

Happy returns: embellishing a new future for Pakistani women artisans

by Amneh Shaikh-Farooqui, Entrepreneurship & Community Development Institute

Abstract

Supporting the development of artisanal and traditional crafts presents a unique opportunity for livelihoods generation and for changing perceptions about the capacities of some of the most marginalized segments of the Pakistani population, in particular the poorest youth and women. Pakistani women are disadvantaged vis-à-vis their relationships to men, their households and communities. They face significant barriers and constraints, which impact their ability to benefit from economic activity. Rural women are further marginalized by limited mobility, feudal and tribal customs and difficult living conditions. Embracing these communities' handicraft practices provides an opportunity to portray their experience and voices and create cohesion and value for people facing barriers in joining the formal workforce. This presentation explores the potential offered by participation in handicraft production processes as a means of empowerment, inclusiveness and facilitating craft preservation. It does so by drawing on years of in-field experience to create an extensive case study that supports current understanding of the issues as well as extends experience on what is previously known. Globally, exports of handicrafts grew by over 100% between 2002 and 2010 alone – to a whopping USD 29.8 billion . Pakistani craft has all the elements required for a strong global brand with a unique competitive advantage including heritage, scarcity, artistry, empowerment and craftsmanship. This presentation details why despite this demand, rural female producers are unable to benefit from international commerce as converting the skills of traditional artisans into modern products that can compete in the mainstream marketplace requires significant investment, patience and expertise. It shares ECDI's work with over 30, 000 women producers across Pakistan to address this gap by creating safe, culturally appropriate spaces for artisans and producers to become self-reliant. By modernizing products and skill-sets and creating an efficient production or value chain as well as training small producers, ECDI utilizes market mechanisms to integrate disenfranchised producers into sustainable industries and connects them with mainstream markets such that craft skill-sets become a reliable source of income for poor rural and peri-urban producers. A key element of this work involves training to foster business and design skills to enable artisans to run productive enterprises and learn critical information on markets and buyers to create the right products for national, international and online markets at a fair price. A related facet is the fact that while colours, patterns and other techniques represent skills that have been passed through generations, ECDI has needed to focus on product innovation to support the survival of traditional techniques. The presentation identifies the role of rapidly changing consumer tastes and a more discerning consumer preference which necessitates continuous design intervention and product innovation. It highlights entrepreneurship as a key driver for women's empowerment, particularly with respect to leadership abilities and confidence. Leadership development is essential for local institutionalization of greater access to and control over assets and productive inputs for women, thereby boosting productivity and increasing employment opportunities.

'Evidence that gender equality, particularly in education and employment, contributes to economic growth is far more consistent and robust than the relationship that economic growth contributes to gender equality in terms of health, well-being and rights.' Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics and Political Scienceⁱ

Background and country context

Pakistan is a country with a rich history and diverse cultures which has been adversely impacted by an unstable and weak political and economic environment, and by natural disasters (droughts, floods, cyclones and earthquakes) that occur every few years. While the country has experienced relative macroeconomic and political stability in recent decades, this has often been derailed by Pakistan's central role in the global 'war on terrorism'. Challenges such as rising inflation and unemployment, the food and energy crisis etc. have led to significant multi-dimensional deprivation, accompanied by increasing crime and unemployment. Pakistan ranks 147th out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index, and 121st out of 155 countries on the Gender Inequality Indexⁱⁱ. The country's total urban population is estimated at 39%, over 46% of whom live in slum or squat settingsⁱⁱⁱ, and face high income inequality. Lack of attention to social services and safety nets has further compounded the problems of the poor, and severely challenged the capacity of the government to cater for even the basic needs of a fast-growing population (e.g. requisite health and education facilities), as well as to work towards promoting income generation schemes to alleviate the plight of the poor.

It is estimated that nearly one third of the country – an estimated population of 193.2 million people^{iv} - lives under the national poverty line. Women in Pakistan are significantly poorer than men, with little or no control over household income, insignificant access to credit, and very limited asset ownership. Statistics cite that women in Pakistan comprise 22%^v of the economically active population, however this is a gross understatement of their contribution and ignores the value of much of the labour that they perform. The majority of women in rural Pakistan are marginalized by poverty, home confinement and geographic isolation. They are largely unpaid for their work in agriculture, non-farm activities, household duties, and cottage or craft industry production. As the International Labour Organisation Global Wage Report 2014/15 highlights, Pakistani women – even when engaged in paid employment – earn 38.5% less than men, and are isolated from national development by illiteracy (46% of women are illiterate^{vi}), and oppressive socio-cultural norms.



