

Policy Advocacy and Campaigns for Responsive Governance:

YRA believes in encouraging people to participate in policy discussions and negotiate with the government on one hand, while on the other we engage with government at all levels to demand better accountability and good governance practices.

To pro-actively advocate for such changes, we are a committed part of various CSO led campaigns and forums such as We Can (gender equity), Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (on government accountability towards MDGs), Vidarbha Livelihood Forum, Vikas Sahayog Pratisthan, Kisan Mitra etc.

To include the youth in governance and making them responsible citizens of the country, we have started the Anubhav Siksha Kendra (ASK) with various other partners in the whole of Maharashtra. We work with them on livelihood and other income generating options, career guidance and sexuality. The youth are also encouraged to participate in local governance and represent their state at various policy discussions and forums



Key Achievements:

1. Established a farmers' Producer Company in 2010. Now the company has share capital of Rs. 10 lakh with 450 share holders and a turnover of Rs. 50 lakhs
2. Through this company, Tur and Chana worth Rs. 11.5 crores were procured from 1693 farmers through SFAC which helped them to get a premium of Rs. 84.65 lakhs approximately
3. Around 10,000 cases of violence against women were handled through our counseling centers
4. 125,000 Change Makers were promoted under the state wide campaign on We Can End Violence Against Women
5. 23 Community Forest Rights (CFR) have been sanctioned under the Forest Rights Act
6. All villages in Wardha Taluka have prepared their Village Development Plans under UNICEF's project
7. 200 Participatory Guarantee System groups of 1000 farmers each have been formed to promote and certify organic farming
8. In Ramtek Taluka, 10 diversion based irrigation sites have been developed to provide irrigation facility for rabbi crops for 154 farmers for the first time covering 300 acres. Yield per farmer has increased by 50% in the last two years
9. YRA represented Wada Na Todo Abhiyan in the sixth session of Open Working Group of UN on Beyond 2015 Agenda
10. A statewide campaign on People's Manifesto was facilitated before Lok Sabha elections to voice marginalised people's aspirations



The Vidarbha Situation:

Vidarbha, consisting of 11 districts, is considered one of the most industrially and agriculturally backward regions of Maharashtra. The Human Development Report (HDR 2010) shows Vidarbha as one of the regions with the lowest HDI (Human Development Index), which is 15% lower than the state average. If Nagpur were to be excluded, the difference would be significantly higher. Largely comprising of tribal population, the main source of livelihood for 65% of rural Vidarbha is rain-fed agriculture and allied activities. However, due to low annual rainfall, lack of any major river systems and irrigation facilities coupled with a hard terrain that leads to high water runoff, agriculture here is less productive than in other regions.

Successive crop failure, especially cotton which is sensitive to change in climate, results in low annual income, seasonal migration and indebtedness. Continuous degradation of natural resources further impacts livelihood of communities dependent of them while limited industrialisation has meant a lack of jobs for the youth and others. Though these severe socio-economic conditions affect most communities, the tribals, small / marginal farmers, landless labourers, dalits and women, who are more marginalised than others, bear its impact on their lives more.



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YUVA Rural Association



About YRA:

Yuva Rural Association, an entity of YUVA (Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action), Mumbai was formed in 2002 to address the developmental issues of the marginalised including dalits, adivasis and women, youth, children, small farmers and landless labourers in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. With more than a decade of work in the region, YRA is known as a vibrant, transparent, accountable and value based organisation creating new alternatives in the sector.

YRA has been working with various like-minded grassroot organisations in 1800 villages in all the 11 districts of Vidarbha on issues of livelihood, gender and governance. Through its advocacy networks and platforms, YRA has been instrumental in promoting and leading different campaigns in Maharashtra and at the national level too.

Core Purpose:

“To empower the distressed communities towards their inclusion in development”

Our key area of work is focused under four broad themes:

- **Livelihood Promotion for Poverty Alleviation**
- **Gender and Social Equity and Inclusion**
- **Natural Resource Management for Sustainable Development**
- **Policy Advocacy and Campaigns for Responsive Governance**

We work on the above themes with a dual approach: working directly with the communities to bring about change, and advocating for better implementation of government programmes and policy changes at the state and national level. Our key strategy is to build and strengthen People's Organisations (PO) and People's Institutions (PI) which can work collectively on various issues faced by the communities.

