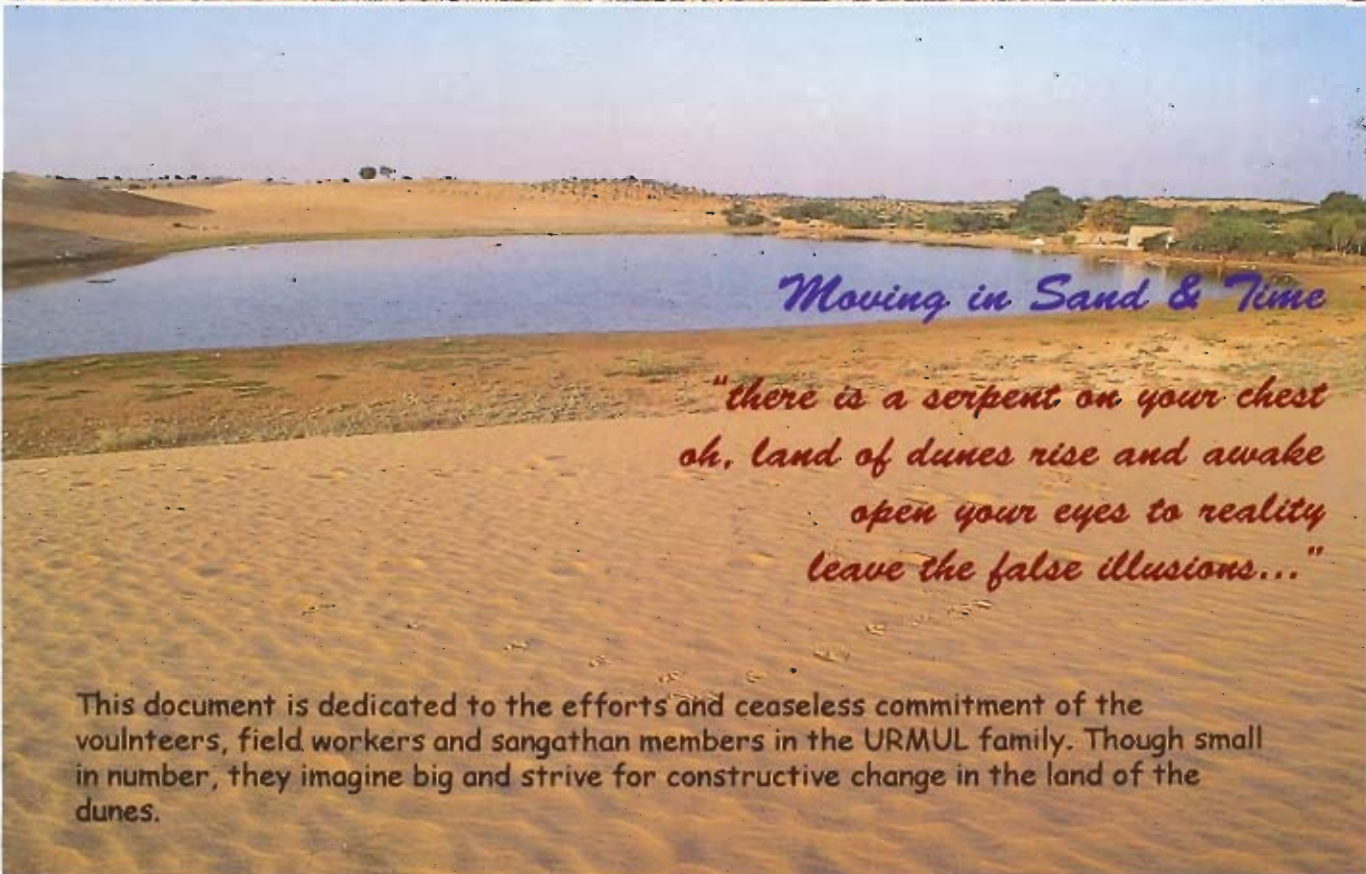
The political scenario in the Thar has been quite fluid and unstable in the last few years. Governance in general has deteriorated a great deal. State bureaucracy has lost credibility because of the rampant corruption and nepotism. Atrocities on the lower castes as well as women have increased quite significantly. Violations of basic human rights has seeped well inside the civil society. The Panchayats under the 73rd Amendments have, after the end of their first term, proven to be fairly effete structures that require skills, effective mobilization and exposure to face up to the challenges of local governance and decentralized planning and financing.





MISSION STATEMENT

"To lead the poor towards self-reliance by making available to them a package of development services that they themselves decide on, design, implement, and eventually finance"



Moving in Sand & Time


*"there is a serpent on your chest
oh, land of dunes rise and awake
open your eyes to reality
leave the false illusions..."*

This document is dedicated to the efforts and ceaseless commitment of the volunteers, field workers and sangathan members in the URMUL family. Though small in number, they imagine big and strive for constructive change in the land of the dunes.





URMUL Trust



URMUL TRUST represents a family of organizations working towards social and economic change in the lives of the people in the harsh, inhospitable and interior regions of western Rajasthan. What keeps these different organisations and the TRUST together are a set of shared feelings, values and commitment about development work and processes. These include honesty, equality, secularism, gender sensitivity. The core of the development premise of the URMUL TRUST is an intrinsic faith in the capacity of the rural people to devise and manage and sustain development programs.

Since its inception there has been an unflinching commitment towards strengthening the processes of local initiative and leadership both within the organisation and at the village level. Most of the members of the URMUL family are natives from the Thar and only a handful of development professionals come from reputed institutions of higher education.

Work with people is guided by the spirit that most often people themselves know what best can be done and must become active participants in changing their own destinies. All the work is focussed on vulnerable sections of society like women, children, poor, socially backward and marginal classes / communities.





URMUL TRUST

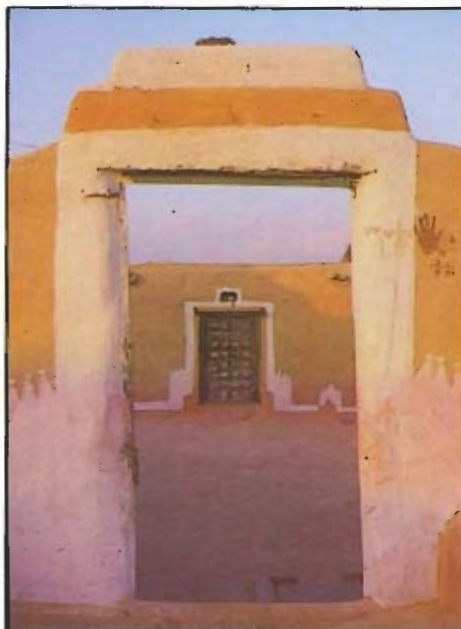
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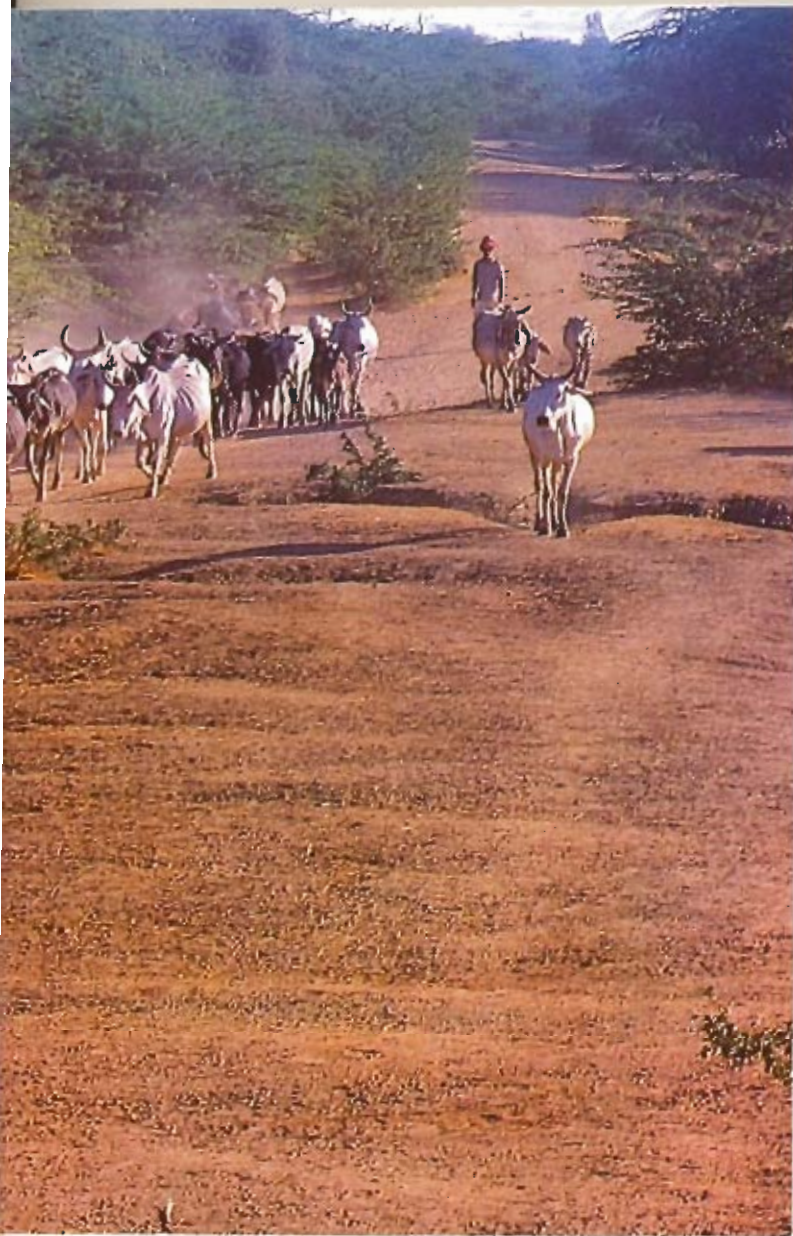
URMUL dairy (Uttari Rajasthan Milk Union Limited) was set up in the arid region of Bikaner district in 1972 as part of the Operation Flood II. Professionally the URMUL dairy acted as district unit of Rajasthan Co-operative Dairy Federation, that was a kind of public sector undertaking. The milk procurement at the village dairy cooperatives increased from 200 litres per day in 1972 to 1,50,000 litres a day in 1984.

Farmer members of the dairy cooperatives gave the mandate for



the creation of URMUL TRUST in 1984 to reach out to the under privileged in the rural areas especially women and children to provide them access to good health care. Initial financial support to the Trust was in the form of a corpus created from a subsidy of three paise per litre of milk collected by the milk unions. Health services of the TRUST were primarily meant for the members of the village level milk societies in the northern Lunkaransar tehsil of Bikaner district.

The Board of Trustees include the



and Bikaner was one of the badly hit districts. The trikaal of ann, jal, & chara (food, water & fodder) broke the backbone of thousands of families and wiped off about half of the live-stock population. It became imperative to provide employment to a people faced with near starvation.



Till then, the URMUL Trust programme was essentially one of service delivery in "soft" sectors such as health and education. The drought drastically changed and radicalized that. For the young members of the URMUL Trust it was just not possible to restrict themselves to "only distributing medicines in the villages". Village groups, in most cases women, were organized to pressurize the district administration to sanction 'Famine Relief Works'.

Many poor families, who had worked on and managed relief programmes, learnt the value and power of collective action during this period. It was at this time that the first seeds of the sangathans were sown. Beginnings were made of a relationship with the people in the villagers which was to continue and thicken in the years to come.

District Collector, the Principal of the Bikaner Medical College, and the Chief Medical and Health Officer as ex-officio office bearers. A close relationship with the Urmul Dairy and the District Government was helpful for the Trust in many ways. Patronage of the dairy provided the Trust institutional credibility and ready access to infrastructure. The Founder Secretary of the Trust is Mr. Sanjoy Ghose.

1987 saw the worst drought of the century in western Rajasthan,



Experience of the drought of 1986-88 made it clear that the development agenda needed to be broadened to address the needs of the rural poor, backward, vulnerable groups especially women and children. URMUL Trust launched a multi-sectoral attack on poverty. URMUL Trust has facilitated three integrated development projects. They stand as important landmarks in the growth of the URMUL family. These integrated development projects cover around one hundred and fifty villages and settlements in the districts of Bikaner, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer.

What is crucial here is that the set of relations and partnerships that URMUL Trust formed in initiating these continue even today. These were both with foreign donors like ACTION AID, SCF, OxFam, SIDA, NOARD, Ford Foundation etc as well partnerships with Government programs like BADEP, CAPART, ICDS, Shikshakarmi Scheme and Lok Jumbish.

Work at Lunkaransar expanded from six villages in 1984 to 22 villages in 1987-88. These were the beginnings of the first integrated development programme in 33 villages of Lunkaransar tehsil (subsequently expanded to 40 villages) covering a population of 30,000 people in 1988. This project today has expanded three of its older clusters with financial support from PLAN International.

In 1988, the URMUL Trust expanded its activities to the command area of the Indira Gandhi Canal. A branch of the Trust was set up at Bajju in Kolayat tehsil so as to provide community based developmental services to the highly scattered population of the area. Initial ac-

tivities included provision of community based health services to 17 villages, enabling local cattle herders make an occupational shift from animal husbandry to irrigated agriculture forced on them by the advent of the canal, and building up of training infrastructure. Financial support was available from the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the Aga Khan Foundation and Save the Children Fund. In 1991, it was decided to take on the role of the nodal implementing agency for the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in Kolayat tehsil of the district, which expanded the Trust's work in the Kolayat Block to 113 villages.

An integrated rural development project is run in 25 villages in the Haddan and Chimmna sectors with financial support from PLAN International.

A chance meeting with a group of weavers from Jodhpur and Jaisalmer districts in 1988 led to the establishment of the URMUL Marusthali Bunkar Vikas Samiti (UMBVS) in Phalodi. It has since expanded into an integrated rural development project operative in 10 villages with activities which include health and primary education, support to livelihoods as well as the initial thrust area of income generation with 170 weavers. Financial support has been forthcoming from OxFam, ACTIONAID as well as the Government of Japan.

