



## A situation assessment narrative of Impact of Covid-19 lockdown amongst the desert communities of western Rajasthan

Districts in focus  
Bikaner, Churu, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Nagaur

This document has been compiled by Desert Resource Centre, Urmul Group, basis the ground reports, communications with the communities, the district administrations and the Urmul programme teams on the ground.

Through this document we attempt at sharing some of the challenges and developments on the ground in the five desert districts of Rajasthan. This document represents various organisations of Urmul network: Urmul Trust, Urmul Setu Sansthan, Urmul Seemant Samiti, Urmul Khejari Sansthan and Urmul Jyoti Sansthan.

In solidarity with desert communities and everyone responding with empathy in these times.

Desert Resource Centre  
April, 2020



## The Summer of 2020

Yet another batch of people were identified to be quarantined, this morning in the Bajju block of the Bikaner district in Rajasthan. Quarantine centres are bubbling up everywhere similar to the numbers of the unemployed people across. In the small village of Bajju, already four buildings are used as quarantine centres. As the team drafts, the fifth is getting prepared. The case identified this morning shall be the first person for this center. Government, the district administration and responsible citizenry is leaving no stone unturned. How long would the communities be able to hold the ground? How long is this struggle going to be for them in the remote villages? And crucially, what will those without jobs, or, means for survival will go through? There has been a significant deliberation going on at different platforms across the country around this.

Fundamental industries and the critical supply chains are affected and has left the MSMEs in a state of limbo. One-month national lockdown simply translates into one-quarter completely bled out for any enterprise. Those without cash reserves are bound to fall flat without external aid and most likely be taken over by a bigger player. Even without quarter-four (Q4) numbers out for the economy at large, we can see acute crises building for smaller businesses and livelihoods even in remote villages like that of Bajju.

The marginalised communities in rural Rajasthan are acutely vulnerable and without any cushion to the livelihood risks. The Covid-19 national lockdown has unlocked a full stack of asymmetrical challenges which will have extended consequences. The conditions of a large section of the unorganized sector in the five districts (Bikaner, Churu, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Nagaur) of Rajasthan, have worsened even before the summer of 2020 truly begins. Most vulnerable are pastoralists, migrant labourers, artisans, and farmers. Challenges for these groups shall only aggravate once the downstream impact of the crises in the economy hit the last mile in the next few months.

A feeling of insecurity and fear has taken over the people in the region which has led to widespread panic, which shall certainly have deeper and extended (or permanent) socio-cultural impacts. We know of villages and communities who have completely blocked the access to the homes, hamlets or even villages. We also know of communities who are falling back to caste based identities and allocation and divisions – two steps back on whatever achieved in the previous 6 decades! As the entire nation has come to a standstill, we attempt to document ground situations and what communities and the practitioners are thinking and worrying for.

## What is this document

This document primarily focuses on the five desert districts of Bikaner, Churu, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, and Nagaur in western Rajasthan. It aims to apprise the readers of the problems that lie ahead for these communities, policy practitioners, and government institutions.

The assessment narrative focuses on the four key value chains of the desert economy- Pastoralism, Rainfed agriculture, Migration & labour, and Handicrafts. Besides documenting the challenges the communities are dealing with during the lockdown - we're also sharing some stories of our interventions and also covering the requirement of long term restorative action in the aforementioned four value chains.

Through the course of the following weeks, Desert Resource Centre would continue to extensively cover the stories of struggles and resilience of the people of the desert against this pandemic.

## 1. PASTORALISTS

In the harsh climatic conditions during the summers, thousands of pastoralist families start on their journeys to greener pastures in the states of Haryana & Punjab. With the nationwide lockdown, this community has been gravely impacted. Their mobility has been suspended till the relaxation in the lockdown and this is causing severe fodder crises in the villages. Pastoralists are the most marginalised communities and most of these are incapable financially to purchase fodder from the open markets. As the summer peaks, this lockdown would lead to these pastoralists missing green grass opportunities on their pastoral routes and eventually shall test every step they walk along with their livestock. The pastoralist community in the western districts of Rajasthan is under great stress due to the lockdown.

Pastoralists are not only struggling for food for themselves and their families but have arrived at a critical juncture where their herds have no fodder to survive on. Pastoralists start migrating to other states towards greener pastures with their herds in the month of March. Owing to this lockdown not only has their movement been restricted but they also cannot afford forage for their livestock. The rampant rumour of livestock carrying coronavirus has also brought the sale of sheep and goats to a complete halt, it being their primary source of income. Another major concern is that some of the herders who had started migrating in the season have been stuck away from home along pastoral routes and are finding it difficult to come back home.

