

"CRAFTING THE LIVELIHOODS"

A Study On

LIVELIHOOD PROMOTION INTERVENTIONS

In
RAJASTHAN
By

URMUL TRUST, BIKANER

Conducted By

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CRAFTING THE LIVELIHOODS

Abstract

The timely response of a development agency to the pressure of a natural calamity, i.e. drought, proved to be instrumental in creating a model for livelihood promotion that is recognized and appreciated widely. It also played a critical role in developing a small NGO into the one known for its credible work nationally. This study tracks down the evolution of the implementing organization as well as community-based institutions built by it around the traditional craft, to put forth the strength of its responsive approach. The approach that was not originally designed to strengthen livelihoods per se, but only to cater to the health care needs of the milk suppliers of a cooperative dairy. The approach that got evolved by the people's livelihoods related needs.

Urmul Trust

Urmul Trust is a non-government organization initiated in 1985 by URMUL Dairy (Uttar Rajasthan Milk Union Limited), Bikaner. The idea of creation of the Trust was triggered off during a visit of the dairy leaders to Tribhuvandas Foundation, Anand. They were highly impressed with the health care activities being undertaken by the Foundation for the women of the milk supplier families. They thought similar initiatives could be taken up in the area of URMUL Dairy to provide health and nutrition support to the women. Mr. Sanjay Ghosh, a management graduate from Institute of Rural Management, Anand and who had worked with Tribhuvandas Foundation for a couple of years, started work under the banner of Urmul Trust (UT), with a small team of motivated persons. UT initiated its activities around health care for women and children of milk supplier families with the financial support from URMUL Dairy.

Evolution of Income Generation Program

In its initial stage of working on health, with an agenda of complementing the dairy's activities, Urmul Trust team did not have any idea that it would soon need to shift its focus from health care to income generation. The conditions created by the drought of 1987 forced them to review their plans and take up income generation activities in a big way. While looking for possible options for supporting the needy poor of the area in this time of distress, they discovered that the old traditional spinning activity had a potential

of providing the people a sustainable livelihood. They saw the 'charkhas' (spinning wheels), lying idle with most of the poor households. Some time back, this used to be an integral part of the activities and the livelihood portfolio of the household. But now it is not being used, because the produce did not have demand in the market.

'Spinning to Weaving':

UT decided to make use of these 'charkhas' and the skills of the people to use them for the purpose of enhancing the household incomes. They bought the wool from the market of Bikaner, which was and is one of the biggest wool markets in India. They identified the poor families to be involved in the activities. These identified families, however, were not traditional 'weavers'. They were given the wool to just to spin. The spun wool was collected back, paying the wages for spinning. With the time, lot of spun wool got piled up as there was no immediate taker of this. The team was clueless on what should be done with that. How to dispose it off at reasonable price, so that the money received could be put back to activity-cycle, became an issue. Soon UT realized that it was not easy to dispose this spun wool off at reasonable price. They were forced to look at other possibilities, like weaving. Students from National Institute of Design were invited to discuss the possibilities in this regard. As an outcome of these discussions, the weaving emerged as a strong possibility to be taken up by these people. But since they were not traditional weavers, therefore, they required training for weaving.

Weaving Training in Lunkaransar:

The team started searching for the experts/traditional weavers, who could help these local people to learn weaving and produce something that could be marketed at reasonable price. In this process of hunting for experts, they came across some weavers of Phalodi, who used to buy raw materials from local markets and produce 'pattus' and other similar products, part of the traditional attire of people of the area, to sell in local market and rural fairs. These expert weavers were also under stress because of low demand of their produce and were looking for better options. When offered good wages by UT, they agreed to come to Lunkaransar and train the locals in weaving.

Emergence of UMBVS, Phalodi:

The training process went on well for a couple of years. But with the time, the experts from Phalodi started realizing that they are not getting enough appreciation, space and returns they deserved. Being away from home for so long became another reason for

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their discomfort. The impact of drought had also subsided for them. Therefore, they decided to go back to their native places. Recognizing their role in training the local people on weaving, UT team offered these trainers its support for having their own weavers' institution in their block, Phalodi in Jodhpur district. They gladly agreed to go back and organize themselves in such an institution, which later developed into what is now well known as 'Urmul Marusthali Bunkar Vikas Samiti' (UMBVS), Phalodi. The UT team supported it financially and with material to start their work and provided guidance as and when required.