The strategic plan for the URMUL Trust formulated at its inception in 1986 had envisaged an expansion every two years into areas in which the URMUL Dairy had already set up infrastructure in the form of chilling plants and other facilities. The expansion from Lunkaransar to Bajju took place in 1988 as per the plan,



Annual retreats: places and time for reflection

1987	Nal, Bikaner	Primary Health Care
1988	Jaimalsar, Bikaner	Drought and Sustainable Livelihoods
1989	Joganiyon ka bala, Bikaner	Sangathans and Marginal Communities
1990	Tal Chaapar, Churu	Expansion in Phalodi
1991	Ratangarh, Churu	Linkages with Govt Schemes
1992	Chatargarh, Bikaner	Clusters & Decentralization of Programs
1993	Mt Abu, Sirahi	Women and Girl Child focus
1994	Ladanu, Nagore	Gandhian philosophy on rural reconstruction
1995	Khatu Shyamji, Sikar	Decentralization of new initiatives
1996	Mukam, Bikaner	Self Assessment: a decade of development work
1997	Bhadariya, Jaisalmer	Focus on women in response to Women Reservation Bill
1998	Salasar, Churu	Non Violence in behaviour and strategy
1999	Sandarshahar, Churu	Advocacy, Transparency and Right to Information



as did the short lived intervention in Chattargadh. The other major expansion, that of the intervention with weavers in Phalodi and Pokaran areas of Jodhpur and Jaisalmer districts respectively in 1989, took place largely due to the reasons other than the plan.

It was in 1992 that the organization began consciously debating the process of decentralization. The annual meeting of the Trust at Chattargadh that year discussed the issue in some detail. Members of the family weighed the pros and cons of decentralization as well as the nature and form that it should take. The main advantages that a decentralization process offered were as follows _

1. The decentralization of decision making would transfer authority and responsibility closer to the field.
2. Level of ownership of the Trust's work by the field workers would be higher since they would be party to decisions relating to their activities.

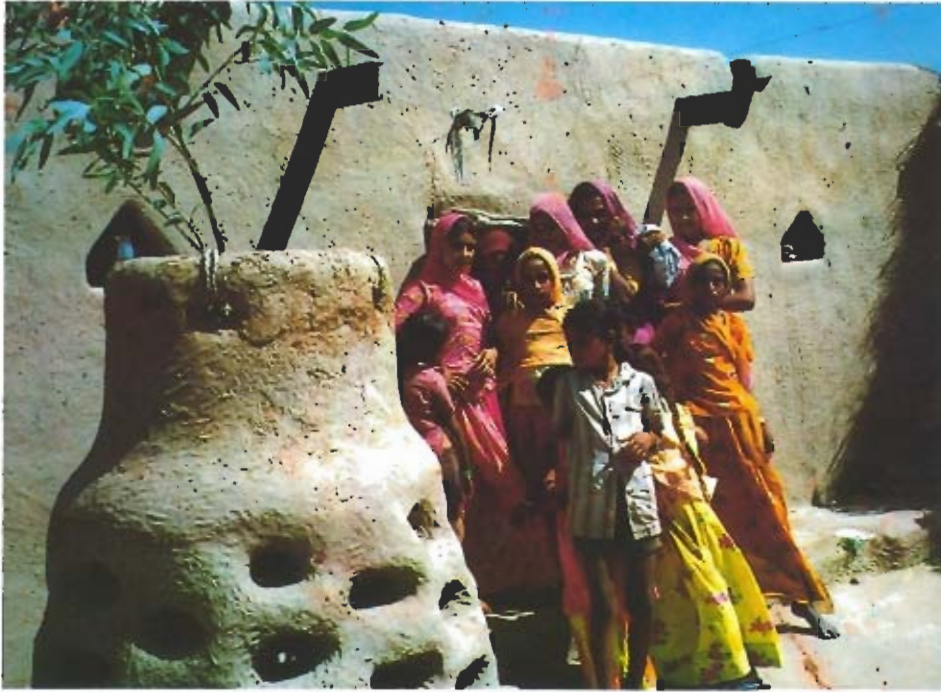
3. It would be possible to implement new and innovative ideas and processes on a small scale.
4. New avenues of advancement would be provided to senior staff of the Trust.
5. Better management of large projects like Lunkaransar and Bajju as decentralized and autonomous initiatives.

The decentralization processes manifested themselves in three major ways.



The Lunkaransar and Bajju projects were separately



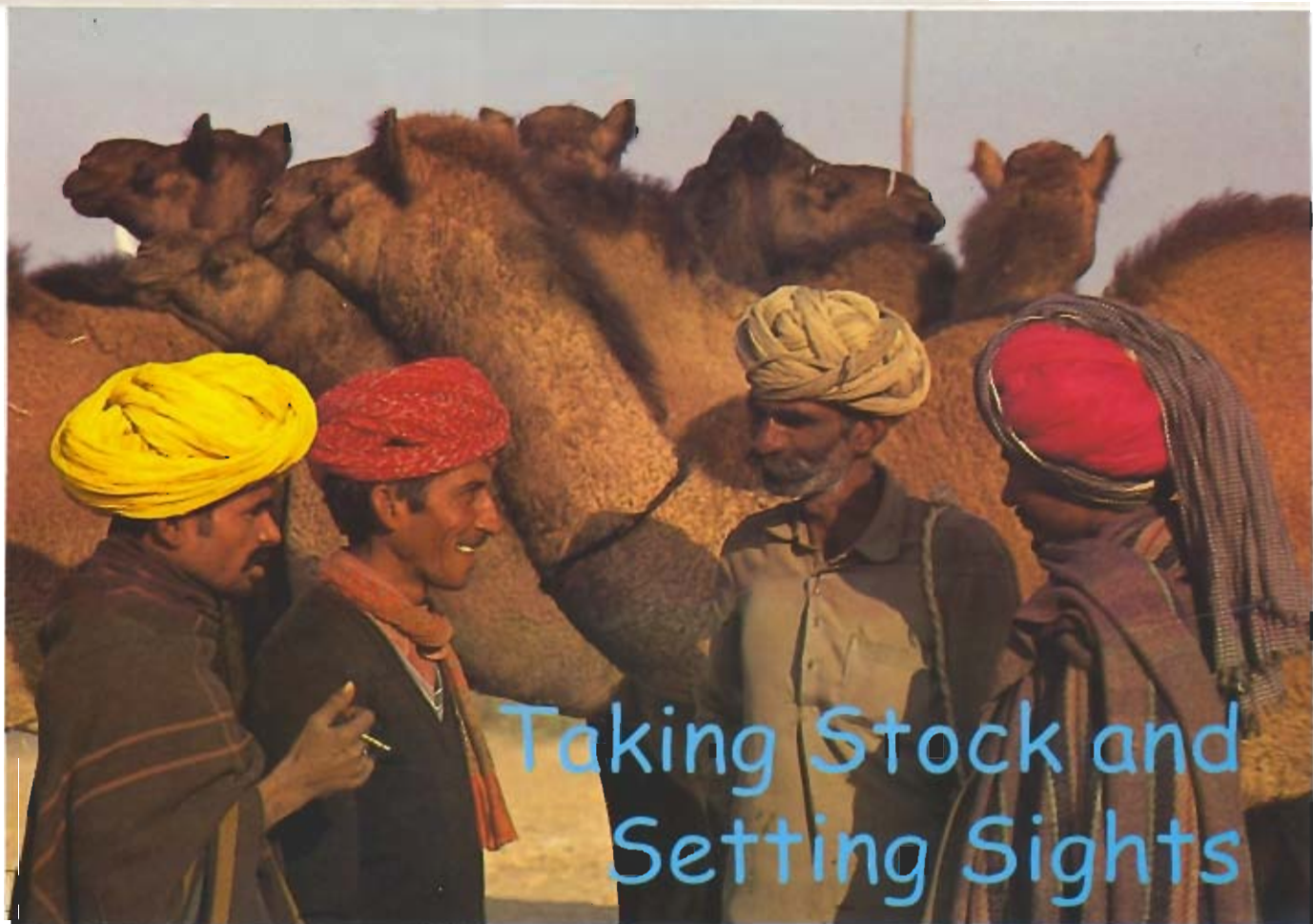


registered in 1994 as URMUL Setu and URMUL Seemant respectively. The projects thereby had separate management boards, which had membership from eminent persons at the state and national level as well as from the communities with whom the Trust works. The lines of answerability to the community were thereby strengthened. The URMUL Trust thus was in the process of becoming an umbrella organization.

The second was within the Lunkaransar and Bajju projects, wherein programme villages were grouped into clusters. Field teams were then placed in the cluster headquarters and given the responsibility as well as authority to carry out the Trust's activities in those villages. Support staff continued to be based at the respective project headquarters. The cluster process began at Lunkaransar in 1993, when four clusters of villages, i.e. Arjansar, Lunkaransar, Sui and Rajpuria were formed. Today there are six clusters functional there, the original four as well as Rajasar and 465 Head. Each cluster now handles responsibilities across all sectors of activity _ for example, Sui cluster handles activities ranging from education to agriculture, with in-house expertise in each of the activities. Similarly, URMUL Seemant has six clusters, Khajuwala, Dantor, Bhaluri, Bajju, Haddan and Chimana. The same pattern of clusters has been adopted by the UMBVS that operates in Bhojasar and That clusters of Phalodi and Pokaran blocks.

Supporting, facilitating small development initiatives across western Rajasthan working on specific issues under the auspices of the Trust was the third crucial element of the decentralization processes. This was done through encouraging senior field staff to move to their home villages and set up these projects. This process, primarily supported by NORAD, SCF, CRY and Oxfam has enabled the Trust to spread its work across western Rajasthan. Today, URMUL is represented in seven districts in this region. Opportunities have been created to relate issues and talk about intra district linkages and form networks on specific issues of the violation of basic human rights.





Development interventions in URMUL Trust family revolve around a core of strategic sectors like collective mobilization, access to health and education services, empowering people on food, fodder and water, security, supporting livelihoods, relevant and action oriented research, trainings in skill enhancement and

confidence and promoting issues of human rights and public advocacy. The strategic features of each sector are decided by a community planning process that starts from the beneficiary family and community and flows to the top from below up. At the core of these development processes are community based organisations (CBOs) like men and women *sangathans*, *prerak dals*, *navyuvak mandals*, *village education committees*, *chak samities*.

Although fairly autonomous the interventions under the different sectors cut across, and supplement each other in pursuance of the final goal of improving the quality of life of the vulnerable communities in the Thar.

Settlements where URMUL family Works

Organisations	Villages and Chaks
Urmul Setu, Lunkanansar	120
Urmul Seemant, Bajju	260
Urmul Samiti, Phalodi	90
Urmul Jyoti, Nokha	43
Maru Shakti, Sujangarh	8
Urmul Khejari, Jayal	8
Srajamyaham, Devikot	4
Shanti Maitri Mission, Pugal	16
GVST, Malpura	5
Vasundhara, Lunkanansar	7
Total	561



Rural Health

The objectives of the health programme are to provide the poor, women and children, especially in the remote corners of the region, access to, awareness and the ability and confidence to access and sustain quality health services and education.

Set up system of recording births and deaths at the village and the Panchayat level

Reduce the infant mortality rate to 60 / 1000 by the end of five years

Achieve 100 % monitoring and follow-up of all antenatal, natal, and postnatal cases

Detect and follow up all the cases of women reproductive health problems

Detect and follow-up all tuberculosis cases

Eliminate night blindness, cataract and anemia

Achieve 100% coverage of eligible children for immunisation

Reduce the maternal mortality rate to less than 2 per thousand by 2005.

Make the Village Health Worker (VHW) self-sufficient in all aspects of maternal and child health and PHC services

Empower the community on issues of public health by equipping them with adequate information and confidence to access services from the Government health structure

Swasthya Sathi (dais) the entry point

In consonance with the objectives of the programme, local women (in most cases the traditional birth attendant of the village) are chosen and equipped with knowledge of curative and preventive primary health, safe delivery birth practices and provided with basic medicines. The reasons for choosing the traditional birth attendants or dais are as follows.

- Normally the village dai is of a low caste. In an area where the caste system is deeply entrenched, the recruitment of the dai ensures acceptability of the really poor.
- Almost fifty percent of infant mortality in Rajasthan is neonatal and perinatal, resulting from lack of effective antenatal and postnatal care. This interface is largely in the control of the dai.

In the course of time, the swasthya sathis have proved to much more than mere village health workers. They act as resource / lead persons for their villages and the interface between the professionals working for the Trust and the village community. They also became a reference point for information on a variety of issues; water, land rights, employment. Today, there are approximately 250 such women in Lunkaransar, Bajju, Phalodi and Nokha.

Dai induction: a constant learning

Dais (swasthya sathis) have been an important discovery for URMUL Trust. The process of identification / induction of the traditional birth attendants as swasthya sathis is a two way process of learning. Knowledge, notions of purity and impurity, values and practices are shared by both the



dai as well as the health worker, who disseminates the information of new techniques and practices that maximise the chances of safe delivery.

Health team as well as others interested have constantly engaged with these training programs, to maintain the quality of transmission and efficacy in imparting the skills and knowledge about safe delivery while facilitating the retention capacity and memory of the *dai*. Ena Singh's short study on the dais in 1992 put together the first of the profiles of the *swasthya sathis* of URMUL trust. Their lives narrated, skills ascertained and retention acknowledged. In the initial years the training program for the dais communicated to the *swasthya sathis* a range of issues in health, including preventive and curative care along with safe delivery practices. Slowly by 1995 this gave way to more intensive trainings exclusively focused on safe delivery practices. The health staff constantly tracks the retention capacity, motivation levels of the *swasthya sathis*. In the last year and a half there has an effort to conduct PHC access surveys to close down on the role and recognition of the *swasthya sathis* and other community health volunteers by the community, Panchayats and the Govt medical staff. There is also a renewed debate on the content of package of safe delivery practices and care of mother and child, that the dais carry. There is an increasing concern to explore more deeply the basis of traditional practices and not be too glibly to accept all the modern practices as correct and well suited to the conditions.



TB, or not TB ?