The situation would not improve even after the restrictions on movement would be withdrawn. Their traditional pastoral routes would be blocked as the pastoralists can arrange fodder for their animals only before the Kharif sowing season. Both pastoralists and their herds are acutely suffering in this scenario and urgent measures need to be adopted to contain their losses.

- In the pastoral communities, there is a significant number of households who are not financially included in the State schemes like Jan Dhan Yojna. A baseline survey of pastoralists undertaken in the month of February, 2020 by DRC, indicated exclusion of almost 18% pastoral people (out of the respondents from two blocks of the Bikaner district) from banking services, alone amongst 322 pastoralists in block Lunkaransar, Chhatargarh and Bikaner. Households that are not connected with banking facilities would find it difficult to avail the relief monetary support such as the Jan Dhan Yojana offered by the government.
- The pastoralists who had already begun migrating to other states with their herds are now stuck and exposed to a precarious environment wherein the food and water for their animals and themselves is hardly available.
- The pastoralists are not able to avail the veterinary care services for their animals as neither can they travel to the nearest facility with their animals nor can they request the healthcare worker to visit them.
- With the seasonally migrating pastoralists are not allowed to travel due to COVID-19 measures, the locals have expressed that the water and forage resources existing in the villages during the summers would be stressed from feeding a phenomenally large number of animals.

“

We have fodder to last only for the next few days. We used to migrate to Punjab and Haryana during the summers. I do not know what would happen if the lockdown gets extended. I am not sure how we are going to manage procuring fodder.  
- Mool Singh, a pastoralist from Nakrasar village, Bikaner district

“

I earn very little income from transporting goods on my camel cart. With the stringent travel restrictions imposed I do not know how I would earn any income and provide food for my family.  
- Ashaq Khan, a pastoralist from Motasar village, Bikaner district

“

I have a large herd of camels to feed. The common property resources have sparse plantations. It would be a difficult summer for our animals as arranging fodder for our animals would be challenging.  
- Gena Ram Raika, a pastoralist from Grandhi village, Bikaner district

“

The pastoralists urgently need fodder and veterinary care support. Even the summers haven't started yet. I do not know how they are going to feed animals in the coming months. This pandemic is going to prove to be catastrophic for their animals and their families.  
- Rewant Ram, Programme Manager, Urmul Trust  
He has been closely working with the pastoralists in the Bikaner district

## Long-term Consequences

- Due to the lockdown measures disrupting the supply chain, trade activities around animals-derived products would be severely impacted. With such a large population of pastoralists migrating from the five districts and having ready access to markets in Punjab and Haryana, this livelihood avenue remains closed.
- Rumours such as how COVID-19 could be spread through consuming meat have begun doing the rounds and it has affected the market of these products. The consumers are now sceptical of consuming it. The locals believe that it will hit the demand of these products for a long time.
- The animal products are already witnessing a fall in prices. The villagers selling their cow milk in Bikaner district since the imposition of lockdown have already witnessed a ~40% fall in the per litre selling price.

The pastoralists are worried about ensuring a steady supply of forage and water for their animals. With their sources of income getting shrunk, their animals and families are exposed to uncertainty.

## 2. MIGRANT LABOURERS

The imposition of lockdown measures has greatly impacted the labour opportunities and labourers along with their families being stuck in alien areas without any concrete support and has put their survival in jeopardy. The migrant labourer and their families with a glimmer of hope await for support and clarity.

### Immediate Challenges

- Many migrant workers are using all possible means to reach their homes. But, they are presently stuck at borders, including state, district and village areas.
- Migrant labourers who were trying to return to their homes are now being asked to spend a few days in temporary quarantine shelters. They are filled with anxiety and fear stemming from uncertainty of their survival and safety.
- Immediate concerns related to food, shelter, healthcare, fear of getting infected or spreading the infection, loss of wages, and safety of their families are a major challenge.
- Due to immediate enforcement of the lockdown they were unable to get their wages from the employers and currently living empty pocketed in a state of complete uncertainty if at all they would be able to receive their due payments.
- These migrants are even facing harassment from the local communities who are responding to this pandemic in a hasty and bigoted manner. All this calls for strong protection measures for these vulnerable communities.