Support to Immigrant Craftspersons in Bajju

On the other hand, some similar activities were going on in Bajju block of Bikaner district also. There were a large number of families of highly skilled craftspersons, who had migrated from Pakistan during the '71 war. The middlemen were exploiting these immigrants. They had no option but to sell their produce to these middlemen from Barmer and Jaisalmer on very low price, who in turn were selling it in high-end market at very high margins. The main feature of their produce was hand-embroidery on cloth. The products were of very high quality, fit to be sold in elite markets and even to be exported. UT organized these families in groups and helped them in marketing of their produce through market linkages it created for them.

Therefore, mainly these three initiatives were going on in three different drought prone belts of western Rajasthan, which is completely arid and has very low rainfall. It was an effort of enhancing or supporting the livelihoods, which could help these poor people survive through this historic difficult period. But that continued because the need was still there and because the occurrence of drought of some degree was there almost once in every two years.

The livelihood promotion activities of UT started to respond to emergency needs did not stop at income generation programs. Besides continuation of health program, it initiated education program at large scale in several blocks of arid zone districts. As and when got opportunity, it also took up projects on agriculture, animal husbandry, etc., aiming at increasing the income of poor farmers. The experience of income generation programs around crafts gave them the ability of shaping up their activities with a larger perspective of livelihood promotion.

The Study

Urmul Trust started its operations with health, aiming at replicating Tribhuvandas

The Livelihood School

Foundation experiences. But its strategy has been flexible and changing as per requirements. During last 20 years of its operations in the western Rajasthan, it has intended to impact livelihoods and lives of thousands of families. Its approach has been diversified. While by taking up education, it works for long term solutions, by working on health intends to reduce their costs on health care for medium term solutions and it also tries to strike the immediate issue of extreme poverty through income generation activities.

This study aims at examining these impacts of Urmul Trust efforts on livelihoods of its target beneficiaries, as well as on livelihood promotion sector in context of the area. Though, the focus of the study is on income generation program, particularly around crafts, but a general impact of works of UT in the area has also been explored.

Methodology

To understand the perspectives of different stakeholders, interpersonal interviews were held with important players in the intervention. Interactions were had with the members of the teams working in three important belts of intervention i.e. Lunkaransar, Bajju and Phalodi. Besides the Secretary, Urmul Trust and the Managing Director, URMUL Daily, important functionaries of three teams, weavers and the representatives of the independent institutions of the weavers created in the process were contacted on their locations.

On the basis of the data, provided by those contacted and gathered through observations, the analysis has been done to assess the impacts. For the purpose, Basix' Livelihood Framework for identification and analysis of livelihood choices has been used. The advantage of using this framework is that it helps not only in identifying the livelihood promotion choices and analyzing the impacts of intervention, but also in understanding the relationships between important stakeholders and to assess the impacts of each one of the initiatives taken under the project.

Choices that Urmul Trust had in drought conditions of 1987

Comparing the Choices across the three institutions, it could be stated that Urmul Trust had not envisaged large-scale intervention on livelihood promotion at the time of its inception. It was the drought conditions that forced the Trust to sit and think about the problem and some possible intervention to help the very poor families come out of the

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clutches of drought.

There are following important options available with the people of the area (Bikaner), particularly the poor, with whom Urmul Trust wished to work:

1. Agriculture: Purely dependent on rains, rainfall being less than 200mm in most monsoons. Possibility of only one crop, mostly bajra (millet), in normal seasons. On an average, one out of every two years is a drought year.
2. Animal Husbandry: Fragile support system of veterinary care and other important inputs including fodder. Paucity of fodder even in mild drought seasons, forces to migrate with animals to distant places of states of Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Panjab. Goats in ones and twos are kept by very poor people, which survive in difficult conditions also. But that is not good enough to sustain a considerable part of livelihood in droughts.
3. Craft/weaving: In absence of a support system, particularly for marketing and designs in line with trends, it remains low. Generally, traders exploit them by taking at very low price and selling in cities at considerable margins.
4. Unskilled labour in relief work: The number of days they get work is low and again the contractors tend to exploit on wages. This too stops with the first rain falling, although the impacts continue for months even after the normal rains have occurred.
5. Migration: Apparently, the most effective strategy for meeting crisis. Mostly young men migrate for survival of the family, leaving women, children and elderly parents behind.

