







AIACA Newsletter Issue 5 May 2017

In this issue of our newsletter you will find stories of our visits to new geographies, new crafts clusters, and activities related to design innovation and business development support. As part of our usual interventions, we get to meet many unusual and remarkable communities and practitioners and learn about their truly inspiring lives! The creativity of folk painters, the beautiful people of the Northeast, aspiring women weavers, and the lives of traditional artisans working with unique local reeds have made our work exciting in the last few months.

In view of the growing consciousness and need for sustainable production and consumption practices in the manufacturing sector, AIACA has been working with traditional craft clusters to introduce sustainable practices in their production processes. A glimpse of our work in Sanganer is featured here.

As we continue to assess different business models and understand what works for the artisans, we come across successful models within our Craftmark network spread across the country! These enterprises, which engage very closely with local artisans, are led by extremely enterprising professionals who make them work by ensuring dignified and sustainable livelihood for the craftspersons. We feel that their journey, challenges, and successes are noteworthy. In this issue, we publish an article by Sudakshina from Studio Coppre, a social venture working to revive traditional metal crafts.

Madhura Dutta
Executive Director

- Stories from the Field

- Enterprise Support Program

- Policy Update

- Guest Column

- Highlights & Upcoming Events

IN THIS ISSUE

AIACA TRAVELS TO NORTHEAST



AIACA team visited nineteen clusters across the three states of Assam, Nagaland and Sikkim to conduct a feasibility study for enterprise promotion of the local handicrafts and handlooms. The potential of various crafts and products and their gaps and needs in terms of business situations, market outreach, etc., were evaluated. The team interacted with artisan entrepreneurs and groups in remote areas practicing their crafts for generations and sustaining it. However, due to lack of adequate value chain support, access to raw materials and markets, exposure and outreach, they have not been able to grow in their business and are mostly limited to local markets. It was a fascinating experience to interact with the artisans and learn about their love and care for their craft, their pride in their traditional practices and their inherent strength to carry on with their tradition even under dire circumstances.

The visit was organized by North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) with the objective of bringing the market ready craft clusters under Craftmark so that they can get a sustained support towards market access and business development services.

Some of the enterprises working in the NE region are in the process of becoming Craftmark members!

WORKSHOP WITH CRAFTS GROUPS OF NORTHEAST

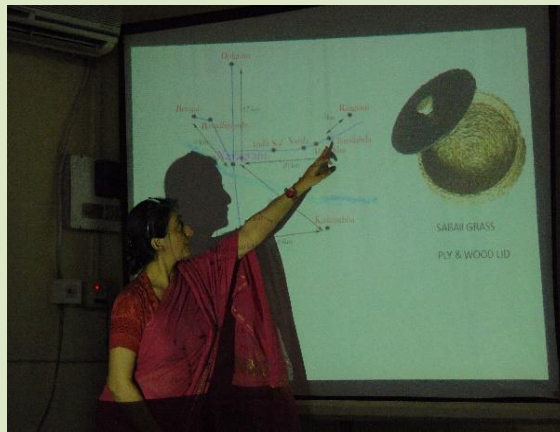
AIACA conducted a two-day long residential 'business orientation workshop' with different craft entrepreneurs and artisan based organizations from Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Assam and Sikkim. It was supported by NEDFi and organized at their Common Facility Centre (CFC) in Khetri.

NEDFi's CFC, spread over an acre, houses a nursery for medicinal plants, and also cultivates indigo plants. The CFC is specifically set up for developing and innovating Water Hyacinth Crafts under the brand Aqua Weaves. Additionally it has a section for candle making, an essential oil extraction production unit, and a Coconut Shell production Craft setup and a shop for handicrafts. It is also used as a regular training centre.

Most of these craft practitioners and enterprises who participated in the workshop are operating out of unorganized or semi-organized setups. The workshop addressed core business strategies related to pricing-costing, production planning, marketing, brand building, etc. Experts in natural fibre and textiles delivered these sessions to make the workshop comprehensive and specifically useful for the two main segments of craft practitioners of this region.



During the workshop it was found that most of the products of the participating enterprises were targeted towards local markets since logistics is a major concern for these artisans (commuting is difficult in these areas because of weather and geography). Additionally, due to remoteness, there is little exposure to new opportunities. During the workshop, they expressed that restricting to local markets felt limiting, and the sessions on marketing seemed to open up new aspirations for them. AIACA plans to carry out more such workshops with these artisan groups in the near future.