“The migrant labourers feel that they have been left in a lurch by their employers. They are unsure about how to fend for their families now. They are trying to travel on foot back to their homes. There are some young local boys who have become self-appointed police authorities and are misbehaving with these labourers from certain marginalised communities. We are all patiently trying to battle this. We cannot go back in old communal times. This misinformation around these communities needs to be actively corrected.

- Rameshwar Godara, Chief Executive,  
Urmul Setu Sansthan

### Calling For Relief As Migrant Workers in Girajsar Look at Dark Days Ahead

The lockdown has not only stranded individuals but also forced labourers to come back home to their villages due to unemployment. Urmul team met with 60 such carpenters in Girajsar who had to return from Mumbai post lockdown as their work had been stopped there. Each of these labourers were earning around 25-35 thousand rupees salary per month which was the only source of livelihood for their families. These people are now jobless. Devoid of any support, these 60 families are uncertain of their survival. Urmul is working to use their skills and plan a self sustained enterprise set up so they can be employed again with optimising their skills. These migrant workers need immediate intervention by both civil society and government bodies for relief.

*“We just returned from a meeting with 60 carpenters from a village who returned from Mumbai. They lost their income avenues. It means that in the next 10 days, there would be 60 families unsure about how they would sustain and eat. We have to ensure that they get local employment opportunities.”*

- Kanwar Singh, Urmul Seemant Samiti

## Linking Migrant Labourers of Nagaur to Government Schemes

Due to unreliable farming based livelihood opportunities, construction labourers from Nagaur mostly migrate to the states of Maharashtra, West Bengal and Telangana for granite work. They are constantly on the move and they are not linked to any government schemes. The Labour Departments across the state do not have updated records of these migrants and they are even not listed under the Construction Workers list issued by the government. Some of these workers managed to come back to their homes in Rajasthan while others are still stuck in other states and have been sent to quarantine centres by the government. They have little to no resources to sustain themselves and their families. It has become challenging for the state government to trace their whereabouts as they are always on the move. These workers have neither been registered in the food security schemes or the Jan Dhan Yojana, thus making it tougher for them to avail any benefits in case they can not return to their work.

Team Urmul is trying to contact the workers stuck at various places through the contact details provided by their family members to know of their situation and troubles. We are further planning to link them to government schemes and get the details of the money they have left at their working sites so we can help them get them back. Based on this evaluation and needs assessment we will also mobilise funds to provide them and their families with ration kits and other essentials for their sustenance.

*"We are working to ensure the number and location labourers who have still not been able to come back. We would facilitate their home coming and also help them come out of the trauma they must be facing due to this situation in stranded places. We are going to ensure linking them to government schemes and unless they retain their work we provide them alternative livelihood option lobbying with the government officials to increase MNREGA work permit per family so they can earn more. We also need to save them from rumours around government benefits by sensitisation and awareness."*

*- Dhanna Ram, Secretary, Urmul Khejri*

---

## Addressing the Plight of Brick Kiln Workers in Hanumangarh and Ganganagar

Hanumangarh and Ganganagar districts have over 450 registered brick kilns in Anoopgarh and Vijaynagar villages with at least 70 families employed for work in each of them. These contractual labourers have mostly migrated from UP and Bihar in huge numbers. These migrants mostly shape and bake bricks in these kilns while the local labourers from Rajasthan work for loading the bricks in trucks for transportation. Due to the lockdown these workers are marred with uncertainties regarding their sustenance. Though the government has allowed regulated work in kilns yet the raw material is not sufficient for them to work for long. The crunched cash flow and no mobility is impacting not just the procurement of new materials or production process but also sale of finalised products has come to a standstill. Even when the lockdown is over there would hardly be any new labour requirement as they would continue selling the already finalised batches. Also, their production window closes by mid June so their annual work and income is hampered. Their literacy rate is abysmal and their enrollment under any government scheme is poor.

Everyday life has become a struggle for even the most basic necessities of food, water and medical supplies. There is a threat to their livelihood opportunity even after the lockdown ceases. Urmul team is initiating dialogue with stakeholders and government bodies to help them avail these basic requirements.