Image 1: Craftswomen in Sajawal, interior Sindh, discuss new product development options post-training

Women are disadvantaged vis-à-vis their relationships to men, their households and communities. They face significant barriers and constraints which impact their participation in and ability to benefit from economic activity. Even within large and modern urban centres, mobility remains an issue. Women face a variety of problems – from social exclusion to traditional belief systems and practices – and most only associate with the world outside of their families through the male members of their households. Many women producers and artisans in Pakistan acquire input supplies and sell their products through male relatives, sometimes receiving little or none of the proceeds from sales. Most women cannot access appropriate credit products without the support of their male relatives.



Image 2: Women producers and their children during a community meeting

Poor women in Pakistan are responsible for the home, the children and all associated chores. In rural settings, they also form the primary source of unpaid agricultural labour on family-owned small farms or in landowners' fields^{vii}. Added to this, women frequently supplement family earnings through piecework for commission. Typically, rural women embroider small scraps of cloth, have little knowledge of how markets work, and are taken advantage of by local middlemen: women can earn less than USD 1 for embroidering an outfit that can take them several days or even weeks to produce^{viii}, and it is not uncommon to find them paying more for embroidery thread than they receive for their finished product. Urban women can face greater food and income insecurity than their rural counterparts, and are also exposed to greater socio-economic imbalances. Many rural migrants to urban slums are displaced and ignorant about means of earning adequate incomes in their new settings. However, many already possess skills to enable them to play different roles in a range of industries.

As Lubna Chaudhry of Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) notes in her study of poverty in Pakistan, 'multiple axes of belonging and identification interface with constructions of womanhood and gender relations in a site to create specific realities and experiences for the female population...provincial and regional differences among women because of different histories and geographies...have meant differential access to resources, facilities and livelihood opportunities.' Among communities and within neighbouring households, women's circumstances vary greatly, affecting their ability to engage in productive activities, as enterprise owners, employees, producers and even consumers. For example, in some parts of Pakistan, women are confined to the home by long-established customs of 'purdah' – a practice of secluding, segregating and veiling women. However, in nearby geographies, women may be able to move more freely, enjoying rights to education and public spaces. Women's labour across the country remains undervalued. This applies to both

non-remunerative and domestic or reproductive labour, as well as to work that might bring in hard cash. The contribution of women is unacknowledged because of socio-cultural constructions about many of these tasks being inextricably bound up with what it entails to be a woman. Women's income-generating efforts therefore are viewed on a highly diverse spectrum – from an unavoidable obligation, compulsion for survival, to a fanciful extravagance. This lack of recognition of women's hard work is reflected in the exploitation and undervaluation of women's labour by society at large, and in poor policy development around the issue.

Situating ECDI's work in the crafts sector

The artisan sector is one of the most promising of the Pakistani economy in terms of growth and social and economic empowerment. This is especially true for women, and for changing perceptions around the world about their abilities and capacities. Like many other developing economies in Asia, crafts form the second largest employment sector in Pakistan, following agriculture. It is estimated that 15% of all employees nationally are accounted for in the crafts and related services sector. In the informal sector, crafts and related trades provide 31% of jobs, of which it is estimated that 54% are filled by women^{ix}. While mostly decentralized, disorganized and undocumented, craft industries such as woodwork, clay pottery, handloom, hand-embroidery etc. have been traditional secondary employment activities for generations of Pakistanis.



Image 3: Traditional appliqué or 'tukri' work being undertaken by craftswomen in upper Sindh

Until recently, crafts as a sector that was not taken seriously in Pakistan, considered dated and viewed as unworthy of investment. Today, fashion and home brands, as well as individual consumers, seek to source products from unusual places and to offer special, handmade or artisanal collections. Meanwhile, development organisations and social enterprises around the world work to revive and preserve ancient crafts and production techniques. There is an expanding global market for socially responsible, high-end products of the kind that Pakistan’s creative and craft industries can produce. Globally, the exports of handicrafts grew by over 100% between 2002 and 2010 alone – to USD 29.8 billion^x per year. Over 65% of this trade comes from developing countries. However, despite its rich cultural heritage and substantial artisan base, Pakistan's art and craft exports make up only 0.8% of the current global handicrafts market share^{xi}.

Pakistani craft has all the elements required for a strong international brand with a unique competitive advantage, including: heritage, scarcity, artistry, empowerment and craftsmanship. However, despite this demand, rural female producers are unable to benefit from growing national, regional and international commerce. This is due to the challenges in converting the skills of traditional artisans, particularly those sidelined from the mainstream, into modern products that can compete in the contemporary marketplace. The Entrepreneurship and Community Development Institute’s (ECDI) work with over 30, 000 women producers across Pakistan to address this gap has pivoted on the ability to create safe, culturally appropriate spaces in which artisans and producers can become self-reliant.

