

Mahila Abhivruddhi Society (APMAS)

1. **Year of Establishment:** 2001

2. **Mission Statement:**

By 2030, APMAS, a cutting-edge resource organization, engaged in multi-stakeholder partnerships for systemic change; innovating and demonstrating sustainable livelihoods institutional models impacting one million households through:

- Co-creating and promoting quality standards and benchmarks
- Capacity and capabilities development
- Ecosystem services – Access to technology, finance, market, infrastructure
- Interface among women-led and diverse community institutions
- Integration of nutrition, health, education and WASH services
- Evidence based policy advocacy

3. **Key Achievements:**

Institutional Impact on SHGs and SHG Federations: Through capacity building interventions, APMAS significantly improved the functioning of SHG federations. Repayment rates of bank linkages increased, and the quality of groups improved. The federations showed improved governance, higher participation, and mobilization of funds from external sources. SHGs also benefited from APMAS interventions. There was an increase in SHGs following best practices, better repayment of loans, and improved bookkeeping. Many defunct SHGs were revived, and nearly 95% of target households were covered under SHGs.

Social Benefits for SHG women: Women in SHGs experienced significant social benefits. They gained sustainable assets, actively participated in community affairs, sent their children to school, and prevented child marriages and labor. Women became community leaders and developed social and technical skills.

Impact on farmers: APMAS' livelihood interventions resulted in tangible economic benefits for farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Telangana. Their income increased through improved agricultural practices, increased productivity, and the establishment of microenterprises and small businesses.

Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs): APMAS supported the development of FPOs, helping them become business organizations. FPOs received licenses, financial assistance, and credit linkages, and they engaged in value chain interventions.

Health and Nutrition Impact: APMAS contributed to improved health and sanitation facilities in households, leading to reduced health issues, increased quality of life, and access to health and sanitation loans for over 95% of households.

Quality Assessment and Rating Tools: APMAS developed and used rating and grading tools to assess over 500 SHG federations and cooperatives, leading to improved governance and portfolio quality.

Self-Regulation and Sustainability: APMAS played a crucial role in developing and upscaling a system of self-regulation for the SHG movement in India. This resulted in improved financial management, increased savings, and sustained growth of SHGs and federations.

Research and Policy Advocacy: APMAS conducted 84 research studies and produced 70 thematic publications, influencing policymakers and advocacy institutions. It also anchored the ENABLE Network and engaged in policy advocacy at the national level.

Self-Learning Modules: APMAS developed self-learning modules in multiple languages to enhance capacity building and improve transparency, governance, and management at all levels of SHGs, FPOs and federations.

Overall, APMAS's interventions have brought positive and transformative changes in the lives of stakeholders, empowering women, improving livelihoods, enhancing agricultural practices, and promoting sustainable development at the grassroots level.

4. Challenges Faced:

Over the journey of 22 years, APMAS had a successful yet challenging journey. As a national level capacity building organisation which started its journey with strengthening SHGs and SHG federations, we have seen these institutions develop into strong platforms for women empowerment. However, the government involvement in the promotion of these institutions made it challenging for the NGOs like APMAS to ensure their sustainability.

Even though APMAS is currently engaged in promotion of FPOs at a large scale, due to the delay in release of funds from the donor organisations, it is difficult to ensure smooth functioning and efficiency in our interventions. We try to have diversified sources of funding (international donors, corporates, government etc.) to minimize this risk and to limit the cash flow issues.

In the current external environment, particularly the legal framework, is rigid for the functioning of civil society.

Staff turnover is another major challenge when dealing with the community institutions. It is difficult to retain domain experts for which APMAS focuses on the capacity building of staff on a regular basis

5. Strategies for Success:

Our approach:

- Institution building
- Capacity Building
- Focus on the poor and the marginalized
- Research and advocacy
- Partnerships and collaborations

Community-led development is APMAS's key approach towards it work with the poor and the marginalized. The interventions across sectors are taken-up through community based institutions such as self-help groups, farmer producer organizations, village organizations etc. and development of community resource pool. This strategy ensures that the interventions are sustainable.

Moreover, APMAS always tries to stay relevant according to the development context and the needs of the community. Through rigorous capacity building, continuous handholding and mentoring, APMAS ensures the sustainability of the institutions.