---

## Long-term Consequences

- The global pandemic has posed a grave situation. There could be a significant reduction in long-distance migration.
- There would be a second wave of home-coming of migrant workers once the lockdown is lifted. These labourers wish to go back to their native places so that they could avail government provisions of food rations and cash transfers.
- The uncertainty that looms around their health, food security, and livelihoods would impact the lives of their entire families. This would even have graver repercussions on the children of these households who during these difficult situations would not even get an opportunity to voice their concerns.
- A number of migrant workers would not wish to return to migrate for a long time. They might prefer to sustain smaller odd jobs or find work in nearby towns. It would deprive traditional industrial centres such as Delhi or Mumbai of migrant labour.
- Due to the huge deficit in labour, the small and medium-sized enterprises would further struggle with the rising wage burden.
- The disruption could extend to the shortage of labour during the Kharif sowing and harvesting seasons.



### 3. FARMERS

The government has allowed the farmers to resume harvest of wheat and other crops. For the farmers in the desert the current arrangements are fraught with challenges. They would need extensive support in the production and supply of resources. An unfair burden during these difficult times would only jeopardize their source of livelihood and survival.

#### Immediate Challenges

- With the nationwide lockdown to control the spread of Covid-19, markets where farmers sell their harvest have also been closed. The harvest of several crops has started and farmers are sitting on truckloads of crops.
- In the kharif season, many farmers lost their crops due to unseasonal rains and were waiting for this rabi harvest to pay back their loans. But now they are now facing a new problem: closed markets and crashing prices.
- There is an additional risk of local traders exploiting small farmers and buying their produce at throwaway prices.
- The access of farmers to vegetable markets has been limited by the authorities. The farmers are finding it difficult to access the markets and procure resources.
- There is a major shortage of migrant labourers as the labourers have been stuck in different parts of the country that had gone for work on the farmlands during this crop harvesting season. Also local labourers are finding it tough to move for work. The farmers are finding it challenging to manage without support.

“We are not able to find labour for harvesting the crop. We can adjust and manage with limited labour for this cropping season. But, now I am worried about the sowing of cotton and groundnuts. In addition, it would be difficult to manage sowing without the support of labour. Even procuring seeds and manure in the market has become challenging. We will have to make do with limited resources.” He added, “Our country is able to respond to the crisis well because our farmers are ensuring that the people do not starve. We all should be grateful to our brothers for working tirelessly for the people in such testing times.”

- Mahavir Singh, a farmer in Bajju village, Bikaner district

---

#### Seed Bank Supporting Farmers in Bajju

The Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP) supported by Oracle initiated the formation of a community-led Seed bank for farmers collectives in Bajju. Initially the objective behind setting this up was: local seed security independent of market fluctuations; better price to farmers for their seeds at harvest; and promotion of indigenous varieties of crops. During the lockdown, with restricted mobility when farmers are finding it really tough to procure seeds from the market, the bank has come forth as a huge support to the farmers. The bank had provided wheat crop seeds to 100 farmers in the region who had agreed to return 10% of the yield for further stocking and functioning of the bank. However due to lockdown these farmers are undergoing huge losses in this sowing season and harvesting. In order to extend support to the farming community in Bajju the SAP team has waived off the fee of 50-60 identified farmers whose sustenance is a challenge in these times.

---

## Organic Fodder Proven to be a Blessing in Pokaran

Under the Marugandha project supported by HDFC bank Parivartan, Urmul team has been working on holistic rural development interventions in 14 villages of 5 blocks of Pokaran. During the intervention the team had facilitated construction of 75 azolla pits in the programme areas. Little did they realise that these pits today will be proven as a blessing to the community members. Due to the lockdown it has become really challenging for the people to sustain themselves and their families, let alone their livestock. Both their immobility and poor financial conditions are a roadblock to being able to meet the fodder requirements of their livestock. The organic azolla pits however are filled with luscious green fodder that can meet all the nutrition needs of the livestock. Pastoralists are reaping benefits of this feed. The cattle are healthier and milk yield is better.

*"During our interaction with the community members, we heard their concerns about their sustenance but were also relieved by the fact that azolla grass is lowering their worries. Back when we planned this intervention, we didn't realise how greatly it would impact the community members. For them today feeding their families is a challenge today but at least they don't have to undergo the same struggle for their livestock."*

*- Pukhraj Jaipal, Programme Manager, Natural Resource Management, UMBVS, Pokaran*

---

## Long-term Consequences

- After the lockdown eases, the logistics bottlenecks would take months to get solved. It would impede farmers' access to markets and procurement of input resources such as seeds, fertilizers, machinery, etc.
- The farmers would find it difficult to adopt the reformed stricter international standards for hygiene, working conditions and living facilities on farm-related activities.
- The farmers have to start sowing seeds of Kharif crops such as cotton and groundnut in the months of April and May. Due to the markets being shut, there is currently a problem in procuring the seeds. This resultant delay could hamper the quality of the crops.
- The migrant labour might be reluctant to be engaged in farm-related activities and the farmers could witness a shortage of labor during the Kharif season as well.
- The demand for food products could be impacted by the slowdown of tourism and hospitality sectors.