Research has shown that women’s active participation in the economy is one of the most important determinants of overall economic growth and a key facilitator of their own economic empowerment. In Pakistan, this requires concerted and deliberate effort that goes beyond establishing microenterprises, facilitating skills development or providing employment opportunities. Access to business and skills training, market exposure, technology transfer, availability of credit, awareness of rights, knowledge of pricing, and negotiation skills are a few of the many challenges faced by women across the country^{xii}.

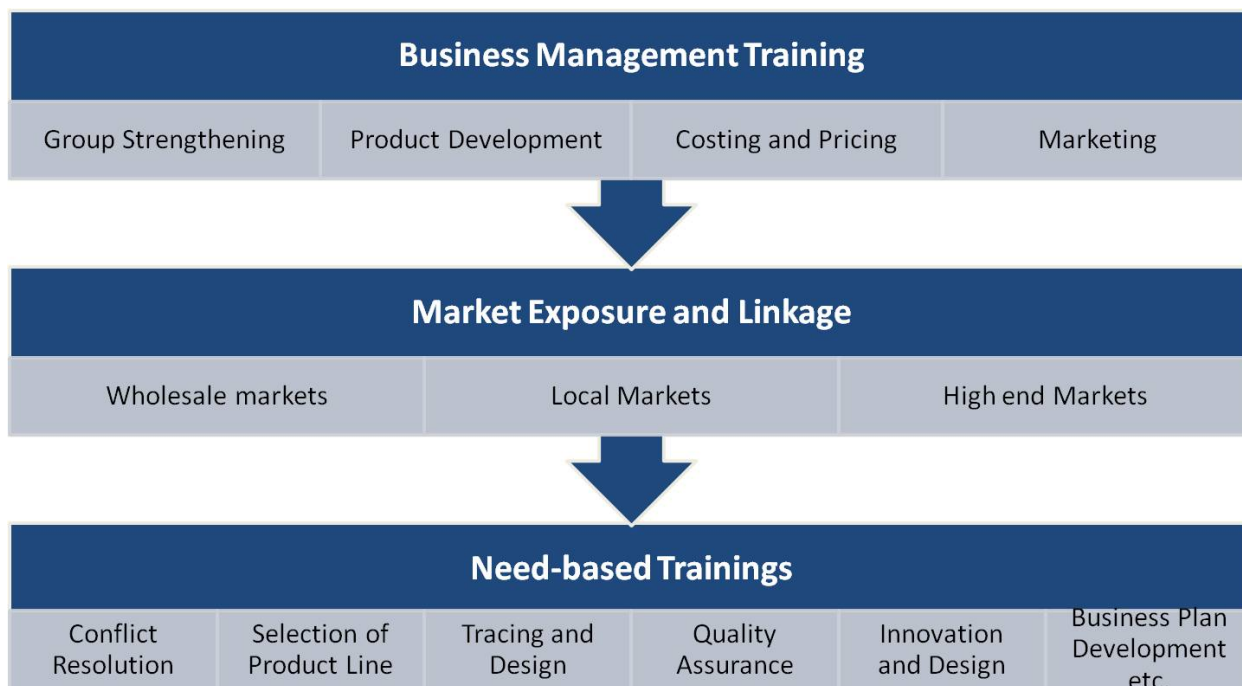


Figure 1: Components of a typical capacity development programme for women artisans, producers and sales agents

Once these barriers have been overcome, women not only earn increased incomes but they are able to assume a more active role in decision-making for their families and their communities. This is solidly in line with the mission of the ECDI, which has worked to raise disadvantaged micro-entrepreneurs and artisans in Pakistan out of poverty since inception in 1990. It does this through the creation of economically and socially sustainable and scalable market structures, promoting gender equality and improving livelihoods for local artisan communities – particularly for exceedingly skilled but homebound women.



Image 4: An accomplished woman artisan creates a cushion for a high-end fashion brand using traditional marori and tilla stitches

The quality of craftsmanship on goods produced by rural and peri-urban women artisans is often outstanding, but products are generally sold into low-value markets through monopolistic buying channels at rates that do not reflect the level of effort and expertise required for production. Since buyers are usually men, transactions take place through a male family member and sequestered women do not have the knowledge or opportunity to develop specific products for alternative markets. These men do not necessarily understand the intricacies of the products that are sought or sold, nor the appropriate prices to be paid or demanded. Women artisans are also unable to access training in production, quality control and basic business management which they require to manage their work.