6. Lessons Learned:

Over the 22 years of journey we have learned the importance of partnerships and collaborations in implementing development activities at ground level. It is very important to bring synergies among different players who are working towards the empowerment of marginalized communities in order to maximize the benefit.

We have also learned the importance of creating enabling policy & advocacy environment by facilitation GO-NGO collaborations towards which we have been a pioneer organisation. We also realized that adopting and integrated approach at every stage would ensure the desired outcomes.

7. Impact Assessment:

Most often we have third party assessments for our interventions and to measure the impact. It differs from project to project. In all the assessments we ensure that the qualitative impact is also measured (through interviews, group discussions, comparative analysis etc.) in addition to the quantitative impact.

8. The Ultimate Strong Point of Success:

APMAS has strong leadership and governing board which is the key to its success. Moreover, the ownership of the community is what make our work more sustainable.

9. Future Ready:

We aspire to reach one million households through our interventions. Our goals for the next seven years are:

- To emerge as a partner of choice for government, academic institutions, donors, corporates, NGOs, community based institutions and other key stakeholders through capacity building, incubation, mentoring and knowledge management.
- To promote self-reliant livelihoods institutions which demonstrate high quality standards, engaged in partnerships and linkages resulting in their member households becoming resilient to cope with risks and shocks.
- To support at least 1000 self-reliant and democratic institutions of SHG Federations, FPOs and FPO Federations in providing range of services resulting in tripling of income for their member households.
- Gender mainstreaming resulting in women's leadership and decision making at household and institutional level and asset creation for at least one lakh women.

- Member households of APMAS incubated community institutions access their rights and entitlements and utilize services of health, education, nutrition and WASH resulting in improved quality of life

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Rural Health Research and Development Trust (URMUL)

1. Year of Establishment - 1987

2. Mission Statement

Urmul Trust is a non-profit development organization based in Rajasthan, India. Our vision is to empower marginalized communities by providing access to basic services such as health care and education, and by improving livelihood opportunities. Their core values include community participation, advocacy, and the use of innovative models to address the needs of their target communities. The organization has a wide range of programs in areas such as health, education, and livelihoods, and has a strong focus on sustainable development. They also focus on working with marginalized communities, such as women and children, and have developed a range of programs specifically designed to meet their needs. Their long-term goal is to bring sustainable change to the region and to empower communities to take ownership and control of their own development.

3. Key Achievements

Urmul has the potential to achieve several key achievements and bring about significant positive changes in the lives of people, the constituency, and stakeholders the Thar Desert region:

Sustainable Livelihoods: By promoting the camel milk and wool value chains, the project created new income-generating opportunities for camel herders. This improved their economic condition and reduced their dependence on unpredictable sources of income, such as rain-fed agriculture.

Revival of Traditional Crafts: Strengthening traditional camel wool crafts and enabling enterprise-grade crafts manufacturing led to the revival of traditional artisanal skills. This preserved the cultural heritage of the region and provided a means of livelihood for the next generation of artisans.

Conservation of Ecosystem: Implementing sustainable pasture management practices and promoting responsible grazing of camels helped in conserving the fragile desert ecosystem. This contributed to biodiversity preservation and prevented desertification, benefiting the entire constituency and stakeholders who relied on the ecosystem for their livelihoods.

Empowerment of Women and Youth: The project's focus on promoting camel milk and wool value chains created opportunities for women and youth to actively participate in camel herding and product processing activities. This empowered women and youth, leading to increased gender equality and improved economic prospects for them in the region.

Economic Growth and Diversification: Strengthening the camel milk and wool value chains contributed to economic growth in the region. By tapping into these untapped markets, the project diversified the local economy and reduced dependency on traditional sources of income.

Improved Nutrition and Health: Promoting camel milk consumption had positive impacts on nutrition and health, particularly for pregnant women and pre-school children. Camel milk's nutritional benefits addressed malnutrition issues in the region.

Enhanced Resilience: By providing input support, training, and infrastructure development, the project enhanced the resilience of camel herders to cope with environmental challenges and market fluctuations. This increased resilience benefited the entire constituency by ensuring stable livelihoods even in difficult circumstances.

Empowering Education: The project recognized the importance of education and worked towards improving educational opportunities for children in the region. Smart classrooms were constructed in schools, equipped with modern technology to enhance the learning experience. By integrating digital tools into the educational process, children were provided with a more engaging and interactive learning environment.