## 4. ARTISANS

The artisans and the varied stakeholders along the value chain are concerned about the lockdown impacts on market demand and business opportunities for the crafts.

### Immediate Challenges

- With the clampdown on movement, the artisans are neither able to go to production centres to work nor produce anything at home. Till the time such stringent restrictions exist these artisans would be deprived of any steady source of livelihood resulting in increasing their vulnerability to poverty.
- Even if the artisans manage to get their hands on raw materials, access to production centres is difficult due to the nationwide immobility.
- The transportation of both raw materials and finished crafts products has been disrupted due to the nationwide ban on trucking of these non-essential products. Also the sale of products currently in markets has come to a standstill due to shut markets.
- Since the demand of the products would steeply decline, the enterprises are aware that it would be challenging to maintain the present workforce. This would result in loss of livelihoods of the most vulnerable sections

“ I work with over 5,000 artisans in the Thar desert. This lockdown has already impacted our production and supply cycle. In the coming months, there would be a drop in the demand. We were designing a premium product line. Presently, I do not think it is feasible for me to focus on that. In the next few months, I am sure this pandemic would have negative repercussions on the economy. I am not thinking of expansion of my brand. I am just focusing on surviving in the market and ensuring that I secure the livelihoods of my artisans.”  
- Prerna Agarwal, Lead,  
Urmul Desert Crafts

“ I am worried that our orders would reduce considerably. If our orders reduce, how would we earn and sustain ourselves? I am the only breadwinner in my family. We do not have a lot of savings. I am not sure how we will cope in the coming few months.”  
- Kanni Ram Goyal, a tailor with  
Urmul Desert Crafts

“ This is the longest I have not been working. I miss being involved in my work. I hope the COVID-19 pandemic ends soon and I can go back to work. ”  
- Rangu Bai, an artisan with  
Urmul Desert Crafts

## Long-term Consequences

- The artisans that used to work in smaller independent artisans' collectives would be affected. Their sustenance would be a fight for survival.
- The artisans' who used to get paid per piece or were paid daily wages would be the most vulnerable. They have no safety net provided by their employers. The government would have to create employment opportunities to ensure their families do not die of hunger.
- Artisans in rural Rajasthan are mostly women who have taken up the skill to earn their livelihood along with status in their families. These lives of these empowered women and their families has come to a standstill also putting them in a critical social standing.
- The survival of the small enterprises hangs by a thread and a lot of them would even have to shut shop.

The MSME sector is looking at a 'sky is falling' scenario and newer, social and decentralized business approaches will be required for these MSMEs closely working with artisans and other rural poor to cope up with the world and its realities.

In this need of the hour, it is essential for organisations and individuals to step up and consider all the difficulties tackled by the marginalised communities and function towards resolving them.

## OUR RESPONSE

During these unstable times, Urmul group of organisations has opted for a two step strategy to overcome these interim yet difficult situations through long lasting permanent solutions.

### 1. Immediate Response

Urmul organisations located in different areas of Rajasthan, with assistance from various partner organisations, are providing critical support to the worst hit communities. Essential services ranging from basic health related supplies and essentials, to fodder for livestock are covered in different areas basis the rapid need assessments undertaken by our ground teams. In Pokhran and Lunkaransar blocks each, around 10-12 thousand masks were manufactured and distributed. In addition, hygiene kits were provided to frontline workers (Anganwadi, Asha, field workers) along with hygiene kits for ANM workers which include N-95 masks, bodysuits and soaps.

We've identified the most marginalised households such as camel herders, families with pregnant women, disabled members or poor who reside in areas distant from markets and provided them with ration kits. In addition, necessary initiatives for the livestock sector are also adopted – essential medication for camels is provided free of cost. We're also engaging with migrant labourers stuck either in quarantine camps or various villages, to manage the psychological impacts. This is being done through engagement like singing, dancing and counselling.