Tuberculosis, the search for it, ascertaining the prevalence of it, ironically in Thar and causes for its difficult cure were the guiding questions for URMUL to understand the human misery the disease had been inflicting. The 1991 TB survey done over a population of around 15000 in around fourteen villages in Bajju and Lunkaransar area laid the basis for a more systematic intervention with TB patients. The ceaseless quest of not merely understanding but also getting involved in active control of TB has been one of the essential component of almost all the health programs in the URMUL family. TB is so endemic and rampant that it difficult to bypass it. The integrated projects in the family have had a evolving TB control program. The program runs through a combination of services like an OPD service two days every month, monthly clinical monitoring of X-Rays, culture, expensive short term chemotherapy for six months; close door to door follow up by the health workers, counselling by the community and referral services and even accessing part of the medicines from the District TB clinic.



Location of OPD	Patients Enrolled	Men	Women	Cured	Drop Outs	Under Treatment
Lunkaransar	141	95	46	76	26	100
Kolayat	40	32	8	50	4	40
Phalodi	28	19	6	10	3	25
Total	209	146	60	136	33	165

Saving sight: a mission with the eye

Location of the Eye Camp	IOL	Cataract Cases	Total Operations Performed
Dasodi, Kolayat block		50	50
Devikot, Sam Block		07	07
Bikaner City	19	133	152
Jhadeli, Jayal Block		31	31
820 RD, Bikaner Block		46	46
Pugal, Bikaner Block	05	60	65
Chatargarh, Bikaner Block		10	10
Bhasina, Sujangarh Block		56	56
Bikampur, Kolayat Block		45	45
Kalu, Lunkaransar Block		77	77
Mukam, Nokha Block	02	86	88
Shereran, Bikaner Block	15	25	40
Lunkaransar Mandi		51	51
TOTAL 13 Camps	41	677	718
Support from Sight Savers International and collaboration with the DBCS has enabled the URMUL Trust family to cover a large number of patients having eye ailments in 1998-1999			

Child survival : a long term commitment

It would not be out of place to state that it was the mothers and their children, a commitment to arrest the IMR rate and facilitate healthy growth conditions for the child in the arid zone that formed the defining, rather quintessential feature of the URMUL health programs. A

mass awareness campaign, drive for immunization, growth monitoring and organising innovative programs on supplementary feed can be counted as one of the salient activities of the program. URMUL has demonstrated the ability to successfully run an ICDS program in the Kolayat block that covers around twenty thousand children since 1992. The Trust has evolved it's own distinct process of supplementary feed out of local material that is popularly called URMUL Mix. The family is well represented in a program on child nutrition supported by UNICEF implementing it in around seventy eight villages Bikaner district. Even in a new partnership with CRY, organisations like Jyoti, Marushakti, Khejadi, Srijamyaham, have picked up

programs on combating mal nutrition reaffirming the basic principle of child centredness.





Major Activities

- ◆ Maternal Health
- ◆ Under Five Year Children
- ◆ Woman Health
- ◆ Adolescent Girls
- ◆ TB Control
- ◆ Health Awareness Camps
- ◆ Eye Camps
- ◆ Malaria Control
- ◆ Family Planning
- ◆ Referral Services
- ◆ Training
- ◆ Health Research & Planning
- ◆ Health MIS

Community based PHC the URMUL approach

Consistent work on the issues of rural health services encouraged the Trust to evolve a "three-tier" strategy. This strategy has proved to be fairly successful for a harsh terrain like the desert districts. It has become popular as the "Urmul approach" and has been used and adopted by many other NGOs active in the desert as well as by Government of Rajasthan in designing their health programs.

Primary Tier

At the village level the communities identify a local woman, often a *dai* (traditional birth attendant) who is chosen as the Village Health Worker (VHW), known locally as *Swasthya Sathis* (Health Counselors). The Trust trains / orient these women to provide ante natal care, conduct safe deliveries, provide postnatal care, health education regarding immunizations, growth monitoring, nutrition, family planning, etc. and also to treat minor ailments. The VHW is provided with a "safe birthing" kit and a medicine chest. She is paid a small honorarium plus an incentive payment for each person registered and for each delivery.

Secondary Tier:

The second tier consists of health extension workers, professional staff of the Trust who do 'health routes', i.e. spend one full day per village, following a set schedule. They constantly interact with the *swasthya sathis* and assist them in the complicated cases. The Health Worker maintains a record and database for the set of villages where he / she regularly visits. These extension workers, locally called *nirogi sathis* are given intensive training in basic principles of both preventive and curative care as well as some basic concepts of health management. In addition to supervising and supporting the VHW, the *nirogi sathis* provide a range of information about preventive and curative care during their visits.

Tertiary Tier:

The program physician and their team constitute this tier. The physician provides back-up medical care, largely at the programme hospital. The managers provide supervision, training and administrative support to the extension workers and staff. This team which is based at the project base office maintains linkages with the Government health department at the district and the block level for participation in programmes like the Immunization, NMEP, NTC and other such programmes. It arranges for referral services at the District hospitals for emergency and specialist services.



Education and Learning

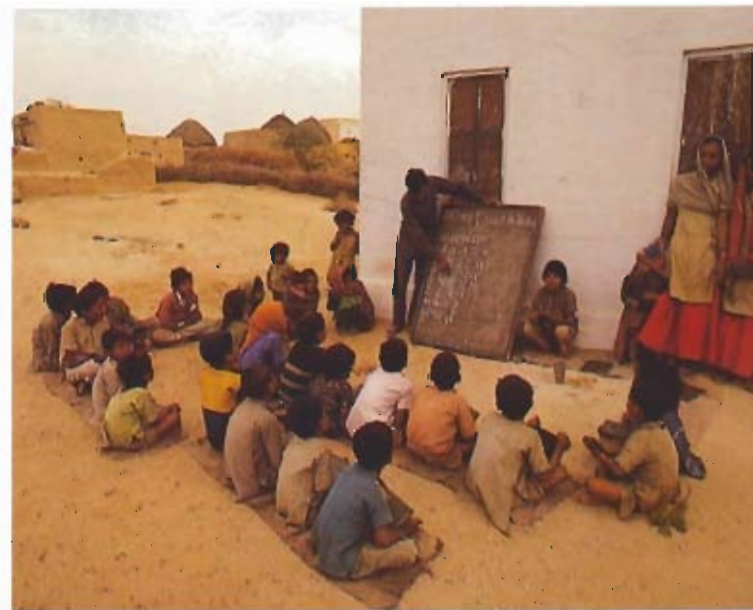
Goals & Objectives

- ❑ Open new formal and non-formal centres in villages where no school exists.
- ❑ Work for total enrollment of girl children in both formal as well as non-formal centres.
- ❑ Improve the quality of elementary education through measures such as provision of school buildings, teaching aids and basic facilities.
- ❑ Motivate teachers in the teaching process.
- ❑ Increase awareness of elementary education among the parents and the community
- ❑ Facilitate access to primary as well as post primary education to deprived and marginal families
- ❑ Achieve minimum levels of learning in all the primary schools.

ing money. Education, as a service, also proved difficult to provide within the government system to a scattered and moving population.

The Trust has also provided infrastructural support and training inputs to teachers in non-formal schools in an attempt to integrate dropouts and non-attendees into the formal schooling system. Marushalas evolved out of these attempts. The Anganshala programme designed for girls by the GoR drew upon this experience in non formal teaching. The curriculum was designed by the SAMBAL resource centre at Bajju. This was financed by SKY. Beginnings of non-formal schools in Lakhmana, Bheelon ki dhani, Basina, Jhadeli, Malikpur are being used by the smaller organizations in the URMUL family as an entry point to organise the local community.

The Trust became the first non-governmental organization to implement the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in Rajasthan in 1991, when it agreed to implement the scheme in 122 villages in the Kolayat block. This involvement with on ECCD helped the URMUL Trust a focus on the children from the age group of 0 to 6 and develop innovative material on pre-school learning.



Education has been a major thrust area since 1988. The Trust decided to concentrate on improving the existing formal system of primary education of the Government. In line with this strategy we have participated in most of the large government supported literacy and universalization of primary education programs. Universalization of elementary education is a challenge in western Rajasthan, which has the lowest literacy rates, especially for women, in the country. In a poverty-ridden community that struggles for basic needs, people were indifferent to the need for education and gave priority to children doing domestic odd jobs and earn-



The ten years of experience the Trust has acquired in education in western Rajasthan has been recognized by education authorities in the state. The Trust is now represented on the Executive Committees of Lok Jumbish, the Shikshakarmi Board, and Sandhan (the training resource institution for SKY). It is also the State Resource Centre for the Anganshala Scheme. Bajju has been designated as the regional resource centre for trainings of SK teachers and administration of SK scheme in western Rajasthan.

In 1993, the Trust began participation in another innovative education programme, Lok Jumbish. This education-for-all initiative aims at organizing communities around better education for their children in a way that enables them to gain some control over, and have responsibility for, the quality of education services in the village. This project is now run in Lunkaransar, Bajju, Phalodi and Nokha regions. URMUL Trust is the single largest implementing agency of the LJP program in the entire western Rajasthan.

A new scheme, recently undertaken for the first time in Rajasthan, entitled "Girls' Education Camps" has been implemented by the Trust with the support of Lok Jumbish. This involves a six month residential camp for adolescent girls who have missed school completely, during which time five years of primary education is intensively imparted. Three such camps have been implemented so far, in Dantor and Khajuwala (Bajju) and Lunkaransar, all in 1997 and 1998. The response from the community was overwhelming, with 450 girls attending. The Trust is working out ways to continue this programme as well as to upgrade the education of previous participants up to the middle level.



The SAMBAL resource centre manages and facilitated the training of teachers for the SKS scheme in the following areas:

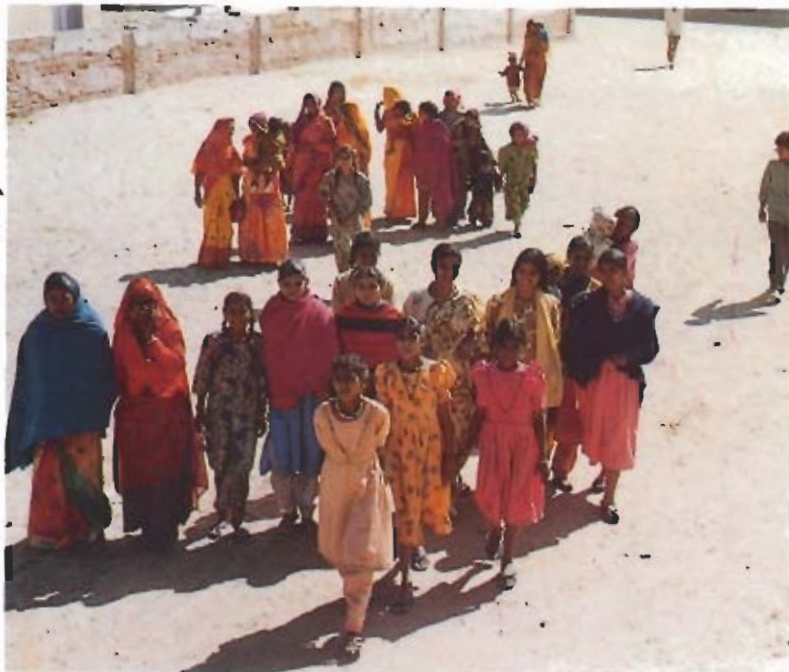
We all go to Urmul School

Place	School	Boys	Girls	Total
Lunkaransar	120	2938	2853	5791
Bajju	140	6609	4596	11205
Phalodi	110	1760	1471	3231
Nokha	35	678	622	1300
Sujangarh	2	20	75	95
Jayal	2	42	28	70
Pachevar	2	24	17	41
Srijamyaham	2	28	20	48
Total	413	12100	9682	21782



Balika Shivir

the little spark that grew into a flame



Once upon a time, in Lunkaransar block of Bikaner District there were a few worried women and men. There was Ganga, Rameshwar, Choti, Kishore, karna Ram Rampal, Uma, Mukh Ram Purna Ram and hundred other friends. They would sit and worry every once in a while. Ten year old girls should have rightfully been in the fifth standard. in the villages of Lunkaransar there seemed to be too few. Where were the girls ? why did not they go to school ? Why did not they reach the fifth standard? They would ask each other these questions and when the answers could not be found they went to ask the parents.