Collaborating with Local Bodies: To ensure the sustainability of the project's initiatives, partnerships were formed with local bodies such as the SHG (Self-help Group Mahila Samiti) and PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions). These collaborations fostered community ownership and involvement in the project's activities, ensuring that the benefits reached the grassroots level.

Natural Resource Management: The project recognized the importance of preserving and restoring the natural resources in the region. Renovating talaabs (ponds) and making the area green through tree plantation drives and initiatives were undertaken. This contributed to water conservation, improved ecosystem health, and provided additional sources of income for the community through sustainable resource management.

Community Participation: The project actively engaged with the local community to ensure their active participation and ownership in all initiatives. By involving the community in decision-making processes and project implementation, the project fostered a sense of responsibility and pride among the local population.

Overall, the initiatives has brought about positive changes in camel herders' lives and their ecosystem. It created sustainable livelihoods through camel milk and wool value chains, empowering women and youth. The initiative also focused on environmental conservation, education, and community partnerships. The result was a holistic transformation, preserving cultural heritage and fostering a brighter and more resilient future for the region.

4. Challenges Faced:

Throughout the projects journey, we encountered and addressed various challenges:

- Limited awareness and participation from the local community.
Strategy: Conducted awareness campaigns, engaged local leaders, and organized workshops to foster community involvement.
- Environmental constraints such as water scarcity and limited grazing resources.
Strategy: Implemented sustainable practices, rainwater harvesting, and community-based grazing plans.
- Market access and integration of camel milk and wool value chains.
Strategy: Collaborated with cooperatives, facilitated market linkages, and provided training on product quality and packaging.
- Capacity building for camel herders and artisans.
Strategy: Conducted skill development workshops and mentoring programs with expert trainers.
- Ensuring financial sustainability.
Strategy: Encouraged self-help groups and cooperation with local bodies for ongoing support.
- Overcoming social and cultural barriers.
Strategy: Engaged in community dialogue and awareness programs to promote gender equality and challenge stereotypes.

By adopting strategic approaches tailored to the specific challenges of Western Rajasthan, collaborating with stakeholders, and empowering the community, we successfully navigated these obstacles. This resulted in positive and sustainable outcomes for camel herders and their ecosystem in the unique context of Western Rajasthan.

5. Strategies for Success:

Community-Centric Approach: Our organization firmly believes in a community-centric approach. We actively involve the local community, including camel herders, artisans, and other stakeholders, in the decision-making process. Their insights and knowledge shape the project's design and implementation, ensuring that interventions are relevant and impactful.

Holistic and Integrated Interventions: To address the multifaceted challenges faced by camel herders and their ecosystem, we adopted a holistic and integrated approach. Our interventions span across various domains, including livelihoods, environmental conservation, education, and community empowerment. This comprehensive strategy fosters synergies and maximizes the positive impact on the region.

Collaborative Partnerships: Building strong partnerships with local bodies, NGOs, development agencies, and experts has been instrumental in our success. These collaborations bring diverse expertise, resources, and networks to the project, strengthening its effectiveness and sustainability.

Capacity Building and Training: Empowering local stakeholders through capacity building and training has been a priority. We provide skill development workshops, technical training, and mentoring programs to enhance the capabilities of camel herders, artisans, and community members. This builds confidence and equips them with the tools needed to thrive in the changing landscape.

Innovative Solutions: We constantly seek innovative solutions to overcome challenges. From sustainable pasture management to leveraging digital technology for education, we embrace innovation to adapt to the region's unique conditions and needs.

Sustainability and Ownership: Ensuring the project's sustainability and ownership by the local community is a core principle. We encourage the formation of self-help groups and cooperatives to pool resources and take charge of their livelihoods. Additionally, we engage with local bodies and PRIs to secure ongoing support and investments from the community itself.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes are in place to track progress and assess the impact of our interventions. This data-driven approach enables us to make informed decisions and course corrections, ensuring the project's effectiveness.

Flexibility and Adaptability: The dynamic nature of the project context demands flexibility and adaptability. We stay open to learning from challenges and successes, and we continuously fine-tune our strategies to meet evolving needs.

Empathy and Respect: We approach our work with empathy and respect for the culture, traditions, and aspirations of the local community. Building trust and mutual respect with the beneficiaries fosters a sense of ownership and encourages active participation in the project.