Image 5: A typical village in Sindh, just outside Thatta, where ECDI works with women artisans

Interventions that succeed do so by also paying overt attention to gender-responsive design and context-sensitive programming in order to deliver economic results. ECDI modernizes products and skill-sets, creating efficient production or value chains as well as training small producers on a range of soft and business skills. By doing this, ECDI utilizes market mechanisms to integrate disenfranchised producers into sustainable industries and connects them with mainstream markets so that craft skill-sets become a reliable source of income. In order to maximize this opportunity, culturally acceptable linkages to quality input supplies and support services, including finance, are also facilitated. ECDI's strategic interventions have long recognized that while pro-poor market-based programming that increases incomes is important, approaches must also take into account women's limited mobility in the public space and gender stereotypes in order to have scalable impact. Practically, this means development of implementation strategies that not only remodel specific value chains and enterprises and incorporate gender concerns in market assessment and research, but that also aim to improve the overall conditions in the sector.

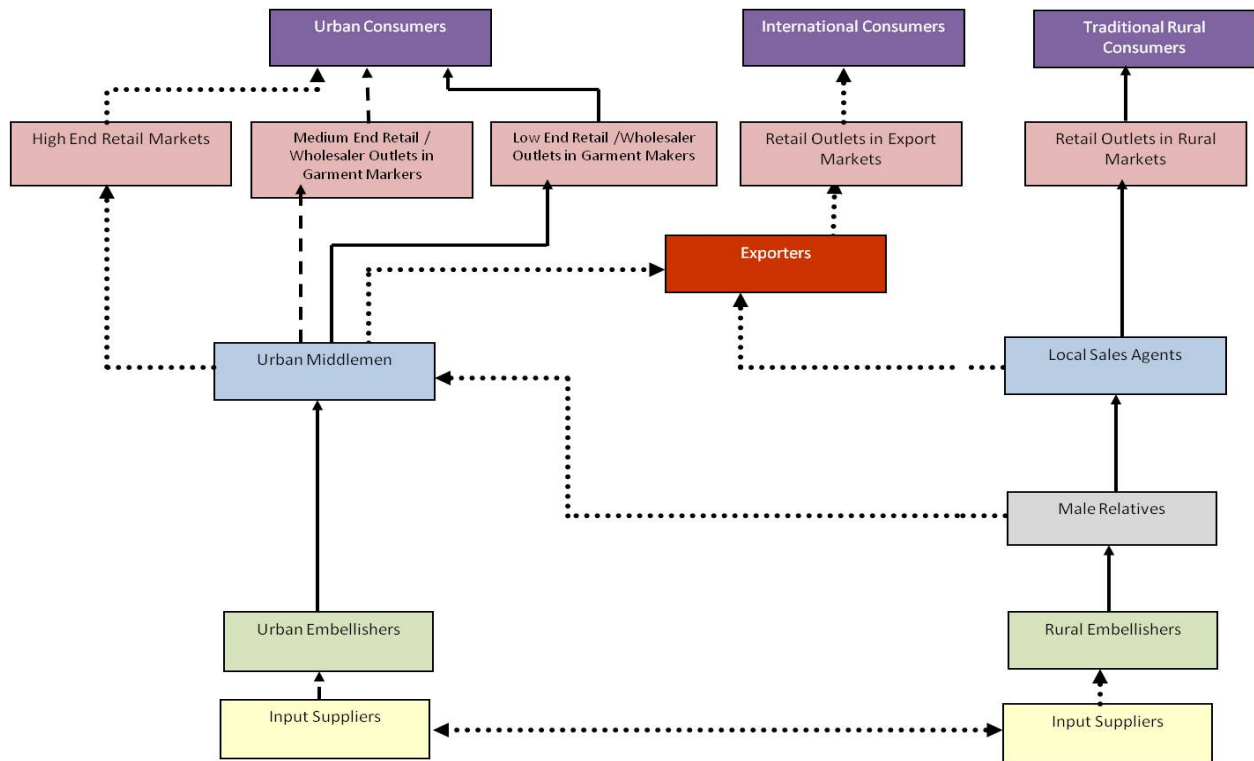


Figure 2: A value chain diagram of the hand-embellished fabrics sector

A related facet is the fact that while colours, patterns and other techniques represent skills that have been passed through generations, ECDI has needed to accord strong focus on product innovation to support the survival of traditional techniques through continuous design intervention and product innovation. Indeed, one of the major impetuses for sustainable development is reviving age-old craft traditions and enabling communities to rediscover their cultural talents and indigenous resources in new forms and ways. The learning process in traditional craft practice is usually handed down through generations, through loose and eclectic apprenticeship or mentee models, and implemented by copying existing masterpieces and mimicking traditional practices. As a result of this introducing design thinking can be challenging, but still remains the most efficient method to encourage ownership and creativity, and to empower local artisans. By promoting new ideas, innovating and finessing traditional arts, as well as incorporating fresh design components into time-honoured artisan craft, ECDI is able to support the creation of products that can be absorbed by mid to high-end markets, both in Pakistan and the rest of the region.