We have also launched a digital fundraising campaign across various platforms where we are requesting donations from donors all across the country to aid our cause. The donations received are being used for providing immediate relief to the impacted communities like food, water, medical support and fodder for livestock in our areas of intervention. We're targeting raising funds enough to support 25,000 individuals on the ground. The details of the fundraising campaign are on our website and can be reached through [www.urmul.org/donate-now/](http://www.urmul.org/donate-now/)

- In Lunkaransar block, ration kits for 15 days and sanitation material is being distributed to 1000 families. Hygiene kits with masks and gloves are being distributed to around 266 anganwadi workers, ASHA and ANM. Alongside, our team is extending support to frontline medical practitioners and support staff in Lunkaransar and Sardarshahar blocks of Bikaner and Churu districts through distribution of 1000 surgical masks, 80 N-95 masks and 40 eye-gear with the support of Plan India.
- 182 hygiene kits (mask, gloves, soaps) to AWW/ASHA/Helper/PRI members were provided along with 30 safety kits (bodysuits, gloves, N95mask, eye-gear and shoe covers) to ANM workers in Bajju.
- Identification and distribution of dry ration to 1500 vulnerable and marginalised families in Bikaner district.
- 5 government quarantine centres have been adopted for extending support by team Urmul Seemant Samiti in Bajju. The issues of these migrant people in quarantine centres are being identified and they are provided with daily hygiene supplies like dental kits, comb, soaps, masks, sanitary pads for women, clothes, along with psychosocial counselling and support.

- Our team in Pokaran region of Jaisalmer district is sensitising people on measures to curb the spread of the virus and have distributed 12000 masks to the community members. These masks were made by our artisan network trained and skilled under the Marugandhan Project with support from HDFC Bank Parivartan programme. Alongside the team has aided both government and private bodies in identification and distribution of ration kits to 400 families in need of critical support.
- *Anaj Banks* (Food Banks) have been set up in 5 villages of Pokaran block of Jaisalmer. These banks are facilitating collection and aggregation of food grains by the community members which would be distributed to the people in need.
- In the Nokha block of Bikaner, our youth leader collective “Jagruk Nagrik Manch” has been assisting the government to enlist migrant workers who have come back home. These labourers have been offered food by community kitchens. We have provided 13,000 individuals in need with ration and fodder through a voluntary community-led and supported ration bank. These banks have collected ration to last for over 6 months, setting up a community based model for disaster management.
- Our eye hospital in Nokha, Jyoti Netra Chikitsalaya, is treating around 30 eye patients per day even during the lockdown.
- Our team in Jodhpur district has reached out to around 2000 people through telephonic conversations to spread awareness on curbing the spread of the virus and mitigating their queries and bridging gaps for requirements on health, food, fodder, government schemes and linkage.

---

### Face Mask Production Unit in Bajju

In our efforts towards mitigating the spread of coronavirus, our crafts unit at Urmul Seemant Samiti in village Bajju has stepped forward to provide immediate support. Urmul Desert Crafts, an enterprise committed to providing livelihood support to artisans of the Thar turned its craft production unit into a mask producing unit where everyday the team is manufacturing over 2,000 reusable cotton masks. These masks are being distributed to the community members, doctors, nurses, field staff, village institutions at a no profit costing. The team is working with government institutions and they are delivering it without failure. The unit also ensures following the safety mandates of social distancing and sanitisation during production as advised by government and health officials. This endeavour saw the commitment and motivation of rural women who participated in the process to manufacture face masks for no profit but purely out of their instinct for helping the people on the frontlines whose safety is at risk during these testing times. The process was also aided by clean energy resources as the entire unit is run on solar energy which not only helped control the cost for production but also facilitated round the clock production. The UDC team of twelve members has thus far produced and distributed over 20,000 masks around Bajju.

*“We have self isolated ourselves inside the Urmul campus in Bajju. Urmul has helped me and thousands of artisans in the region with a source of livelihood. Today, we have the opportunity to give back to the community, so we are helping the team to produce these masks and contribute our bit. It makes me really happy that we are serving our community in these times.”*

*- Manoj Kanwar, Urmul Desert Craft*

---

---

## Focusing on Comprehensive Support in Bajju and Kolayat Blocks

Bajju and Kolayat blocks in Bikaner district are critical points where the government officials are developing quarantine facilities. However, the medical staff and other machinery working towards disaster management are ill-equipped. With our partner Plan India, Urmul Seemant has extended support to distribute ration kits to around 1500 families, PPE and protective provisions like sanitisers, soaps, masks, gloves etc to community members, health workers and volunteers. Alongside the team is planning awareness sessions in selected 71 villages to inform people on crucial aspects such as prevention, hygiene, social distancing, isolation and combating stigma and convincing individuals to adapt hygienic practices. Our team is also assisting local administration in deputing volunteers and care-givers to deliver services to the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, and other vulnerable groups.