ESTABLISHING A MODERN CONNECT FOR GOND AND MADHUBANI ARTISTS

A product development workshop was conducted by AIACA, supported by EXIM bank, for Gond and Madhubani Artists in February 2017 in Bhopal. The objective of the workshop was two-fold. On one hand, we tried to introduce the artist groups to newer themes that can cater to a larger market, to help them widen their creative inspirations and explore territories beyond traditional mythological themes. On the other hand, we developed a new collection of products for the Indian markets, using these traditional centuries-old hand-painting techniques.



Gond being a colourful and bold art, three bright colours were picked for base products along with off white. For Madhubani, earthy colours were chosen.

The Gonds, the largest Adivasi community in India, traditionally painted on mud walls of their houses but today they largely paint on canvas, paper and walls using acrylic as their medium. These artists create beautiful depictions of their natural and mythological worlds, traditional songs and oral histories. Madhubani, having distinct features of its own, was traditionally created by the women of the Brahman, Dusadh and Kayastha communities in the Mithila region in India. The painting was traditionally done on freshly plastered mud walls and floors of huts, but now they are also done on cloth, handmade paper and canvas.

Keeping in mind that many traditional motifs are easily replicated today on contemporary products using block printing or digital printing techniques, the plan was to innovate application of motifs on diverse products in a way that would be difficult to copy. The product range was also designed with the goal of engaging the artisans all year round.

The artist groups, though apprehensive in the beginning, were seen actively interacting with each other by the end of the first few days. ***Sunil, a Gond artist shared, "We have always used primitive themes that talk about our rich cultural traditions in our work, but because of this workshop we are now using different subjects. I think this shift will help us become much more marketable."*** The other interesting experience was that the groups were rather indulgent when it came to using different colours in the product. Though both these groups have been practicing this art for years and have supplied to the customers without much variations in the style of work, all of them were inclined towards using many colours. They were oriented to use limited colours to make the products attractive for contemporary markets. By the end of the workshop, both the groups had developed fifty four products in total and they have learnt how to paint on different products keeping current market dynamics in mind.

DESIGN INNOVATION IN MADURKATHI WEAVING

Madurkathi weaving is a traditional craft from the Midnapore district of West Bengal. Madurkathi is a type of grass reed used for making 'madur' or mats. These mats are common items in any Bengali household, and are used for sitting, sleeping, and performing religious rituals. Today, seeing the growing market, the artisans make various other products using madurkathi, including table runners, curtains, hats, purses, window blinds, etc., which are sold in diverse markets.

In an attempt to encourage this diversification, February 2017 marked the beginning of a design development workshop by the Craftmark team for Madurkathi weavers of Barbasudevpur Deshapran Pragati Sangha, an all women society based in Purba Medinipur, West Bengal.

During a time when the world is moving towards eco-friendly practices, matching these traditional crafts, historically based on sustainable practices, with contemporary tastes and demands is becoming crucial. A designer from the National Institute of Design along with AIACA supported the group of eight artisans to develop new products and designs, targeting both domestic and export markets. The idea was to simplify the existing patterns without losing the basic nature and essence of the craft. The workshop also focused on introducing new weaving techniques to create tessellated patterns of the cotton warp in the mats that are developed.

The workshop was held in the Common Facility Centre in Barbasudevpur village of Purba Medinipore, where the women made yoga and beach mats, and also learned to incorporate new colour combinations, patterns and finishing techniques in their old products. The workshop concluded in March and we hope to see the new collection placed in markets soon.



ETP ESTABLISHMENT IN SANGANER, JAIPUR : ESTABLISHING GREEN PRACTICES IN THE CLUSTER

Sanganer, a town in Jaipur, is renowned for its age old printing and dyeing industries. The town is located about 12 km south of Jaipur. A large number of small and large scale textile and block printing units are located here. These units discharge effluents directly in open land and nearby ponds/rivers, threatening the groundwater quality in these areas. Jaipur is largely dependent on groundwater for its drinking water supply. 90% of the drinking water of the city comes from groundwater, with 10% supplied from the Ramgarh Lake situated 35 km from the city. The water supply in the city is maintained by PHED, Rajasthan.

Dyeing & Handblock printing in Sanganer & other identified areas in the state have been under strong vigilance by State Pollution Control Board for the last ten years. Even though the Board has been urging the cluster to install effluent treatment plants, not enough progress has been made.

Looking at the pressing situation, AIACA with its local partner HSDRC, mobilized CALICO Hand block Printers Cooperative Society to operationalize a Common Washing Centre and motivate individual dyers & printers to stop washing in their homes. Thereafter the used/polluted water from this washing area was tested and the reports were presented to the Collector, Jaipur & State Pollution Control Board. Following this, an Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) has now been successfully set up by AIACA under its 'Going Green' initiative supported by the European Union (through its flagship sustainable consumption production programme). At the opening ceremony of the ETP, the CALICO Cooperative members and the block printers were present along with representatives from state government and Pollution Control Board. The printers vowed to undertake joint responsibility towards use of this ETP to reduce pollution in this area.