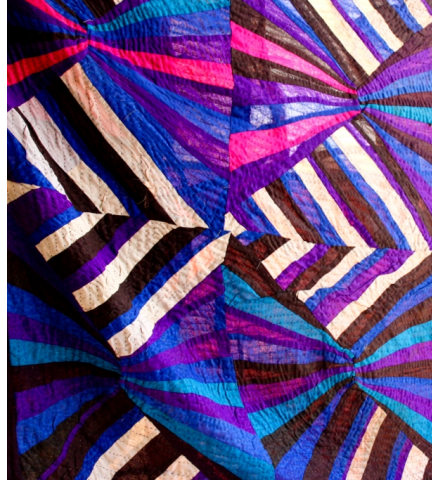


Image 6: A traditional appliqué quilt showing innovations in pattern by the artisans themselves



Image 7: A higher value product that utilises traditional organic dyes for block-printing and employs both appliqué and quilting skills



Image 8: A contemporary take on the traditional quilt, using modern colour palettes but still employing traditional quilting, block-printing, embroidery and stitching skills

Despite economic stagnation, creative decay and unimaginative and stultifying policy interventions, artisan craft still provides the best opportunity of any sector for the employment of women, since female participation in craft activities is culturally acceptable across the country. Craft, therefore, allows for secluded women to earn an income from their homes, building independence, self-esteem and confidence, while respecting local sociocultural norms. It also brings different communities together and reduces economic disparities across the rural-urban divide. ECDI's work with these communities fosters leadership while building capacity and skills and lobbying to create fairer, more inclusive value chains, stimulating market access for homebound women. In 2004 ECDI, together with its partner, the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), developed a leading-edge model piloted in Pakistan called Behind the Veil. The model utilized market mechanisms to integrate unrepresented female producers into sustainable industries. This approach has since been successfully applied to several other projects implemented by ECDI and its partners. These initiatives have delivered due to strong local presence and relationships, fostering of innovation and design education, and the rolling out of culturally appropriate women-to-women sales agent networks that bridge the gap between sequestered women and the outside world. The methodology is based on mobile women from within local communities serving as a type of middleperson, able to interact and communicate with women artisans. The women intermediaries meet directly with rural embroiderers, offering an embedded service package that includes inputs, quality control, product design and the provision of culturally appropriate, commercial market linkages for women producers. These connections help them to overcome social barriers and limitations in value chains, and to realize a higher return on their labour. The Head of USAID, when promoting the success of its programmes to a US House Committee in 2008, cited the example of ECDI's work in Pakistan to illustrate the power of microenterprise development to alleviate poverty in challenging environments.



Image 9: A young trainer in the field, using visual aids to explain colour palettes to rural artisans

However, working in the sector is not without its challenges. Craftspeople struggle to meet the demands of the market in terms of quality, consistency, scale of production and adherence to industry standards. Female artisan entrepreneurs often face difficulty developing the business skills (including marketing, management, accounting) required to scale their enterprises. They are unable to win large or repeat orders due to perceptions among high-end retailers and other buyers that the products are low-value with poor finishing. There is also a severe trust deficit between different actors in the chain.

These challenges represent the key barriers to market entry and expansion for female micro-entrepreneurs in the sector. Responding to these challenges allows increase in opportunities for growth throughout the value chain and builds a strong foundation on which the artisan sector can flourish. ECDI addresses these obstacles through targeted interventions that aim to build the capacity of artisan entrepreneurs to develop high-quality products drawing on traditional art and craft techniques, to manage their businesses, and connect with national, international and online markets. Building local female entrepreneurship acts as a key driver for women's empowerment, particularly with respect to leadership abilities and confidence. Leadership development is essential for local institutionalization of greater access to and control over assets and productive inputs for women, thereby further boosting productivity and increasing employment opportunities.

The state of artisanal craft in Pakistan

In Pakistan, discourse around craft is centred on preservation of heritage and cultural tradition and its importance as an economic catalyst for national growth and for employability of the poor. It is widely accepted within the development community in the country that supporting the development of artisanal and traditional

crafts presents a unique opportunity for changing perceptions about the abilities and capacities of some its most marginalized segments. Embracing these communities' handicraft practices provides an opportunity to create cohesion and value for people facing barriers and gender discrimination in joining the formal workforce. However, this conversion requires significant investment, patience and expertise.

The crafts sector in Pakistan has a long way to go to reach its potential as a sustainable source of economic growth, as well as for artistic expression and creativity. It is often cheaper and easier to import from Turkey, India or Thailand via informal channels than to source from Pakistan itself. Lack of skills, quality production and market access all complicate the equation and make it extremely important for Pakistan to engage in and learn from the global and regional discourse on craft and making – a space that Pakistani artisans or organisations working with artisans are entirely removed from and unaware of^{xiii}.