UT did not conduct formal exercises to identify the most suitable intervention for the people of the area - like portfolio-mapping (listing down the usually taken up activities for livelihood), triangulation (short-listing of potential activities suitable to needs of people and competence of the implementation agency) or 3-E (Exploring External Environment - identifying the bottlenecks and strong components of various existing conditions).

Just the guts feeling about a couple of factors, which apparently seemed suitable for the intervention, encouraged them to go ahead with spinning and later weaving as the activity. One was the fact that Bikaner was and is one of the biggest wool markets in India and the other that there were large number of people who were skilled enough to take up the task of spinning with the traditional 'charkha'. The artisans, who had come to Lunkaransar to train and guide them in weaving later set up independent unit at their home town, Phalodi, which is currently the most successful unit initiated by UT. The

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Lunkaransar weavers went ahead with their work and some year later set up an independent society at Lunkaransar, named 'Vasundhara'. In Bajju, the same experience was used to organize and involve the Pak immigrants of 71 wartime around embroidery-craft.

If we look at the other options available with the families in those circumstances, we find that there are two major activities that constitute the portfolio of most livelihoods in the area. One is agriculture and the other one is animal husbandry. The people of this area are skilled in both. But in severe drought conditions, both these activities get under stress as explained above. In such conditions, working as unskilled labour in relief work initiated by government and migration was the other possible option. The relief work also does not provide adequate income as it provides work for limited number of days and as soon as the rainy season starts, it is withdrawn, not appreciating the fact that it is going to take at least three to four months before the produce is actually got. On the other hand, the migration leaves the families divided with children, women and old members of the family left behind. **UT team knew it well that they can't remove the bottlenecks of these occupations, with their limited resources.**

Therefore,

- 1. The initiatives around livelihoods were not an outcome of a well thought out plan, but was an instant and obvious choice available with the Trust in given conditions of drought.**
- 2. Trust did not have a long-term vision on these lines at that point of time, but the situation was handled as per need and circumstances.**

Box-1 Why Respond Drought?

Why Urmul Trust decided to shift its main focus from the health to income generation programme? In a drought prone area like this, rainfall is less than average in five years of a decade. Then why they shifted their focus is the question. Let us check it.

Usually, one would take drought purely as the less rainfall. But it is true only partly. It is not just the quantum of water falling down from clouds on this part of mother Earth. Even 120 mm of rains might be enough in one set of conditions, while in another even 300 mm might not be enough. It actually depends upon the timeliness and adequacy of the rainfall at those particular points of time. A very heavy rain at an inappropriate time of cropping cycle might be counter-productive and might worsen the drought conditions, if there is no rain when needed.

Then someone living in green belt might assume that drought means less availability of drinking water. It is also partly true. While water availability for human and animal consumption is critical, the lack of availability of the food grains is the major reason for creating worst impact on lives of people. Therefore, it is not about supplying water through tankers or trains to the drought-hit area only, but also about arranging for sufficient food.

In this part of country, people have developed capacity and mechanism to tackle droughts, but repeated droughts and those with massive intensity could create unbearable impacts. Particularly, the poor who cannot have grain stocks to face such crisis, need help in these circumstances most. These are the points, where everyone trying to work with poor in these areas has to respond. The drought of 1987 was a historical one, with impacts left by the previous years to worsen it. Could anyone talking about poor ignore it?

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THE INTERVENTION

On the basis of the above-mentioned contributing factors on both the sides, the intervention around crafts had been planned. The objective(s), nature and design of the intervention were as given below:

Objective of the Intervention: The basic objective of the intervention was to meet the crisis to the livelihoods of the poor people of the area. But with the time and growth, it got extended to multiple objectives around livelihood promotion. The project-based intervention turned into programme-based intervention with following set of objectives ahead -

- Create sustainable livelihoods for the poor, having skills in spinning, weaving or embroidery.
- Help build up linkages with financial institutions and donors that sustain beyond intervention.
- Provide marketing linkages to ensure genuine price of the goods that sustains beyond intervention.
- Provide technical support and know-how to keep with the trends and pace of the time.
- Develop Independent weavers' institutions, capable to produce, market, manage the institutional activities and access the funds independently.
- Provide required guidance and inter-institutional linkage and coordination to these weavers' institutions.