The fathers were met, the mothers were met, uncles and aunts and grand mothers and grand fathers too. They were all very concerned, but could not send the older girls to school. They have work to do, some said. their younger siblings need their care. Who will





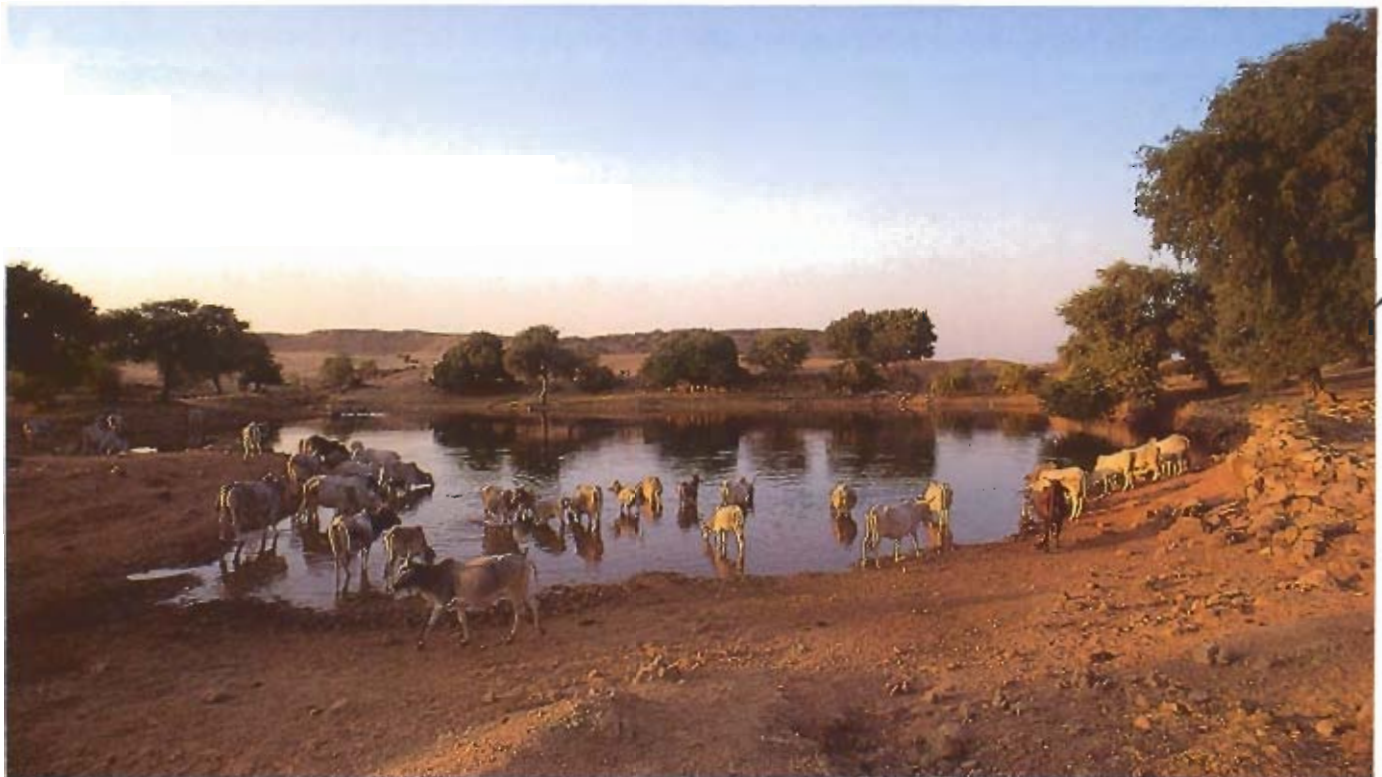
care for our sheep and goats? Twelve year old girls are ready to get married. Young girls in our society cannot be sent to school where all the teachers are men. There were many an argument. A few consented to send their girls to school but for most others, existing options of primary schools or alternate learning centres were not good enough.

The wise men and women in Bikaner and Jaipur were consulted. They were worried too. The Lok Jumbish (peoples Movement) programme for universal primary education was keen that the education of girls receive special attention. They had heard of residential camps run by M.V. Foundation in far away Andhra Pradesh.

Could girls stay away from their parents for so long? Would they really be able to study upto the fifth standard? Alas, there was many a doubtful friend. Nevertheless, Lok Jumbish boldly decided to organise residential camp for four and a half months.

Some months later, the stories from the camps spread far and wide. The news reached Lunkaransar. Now there was a spark. The word was carried to the villages by one friend after another. from one parent to another. suddenly, there were 250 girls between the age of ten and fourteen in Lunkaransar block who could study. six months for an opportunity of a life time. A Balika Shivar (Camp for girls) was held in January 1998 at Lunkaransar. The spark became a flame and the tale goes on.....

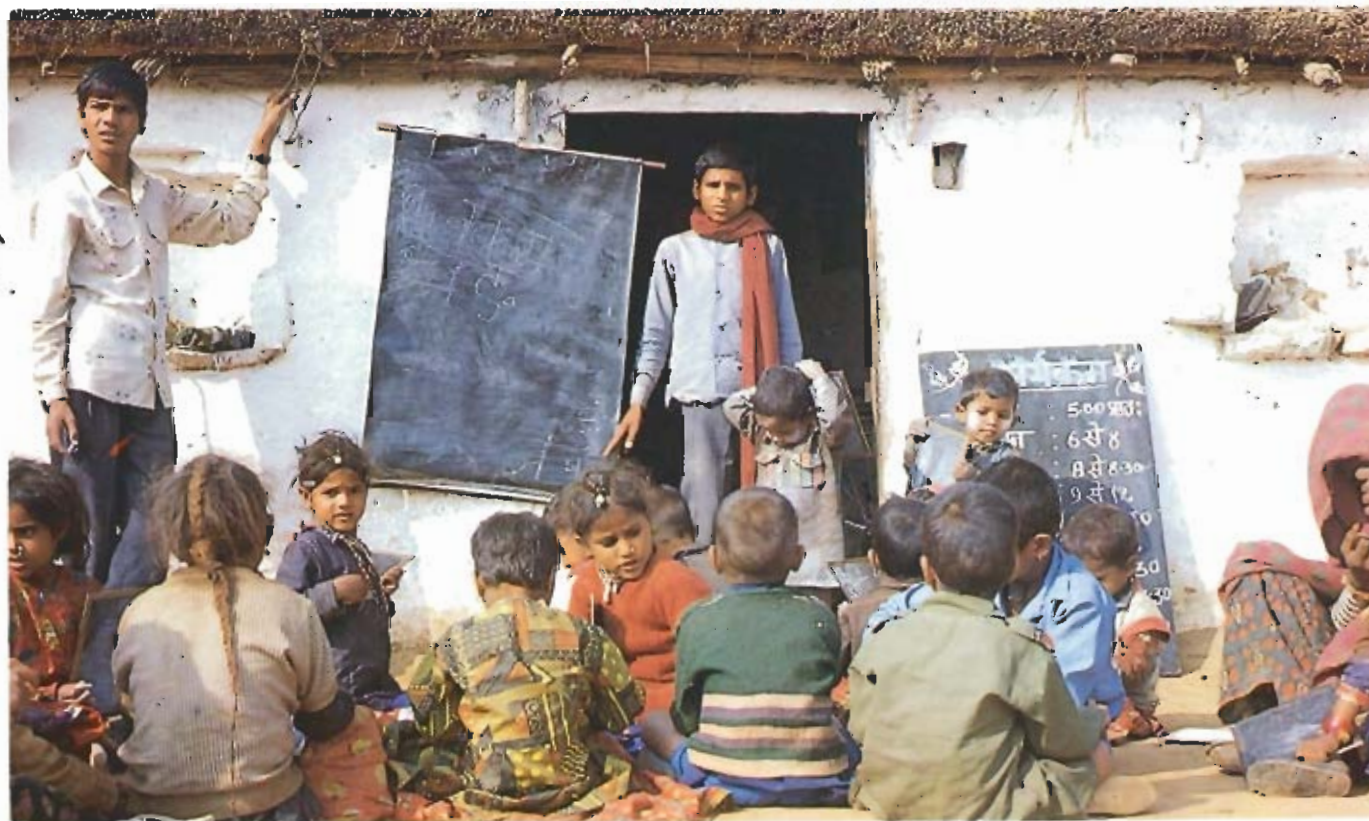
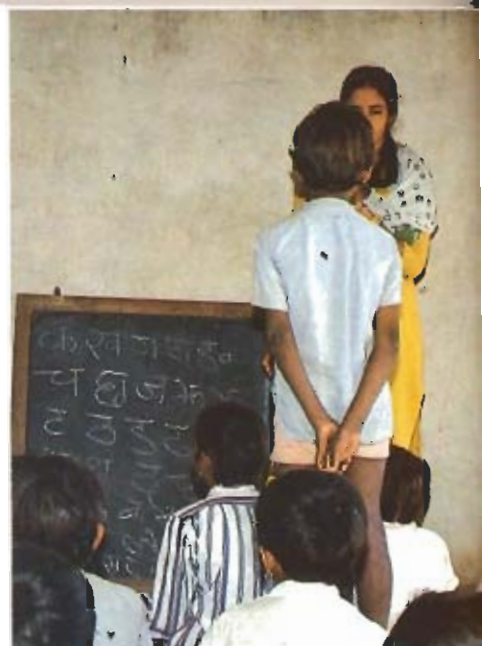
Location of Camp	No. of Girls	Date of Start
Lunkaransar	157	10 Jan'98
Lunkaransar	117	1 Jan'99
32 Head	90	15 Jan'99
Dantor	89	15 Dec'98
Dantor	82	29 Oct'98
Bajju	115	7 Jan'99
TOTAL	650	

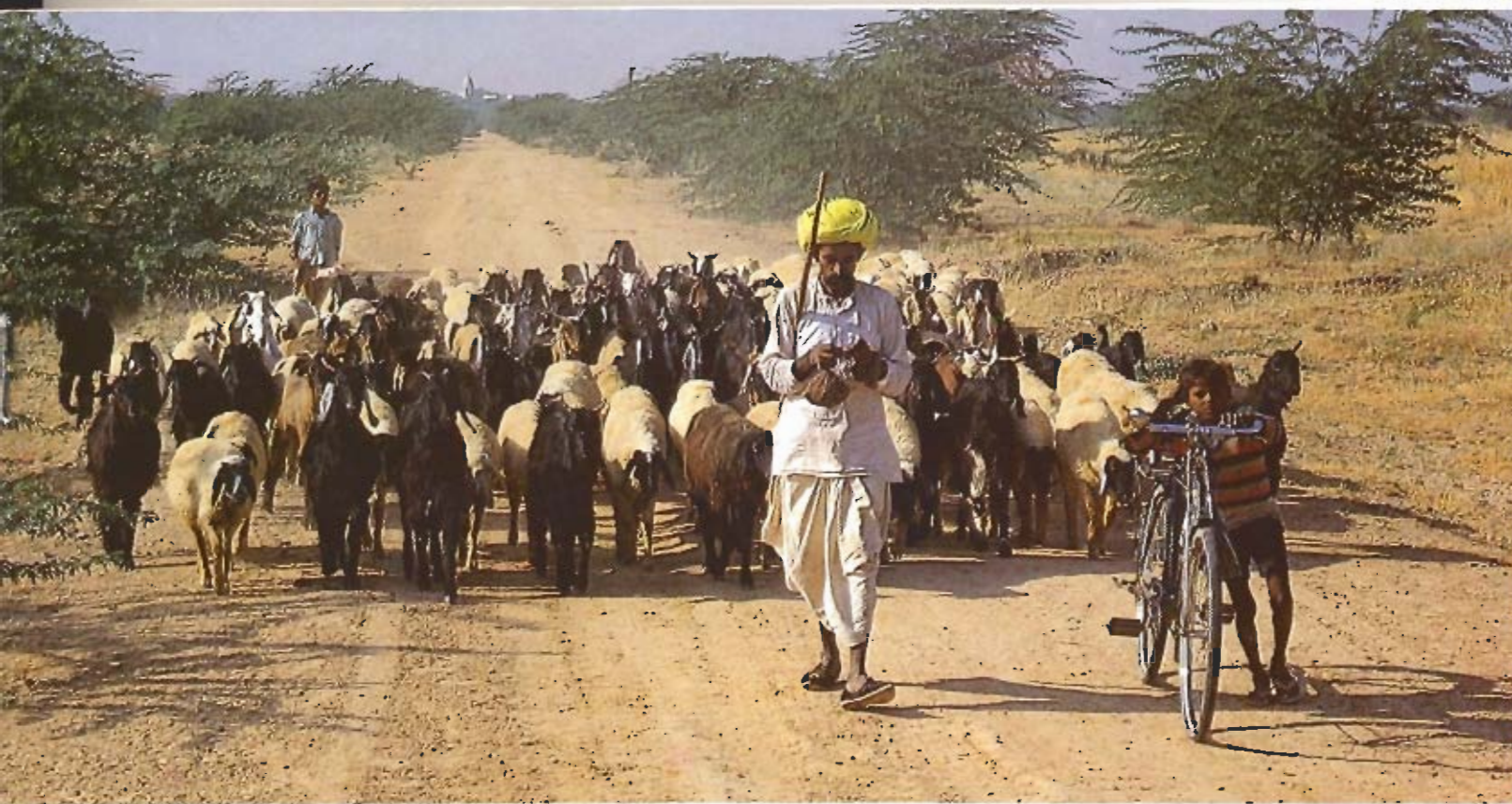


Hub of joyful learning URMUL Marushalas

The marushala (desert school) is an alternative school that was conceived by the URMUL Trust in 1992. At present there are eight marushalas. All of them are located in places where no other schools exist. By following the seasonal calendar the Marushala ensures that children do get an opportunity to attend the school while contributing to household chores as well as family labour. Children are admitted at the age of three. However teaching only begins at the age of six. Children are taught Hindi, Mathematics, Environmental Science and Moral Knowledge. Compared to other schools Marushalas have plenty of teaching aids. The teacher: student ratio is also much higher than in most other schools.

Children in the Marushala set the work agenda. Day begins according to the preferences expressed by the children. The relationship between the teacher and the children is one of camaraderie. The children are oriented not to accept anything blindly, and are encouraged to be curious and inquisitive. Learning in the Marushalas takes place in a relaxed atmosphere. No fees are charged but the parents are motivated to contribute voluntarily.





Learning in the common pasture Gocharshala of Malikpur

Villages of Bajolav, Bacheda, Malikpur in Malpura tehsil of Tonk district share the same common pasture land. People with the facilitation of the development workers of GVSTK have started a gocharshala. The staff consists of one trained teacher and a herder. Hours of learning and teaching come around noon time when the children who have come to the pasture land along with their herd rest at one common place., ususally near the water pond around shades of trees. During this time of teaching the herder looks after the herds and flocks of the children who are mostly girls. The location of the gocharshala is not fixed

Even after attempts by Marushalas it was found that children who belonged to semi nomadic families, whose life was mostly passed in pastures far away from settlements for a good part of the year, were not able to attend schools. In the daily life of the region children especially girls have to contribute their daily time to rear flocks and herds. URMUL has always recognised the challenge and has tried to explore alternatives to address it like organising a special camp for the girl herders of the Thar in 1995. One such attempt is the gocharshala by GVSTK in villages of Tonk district.

