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Day Labourer to an Entrepreneur: A Success Story

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The arid region of the Western Rajasthan is about 20.87 mha which is one of the most densely populated deserts of the world. The North-Western part of the Rajasthan is popularly known as Thar Desert which constitutes 61% of the total hot arid regions of the country. It spreads over about 12 districts of total 33 districts of Rajasthan. The climate and vegetation scenario of the zone is very fragile, extremes of temperature (-5 to 50° C), very low precipitation (<100 mm), scarcity of water, frequent drought, land deterioration, low organic matter content, presence of soluble salt in the soil and water; and advancement of the desert resulted into very low productivity of agricultural crops.

Agriculture is the major sector of growth of the Indian economy. A large percent of the population is still dependent on agriculture for its nourishment. The poor availability of natural resources badly affects the livelihood of the people of Western Rajasthan. The livestock supports more than 70% livelihood, but has currently remained unproductive for various reasons. The depleted natural resources, land degradation accompanied by acute shortage of water, perpetual drought and famine like situation led to livelihood insecure and poverty that forces the people to migrate into other areas for survival.

Shri Uka Ram, age 45 years resides in a small *dhani* of Punaron ki Basti village, Undkha garm panchayat of Barmer district in Rajasthan. Owing 3 ha of dry land which he could cultivate only during *kharif* season and producing hardly sufficient income to meet expenses of 11 persons in his family. Seeming non-profitable job of farming, he migrated to mining factory in neighboring state Gujarat to earn some money for his family livelihood.

After few months having earned some money from the mining factory, he came back to his village on the occasion of Holi festival. One day, he came across with BAIF officials in meeting held at his village. Through discussion with him, the BAIF officials identified his technical skills and selected him for participation in the exposure visit to CAZRI, AFRI and forest department at Jodhpur. During the visits he learned that sandy soil of arid zone can also be profitable if it is used according to its capability. He decided to do one of several options – fruit tree plantation, arid plant nursery, dryland fodder trees, or mixed agroforestry. BAIF provided him Rs. 30000 under a project funded by Jamsetji TATA Trust. His interest

encouraged him to dug-out an open well to develop a water resource with the support of BAIF (NGO). With a strong desire for learning the latest propagation techniques in fruit and forestry plants, he attended one training programme on improved nursery technologies (grafting) of horticultural plants conducted at KVK, Danta, Barmer.

He was very fascinated to do innovative activity and challenge in his life, looking his keen interest and dedication, the BAIF has given him a wadi (farm) of 5 tree species viz., malta, caronda, khejdi, papaya, and bel besides other well suited species like ber, lasoda, pomegranate and date palm. He began his task from a small orchard of these species with hard work caring plants like his children. It seems impossible task to think about an orchard in such a harsh condition but his restless work and full dedication made it true. BAIF staff continuously encouraged and built confidence in him to start a nursery enterprise. Moreover, he got her family support; they helped for care the nursery plants. With all these encouragement he developed his own nursery. First nursery of papaya plants was failed due to hot storm, but he did not lose his confidence because BAIF supported him with material and labour to rebuild his nursery on free of cost. He prepared a nursery of around five thousand fruit plants such as ber and Gunda/lasoda. After successful germination and growth of plants, he sold @ Rs.15 per plant. BAIF purchased four thousand plants of approximately of Rs.60, 000/- from his nursery to supply other beneficiaries of the nearby villages. He sold out one thousand plants of worth Rs. 15,000 to other farmers.

Now days, his business is growing due to demand of saplings by other farmers. His earning changed his life drastically from a daily labourer to a reputed entrepreneur. Presently he also owns total 11 animals including cow, oxen and goats which shows it a symbol of prosperity due to change in his status from past mere labourer to present reputed man. He also purchased a diesel engine pump set for irrigation. It is due to his hard work, interest and dedication, and support from organizations like BAIF, he has converted his desert land into a green nursery park. He says about his success “I never thought I would cultivate my whole land, BAIF made me believe that I can do it”.



A view of Uka Ram's nursery