Nature of the Intervention: The nature of the intervention is multi-dimensional. As is clear from the objectives, it had to initiate activities on a number of issues. While working for institution building, they had to initiate work on design development and improved dyeing practices to suit to the latest trends of the market. Then with funds procurement to get through the innovative phase, they had to concentrate on the marketing of the goods to ensure safe returns. Similarly, while addressing capacity enhancement needs, they were to develop systems/mechanisms for resolving disputes among the members of an institution and between different institutions arising out of the intervention.

Design of the Intervention: The design of the intervention has been changing with the time and circumstances. Initially, it was restricted to ensuring wages to the people in distress due to drought that was for a limited period. Later, on the basis of the learnings, got evolved into a long-term programme to promote sustainable livelihoods around the craft. From centrally initiated and controlled activity, it has developed into an

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activity that is run and controlled by independent institutions.

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERVENTION ON VARIOUS CONDITIONS

A. Factor Conditions

Pre-Intervention Status -

Favourable:

- i) In initial phase, the availability of raw material (wool) was excellent as Bikaner was a big wool market.
- ii) The people of the area were traditionally skilled in spinning.
- iii) The machine (the 'charkha') was available with almost all households, lying idle for years.
- iv) Phalodi weavers were traditionally skilled in weaving. The women in Bajju also were traditionally engaged in high-end material production, with their strength in embroidery.
- v) The infrastructure conditions were fine. Roads were generally good in the area.
- vi) There was acceptability for the weaving among the castes to which most of the poor belonged in the area. There were no social issues around caste, religion or gender on this.
- vii) There was willingness of government and administration to support any livelihood promotion activity in drought conditions.

Unfavourable:

- i) With the evolution of weaving on cotton as the main activity, the raw material (cotton yarn) availability became as difficult as it was anywhere in north India.
- ii) The people of Lunkaransar were not traditionally skilled to take up weaving. They had to be trained by weavers from Phalodi.
- iii) Distances were a big issue in western Rajasthan, as the population is very dispersed.
- iv) The status on access to funds was bad. Financial institutions did not consider these people credit worthy.

Influence of the Intervention on the Factor Conditions -

1. Raw Material Availability - Urmul Trust ensured the availability of wool in the initial phase and the cotton yarn in the second phase, when weaving emerged as the important activity. It ensured the timely supply of the raw material and the material used in weaving and value addition.

2. Financial Support - As such the weavers neither had capital to produce and market the goods, nor did they have anything to offer as parallel for taking loans from the financial institutions. Urmul Trust supported them to access grants to meet initial losses incurred in the phase of innovation and later funds to run their enterprise, which was critical in initial phase. It also made available its campuses for use of these weavers' institutions.

3. Research and Development - It helped them try out new items taking chances of getting some investment consumed in experimentation. Generally, individual weaver or small institution cannot afford this.

4. Linkage with the government schemes - The Trust provided the weavers linkages with government agencies and their schemes to train and support the activities of weavers. They not only got free training and raw material required for those trainings, but they got cash stipends also. These agencies helped in marketing of the goods also.

5. Provision of expertise - Professional from top management, social sciences and designing institutes were made available.

6. Infrastructure support - The required infrastructure needs were met with the help of UT, which allowed the weavers to use its campuses for common use free of cost at a time when they were short of common funds. It helped in transportation of goods also.

7. Patronage - UT team provided that critical confidence to the weavers by being on their side whenever they needed a support. The most sought after guidance was readily made available to them as and when required.

B. Demand Conditions

Pre-Intervention Status - The demand conditions were not good generally. The 'charkhas' got out of lives only because the returns from the efforts were not good

enough. Even the Trust could not get good price for the spun wool. This level of value addition had got out of acceptable limit in the market.