Through various methods and processes, we help generate awareness, create perspective and build capacity of the communities which helps in changing the attitude of the people. By training volunteers and prospective leaders, we help in identifying need and rights based issues such as education, health, employment etc. in all villages and build the POs / PIs around these. Through our well trained cadre of women, youth, farmers and volunteer leaders, we empower the PIs to strengthen their presence in the market from the village to the district level and the POs to negotiate with the state at the policy level.

To increase the pace of good governance, we are an active part of various state and national level forums and networks of Civil Society Organisations, state/ national level campaigns and researches.

THEMES AND STRATEGY

▣ Livelihood Promotion for Poverty Alleviation:

Vidarbha region has a high rural population comprising largely of small holder farmers dependent on rainfall for their annual yield and income. YRA works with these farmers, adivasis, women and youth groups to strengthen their livelihood by providing them with various income generating options based on land, water, livestock, forest and non-farm and also helping them access various government schemes.

Our initiative on organic farming through the use of local seeds promotes sustainable agriculture. Over 200 Participatory Guarantee Scheme Groups with 1000 farmer members have been formed who share organic farming practices and monitor each others' methods before applying for organic certification. Developing kitchen gardens and goat rearing units for women farmers, conservation of local seeds, promotion of biogas, creating market linkages, building capacity and developing employable skills of young men and women etc. helps in improving the food security of these people. Through Mahila Vikas Parishad (a PO promoted and facilitated for a decade by YRA), more than 500 Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Joint Liability Groups (JLG) have been formed which allows them to access bank loans for undertaking small enterprises and other related purchases. To help farmers get better price, a farmers' Producer Company has been established having 450 shareholders which procures and sell commodities at a higher rate than middlemen.

YRA works with the adivasi communities to ensure their legal rights as per the Forest Rights Act (2006) over the control and use of non-timber forest produces and other natural resources on which they are traditionally dependent for their livelihood.

▣ Natural Resource Management for Sustainable Development:

Changing climate and environmental degradation has the most impact on the small holder farmers, adivasis and other marginalised groups as it affects their survival and livelihood directly. Through our programme on natural resource management, we work towards conservation of soil, water and forests and create methods to enhance livelihood in the process.

YRA promotes the PHAD irrigation system which depends on the natural contours of the land and uses gravity to channel run-off water during rainfall to distant fields. This system of irrigation not only increases soil moisture but also helps in reducing soil erosion and improving water storage. Agriculture productivity therefore increases in dryland farming enabling the farmers to farm for two seasons and also increase the yield per season.

Through the formation of Biodiversity Management Committees, YRA assists in the implementation of the Biodiversity Act (2002) which helps in mapping the local flora and fauna in order to conserve them and allow for a sustainable usage of its biological resources.



▣ Gender and Social Equity and Inclusion:

To address the issue of gender inequity and social discrimination, we have created a two-fold approach: reduce incidences of violence against women through legal aid and counseling, and provide women with avenues for socio-economic and political empowerment under the umbrella of Mahila Vikas Parishad.

For victims of violence, counseling centres have been opened in collaboration with police stations to provide individual counseling and settle cases of dispute. Legal awareness is provided in villages and urban slums through barefeet counselors or women volunteers trained in handling such cases. Awareness campaigns are held to educate the Police, Patils, Aanganwadi workers, WCD department officials, village leaders etc. on legal rights of women and various provisions under the Domestic Violence Act. Women are also trained to become para-legals who are experts in laws related to women and livelihood.

To reduce all types of discrimination, an umbrella structure has been created from the village to the district level called the Mahila Vikas Parishad. Each MVP is a federation of women who come together to address various rights based issues which affects them. These groups work on health & sanitation, literacy, alcoholism, child rights, Self help Groups, skill building for entrepreneurship, co-operatives with market linkages, land and property rights, bank accounts, ration cards, budget handling and training of women for taking on leadership roles at the local governance level.

Currently, there are 40,000 MVP members from 1500 villages, 31 blocks and five districts of Vidarbha working together to achieve their goals.