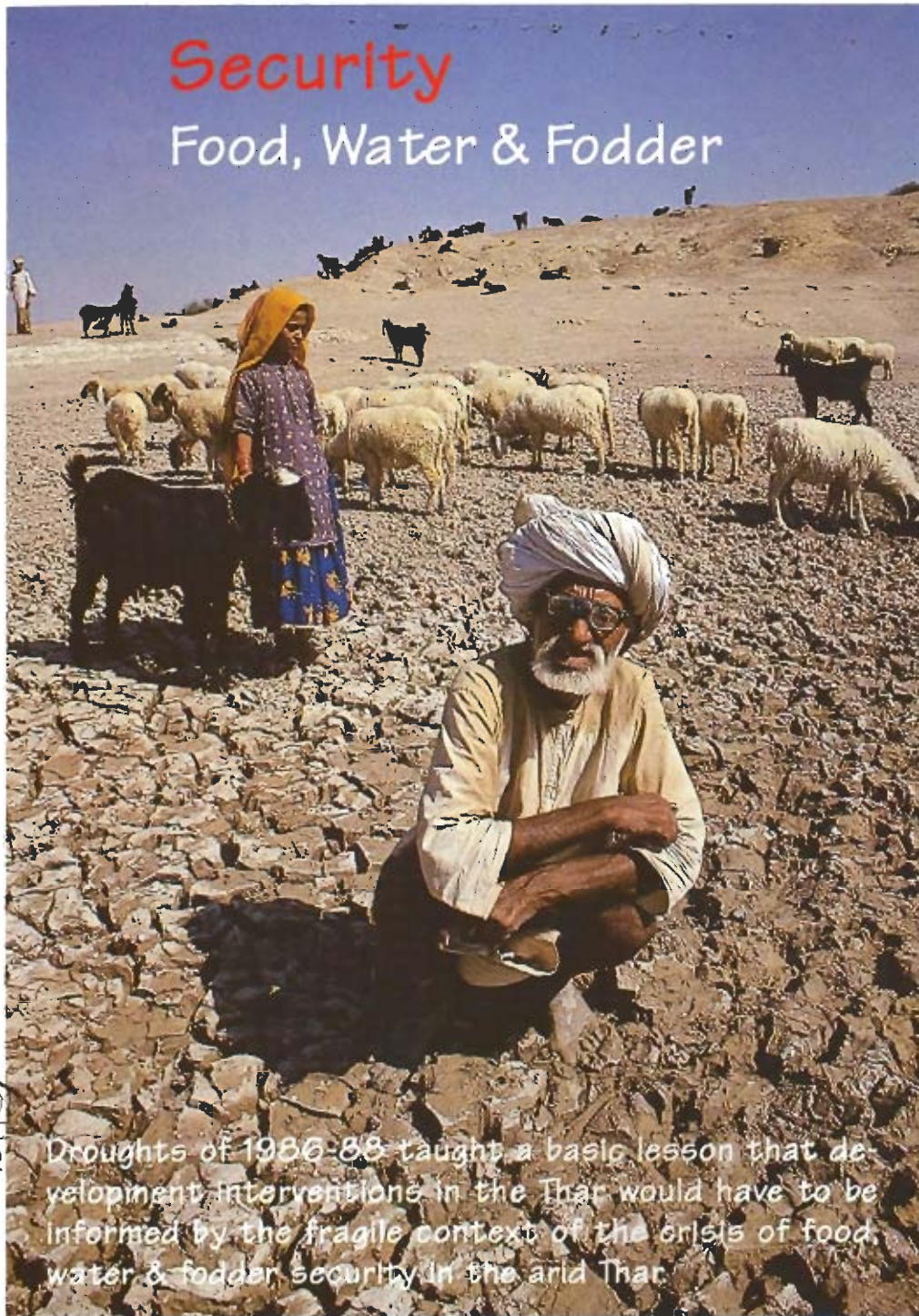
but mobile, in tune with the rhythms of movement of herds, availability of grass and water in the pasture land. The fall of dusk coincides with the journey back to the village of the animals, children as well as the teacher and the herder facilitator. Night time is usually kept for talk-

ing and counselling parents. Pastoralists of Malikpur, mostly Gujars, Meenas, Balais, Jats support the gocharshala which has around fourteen girls and eight boys as regular students. GVSTK is in the process of documenting this experience and creating a new curriculum that would be appropriate for mobile learning centres elsewhere as well.



Security

Food, Water & Fodder



Droughts of 1986-88 taught a basic lesson that development interventions in the Thar would have to be informed by the fragile context of the crisis of food, water & fodder security in the arid Thar.

Working on issues of security of human and livestock life, URMUL has realized that these three elements of the triad - food, water & fodder cannot be seen in isolation. They are intrinsically linked to each other. Whether it is the effort to organise more and good quality food grains for the home basket of the poor or restore a pipeline connection and evolve norms for equitable sharing of drinking water or erecting of *bagars* of

fodder that would save the skin of the poor by selling them fodder at a much cheaper rate than the monopoly rates of the market at times of acute scarcity, they all have a close relation and interconnection. Efforts on all the three together create realistic safety nets for the poor.

Interventions to secure the triad have shown that scarcity in the Thar cannot be tackled only as a mere response to climate and natural resource use practices. Another engagement is required in the sphere of the political economy of ecology and scarcity, to overcome systemic scarcity perpetuated by the elites, markets and the state. Equity, democratic space and opportunities for marginal classes and women have been prominent concerns for URMUL in this sector.

Most of the collective issues raised by the men and women of the *sangathans* are around access to food, water and fodder. Very often these are stories of encroachment on their rights either by some upper caste, Panchayats, or State Depts, etc. Facilitating the mobilization of the people around issues of equity and optimum resource management, URMUL has learnt that communities require their own institutions to manage these critical resources even at the cost of antagonising the entrenched dominant relations of power and hegemony. Many *sangathans* in this sense are the ecology keepers of the future.



Sangathans

why do they
need grain
banks

Prices of food products are high and the markets are becoming more exploitative

Facilitates access to small and marginal farmers for storing their grain by reviving the age old tradition of collective golas

Meets the urgent and pressing requirements of the poor and needy

Makes available more food in the home basket for the consumption of children and women

Provides a buffer stock during times of drought

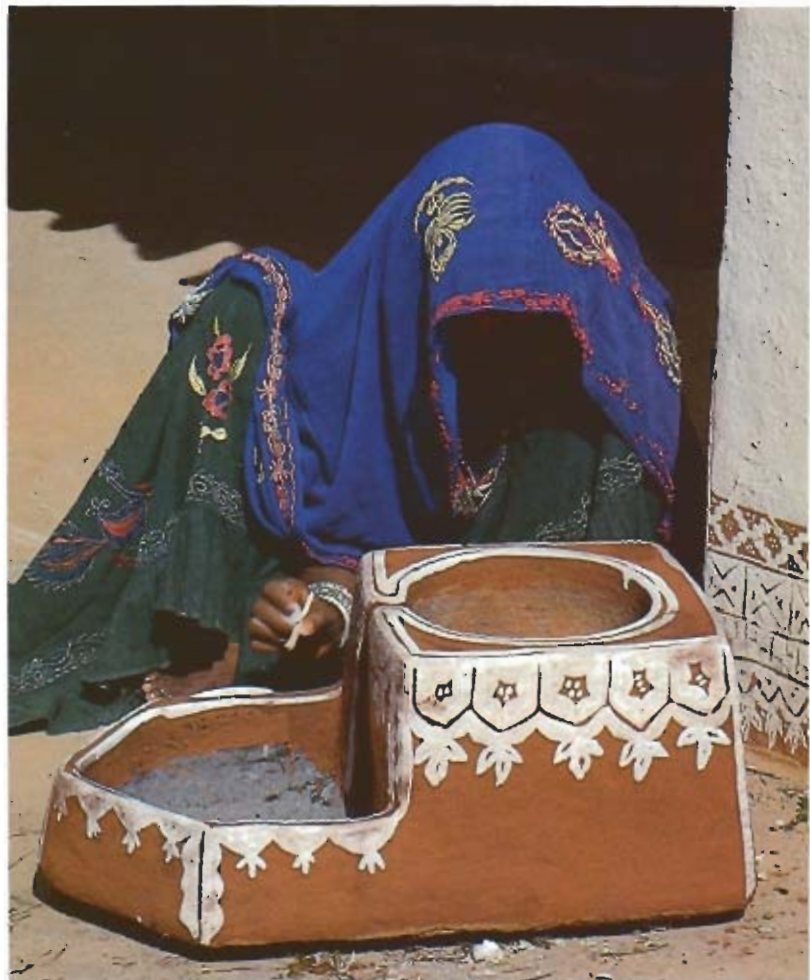
Makes available good quality seeds

Enables the small and marginal to participate in the market and earn some supplementary incomes

Enhances the skill and confidence of the sangathan

Food for the home basket

Food Security to families, especially poor, women and children is addressed through a variety of interventions. Members of the *sangathans*, men and women, have been makers of this processes. Initial cry over the matter was raised mostly by women *sangathans*. They all had a common problem. The PDS shops were far away, were not functioning or their quotas were not been given to them. Some solution had to be found that could address this collective malaise. URMUL started a campaign against the mal functioning of the PDS system. Some quotas were restored, shops relocated near by and some *sangathans* were even offered the running of the PDS shops. These victories were significant in motivating the *sangathans* but then they were not sufficient. Given the extended period of scarcity in the Thar the need was to have control and access over sufficient food for the family all the year round. For the poor it was very difficult, almost impossible. A collective strategy that would also take care of the poorest in the community had to be found. The *sangathans* see the grain bank as a solution to many of these problems.



Grain banks of Lunkaransar: collective security in 1998-1999



Village	Buying rate (In Rs/Qt.)	Weight (In Qt.)	Initial Selling Rate	Final Selling Rate	Beneficiary Sangathan	families Others
Chakraika	558	100	562	582	20	10
Bhopalaram	561	143	565	595	22	31
Dudiwoli	557	77	565	590	24	40
Musalki	576	75	586	640	22	23
Sodhwali	629	148	646	655	30	60
Ajitmana	522	98	535	545	24	50
Shublai	550	100	560	625	35	35
Badia	517	121	525	585	13	13

"We started this grain bank in 1996. It was done through an assistance of Rs 50000 from URMUL and now we have Rs. 57000 in cash and another Rs 15000 still to come back as credit. This shows our efficiency and the ability to run the grain bank as a small enterprise. The capital would have increased more than what is now but due to the fall in the market prices of Moong in the year 1997."

Rugharam, a small farmer

Sangathan members of Kisanpura

"I get my own bajra for consumption for the whole year. When there was no grain bank I had to go to the market for purchasing the same and lose my daily wages of Rs 150. Now I can take bajra from the Grain bank at any time..."

Ratnaram, a casual labour

"Grain bank is a boon for us as Children do not have to miss classes for purchasing grains from the nearby villages.."

Jhumka, a housewife



Safe Drinking Water for people and cattle



Interventions during the drought of 1987 in securing drinking water for people set the tone of interventions on water security. Like food it was long back internalized as one of the non negotiable commitment of any URMUL initiative. There were number of villages in the URMUL project area that had no secure and sustainable water supply. There was a need to lay pipelines and construct open *diggis* (reservoirs) to tap water supply from the Kanwar Sen Lift canal that had come to Lunkaransar. The laying of the 12kms pipeline from Adsar to Nathwana, where people contributed labour worth Rs 1,50,000 was one of the first beginnings. The strategy of the Trust from initial days was of pressurising the Government by organising local communities, and using media and public opinion to get drinking water to these severely affected areas. The construction of diggis at Kishnasar and Rajpuria and their linking with the canal at Nathwana was only pos-

sible in 1991, after a four year long struggle. Water is not merely a scarcity in the Thar. It is also one of the most powerful and stark discriminators of caste hierarchies, of the pure and the impure. Interventions on access to drinking water to many socially backward communities also became campaigns for social change.

In striving for water security URMUL's interventions are not just restricted to the modern sources like *diggis* and pipelines. The conservation and regeneration of the Traditional Water Harvesting Structures (TWHS) has been equally important. Whether it has been the construction of community kunds / ponds or their renovation, they have been priority interventions. URMUL developed a conscious strategy of equipping poor households with private storage kunds - examples of which can be seen in all the members of the family.



Strengthening Traditional Water Harvesting Structures (TWS): reaffirmation of commitment

Location	Kunds	Johad / Nadi	Renovation	Villages / Dhanis
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TWS FOR SCHOOLS / COMMUNITY HABITATIONS

Jaisalmer	2	1		3
Nokha	18		7	25
Jayal	2	1		10
Sujangarh	1	1		2
Pugal	7		3	10

TWS FOR COMMUNITY CIVIL SPACE

Seemant : Border Education and ECCE Centre	48
Weavers' Support Centre	30
SETU: Collective Space for Sangathans	75

This intervention on strengthening TWS in the Thar was supported by a Grant project from NLNO, PLAN International with the facilitation of PLAN, ICO



Interventions in the URMUL family from 1997 onwards suggest that water security would be one of the priority areas in the future. The tradition from the URMUL past has some cautions to offer: the first and the most crucial step is to strike a partnership with the community that is precise and written, not to commit any intervention in a structure without significant community contribution, exceptions of extreme cases of water scarcity apart.

Lining of the *nadi* of Miyakor

regional example of community water harvesting

The execution of the work of the desilting and lining of *nadi* (a community pond with stretched out catchment area) in Miyakor had become a much discussed issue for almost a year and a half. What is happening there! Why are you still not beginning the work in spite of the funds?, donors would curtly remark.

Was there anything happening in Miyakor regarding the renovation of their *nadi* at all? Only the URMUL Seemant staff and the villagers knew what was tran-

spiring. The silence and the apparent inactivity was, in fact time for building rapport, thick relations with the villagers of Miyakor and the nearby dhanis.

Miyakor an old village was caught in a time prison. The traditional water sources that their elders left were proving highly insufficient for the growing population of humans and livestock in the village, not to mention those who had gone away to their far off hamlets almost permanently. The old large *bawari* (deep step well) needed major repairs, the catchment of the *kund* nearby was damaged and dirty. They had not seen the *nadi*, their last recourse for water, even approximate to the water levels it used to contain earlier. They all wanted to execute the task of desilting and lining of the *nadi*. But the condition put by the URMUL staff looked difficult - contribution from each household, all the castes and a commitment to meet at least twenty percent cost from the village. That was impossible for such a large work, so it seemed in the beginning. And the URMUL staff would not budge, instead good them to try again. Slowly a consensus emerged and the villagers collected the contribution. The work was executed in a fine manner by the people of Miyakor. They own the work with pride, the only one of it's kind in the entire region.