STRENGTHENING CRAFT BUSINESSES

As part of its Enterprise Support Programme, Craftmark invited experts from Women on Wings (WoW), EXIM Bank and Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) to deliver sessions on business development and communication strategies in a workshop held at India Habitat Centre in January 2017.

The day was divided into three broad sessions. The first part of the workshop primarily dealt with issues on business-related challenges and the need to have an operational plan. The trainers from Women on Wings explained through participatory exercises why sustainable businesses must be established and what kind of sales and marketing strategy can be applied to achieve optimum results. Apart from marketing, online strategies were also discussed. The session concluded with a SWOT analysis of the different participating enterprises. The session was very interactive as the participants actively discussed the issues that they all face in their day to day work.

The second session was led by trainers from EXIM bank and they discussed the various financial schemes and opportunities that the bank offers for artisan enterprises, including loans for working capital, infrastructure development, etc. The representatives also explained in detail the different paperwork and eligibility criteria required to apply for loans and avail these schemes. Experiences and case studies from the field on how similar financial support has been mobilized by the Bank so far for smaller enterprises were shared, making the session relevant for the participants.

The day concluded with DEF's session explaining the importance and the power of effective story-telling through digital platforms, including social media. The expert discussed the various models of story-telling and also the different tools of digital content that can be leveraged to increase visibility and brand awareness.

After the workshop, a few crafts enterprises from among the participants directly connected with WoW for more long-term and customized business support for their organizational growth, as well as with EXIM Bank for financial support. AIACA continues to facilitate the process at both ends for fruitful partnerships.



RBS's 'MAGIC HANDS' VISIT VARANASI & MUBARAKPUR

As a part of Royal Bank of Scotland's Employee Engagement Programme, a team of 21 volunteers visited the Varanasi Weavers and Artisans Society (VWAS) in Varanasi and Mubarakpur Weaves in Mubarakpur. These two innovative projects are expected to create replicable models that can be undertaken throughout India. Viewing the two collectives as startups, the objective of this engagement was to develop a comprehensive, integrated organizational plan for each of them for the next three years. One team proceeded to Mubarakpur to analyze the model as a sustainable business, while the other two groups observed and studied the VWAS model. The specific areas of their analysis and evaluation included organizational structure, financial planning and management, risk Identification and management and market research. Additionally, ideas around financial access, business development, and market access were shared and brainstormed with the weavers directly making it a very interesting session. This exercise also added a fresh perspective to the VWAS local team. Currently, the RBS team is in the process of developing a report on their observations and recommendations that can be used for strengthening these enterprises.



BUILDING DREAMS TOGETHER IN VARANASI

Till five years back, Mustaqeem Ansari, a master weaver from Ramnagar cluster, Varanasi, had been living in a joint family that collectively owned 90 handlooms. The entrepreneurial spirit in him motivated him to start his own venture. He started out on his own with one handloom and was able to generate enough business to move up to 15-16 looms in about three years. AIACA has been working with Mustaqeem for more than two years and has provided him with direct market exposure and access, technical capacity of using digital media for his own promotion, and business development support through workshops.

To address the need for access to capital, last year AIACA had organized a capacity building workshop in Varanasi with EXIM Bank on their financial schemes for small businesses. Post this workshop, Mustaqeem applied for a term loan to expand his business further and to build his own Common Facility Centre (CFC). Mustaqeem says, **he wishes to employ the smaller weavers in his CFC and not only provide them with regular work in a dignified environment but also share profit with them!**

AIACA played an instrumental role in supporting Mustaqeem to develop a comprehensive business plan for the CFC along with preparing other documents for the bank. Loan worth INR 11 Lakhs has already been sanctioned (the loan amount applied for was twenty lakhs) and construction is ongoing at the moment. Mustaqeem plans to build a work-shed (loom) area for a workforce of at least 30-40 weavers, a dyeing centre, a pre-loom centre and a showroom. Over the last one and half years, AIACA's handholding support and his own indomitable will has led him to do business with about 20 new buyers including retail and wholesale customers.

The Journey of COPPRE

Coppre started off as a livelihood development project funded by the Forbes Marshall Foundation and Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), Pune Chapter, in 2012. It is the outcome of a creative collaboration with the metal craftspeople, to evolve a contemporary range of metal products that cater to the present while retaining the heritage craft process.