6. Lessons Learned

Community Engagement is Key: Engaging the local community from the project's inception is crucial. By involving them in decision-making and planning, we ensure that interventions are relevant, accepted, and sustainable.

Adaptability is Vital: Flexibility and adaptability are essential traits in development work. The ability to respond to changing circumstances and incorporate feedback enables us to fine-tune our strategies and achieve better outcomes.

Empowerment Leads to Ownership: Empowering local stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. When communities take charge of their development, projects have a more profound and lasting impact.

Collaboration Enhances Impact: Building collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders brings diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources to the table. Together, we can achieve greater impact and sustainability.

Holistic Approaches are Effective: Addressing multiple challenges with holistic interventions brings synergies and maximizes positive outcomes. Focusing on livelihoods, environmental conservation, education, and empowerment together creates a more comprehensive impact.

Cultural Sensitivity Matters: Understanding and respecting the cultural nuances of the region is essential. Cultural sensitivity helps build trust, and projects can be tailored to align with the local way of life.

Data-Driven Decision Making: Monitoring and evaluation play a critical role in project success. Data-driven decision-making allows us to assess progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and make informed choices for course corrections.

Innovation Drives Progress: Embracing innovation opens new possibilities. By leveraging technology and seeking creative solutions, we can overcome challenges and improve the effectiveness of our interventions.

Long-Term Vision is Necessary: Sustainable development requires a long-term vision. Building lasting change takes time, and we need to be patient, committed, and persistent in our efforts.

Resilience in the Face of Challenges: Development work can be challenging, and setbacks are inevitable. Maintaining resilience and a positive outlook are crucial in navigating obstacles and staying committed to the mission.

Empowering Women Leads to Transformation: Empowering women has a cascading effect on families and communities. Investing in women's education, skills, and livelihood opportunities can bring about transformative change.

Community-Led Solutions are Effective: Communities often hold the best solutions to their problems. Listening to their voices and involving them in finding solutions results in more relevant and impactful outcomes.

These lessons have guided our organization's growth and enriched our approach to development work. They remind us of the importance of staying connected to the people we serve and continually learning and evolving to create sustainable and positive change in the communities we work with.

7. Impact Assessment

Indicators and Targets: We establish clear and measurable indicators to track progress towards specific project objectives. These indicators are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are set in consultation with the local community and stakeholders.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Our projects incorporate rigorous M&E systems. Regular data collection and analysis help us track progress, identify bottlenecks, and make timely adjustments to optimize outcomes.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection: We employ a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This includes surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observations to gather both numerical data and nuanced insights.

Comparative Studies: In some cases, we conduct comparative studies between project areas and control groups to assess the impact more comprehensively. This allows us to attribute changes to our interventions accurately.

Longitudinal Studies: For projects with long-term objectives, we conduct longitudinal studies over extended periods to understand the sustainability and long-term impact of our work.

Beneficiary Feedback: We actively seek feedback from project beneficiaries through periodic reviews and consultations. Their perspectives and suggestions provide valuable insights and help us refine our interventions.

External Evaluation: In some instances, we engage external evaluators or experts to conduct independent assessments of our projects. This brings objectivity and impartiality to the evaluation process.

Mid-Term and Final Evaluations: Regular mid-term evaluations allow us to assess progress and make mid-course corrections. Final evaluations provide a comprehensive assessment of the project's overall impact, achievements, and challenges.

Reporting and Transparency: We maintain transparent reporting practices, sharing the evaluation findings and outcomes with stakeholders, donors, and the community. Transparent communication fosters accountability and trust.

Learning and Adaptation: Impact assessment is not solely for measurement but also a learning opportunity. The insights gained from assessments help us adapt and improve our strategies for future projects.

By employing a rigorous impact assessment framework, we ensure that our organization's work is evidence-based, accountable, and continuously improved. The assessments guide us in refining our strategies, replicating successful models, and ultimately maximizing the positive impact on the lives of the communities we serve.

8. Ultimate strong point of success

The ultimate strong point of our success lies in our unwavering commitment to the people we serve. At the core of our organization's ethos is the belief that development is about empowering communities, not just implementing projects. This commitment to community-driven development has been the driving force behind our success.

Community Empowerment: We prioritize the needs, aspirations, and voices of the local community in all our initiatives. By actively involving them in the decision-making process, we ensure that our interventions are relevant, sustainable, and embraced by the people themselves.