Several programmes have been implemented by government, not-for-profits and bilateral agencies to train craftspeople in improving technical skills, but artisans and entrepreneurs focusing on traditional cottage arts lack the business acumen and finances needed to sell their products. Further, at the national level, craft is very narrowly situated within Pakistan's rich cultural convention as espoused in traditional contributions from rural or peri-urban centres without any attempt to link or interface these with contemporary, creative expression and talent from large urban populations. This results in an even deeper chasm in cultural recognition and visibility on an international level, where is there very little awareness of what Pakistan has to offer. For Pakistan's crafts sector to grow into a thriving, independent practice with commercial benefits, it will need broad support networks, learning opportunities and exposure, so that developing and marketing new products based on traditional forms and techniques has the potential to transform craft into a viable source of livelihood for thousands, as well as to help sustain these art forms as living traditions for future generations.



Image 10: A craftswoman in the conservative Khyber Paktoonkhwa province works on a table runner for a local homeware store.

A large number of women are excluded from markets or unable to take advantage of market opportunities. Tradition and culture dominate in conservative communities and few socially acceptable work opportunities exist for women. Young men too are not afforded adequate opportunities to pursue education and/or employment. A lack of positive alternatives for youth to spend their time coupled with poor skill and employment opportunities are increasingly seen as major factors for violent behaviour and tendency to join extremist groups. Without access to financial resources, poor market knowledge and the inability to invest in capacity, artisans are stuck in a vicious cycle of producing one-off items with poor finishing, resulting in little repeat business.

Similarly, educated and skilled young people are not satisfied by the current offerings in the job market and seek opportunities to express themselves creatively and artistically. There is wide agreement that poor business skills and an absence of suitable mentors are among the biggest obstacles that these entrepreneurs face. Other urban businesses, often small and women-led, seek to support women artisans, working closely with them to develop traditional skills in a new manner or to showcase age-old techniques and help preserve them. These too benefit from engagement with creative opportunities, enabling them to grow and evolve as genuine catalysts for their local economies.

Local consumers tend to see craft as common and cheap, to be replaced with mass-produced, name-brand products as soon as the pay cheque allows. Poor innovation and lack of design intervention and branding has further cemented this perception, with the average consumer seeing craft as a primitive, redundant process which is not worth investing in. Lack of pride around the 'handmade' or 'made in Pakistan' labels further compound the issue and have relegated craft to a niche market. Most 'makers' create not for personal or artistic expression but to earn a livelihood, although this is changing slowly in larger urban centres where craft is being seen in the context of therapy or as freeform creative expression, as a way of documenting history, as a channel for activism etc. However, these conversations occur in silos and in select, elite spaces, with little attention to the intersection between traditional and more modern creative forms of expression.

Changes in consumer trends and the rapid evolution of consumer tastes in the last twenty years, alongside the entry of new and aggressively promoted mass-produced products in both rural and urban markets, has meant that craftswomen struggle more than ever to survive and remain competitive. To grow and develop would necessitate investment in individual capacity as well as the enterprise itself, continuous design intervention and product innovation – areas the craft sector in Pakistan has notoriously struggled with. Widespread recognition of the dire need for intervention has fostered a surge in dialogue on how to set up new systems to pull female artisans into the modern economy. Discussions currently centre on promoting the use of technology, including but not limited to: the internet, electronic platforms, digital mapping and payment systems, and the use of cellular technology to educate craftspeople. There is heightened excitement about the potential of ecommerce and technological advances as mediums to support artisans in accessing new markets. And while this is extremely important – the merger of the traditional cottage industry with the digital world – the discussion often fails to take into account on-ground realities, and is based on pervasive myths about the craft industry of Pakistan.

The first myth involves the romantic notion that if someone invests in the sector, it will grow. This idea is linked to the concept that there are endless numbers of artisans that are skilled, keen to develop their craft and simply await a middle party, a saviour, to help them. This analysis does not take into account sociopolitical and cultural factors and reduces artisan agency and voice by portraying them as helpless innocents. The second myth is that women artisans are completely disengaged from mainstream markets and the only thing holding them back is access. Like all respectable myths, these too are rooted in the truth.

It is correct that the sector is in desperate need of investment and concerted support and that artisans struggle to meet the demands of, and lack ingress to mainstream markets, primarily due to poor product

quality and inadequate understanding of current trends. However, to pay lip-service to these issues, without a more grounded understanding of overall sectoral and consumer dynamics, is to obscure the role of informed intervention. Current literature on past work in this space, whether successful or flawed, tends to blame the technique employed and fervently insists on an assortment of 'essential steps' to prevent future failure, while simultaneously conceding failure as both inevitable and incomprehensible. Everyone harps upon the capricious nature of the artisanal sector – fast-fashion corrupting the consumer soul, unskilled artisans unable to produce on time or to required quality, lack of government support, poor commitment by the private sector etc., but the reality is there has been little work on the ground to support the development of real policy change. There are no in-depth studies of the sector, no concerted market assessments either on the supply or demand side and very little product development, design and innovation work. Whatever has been achieved has been done so in silos, poorly documented, rarely built upon and even more rarely shared or accessible. Meanwhile, a fascinating mix of solemn fatalism and manic optimism prevails in all documentation on the issue – from popular reporting to policy papers.