*“We are actively trying to procure hygiene and safety kits for our 182 frontline healthcare workers. By the first week of May, we would have supported around 1500 households of locals and migrant labourers with dry ration. We are planning to conduct awareness drives in 71 villages in the Bajju and Kolayat blocks around hygiene practices. In addition, the drives would focus on clearing doubts stemming from divisive and intolerant news circulated through social media. Our aim is to combat this pandemic across all levels. We are quickly trying to reach out to as many vulnerable people as possible.”*

*- Prashant Singh, Education Coordinator, Urmul Seemant Samiti*

---

## Reaching Out to the Scattered Herder Settlements with Immediate Support Services in Bajju and Cheemana Clusters

The camel herding community is no exception to the sufferings. They are worried for the sustenance of both their families and their herds. With herd sizes of upto 200 camels, fodder for them is a challenge but providing them with required veterinary support in these times of immobilisation is an added trouble. Most commonly identified illnesses amongst camels in the region are Sarcoptic Mange or Paanv and worming both oral and on the body of the camels. With no mobility possible it has become a challenge for the herders to travel to the nearest markets for buying these vaccines. Additionally these are costly vaccines and in these times where they are finding it tough to meet their families needs, health services for their herd is far fetched. Through our youth cadre formed under The Camel Partnership (TCP) with support from Revitalising Rainfed Area Network (RRAN) and Centre for Pastoralism (CfP), we are now distributing critical vaccination for animals in two blocks in Bikaner districts. Our youth cadre is ensuring that the vaccines are either distributed further or are administered covering over 1200 identified camels.

---

## Adoption of Quarantine Centres

Due to the lockdown migrant labourers moving towards Punjab, Haryana, MP and UP for the Rabi harvesting, got stuck when they reached Bajju, ending up in quarantine centers. Urmul Seemant Samiti decided to intervene and adopted 5 quarantine centers – 4 in Bajju and 1 in Kolar to help these distressed migrants who were locked down. The Urmul-Plan team closely monitored the issues they were facing for its redressal. These people to begin with had no sanitation or hygiene belongings which were provided to them including face masks made by our artisans, individual water bottles, hygiene kits (washing and bathing soap, comb, nail cutter, dental kits, hair oil, mirror and sanitary napkins). In some cases the team also arranged for new clothes from the Urmul crafts store for some women and children who had not taken bath for almost 7 days since they had nothing to change into. We also provided toys to the children so that they could pass time more effectively. The team also covered any shortage in the centres including that of food or water from their own campus stocks.

Our team members are visiting these centers twice daily to monitor the situation closely and to counsel the quarantined women and men. To keep the women busy and more positive, we conducted yoga sessions, gave hygiene training, involved them in planting a kitchen garden in the campus, sang songs with them, cooked food together and maintained cleanliness at the premises.

*“Times like these call for collaborative action of CSOs towards aiding the communities in need. Our team is supporting the distressed communities with food, water, hygiene, safety measures and awareness around the mitigation of the virus. Our help extends to children, women, elderly, handicapped, and every member of the community. We are determined to this cause.”*

*- Sunil Lahri, Joint Secretary, Urmul Seemant Samiti*

---

## Girls spearheading COVID awareness interventions through phone calls in Jodhpur

Our team in Jodhpur district are reaching out to distressed communities and registering their issues through phone calls. Supporting us in this intervention are the girl students of our Prajwala project, we have connected to schools through Kasturba Gandhi Awasiya Vidyalayas (KGAV) and Sharde Hostels. Over the project period we had trained these girls on WASH who today in turn are voluntarily helping their community members get aware about curbing the spread of coronavirus. They have helped us make 317 calls to parents of students and community members ensuring they take the prescribed precautions against the virus. With support from 919 girls in KGAV and 868 girl volunteers in Sharde hostel we have been able to reach out to 1800 households in 11 blocks of Jodhpur through telephonic conversations around awareness and sensitisation of COVID-19.