Holistic Approach: Our holistic approach tackles challenges from multiple angles. Instead of addressing issues in isolation, we recognize that they are interconnected. By integrating livelihoods, education, health, and environmental conservation, we foster comprehensive and sustainable development.

Collaborative Partnerships: Building strong partnerships with various stakeholders, including local bodies, NGOs, experts, and donors, has been pivotal in our success. These collaborations bring diverse expertise, resources, and networks, strengthening the impact of our projects.

Innovation and Adaptability: We embrace innovation and adaptability to respond to the evolving needs of the communities and the changing landscape of development work. This willingness to learn, improve, and adopt new approaches has kept us relevant and effective.

Data-Driven Decision Making: Our commitment to data-driven decision-making ensures that our interventions are evidence-based and outcomes-focused. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation enable us to assess progress and optimize our strategies.

Empowering Women and Youth: Recognizing the crucial roles women and youth play in development, we prioritize their empowerment. By investing in their education, skills, and livelihood opportunities, we unlock transformative potential in the communities.

Sustainability and Ownership: We believe that true success lies in empowering communities to sustain the positive changes beyond the project's tenure. Encouraging self-help groups, fostering local ownership, and building capacity all contribute to long-term sustainability.

Resilience and Patience: Development work is not without challenges and setbacks. Our resilience and patience in overcoming obstacles have kept us focused on the long-term impact and inspired us to persevere.

Transparency and Accountability: We maintain transparency in our operations, financial management, and reporting. Accountability to our donors, partners, and the communities we serve is a core value.

Ethical Practices: Our strong commitment to ethical practices and adherence to high standards of professionalism have earned us the trust of our stakeholders.

By staying true to these principles and consistently putting people at the center of our work, we have been able to make a meaningful and sustainable difference in the lives of the communities we serve. This ultimate strong point has guided us on our journey towards positive social change and will continue to propel us towards greater impact in the future.

9. Future Ready

As an organization committed to sustainable and impactful development, our future goals and aspirations revolve around building on our successes, expanding our reach, and fostering positive change in more communities. Our vision for the future is centered on the following key areas:

Scaling Impact: We aim to scale up our successful interventions to reach more communities and regions in need. By replicating successful models and adapting them to different contexts, we strive to extend our impact to a larger population.

Empowering Women and Youth: Our focus on empowering women and youth will remain a priority. We envision creating more opportunities for education, skill development, and livelihoods, enabling them to become agents of change and leaders in their communities.

Climate Resilience: Given the growing challenges of climate change, we are committed to building climate resilience in the communities we work with. Our initiatives will emphasize sustainable resource management, water conservation, and climate-smart agriculture.

Innovation and Technology: Embracing innovation and technology will be central to our future-ready approach. We will leverage digital solutions to enhance education, health services, and livelihood opportunities, ensuring that our interventions remain relevant and efficient.

Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods: Our goal is to further diversify and strengthen sustainable livelihood opportunities for marginalized communities. This includes expanding Agri-dairy value chains, promoting camel milk and wool value addition, and fostering entrepreneurship.

Environmental Conservation: Environmental conservation will continue to be a core focus. We envision more tree plantation drives, rainwater harvesting initiatives, and efforts to restore and protect local ecosystems.

Education for All: Our aspiration is to ensure access to quality education for all children, especially in remote and underserved areas. We aim to establish more smart classrooms and digital learning centers, bridging the education divide.

Community Resilience: We will work towards building strong and resilient communities, equipped with the knowledge and tools to address challenges and seize opportunities effectively.

Policy Advocacy: Our organization aims to actively engage in policy advocacy at local, regional, and national levels. By advocating for inclusive and sustainable development policies, we seek to create an enabling environment for positive change.

Partnerships and Collaborations: We will continue to foster partnerships and collaborations with like-minded organizations, government agencies, and donors. By combining our efforts and resources, we can amplify our impact and achieve shared goals.

Data-Driven Impact: Data-driven decision-making will remain integral to our approach. We will invest in robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track our progress, learn from outcomes, and continuously improve our interventions.

By striving towards these future goals and aspirations, we envision a future where marginalized communities have increased access to opportunities, improved livelihoods, and the resilience to overcome challenges. Our organization is dedicated to being future-ready, adapting to evolving needs, and working tirelessly towards a more equitable and sustainable world.

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