The main focus of not-for-profit interventions in the sector tends to be on training and developing skills, and not on marketing and sales channels or developing a sustainable small business. Little innovation or investment is made at the product development stage: investing in designers, improved inputs, systems and mechanisms as well as in local businesses are critical missing pieces that needs to be addressed in the value chain to successfully turn women artisan groups or communes into viable small business enterprises. Large government-financed initiatives also face similar issues or run into red-tape and sustainability problems. Because of the large subsidies offered, artisans are not trained or able to survive on their own, and, as a result, organisations that seem to be 'doing good' in trying to revive the craft industry end up promoting dependence and lack of originality.

This lack of unique ideas has resulted in stalled dialogue in the craft industry, and copying or counterfeiting is an endemic issue in this field in Pakistan. Talented craftspeople are forbidden to work with others, which prevents them from growing their businesses. There is a huge fear about losing what people see as limited market share. Further, young people in the community tend not to see craft as a viable or respected source of income, since inadequate value is attached to skilled workers, and families no longer train their children in the trade. This results in the loss of master craftspeople. It is, therefore, clear that lack of skills, quality production and market access are not the only missing pieces of this complex puzzle. While it is not easy to generalize, as many issues have specific gender, economic, geographical and cultural contexts, it is important to remember that artisanal craft itself does not have magical properties and should be viewed with the same lens we apply to other mainstream market commodities, with the caveat that there needs to be a rights-based approach to skill-building and compensation, and an elevated recognition of the poor conditions in which many producers across the country work and live.

Looking to the future

From our experience, we know that our model works. Incomes are raised, and new women artisans, embroiderers and sales agents are (organically) attracted into the market. But access to higher-value markets (e.g. export markets) remains tricky and more concerted intervention is needed to ensure higher quality, improved and new samples, regular orders, and so forth. The truth is that the value chain for most handicraft products is complex, and the entire industry needs to be properly evaluated to understand what is really possible. Culturally appropriate, innovative enterprise-based solutions that combine broad-based capacity-building and training with mentoring and technology solutions to offer support for women makers and producers is needed – but also calls for more serious commitment and industry buy-in. These solutions need to incorporate respect for the rights of women, such as safety; for social norms, such as some level of segregation between sexes; and extend to their promotion in the value chain.



Image 11: Quirky hand-worked and stitched toys made by women embroiderers in Chitral for Polly and Other Stories

At present, many fear that a growing fast fashion retail economy and increasingly commodity-driven world has made the very survival of artisan communities more precarious, particularly sequestered women producers within the same. Development actors and creatives are deeply concerned that these communities will not be able to keep up with growing competition, bulk manufacture of inexpensive, and often machine made, goods, and seasonal changes in fashion and aesthetic trends. They fear a downwards spiral in prices for traditional craft items and eventually, the loss of culture, tradition and livelihoods for artisanal producers.

While these concerns are valid and need to be addressed, globalization also offers important market opportunities. The advent of cheap, smart technologies, increasing cellular phone usage and the deep penetration of internet connectivity across Pakistan bodes well for a future in ecommerce sales and the ability for artisans to access new markets, connections and skills. However, this will need to be tempered with real work on the ground in preparing female artisans to deliver work of the standard and quality that the modern, contemporary marketplace, whether in-country or abroad, requires. A salient feature of the modern market is the pace at which styles, designs, and colour palettes change, resulting in increasingly shorter product life cycles. As retailers 'strive to stay ahead of their competition, new products replace old ones with greater frequency than in the past. Producers, in turn, are forced to keep abreast of trends and constantly develop new designs and products' (Barber, 2006). For an underperforming sector with limited resources and champions, efforts to improve should focus on design and engagement, as well as stronger administration and much greater production efficiency.



Image 12: Hard at work creating a stunning truck-art inspired piece, Jamila is one of over 300 women sales agents that ECDI works with.