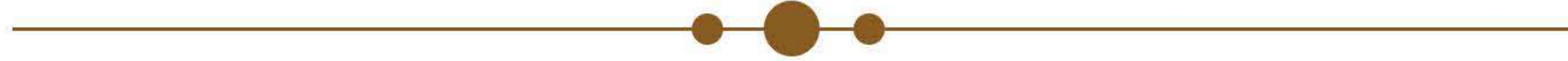
We are helping distressed people get linked with government schemes and benefits. Additionally, 169 girls groups in Osian block have made communication material on awareness in local languages for enhanced understanding of the community members. 25-30 families of these girls are also making masks for distribution to families in need. These volunteers are also safeguarding the village borders for alien entry and informing the local authorities in case of any violation.

*“The world is struggling with this pandemic. Rajasthan has a rich heritage of combating challenges with togetherness, love and care for each other. We at Urmul family have the same approach with which we are tirelessly working to support the communities in need and end this virus from the country.”*

*- Ashok Sharma, Programme Manager, Education*

---





## 2. Restorative Measures

The drastic impact of this lockdown would be visible even long after it is lifted. Urmul group has already initiated measures to provide immediate relief to the worst hit communities in these unfortunate times. In addition, Urmul is prioritising to actively function with social enterprises, Self Help Groups for betterment of the communities post lockdown. We are closely working with State government and district administration for long term restorative support to marginalised communities.

Currently, in Jaisalmer, steps are taken to formulate "*Anaj Bank*". *Anaj Bank* is a community supported ration bank which will be distributing grains to the vulnerable families that are provided by generous inhabitants of the region. Alongside, we aim to increase engagement with government schools towards mass awareness for preventive measures.

We are also realigning program priorities of most of our programmes to support the long term restorative action. In the restorative phase, our focus areas shall be livelihoods, education and health. We'd be focussing particularly on crafts, pastoralism and agriculture value chains for long term support.



## Key contacts for further communication with Urmul group of organisations

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Contact Details</u>
Arvind Ojha	Chief Executive, Urmul Trust	<a href="mailto:arvind@urmul.org">arvind@urmul.org</a> +91 94141 37093
Ashok Sharma	Programme Manager, Education	<a href="mailto:asharma2020@gmail.com">asharma2020@gmail.com</a> +91 96104 21973
Chenaram Bishnoi	Programme Manager, Sustainable Agriculture Programme	<a href="mailto:chenaram.bishnoi@urmul.org">chenaram.bishnoi@urmul.org</a> +91 99832 60548
Chetanram Godara	Chief Functionary, Urmul Jyoti Sansthan	<a href="mailto:chetanram2009@gmail.com">chetanram2009@gmail.com</a> +91 95876 16360
Deendayal Arora	Programme Director, Urmul Marugandha Programme	<a href="mailto:deendayal.arora@urmul.org">deendayal.arora@urmul.org</a> +91 94132 52415
Dhanna Ram	Secretary, Urmul Khejri	<a href="mailto:uks.rajasthan@gmail.com">uks.rajasthan@gmail.com</a> +91 79761 86608
Dipak Gode	Coordinator, Desert Resource Centre	<a href="mailto:dipak.gode@urmul.org">dipak.gode@urmul.org</a> +91 94228 93938
Harbans Singh	Secretary, Urmul Seemant	<a href="mailto:kambojharbans89@gmail.com">kambojharbans89@gmail.com</a> +91 80940 19609
Prashant Singh	Programme Coordinator, Integrated Rural Development Programme	<a href="mailto:prashant.urmul@gmail.com">prashant.urmul@gmail.com</a> +91 73405 51067
Prerna Agarwal	Lead, Urmul Desert Crafts	<a href="mailto:prerna@urmul.org">prerna@urmul.org</a> +91 84479 67539
Ramesh Saran	Chief Financial Officer, Urmul Trust	<a href="mailto:rameshurmul@gmail.com">rameshurmul@gmail.com</a> +91 94146 05399
Rameshwar Godara	Chief Executive, Urmul Setu Sansthan	<a href="mailto:urmulsetu@gmail.com">urmulsetu@gmail.com</a> +91 76650 08821
Rampal Bishnoi	Head, Administration, Urmul Trust	<a href="mailto:rampalbishnoi@gmail.com">rampalbishnoi@gmail.com</a> +91 94143 24579
Rewant Ram	Programme Manager, Pastoralism Intervention	<a href="mailto:rjaipal9@gmail.com">rjaipal9@gmail.com</a> +91 98288 50803
Sunil Lahiri	Programme Director, Urmul Seemant	<a href="mailto:sunil.lahri67@gmail.com">sunil.lahri67@gmail.com</a> +91 8094019610