Then the weavers, like the ones of Phalodi, used to sell their goods in the 'haats' (weekly local markets) and the rural fairs. With the times, the demand reduced in these traditional markets due to change in lifestyles. The margins offered got reduced. During the drought conditions, the demand and margins came further down and it made the activity unviable for the weavers.

For Bajju craftswomen, the only way to sell their products was to sell to middlemen coming from Barmer and Jaisalmer. They would offer them very low margins and make huge profits by selling these high end products. They also were in bad shape in this crisis of drought. Having no considerable income from other sources, like agriculture and animal husbandry, their condition was miserable.

For all of them, there was no direct link with the bigger consumer markets. They had to depend upon small local markets or the middlemen. In both the cases, they could not get enough margins to make a reasonable livelihood.

Influence of the Intervention on the Demand Conditions -

1. Market Linkages - In first phase initially, the Trust was unsure of what it would do with the spun stuff. It got into action when lot of spun wool got piled up. Even after initiating weaving, it did not know what to do with woven goods. It was forced to look for potential buyers of the material and also got into proper marketing, which forced them to think about designs, kinds of material to be produced that could be sold in the market, etc. In other words, it had to find and create suitable markets for the kinds of material the artisans could produce. But with the time, it mobilized all its resources to tap the markets, offering reasonable margins. The professional manpower available to serve the Trust was capable to reach to the most sophisticated buyers and sell the goods produced in this remote part of the country. It developed linkages with some of the famous chains of outlets of these products, like Fabindia.

2. Exhibitions, fares and export - A large chunk of the goods produced was sold in the fares and exhibitions organized in big cities, like the one in Delhi called 'Delhi Haat'. Besides this, the foreign markets were also explored. The weavers themselves are visiting the markets abroad to sell and create demand for their goods. There

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is some success in this initial phase, although it is a costly and time-consuming process.

3. Diversification - Depending upon the needs of the time, the diversification in products was done. With the help of students and professionals from reputed institutions, like National Institute of Design, the Trust linked these institutions to the agencies and the people, who could support them in knowing about the latest designs, colour combinations and sizing patterns. Initially, these weavers used to make very traditional goods, like 'pattu' or blankets. Now they are producing a range of gents and ladies wears and home furnishing materials.

4. Brand Identity - The Trust helped these weavers to produce the goods with a brand identity as 'Desert Craft', which has an acceptance among elite consumers. The products of the institutions emerged out of this intervention have a distinct identity in terms of fabric, texture, shades, designs, etc.

C. Industry Conditions

Pre-intervention Status - Prior to the intervention, the craft of this desert, had no recognition in the national markets. It was not good enough to draw attention of raw material suppliers, buyers or even policy makers. Phalodi's traditional weavers were engaged only in making a couple of items, like blankets, pattus, etc. for consumption of local people. Similarly, the Pak immigrants of Bajju block somehow continued their craftwork to produce for a market unknown to them. In all, it didn't make any significant impact on the craft or handloom industry as such.

Influence of the Intervention on the Industry Conditions

Urmul Trust had single point agenda in the beginning, that of helping the poor of the area out of crisis due to drought. To take up spinning of wool as the income generation activity was just an ad-hoc strategy. It had no intention to influence the industry conditions, whatsoever. But through its intervention over a period of time, it made significant impact on industrial conditions:

1. Desert Craft and Handloom - With the time, reaching various markets, the craft of deserts started making its presence felt. Over the years, it has reached a stage, when the craft of this part of the country is recognized from distance and is appreciated in all sections of society, be it rich or intellectual. The demand of these

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products has increased in national as well as international markets, where it has started making the presence felt.

2. Cotton Products - The product of the region, under the initiative of UT with these local artisans has added significantly to the acceptability of cotton products as high value goods. These are considered to be naturally suitable to the human body, therefore, good for health. People are ready to pay higher prices for cotton products, particularly made on handlooms. In the era of machine, it has helped the handloom sector increase the resistance to this growing anti-livelihoods phenomenon.

3. Quality and Design upgradation - The intervention has helped the designs and quality reach another level of appreciation. While making the traditional designs and materials accepted in the consumers across classes, it has itself acquired lot of new things from the market in terms of designs and range. The vast range of the goods being produced at three important centers backed by Urmul Trust is the evidence of it, where it ranges from plain cloth to men & women wears and to home furnishings.