Fodder for livestock

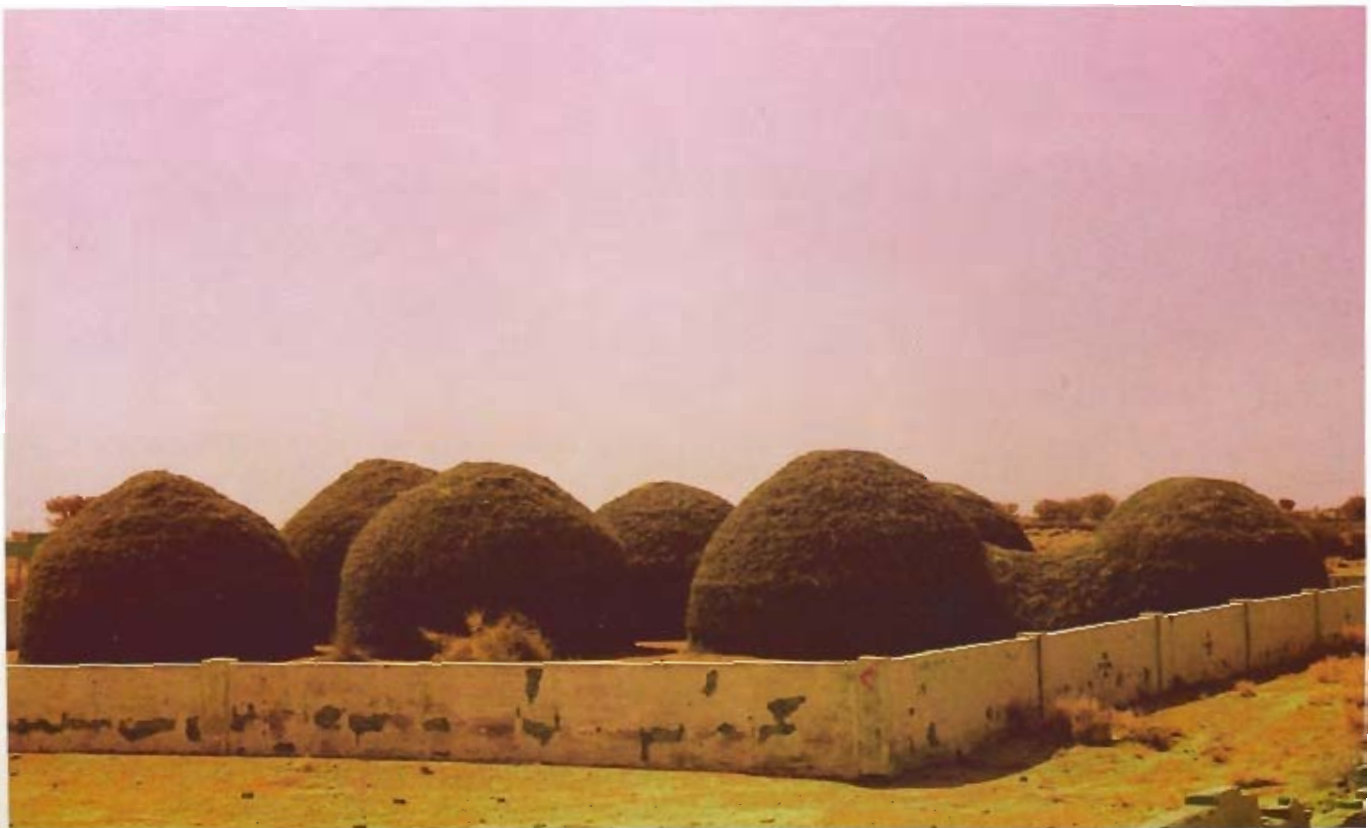
URMUL has been forthcoming in responding to the fodder scarcity that the arid region copes up with every year. Fodder depots and cattle camps were among the initial interventions. The issue of fodder scarcity made URMUL venture out to a place like Sundra in Barmer, hundreds of kilometers away from Lunkaransar, practically unknown to URMUL, and organise one of the biggest fodder camps exclusively for camels stretching for more than a fortnight.

Gradually over time interventions and processes were scaled up and became more organised. The strategy of fodder security is an interplay of related processes. Efforts in early nineties about fodder security took the form of setting up four fodder farms in villages of the Lunkaransar tehsil. These fodder farms, surveyed in 1994-95, had regenerated as sites that could boast of a rich variety of bio diversity. These are run and managed by the sangathans. Regulation of the livestock traffic and the collection of grazing fees is one of the prime tasks of the sangathans and their capital for managing the farm. The role of the Trust is now more to

facilitate their problems with the bureaucracy and at times between them as well.

The other important element that affected the fodder availability as well as its distribution was the vicious cycle of market prices for fodder. Response to this regional problem was to practice stocking fodder on a collective basis, a strategy that had been successful in many other arid regions as well. URMUL decided to open two types of fodder banks - one, smaller at the level of one village that was to be used and managed by the sangathan itself; and the other at the level of a cluster or even the whole project area. For instance the Lunkaransar project in 1994-95 had around eight village fodder banks each of couple of hundred quintals capacity and one central bank that had more than 12000 quintals.

The sangathans buy the fodder at a time when the prices for it are low and it is available in abundance. This stock that is stored in huge *bagars* or *kidas* is a saving grace against scarcity that would engulf every-



one. The daily sales from the fodder banks of URMUL is able to nullify the impact of the much higher prices for fodder in the market and resist competition with them for a period of at least a fortnight or more. Fodder banks make access of fodder possible for even the small husbandmen having few cows or goats at a nominal price inspite of the whims and fancies of the mandi. Another important integration which URMUL has done for the availability of fodder is of accessing relatively fodder rich areas for fulfilling the needs of

fodder scarce tracts of Bikaner district. The vast stocks of sewan in Ramgarh, Mohangarh in Jaisalmer are utilized to augment the fodder demands of farmers in Bikaner district. In fact it has been these supplies from the sewan reserves of Jaisalmer that have contributed to the resilience the low price of fodder at the URMUL fodder bank. Apart from augmenting fodder needs the intervention generates wage labour for poor for around a month.



Green Fodder, Pastoralists & Farmers in Chitrang

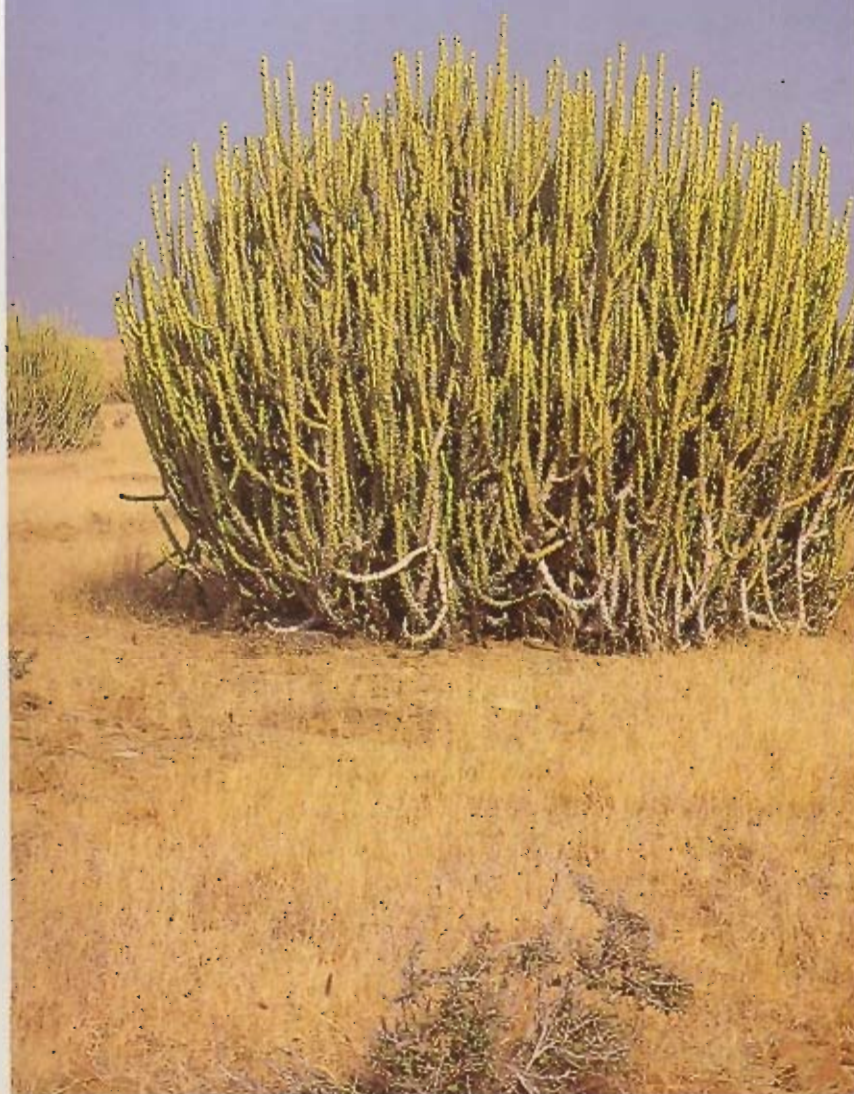
Rural dialogues with pastoralists, farmer-usbandsmen, herders and wise elders in the command area pointed the critical need of understanding certain sustainable resource use practices in the command area. One of the important one was of not taking a sudden leap from an agro-pastoral base to an intensive irrigated regime. Cultivation of green fodder like *jawi*, *jowar* or *barsing* in a small portion of the agricultural land was essential to sustain an optimum size of cattle holding in the family and a livestock population in the command area. This was one of possible ways to ease off the pressure of almost permanent migration of hundreds of pastoral

families to Punjab for green fodder or dependence on high price exports of fodder from Punjab. The consultation brought forth the wise natural resource practices of the Rath, Jaluka, Johyas, Parihars, Pawars and other muslim communities as a possible alternative to negotiate with the changes brought by the command area.

For more details, see Tradition and Change Among Pastoralists in Chitrang - a report on the ecological conditions of north west Bikaner, AZERC, 1996



Sustainable Livelihoods



Sustainable livelihoods emerged as a distinct program sector in URMUL trying to grapple with issues of the daily survival of the poor. Starting with sheep and goat credit, production credit, bunkarshala loan, kund loan etc URMUL gradually created its own processes of estimating poverty, economic status of families and thereby prioritising the target group for the livelihood program became critical. The process grew denser with time and also spread to different initiatives.

Objectives

Increase income levels by developing ecologically sustainable natural resource use practices

Reduce the dependence on private money lenders by providing credit through community managed credit groups.

Enable women to earn independent incomes.

Enhance the productivity of land and optimise gains from livestock with the induction of technical inputs coupled with extension work.

Identify and promote viable and profitable off-farm income generation programmes.

Institute systems and processes for achieving both program as well as organizational sustainability.

Generate surpluses that finance part of the cost of services like health and education

Organise trainings and counselling sessions for skill development to enable poor families to choose from a variety of income generation activities.



UMBVS: *dhorapalli* in That

an innovation in micro watershed management

In 1995 the Pokaran region was badly hit by rains. Malaria was rampant, every house having two to three adults suffering. Standing crops could not be reaped. The epidemic had crippled the work capacity of the entire community. People were disillusioned and disheartened and had lost hope. On top of that, to make matters worse, the heavy rains washed away all the old *dhoras* (embankments) and the fields were full of water.

Due to the undulating rocky terrain of the region the rate of surface run off water is fairly high, the terrain giving way to countless drains and torrents. Water gushes down from all sides from several sq kms, all flowing with great force and volume to the vast salt water pool - the rann of That. It is this persistent gush of water that had broken the *dhoras* that were strong like walls, as high as five to seven feet and more than fifty years old. UMBVS took the initiative of repairing the *dhoras* of the poorest families in That. Soon it started a systematic process of regeneration of the entire watershed that was shared among five six villages of the neighbourhood. The villagers of Kelawa, Nananiyai, That, Khalifon ki dhani, Chacha, Nai Guddie were all involved in this process. From 1995 to 1998 around four hundred fifty families have participated in the *dhorapalli* work and more than six thousand seven hundred fifty bighas of agricultural land protected. A hardy desert species of Ker

is planted on the top of the *dhoras*. Along with building embankments, sangathan members and UMBVS have also organised the water drainage system in their fields.

Laalo, a participant in the process recounts the advantages *dhorapalli* has for them and their lands:



“..It protects the top soil and enriches it. Crop yields have almost doubled and there is more fodder available. We can even take crops of wheat, mustard and other oil seeds. It is a sustainable measure for drought proofing and these *dhoras* would last a long time.”



Sustainable livelihoods has developed its own principles and premises. The first basic principle is based on the premise that the poor are not equal and all of them cannot be good entrepreneurs. The processes of ranking families through an elaborate process of community consultation, resource mapping, wealth ranking using indicators devised out of experience and analysis is the most critical precondition for any intervention in livelihoods to begin. Further defining the target group, women and mahila sangathans have proved to be better entrepreneurs and more creditworthy. The sec-

ond principle is that beneficiaries cannot be organised only around loans and credit. Some other affinities have to be coupled with this like group savings, resource sharer in a water shed or a canal, same occupation, resident of the same settlement etc. The third crucial principle is that almost all the interventions in loans and credit create recycled funds accrued from repayments, interest that lie either at the level of a sangathan or a village committee.

The aim of interventions under sustainable livelihoods

Yields of Water Course Covering : an innovation in command area

Name of Chak	No. of Farmers	Covered Length (in Sq ft)	Costs (in Rs)	Farmer Contribution (in Rs)	Groundnut Yields (in Rs)
IGM	12	4000	30,000	7,000	4 lakhs
6ADY	26	4000	34,000	15,000	13 lakhs
IBD	6	1000	13,500	5,000	3 lakhs
2MKD	4	200	2,000	700	4 lakhs
Total	48	9200	79,500	27,700	24 lakhs

Source: Annual Report of Agriculture Program, 1996-97, Bajju



has been to provide opportunities, skills and linkages for enhancing disposable incomes as well as ensure resource practices that increase agricultural and livestock returns to the poorer sections of the community. This is done by promoting access to productive resources such as information, technology and capital. Interventions are routed through formation of village level groups (*sangathans*) and development committees (*prerak dal*) of men and women.