We started working with a small cluster of 10 copper artisans in Pune. The lineage of the copper metal craftspeople in Pune dates back to over 400 years. They migrated to the city in the 17th century and flourished under the royal patronage of the Peshwas. However, over time, many factors have altered the socio-economic conditions of these artisans. Hit by changing traditions, rising copper prices, lucrative economic opportunities outside the confines of their craft and the convenience offered by materials like stainless steel and plastic led to an overall decline in the demand. Soon, only a few families of the community persevered with the craft. The artisans started supplying handmade metal wares at daily wages or a meager remuneration per kilogram of metal they worked on. This drastically undermined the skill required for handcrafting these metal wares.

There was urgent and immediate action needed to not only revive this art form but also make it lucrative for future generations to pursue this tradition. During the project spanning two years with INTACH, the foundational goals of heritage craft preservation for a social venture aimed at sustainability were developed.

This project then evolved into a social enterprise, Studio Coppre which was founded by Rashmi Ranade and co-founded by Chhanda Bihari, Sudakshina Sinha Banerjee and Seemantini Mihir, under the leadership and mentorship of late Mr. Adhar Mirchandani in 2014. Armed with a long-term vision and having understood the gap in the market for high-quality handcrafted wares and the need to promote and preserve artisanal skills, Coppre started to design, produce and market contemporary wares. We are currently working with over 140 artisans in various clusters in India.

Studio Coppre aims to have a sustainable growth with focus on product development, exploring new target markets, increasing artisanal footprint and working with more metal craft forms to increase the reach and impact of their work. This paradigm shift in the perception of handcrafted metal wares of superior look and finish has been possible because of a multitude of factors. We were the category creators in branded handcrafted metal wares and deployed the best industry and management practices onto the craft sector and worked with a smaller footprint of artisans so as to ensure higher individual returns. We also broke the tradition of paying the artisan by weight of raw material and started remunerating them by the number of items produced. All these have led to an increase by 30% of the artisans earning capacity. We have also made efforts in training artisans in design, finishing and accounting and have disbursed soft loans for workshop upgrades. We are proud to say that many of our artisans are themselves independent entrepreneurs today having their own workshops and running fairly successful ventures.

Today Studio Coppre is spreading its wings to revive other metal art forms. We have been instrumental in reviving the copper craft of Maharashtra and aim to be a model for sustainable craft-based ventures across India.

- **Sudakshina Sinha Banerjee** (Co-founder and Director- Market Outreach, Studio Coppre)

Studio Coppre is a social venture working to revive heritage metal crafts. Having understood the gap in the market for high-quality handcrafted wares and the need to promote and preserve artisanal skills of metal workers, Coppre designs, produces and markets handcrafted contemporary wares.



HIGHLIGHTS

DEVELOPMENT OF A FOUNDATION PAPER FOR MINISTRY OF TEXTILES, GOVT. OF INDIA

AIACA is a knowledge partner for Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India for developing a certification and quality standards for handicrafts. AIACA also recently developed a foundation paper for development of handicrafts as a creative industry in India. As a part of this research, AIACA carried out several interviews of artisans and crafts entrepreneurs, industry experts and market representatives as well as exporters from across India to support its key recommendations.

AIACA SIGNS MOU WITH NEDFI

NEDFi signed an agreement with AIACA (Craftmark) with the aim of facilitating value chain strengthening and promotion of traditional crafts of the North Eastern Region through the Craftmark programme.

MRIGNAYANEE BECOMES A CRAFTMARK MEMBER

Mrignayanee is a unit of Madhya Pradesh Hastshilp Evam Hathkargha Vikas Nigam Ltd, aiming to protect, nurture and promote the unique crafts and craftsmanship of Madhya Pradesh. Mrignayanee recently became a Craftmark member, bringing a total of eight traditional crafts of MP under Craftmark.

AIACA TRAVELS TO BANGKOK

AIACA is attending a SWITCH-Asia Seminar & Networking event with Regional Finance Institutions between 15 – 17 May 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand.

SOCIAL ENTITLEMENTS AND SCHEME BENEFITS

VARANASI

Varanasi Weavers and Artisans Society (VWAS) has facilitated social scheme benefits to 2914 beneficiaries. Of the total beneficiaries 22% are women. The weavers have appreciated the door-step service offered through cluster coordinators from weaver communities hired by AIACA. Additionally, support has also been provided to handloom weavers with credit linkages of worth INR 53,20,000 in the past few months, including Mudra and pension schemes.

KOTA

The Kota cluster was able to support 93 of their weavers with credit linkages worth INR 46,50,000 under the Mudra Scheme, mobilised through Central Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur and Baroda Rajasthan Kshetriya Gramin Bank.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ANNUAL CRAFTMARK JURY – 24 MAY 2017

- CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION-CONSUMPTION IN CRAFTS – JULY 2017