4. Related Industries - One can see the representatives of leading companies producing thread and dyes in any of these units of weavers. The promotion of natural dyes has also taken place here, which is being sought on demand from consumers. Then some important retail chains have been accepting their goods for niche markets. It is making a dent in the future prospects of the handloom and craft industry.

D. Institutional Conditions

Pre-Intervention Status - The institutional conditions for the handloom in the area was not good earlier. The weavers were the isolated units to face all kinds of difficulties related to the weaving and its trade. There were associations to support the traders, but there was no institution to protect the interests of the weavers. Even the government departments meant to support weavers were not practically reaching them. They were on the mercy of the circumstances, always being on receiving end. Right from the procurement of the raw material up to disposal of the products, it was all their individual effort.

Influence of the Intervention on the Institutional Conditions - Urmul Trust always gave an emphasis on development of the independent institutions of the people involved in the activities at all levels. It took a number of steps for strengthening

these institutions:

1. Independent Institutions - Initially, the Urmul Trust helped the artisans/target beneficiaries to organize into groups and encouraged collective functioning. With the growth of the groups in terms of maturity and quantum of work, it encouraged them to develop their own independent societies, having responsibilities of production, marketing, management, etc. with themselves. It provided them the required patronage and guided through the initial phase of risk and difficulties.

The idea to have weavers' institution, fully independent and responsible for its works was not there initially. It came up when the expert weavers, who had come to Lunkaransar from Phalodi to train the local people in weaving, decided to go back to their native place and do their own work. This might have been an outcome of some emotional outburst on the part of some of them, due to a sense of neglect developed in the process. But Trust took it in a positive and healthy spirit and not only allowed them to go back, but also encouraged them to form independent society, later named as 'Urmul Marusthali Burkar Vikas Samiti' (UMBVS) and provided material, financial, technical and managerial support to start their enterprise. It sent the experts for designing and management to help them set up their institution smoothly. It worked well.

In line with UMBVS, Phalodi, the weavers of Lunkaransar set up their own organization, 'Vasundhara'. The process of setting up of similar institution is currently going on in Bajju, where so far the activities have been centralized, partly because of the nature of the activities. Since most of the work here is related to value addition, the process of involvement of artisans has been of different nature. But it is now going to happen.

Important thing about these institutions is that the members, the craftspeople, live in distant villages, far from each other. They do not work or live in clusters, where organizing them around an association or society could be far easier.

2. Capacity Enhancement - Right from training of Lunkaransar people for weaving with the help of experts from Phalodi to the training on latest trends and colours, Urmul Trust helped all of them in getting equipped to face the challenge in modern and ever changing market conditions. It organized the exposure visits for them whenever and wherever it was necessary or there was an opportunity. It helped them develop their systems that were transparent and assuring. The trust among the members was developed because of capacity and attitude building of the

leadership. So, besides developing their organizations, it has worked on their capacity building also, so that they could independently handle all the important affairs.

3. Inter-Institutional Linkages - The linkages and credibility of Urmul Trust has been nicely translated into relationship among these independent institutions. These weavers' bodies have access to information and support from all the agencies and people, who have been in touch with the Trust. With the time, there has developed an independent relationship among these organizations also, which would be of great help to them in long run, even when the Trust formally stops supporting them.

IMPACTS OF THE INTERVENTION

The intervention was flexible and changing as per requirements. During last 20 years of its operations in the western Rajasthan, it has impacted lives and livelihoods of thousands of families reeling under the influence of the difficult living conditions, which are certainly of the most difficult in the country. The approach has been quite diversified, starting with health, then adding education and finally taking up income generation activities as its major activity along with health and education. It worked for long-term solutions through education and by working on health it intended to reduce their costs on health care, i.e. in response to large scale casualties and financial losses due to malaria epidemic they took up campaign to eradicate malaria. Simultaneously, it tried to strike the immediate issue of extreme poverty, through income generation activities. So, the Trust has adopted long-term, medium-term as well as short-term strategy to combat poverty.