In the last few years attempts have been made by different initiatives to broaden the range of types of credit away from the most typical ones like goat and sheep credit, kund loan etc. Nevertheless production credit for agricultural assistance of seeds, and cost of sowing inputs continues to retain it's old firm terrain.

Production Credit in 1998 : protecting the poor

Location	Villages	Family
Sujangarh	2	31
Jayal	1	65
Lunkaransar	15	233
Phalodi	10	70
TOTAL	28	399

Apart from offering financial services to the poor, the other major emphasis of the sector has been on popularising and promotion of ecologically sustainable natural resource use practices. Given the fragile natural resource micro-regimes in the Thar an emphasis on land use practices is a crucial one.

In Bajju the the Trust initiated the work of settling semi mobile traditional cattle herders on lands that had been allotted to them in the IGNP command area. These



families from Jaton ka bera, Ranjitpura were forced to make a hurried shift from free ranging animal husbandry to intensive agriculture. The Agricultural Program took up the challenge of settling these people. The other community were the Pak Oustees of the Indo Pak war of 1971. One of the major problems in Stage II was the design of the water channels. Most of them would either loose away in a sand dune or were



clogged with sand for three months. This was one of the major obstacles in cultivating the groundnut crop that was preferred by everyone as it gave good market returns. The team and the farmers decided to try out a solution. It was simple, cover the water channel around the entire length that it shares with the slope of the dune with stone slabs joined with the mortar of mud

and clay. When tried out it proved to be an effective practice. The innovation of the handful of farmers and the team was recognised by the CADA as well as the WFP. The process of covering water courses that URMUL Seemant and its sangathans have demonstrated has formed the basis of a new intervention of covering water courses in the entire Stage II region.

Average Annual Incomes from URMUL Desert Crafts Gallery

Name of Organisation	Number of Artisans		Villages	Average Monthly	Average Annual
	Female	Male		Income (In Rs)	Turnover (In Rs)
UMBVS	17	153	10	2500-3000	39 lakhs
VASUNDHARA	62	38	10	1500-2000	13 lakhs
SEEMANT	136		7	500-600	8 lakhs
TOTAL	215	191	27		60 lakhs

URMUL had started search for opportunities in non farm livelihoods since the drought of 1987. In this quest lay the beginnings of an exploration of opportunities in handicrafts not just in Bikaner district, but also in Jodhpur and Jaisalmer districts.

A chance meeting with an itinerant pedlar from Jodhpur led to the discovery of the weavers of Bhojasar, Dhat and Gomat. They opened up new possibilities about using the yarn that had been lying stuck up in the store. They trained local people as weavers and in turn, over a two year period, acquired new skills, got an exposure to the demands of bigger markets. This team of five weavers laid the foundation of the UMBVS. The organisation has developed a whole range of products like bed spreads, floor coverings, table linen, women's wear and shawls. They are based on pattus, traditional blankets / shawls from Bhojasar and Mallani woven on the pit loom, with extra weft motifs, using both cotton and woollen yarn.

Lunkaransar developed an off farm project with spinners and weavers as beneficiaries. In response to the unceratin and seasonal agriculture the newly trained weavers produce fabric and woven furniture. The product range of Vasundhara, the off farm initiative include attractive garments and range of furniture and accessories.

At Bajju, the Trust began to work with a group of refugees from the Indo-Pak war of 1971 who had settled along the Indira Gandhi Canal. These women knew the art of mirror embroidery and used to work for the middlemen for miserably low wages. In a program initiated in 1991 with these women, the Trust provided raw materials, training, design and marketing support to these women embroiderers. From cushion covers and bags in the initial years the range has expanded to cover garments, accessories and a wide variety of soft furnishings.

Srajamyaham's work in the five vilages of the Devikot area in Sam, Jaisalmer represents the most recent of the attempts at initiating an off-farm livelihood program for women in a new area. The initiative wants to promote women embroiderers and braiders as the main beneficiaries. Production is yet to begin.



Carving Collectives

Carving collectives in the community of men and women, artisans, semi nomadic pastoralists, marginal farmers, migrant labourers, forest committees, water user groups, farmer chak samitis and even itinerant folk performers constitutes the core philosophy of development work that is professed and practised by URMUL Trust. This basic approach of engaging people, putting them at the center of most development planning and executions forms the essential background in all the programs across the different organisations of the URMUL family.

The formation of groups or *sangathans* (collectives) of both men and women, has given the Trust an oppor-

tunity to initiate processes of collective action. The work with the *sangathans* has been the backbone of the ability of the URMUL Trust to implement even top down Govt schemes with a genuine participation of people to set up innovative models / precedents on community management.

Initiating families into small savings every month has been an entry point activity for many group organisation processes in the URMUL family. It has been one of the core strategies of beginning work in a new project area. Women groups in several villages have made very strong savings groups. Efforts of one of the members of the family Marushakti, have been pathbreaking in rallying women around savings. What is critical about Marushakti's SHGs is not merely the consistency with which they have converted small savings into a large amount, but the fact that savings has sustained processes of building relationships and awareness generation in the community as well.

Mahila sangathan of Chak Raika

Water ! finally, after so many years

Chak Raika is a small settlement predominantly of Raikas near Jetpur in the north east corner of the Lunkaransar block. It is one of the few settlements in the block that still do not have their own adequate arrangement of drinking water. The water crisis at Chak Raika emerged as a priority issue in URMUL in 1993-94. The story of Chak Raika is a miserable saga of common people and their frustration in the process of negotiating drinking water with the PHED and it's

contractor nexus. At the same time it demonstrates the grit and tough survival sense of the Raika men and women who have kept up with the effort and never gave up.

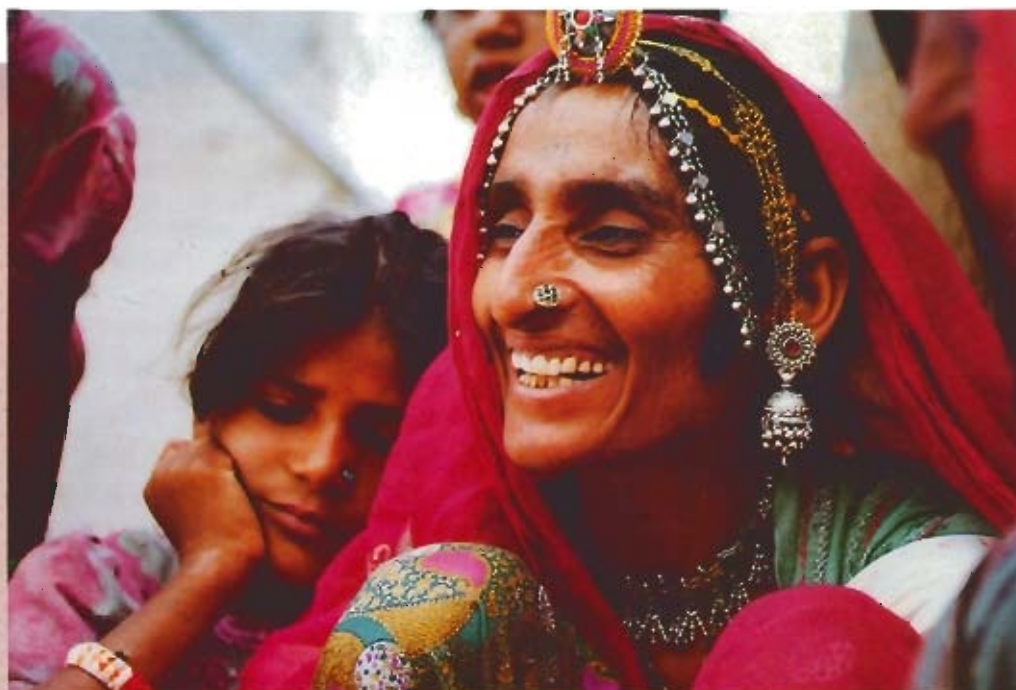
A pipeline was sanctioned for Chak Raika from Rambagh that is around ten to twelve kms. The PHED gave the contract to a private contractor for whom it was a work of minimal importance. So the issue kept lying idle with no response from the PHED. URMUL Trust has been supporting an emergency supply of drinking water to the Chak raika every year. And no month would have passed when the mahila sangathan would not go and tell their plight to engineers and the bureaucrats in Bikaner. Even the State Secretary of the PHED was met at Bikaner. The PHED, ironically had no strong grounds against the contractor. When the PHED did concede, the work was designated to another contractor.

Finally on 11 July 1991, after six years of persistent follow up, the pipeline was inaugurated and water let out by the eldest woman of the settlement, a sangathan member in the presence of the District Collector. But for the sangathan it is only a beginning. The next issue is a campaign to get the settlement converted into a revenue village and thereby access some more basic amenities.



In URMUL the process of initiating and sustaining collectives is a long term process. Every month, members of these sangathans meet each other. URMUL frequently organises their collective meets, melas, exposure visits and training programs.

Sangathans work as grass root pressure groups that have to negotiate and confront issues that take a long time to get resolved.



Dandkalan Ruchi mahila mandal from casual wage earners to micro entrepreneurs

When health workers from URMUL accidentally met the women in Dandkalan, they were amazed. These families of war displaced refugees were staying in abject destitution struggling to eke out a living. URMUL found a lively swasthya sathi (dai), started an income generation program with women who knew embroideries of Sind, an ICDS center, accessed afforestation programmes. A savings programme was started to add thrift value to small wages women had started earning. In all these interventions the Ruchi mahila mandal of around twenty eight women have been the ones to take lead. Savings soon became popular among the women. They could go and talk in the bank confidently, operate their own bank account. NABARD last year selected them as the best SHG in Bikaner district. Women accessed loans from the bank to invest in buying cattle. They now want to start their own milk cooperative society and also a small general store managed by the women.

URMUL



Collective savings of URMUL family SHGs in 1999

Location	Female SHGs			Male SHGs			Total
	SHGs	Members	Savings	No. of	Members	Savings	
Lunkaransar	31	520	1,26,840	13	305	1,03,615	2,30,455
Bajju	122	1464	1,73,620				1,73,620
Phalodi	3	450	2,00,000	13	300	40,000	2,40,000
Sujangarh	8	191	75,373	4	108	1,15,280	1,90,653
Jayal	8	134	35,408	9	126	73,110	1,08,518



Growth Strategies

The last two years have been years of reflection and introspection within the URMUL family. A number of new issues came up, the advantages as well as the disadvantages of the decentralization processes have been a matter of debate. Since last year a conscious process of repositioning of the URMUL Trust family has been initiated. A major part of the process has been a series of strategy meetings of organisations in the URMUL Trust family and the Trust itself.

This process seeks new roles and perspectives for certain critical concerns expressed by the staff and the members of the community. These pertain to the kind of programs we want to do, their processes and impact. It is also about reassessing relations amongst the members of the family, their relation with the URMUL Trust. Growth strategies point out critical areas of growth and decide certain priorities of a long term agenda - that is representative of the development challenges of the Thar.

The three broad growth strategies that have been identified lie embedded in the experience of URMUL as a grass roots development organisation. They are not mutually exclusive. In fact they are not only closely interlinked but also cut into perspectives and program priorities that have informed the choices in the core program sectors. These interlinked set of strategies represent an attempt to gradually influence the agenda of URMUL to become more focused on issues like learning, awareness, research and training, advocacy for basic rights, information dissemination and becoming a facilitator, a node for innovative development processes and issues.

Forging ties

A glance at the growth of URMUL Trust family suggests that building and sustaining relationships has been one of the important elements of the expansion of URMUL in parts of Thar. The well knit URMUL family itself is a good example of forging ties. Thick relationships with the swasthya sathis, members of the sangathans have created an initial level of confidence to take the process further and deeper. The efforts to establish a nation wide network CHARKHA - a communication medium between the development activists, volunteers in the field and the media in ivory towers remain pioneering efforts in forging ties. URMUL is committed to establish CHARKHA in Rajasthan. In the new repositioning it has been felt that this process has to be taken up more systematically and consciously.

Forging ties is seen critical at three levels:

with donors / partners

- develop sustainable long term partnerships
 - advocate and sustain a holistic agenda for the Thar
 - influence donor development agendas with development perspectives and experiences from the field
- within URMUL family initiatives
- invent and abide by certain minimal formal processes to sustain the in formal and organic ties within the URMUL family

- develop common pool resources to initiate program linkages and resource sharing
- commitment to implement certain programs that are critical and non negotiables as per the development perspective of the URMUL Trust

with the community / civil society

- sustain the quality of program interventions that initiate and strengthen processes of community participation and formation of collectives
- impart skills and refurbish commitments among the development workers to carry out community participation programs with grit, conscience and understanding



URMUL Sanchar Team performers of forging ties

In a place like the Indian Thar, where the society is largely preliterate and live oral traditions enjoy a popular provenance, the communication processes an organisation adopts become crucial. From its early days of working URMUL realized that intimate and meaningful communication with the community is not possible without resorting to traditional idioms of expression. This formed the basis for constituting the Sanchar (Communication) team from a motley mix of local folk performers from different parts of the Thar. The allegorical opening of the Sanchar team Shows with dialogues of the audience with Gyanoo Baba - the wise old man on the needs of the times and development issues - firmly situates the talk about development and change in the daily gossip and everyday clamour of the village square, i.e. makes it

intimate and personal for the community. The Communication team spearheads campaigns be it for health camps, raising awareness on education or spreading news about a revenue camp. A team of five people with their instruments, they are almost perpetually on wheels, from one village to the next one relating to people, women, children. The repertoire includes puppets, folk songs, a mix of street theatre and mime to make the communication process effective and lasting in the memory of the community.

Sanchar Team does not only communicates at the grass roots level. They have proved very effective in shows with the bureaucrats, dignitaries as well as in attracting customers during the URMUL handicrafts mela. Recipient of several prizes at the state and the national level, the Sanchar team is an inspiration for anyone who wishes to embark upon forging intimate ties.