The world is changing and it will become harder for businesses to operate in a manner where profit maximization is their only game. As consumers become more aware of the flaws in the current economic system, truly successful companies will not want to be surrounded by slums populated with a disenfranchised youth who have no hope of ever getting a job – that is nineteenth century thinking, and the industrial revolution is long over. If businesses and governments do not address poverty or create jobs in areas where skilled people can be employed, they set them up for a hard life – a life where they cannot afford to eat well, to go to decent schools and make ends meet. This is not the sort of world most of us are happy to live in. While working with crafts and supporting the growth of creative, handicraft economies is not a panacea, it does offer an inclusive path to feasible sustainable development for remote and homebound women producers. In our view, it is vision and strategy, and not just technology, that will drive both digital and real-life innovation and transformation. Working with craft can result in economic benefits and a better quality of life for millions of people, but first we need to move beyond the contribution of craft's 'folk' traditions to incorporate and highlight vibrant subcultures and other contemporary manifestations that will be the future drivers of creative expression in the sector. This needs to be supplemented within the public domain, with concerted awareness-raising based on evidence of future growth and both rural and urban economic sustainability, and around the quality of Pakistan originated product and design. Cross-sectoral, collaborative action for a sustainable future with defined roles for public and private actors in building individual competencies, infrastructure, and organisational capacities and strategies is also needed, such that collaboration to scale up systems in order to achieve societal and economic prosperity is achieved.

Bibliography

Asian Development Bank (2000), 'Women in Pakistan: Country Briefing Paper' (accessed on 10 September 2017) <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/32562/women-pakistan.pdf>

British Council (2016), 'Creative Cities in Pakistan', British Council Pakistan

British Council (2017), 'Activist to Entrepreneur: the role of social enterprise in supporting women's economic empowerment', Global Social Enterprise Programme, British Council UK

CIA Factbook (2018), 'Pakistan', <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html>, (accessed online on 4 February 2018)

Kabeer, Naila and Natali, Lusia (2013), 'Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is there a Win-Win?', Institute of Development Studies Working Paper 417, IDS

McVay, Mary (2007), 'Behind the Veil: contemporary markets for homebound women embroiderers in Pakistan', Poverty Outreach Working Group, The SEEP Network, Washington DC

Salim, Sara and Mahmood, Zafar (2015), 'Factors shaping exports of cultural goods from Pakistan', NUST Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity, Vol 1, July – December 2015, pages 73 – 86

Sauder, Allan and Shaikh, Perveen (2000), 'SIDP Feasibility Study: A Marketing Initiative for Women Entrepreneurs in Pakistan', July 2000

SDPI (2004), 'Women and Poverty: Salient Findings from a Gendered Analysis of a Quasi-Anthropological Study in Rural Punjab and Sindh', Lubna Nazir Chaudhry, Research Report Series #28

Shaikh, Perveen and Jones, Linda (2005), 'Middlemen as Agents of Change: MEDA and ECDI in Pakistan', Practitioner Learning Programme in BDS Market Development, Learning Paper, The SEEP Network, Washington DC

Social Policy Development Centre (2009), 'Annual Review 2007 – 08: Women at Work', Social Development in Pakistan, Times Press, Karachi

The World Bank (2017), Trading Economics <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/population-living-in-slums-percent-of-urban-population-wb-data.html> (accessed on 15 February 2018)

The World Bank (2018), 'Databank: Pakistan', Population data for 2016 from the World Bank website, http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=PAK, (accessed on 15 February 2018)

The World Bank (2018), <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/12/06/embroidering-new-future-pakistan-rural-artisans>, (accessed on 2 February 2018)

UNDP (2016), 'Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone', Islamabad <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PAK> and <http://report.hdr.undp.org/> (accessed online)

Endnotes

- ⁱ Naila Kabeer (2013)
- ⁱⁱ UNDP (2017), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PAK>
- ⁱⁱⁱ WB (2017), <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/population-living-in-slums-percent-of-urban-population-wb-data.html>
- ^{iv} Population data for 2016 from the World Bank website, http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=PAK, accessed on 15 February 2018. Please note the CIA World Factbook estimates the number to be nearly 205 million in 2017.
- ^v The Business Recorder, February 2017, <https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/02/20170217142782/>
- ^{vi} CIA Factbook 2018, 2015 estimate <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html>, accessed on 04 February 2018.
- ^{vii} The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) estimates that women engaged as unpaid workers account for 25% of all full-time and 75% of all part-time agricultural labour in rural Pakistan.
- ^{viii} ECDI field research, 2004 - 2007
- ^{ix} British Council (2014), 'Cultural and Creative Industries in Pakistan', British Council, Lahore
- ^x United Nations and UNCTAD (2010), 'Creative Economy Report 2010', http://unctad.org/es/Docs/ditctab20103_en.pdf
- ^{xi} *ibid*
- ^{xii} Sauder, Allan and Shaikh, Perveen (2000), 'SIDP Feasibility Study: A Marketing Initiative for Women Entrepreneurs in Pakistan', Aga Khan Foundation, July 2000
- ^{xiii} There are some incredible examples of how crafts can be transformed and elevated across the border in India but also in other parts of South Asia like Nepal, which have been able to integrate their traditional techniques and skills into the modern economy.