The impacts of the livelihood promotion efforts through the income generation programme around craft can be listed down as under:

1. **Increase in Income:** Several hundred families of three belts, Phalodi, Lunkaransar and Bajju have benefited from the intervention on sustainable basis. Through craft alone, the enhancement in their income has been ranging between Rs. 3,000 to 20,000 per annum, depending upon their quantum of time put in. Even Rs. 3,000 is a considerable amount in the conditions these families live. Looking at the frequencies of the drought in the area, the income from craft is the real tool to rescue them. That is the most reliable source of income to have the life keep going.
2. **Social Equity:** Most of the craftspeople belong to so-called 'lower castes' of

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the caste hierarchy in this most caste-ridden society. Not only they have overcome the complex of being from lower castes themselves, but also teaching those feudal 'upper caste' minds some lessons by involving them generously in the development activities being conducted by their institutions along side the business. It has given the deserved sense of dignity to them. They seem to be having no complaints from the past and are trying to look forward to have a better future for all - together.

3. **Craftspeople's Independent Institutions:** The institutions created in the process are models for people to see, how the rural people with no or very less education can develop and manage their institutions. They now know how to take business decisions, settle the disputes arising out of difference of opinions. They have learnt to keep the pace with the time and to match the demand of even the most dynamic markets including foreign markets. Moreover it is helping them understand and address broader issues of development in organized manner, which could not have been otherwise possible in this society.

4. **Work Conditions:** The work they are doing not only brings them income, but also provides much better work conditions than any other activity that could be thought of in this desert with limited options. Staying at their own homes with families all the time to take care of their routine needs and working at will for themselves (own enterprise), really gives them sense of pride and satisfaction. They have much better conditions for health, not getting exposed to sun and dust storms like others in labour work have to.

Life is Different Now

Box-2
Ransar village is about 40 kms. from Phalodi in Jodhpur district in western Rajasthan and is a part of drought prone arid zone. Podha Ram and his five sons live happily here. All his children are married and live separately in pacha houses. He lives with one of them. Their faces are glowing with satisfaction they have with their lives. They really get excited about telling the difference, the creation of Urmul Manusihall Bunkar Vikas Samiti (UMBS), their own institution, has brought in their lives. Podha Ram recalls the difficult days he had just a few years back.

He has been a weaver all his life, making 'patus' and blankets and selling them in local markets and rural fairs. The sense of insecurity in terms of availability of raw material to continue weaving and the uncertain margins always haunted him. He could hardly manage enough to just feed the family. He was worried about the marriages of his sons and daughters. But now he is absolutely relaxed to see the good times coming in his own life, with all major social responsibilities fulfilled in a dignified way.

With UMBS getting formed with his sons as its members, the whole family has a massive change in their lives. When asked about the difference, one of the sons Moolia Ram tells almost in one breath, the following things-

1. The returns of the weaving work have almost doubled.
2. Raw material is regularly available, ensuring continuity in work & wages.
3. Assured payment and in time.
4. Ability to stay at home and work, making them available to the family all the time.
5. Better health conditions, protected from sun and exposures. Have to spend far less than usually people have to spend due to health problems.
6. Less hard work.
7. Neat and clean living and work environment, with pacha house and workshop.
8. Had enough savings to arrange for their own and sisters' marriages in a dignified manner.
9. No traps of loans like in past.
10. All children of school going age are in school.
11. Have 20 goats and two cows, giving additional income and nutritious food.

It was difficult to understand if Moolia Ram meant to say 'you support income enhancement, we will take care of health, education needs, ourselves' ? While Moolia Ram spoke, others nodded in agreement, --- vehemently.