Objectives

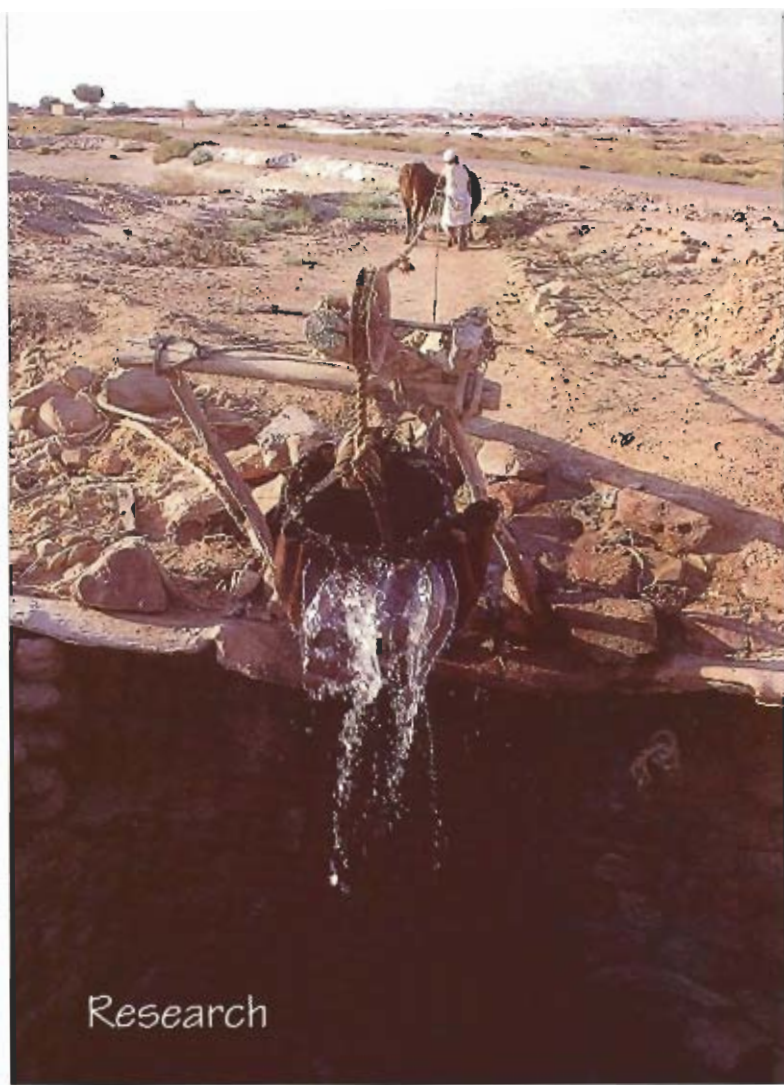
- Equip smaller projects / organisations with organisational, management and administrative capacities
- Undertake process documentation, monitoring and evaluations for the organisations / initiatives that are part of the URMUL family
- Offer consultancy services for development support for organisations and donors working in the arid zone of the Indian Thar
- Document and dissemination relevant information on the changing socio-economic and cultural status of the major vulnerable communities in the Indian Thar
- Resource centre for development volunteers, professionals, institutes and universities
- Facilitate exchange of information among the organisations that are part of the Urmul family, network with other agencies with a similar agenda active in the Thar as well as other arid regions in the world.

The URMUL Trust began as a development organization for implementation of programmes in the field. The need was felt, with time, to document, analyse, introspect about interventions, their processes and impact. Very often URMUL needed to present views on issues facing the

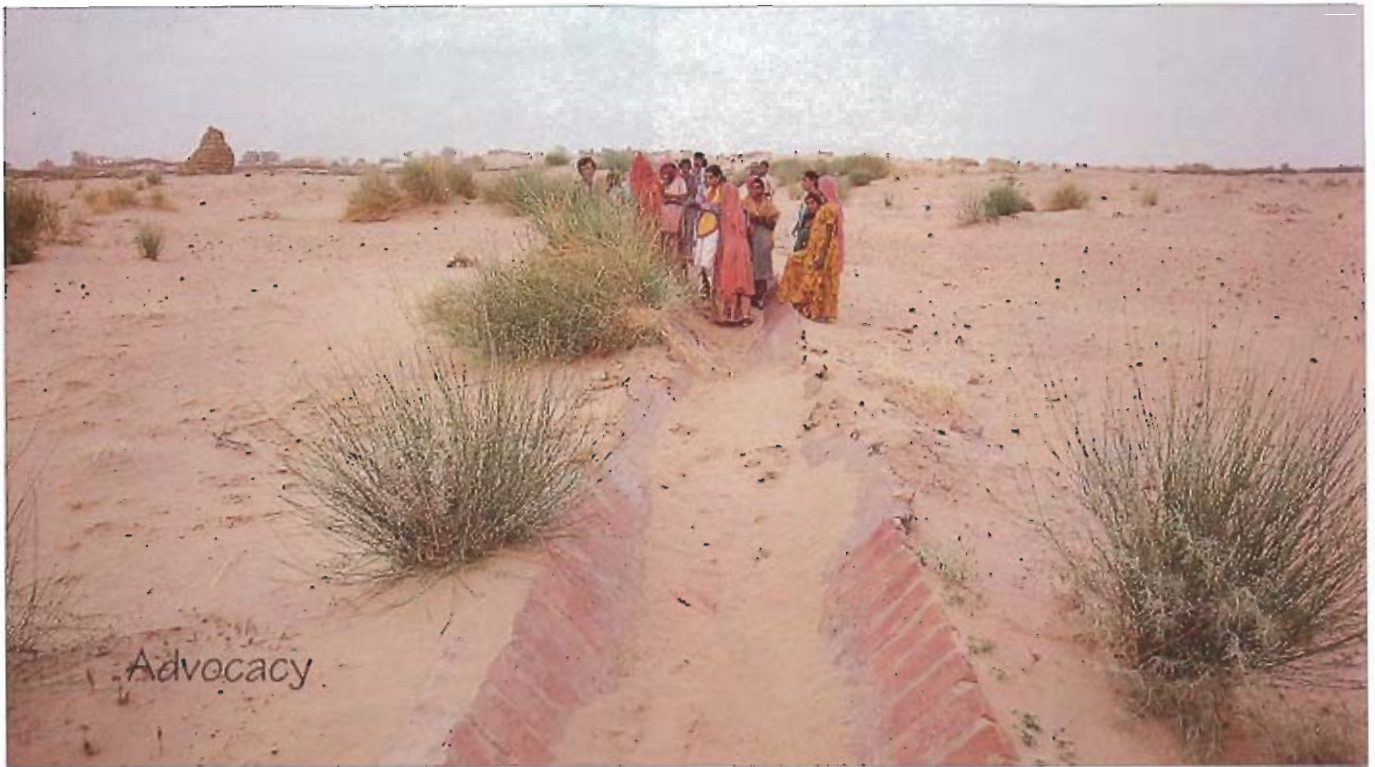
people of the region to a larger audience so as to initiate debate and discussion and to influence development policy for the region. To meet this requirement, systematic studies on issues in the field area were required. There was also a need to enhance the critical sense of the frontline development workers and develop in them an aptitude for analysis, ability to take informed stands. To facilitate these processes Arid Zone Environment Research Center was institutionalized as a subsidiary of the URMUL Trust in 1993. AZERC has built up a library consisting of approximately 4000 books in English, Hindi and Rajasthani. Apart from books, several reports, monographs, and a rich collection of oral testimonies on the Thar make it a specialized centre for information on the arid zone of the Thar.

To see through and trigger off the decentralization processes URMUL Trust set up a Coordination Unit to support its initiatives. The Unit worked like an exchange centre and an outpost for the decentralized initiatives of the URMUL family.

In 1997 the Unit was merged with AZERC to avoid duplication of services as well as scale up the kind of development support expected by the members of the URMUL family.



Research



Droughts of mid eighties saw the first mobilizations of the community around issues of security. URMUL advocated a change of the agenda to become more poverty sensitive and firmly grounded in the survival problems of the Thar. In fact it laid the basis for the conception of the Integrated Development Programs that URMUL implements. Similarly certain events of the nineties were critical for URMUL Trust to take positions on the issues that concerned the whole region or were results of certain policies and development models of the state. Some of the main events that laid the basis for the future advocacy initiatives in URMUL Trust were:

- Nahar yatra in 1991
- Relief & Advocacy work in Malaria epidemic of 1994
- Release and Rehabilitation of around 300 bonded labourers

The growth strategy on advocacy is about strengthening the inner capacities of the family as well as initiating more robust relations with the civil society and a sustained engagement with the state as well as the judiciary.

Major thrust areas of public advocacy

- Child rights
- Quality of Primary Education and Health Services
- Access to Safe drinking water
- Food Security for all
- Ill effects of the IGNP Canal
- Right to Information and Transparency
- Media and Development Communication
- Effective functioning of the Panchayats
- Rights of bonded labour and dalits
- Federating local institutions like SHGs, Samities
- Promotion of alternative technologies & energy

Certain new initiatives by some of the URMUL members show this progression from sangathans rooted in the village to broader structures of collectives that are at a higher level - block, district or the region. Some such initiatives are Jagruk Nagrik Manch in URMUL Jyoti, Core Group on five Panchayats by Shanti Maitri Mission. There is also an emerging focus on issues of the vulnerable, outcast and marginal communities. Mazdoor Chetna Manch of Khejadi is exclusively focused on dalits and works for generating awareness about labour rights as well as redressal of problems of casual labourers of the Jayal block in Nagore district.



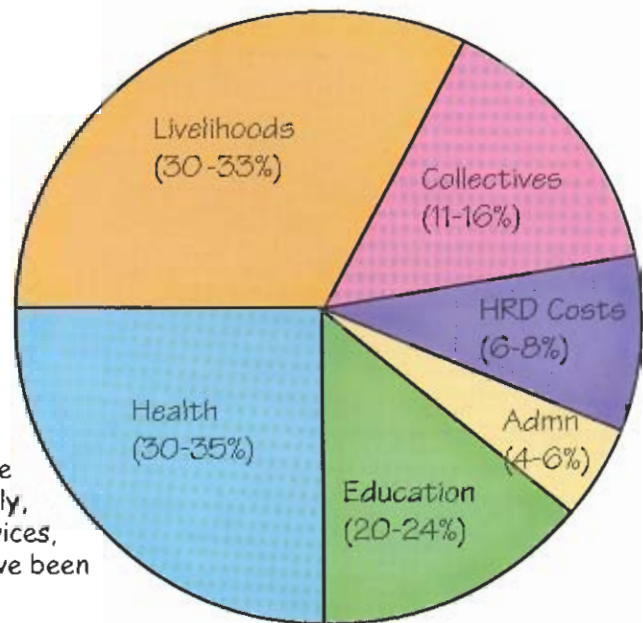
Costs and Sustainability

Sectorwise allocation of Expenditure
(based on averages of last five years)

The URMUL Trust has sought and received support from a number of agencies, both Indian and abroad; from Govt Depts and related agencies and Boards. For instance URMUL Trust received from foreign contributions around Rs 1.6 crores in 1998-99.

In the last few years, as the new initiatives grew and URMUL Trust is recasting its role, issues like sources of funding, interlinkages within the family, sharing of resources, assets and development services, handing over of revolving funds to sangathans have been at the heart of the debate.

But the search is still on - for a path of development that can sustain the outputs and outcomes achieved and ensure that they make a long term impact. At the same time, the human and monetary costs of paving such a path to sustainability must be affordable to the community and should not result in long term dependence on funds from outside.



path to sustainability



Abhivyakti

the URMUL crafts shop

The beginnings of handicraft production units led URMUL to look for avenues of marketing these products. URMUL stands for dignity and security of the labour of artisans. There is another commitment URMUL has to the exquisite and rich traditions of craftspeople of the Thar - of preservation and representation of these craft traditions.

Abhivyakti which literally means "expression" is a step in that direction. To tap the increasing tourist traffic to Bikaner as well as explore possibilities of retail selling in the city URMUL decided to open a retail outlet in Bikaner city in 1991. The Rajmata, Chariman of the Maharaja Rai Singh Trust kindly agreed to rent out a small outlet to URMUL at a very nominal rent in the Junagarh Fort complex.



Pattus, bed spreads, table linen, etc from Phalodi, garments, woolen jackets and shawls and durries from Vasundhara, exquisite hand embroidery items from Seemant, all can be found here, well arranged and stocked in the small room with it's antique rohida wooden roof and red sandstone pillars. For all these years Abhivyakti has served as the window of desert crafts produced by artisan communities of URMUL. It has become one of the special attractions for thousands of tourists who visit Junagarh fort every year.

Sales from Abhivyakti amount to around eight to ten lakhs in an year. Profits from the sales go directly to the artisans through their respective production units. Only 10% of the sales is kept with the URMUL Trust. This amount is used for the maintainance of Abhivyakti.

Abhivyakti is a shop with a *difference*. It is not only a craft outlet but a window into the panorama of the development efforts of the URMUL Trust as well as conditions of the artisans of the desert.

Abhivyakti

Kamal Golanki Inside Junagarh Fort Bikaner Rajasthan India TEL: (088) 0751-522139

Concept: Arvind, Kashyap, Rahul, Anwar, Bibhas; **Photo Credits:** Raghu Rai, Debrata Banerjee, Rajesh Vora, Nitin Rai, Anjali, Vikram Channa, B.S. Purahit, Swasti Singh, Arvind Ojha and others; **Text:** Ajit, Rahul, Anwar, Kashyop; **Documentation Support:** Amul Raj, Sunil Bhat, Wasim, Dharendra, Anwar, Dilip Singh, Ganga, Ramchander Barupal, Madhavan, A.K. Mukherjee, Ramesh; **Comments on Draft:** Arvind Ojha, Madhavan, Kashyop; **Art Direction:** Bibhas Das; **Processing & Production Support:** South Asian Network for Alternative Media (SANAM); **Bijoy;** **Publishing:** Ganeshan, Uthra Print Communications

Contact Address:
Arvind Ojha,
SECRETARY, URMUL Rural Health
Research and Development Trust P.O.
Box - 55, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India:
Telefax: (091) 0151-523093



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