The Livelihood School

5. **Identity to Desert Craft:** The craft, which was struggling for survival, not only got a lease of life, but also got an identity in the whole country. The products made by these people are recognized from distance by a big section of the society, which appreciate these goods. Now, the traditional rural craft of this area is being accepted abroad also. They have been able to get orders from several countries, like Australia, Spain, New Zealand, France, Dubai, etc.
6. **Knowledge Building:** The introduction of the new advanced techniques in dyeing, manufacturing, designing, etc. has given an altogether new height to this rural craft. It might be guided by the market needs, but the introduction of these practices would definitely take this art a long way forward. It has been adopted not only by the members of the institutions created here, but also by most others involved in this craft through out the western Rajasthan. With this increased ability to match the needs of the markets, some other agencies are also getting into organizing the others into groups and trying to help them. Certainly, there is space for many Urmul there. But they must make sure that the interests of the craftspeople are on the top of the agenda.
7. **Spin-offs of Livelihood Intervention on Craft:** Urmul Trust has provided a critical link between people and the Urmul Dairy, Bikaner. It has ensured the flow of benefits to the economically lower sections of the society. Besides this, while working with the poor having the skills around craft, Urmul Trust has been responsive to the needs of other deprived sections also and responded as and when required as per their capacities and availability of resources. There are several examples of its initiatives taken to help very poor people from other sections also. This is besides the health and education programmes.
8. **BEYOND INCOME GENERATION PROGRAM:** The impact of the income generation activities conducted in all these years by UT has been seen and appreciated by several people visiting its area and works. But another significant gain in terms of livelihood promotion has been on the front of education and health, which has touched a number of households, manifolds more in last 20 years. In a very low literacy area, UT has actually made education the felt need of life among the locals. Most importantly, issue of education of girl child has been addressed effectively. At any point of time, there could be seen educational camps for girls at one campus of UT or the other. The provision and promotion of education would certainly help the local people, particularly the next generation to find better livelihood avenues on the strength of this literacy, which their predecessors did not have and had to work as unskilled labour depending

upon mercy of the contractors. It would also add a new dimension in their lives for dynamism and progressiveness.

Similarly, the health program, hailed by one and all has given a new perspective to the people of the area, particularly women, who have been the focus of the health programs. T.B. has been a common disease of the whole arid region. Then, malaria has played havoc, reaching a dimension of epidemic in recent past. UT played significant role in bringing the issue to the notice of the policy makers and concerned departments, besides working themselves to see the people out of the traumatic epidemic. Such diseases have played a big role in affecting livelihoods of thousands of poor people here. The health interventions have effectively brought recommended practices into the life style of these people, because they trust the Trust.

Besides health and education, UT has responded on other fronts also as and when required and as and when got an opportunity. Be it dairy, agriculture, nutrition or something else. The important part of their intervention is that they create a deep impact on the livelihoods of the households, rather than just leaving it superficial.

Box-3 Beyond Crafts

A lush green farm of 50 bighas (about 35 acres) in this arid zone of Bajju, Bikaner in western Rajasthan within 40kms of border with Pakistan, in month of March, could surprise anybody. With desert all around, these fields, good enough to send shame to crops of Panjab and Haryana, create a real oasis. A beautiful big pacca house, a big garage with a new tractor in it and over a dozen cows around in the middle of the farm make it all the more attractive. This is Ganeshya Ram's farm, which is a well-respected person of the area.

But it was not the same a decade back. This piece of land was just the usual part of this globally known desert. The owner, Ganeshya Ram was a drug addict. His level of respect in the community was as good or bad as that of any other addict in the society. The main source of income for his family was digging the rootstock of the withered away trees and selling them in the market as fuel. He had the ownership of this land, but did not even know where it was exactly located. He never believed his life could take a happy U-turn ever.

Luckily, for him and 13 others like him, Urmul Trust took an initiative to help them. First of all, it organized a de-addiction camp in which many of the people including Ganeshya Ram were treated. It got their lands identified, got the legal ownership established with possession (Khabla). It also initiated an integrated land development programme for these families. Five Bighas (about 3.5 acres) of each one was leveled with the help of tractor. The water channels from Indira Gandhi Canal were got cleaned up and covered to ensure supply of water. Seeds and manure was made available at subsidized rates. The Trust team also provided technical support for next couple of years.

And the result is Mr. Ganeshya Ram, a well-respected person of the society now. With the help of the savings from earnings, he cured rest of his land himself and made the farm as big as it is now- 35 acres. It is not just about supporting one or 14 families struggle out of poverty, but much more than that. It is about setting the local economy at a new pace. There might be many more, getting work at their farms. There is valuable grain produced to add to the national kitty. The cash inflow in the poor community would have a manifold positive impact on whole of the local community. It is not about helping Ganeshya Ram, but the community of the area, which is so deserving. But deprived.

Could it happen without flexibility in the working and sensitivity in the attitudes of Urmul Trust people? Perhaps, not.