Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) among artisan organisations in India

SURVEY REPORT

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In collaboration with:
All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA) and GoCoop Social Marketplace
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Executive Summary

The handicrafts and handloom sector is one of the largest employment sectors in India after agriculture and primarily rural based. It engages more than 10 million artisans who work either on wages or are self-employed. The sector is also composed of several NGOs, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), cooperative societies, and private entrepreneurs who play an important role in the value chain.

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can enable the artisans and handicraft/handloom organisations to overcome the geographical barriers and connect to a wider customer base. The ICT trends in India are evident of a growing digital landscape that includes 980 million mobile subscribers and 354 million internet users. The digital divide, however, still exists. For instance, about 67% of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) considered the backbone of the Indian economy are not online.

Among the handicrafts and handloom organisations surveyed by us, the status of ICT is as follows:

- In terms of basic infrastructure, while 98% of respondents have electricity, 44% face very frequent power cuts, often several times in a day.
- Little more than half have landline telephones
- On an average, 5 of 6 male staff, and 3 of 3 female staff have mobile phones
- Close to 30% do not have a computer (either desktop/laptop/tablet/ipad)
- About 73% have internet connection though many reported the problem of slow speed
- About half are using computers for stock management and 23% of them use a software like Excel or a customised software for the purpose
- About 82% of internet users use email of which 28% use it only few times a month
- About 43% of organisations with internet access have their own website and 41% of them use facebook
- About one-fourth of organisations with internet access do not use any of the tools like website, facebook, or e-catalogue.
- About 70% of organisations with internet access has a staff with internet skills. However, there seems to be a limitation in terms of staff with basic computer skills like Word and basic Excel.
1. Background

1a. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT): Trends in India

The number of mobile phone users in India is around 980 million. The rural areas contribute to about 43% of the total mobile subscriptions in India. As of August 2015, there were about 350 million active internet users in India, with 159 million using internet on mobile phones. The mobile internet user base is growing phenomenally in rural areas. India is expected to become the second largest in internet subscriber base after China. 134 million are active social media users in India, of which 97 million are using mobile phones to access it (August 2015).

However, there is another side to this digital revolution. On one hand, the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in India are huge contributors to the economy, particularly rural areas, providing employment to about 110 million and contributing 37% to GDP. However, on the other hand, about 67% of SMEs in India are not online.

The e-commerce market in India is expected to touch $100 billion by 2020 (Live Mint, 2015). The online companies in India are supporting the ‘Make in India’ initiative of the Government of India thus encouraging small local producers including artisans to connect to a wider customer base. For enterprises and organisations located in rural areas and with lesser resources, digital technologies can bring them visibility, market information, new customers, and enable them to sell online.

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1 Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), June 2015
2 Ibid
3 We are social: http://wearesocial.sg/blog/2015/08/digital-social-mobile-india-2015/
4 Ibid
5 Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Annual Report 2013-14
6 Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Annual Report 2012-13
1b. Handicrafts and handlooms is one of the largest employment sector in India after agriculture

- Handicraft artisans in India is estimated to be about 6.8 million (2011-12), and handloom weaving employs about 4.3 million in weaving and allied activities (2009-10)\(^8\)
- A large number of artisans in India comprise of women (77% in handlooms and 47% in handicrafts)\(^9\), and belong to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Castes (OBCs)
- Most artisans are based in rural areas (87% in case of handlooms)\(^10\)
- Majority of them work from their own homes and the entire family supports in the work
- The artisans are either self-employed or work on wages
- Indian artisanal sector is characterised by diverse craft and weaving skills acquired over generations of craftsmanship. About 516 major craft traditions of India are featured in the book ‘Handmade in India – An encyclopaedia of Indian crafts’

While the artisanal sector in India offers immense scale for skilled employment, it faces several challenges to realise its full potential. In many cases the artisan communities are located in distant geographical locations and dispersed across remote areas. Many of the artisan based organisations such as SHGs, Cooperatives, and NGOs are also rural based.

The day-to-day coordination required for design, production, and marketing is often a big challenge faced by artisan based organisations. The lack of information about and connecting to distant markets is another key impediment for them.

While ICT cannot address all the sectoral issues, the mobile phones and internet technologies for instance have a vital role to play in addressing the lack of connectivity owing to distant locations. As per a FICCI survey, the internet technologies can lead to increased revenues, profits, and customers for SMEs.\(^11\)

The internet can enable access to information about market trends and opportunities, government schemes, connecting with new customers, and disseminating information about products through websites and e-catalogues.

\(^8\) Planning Commission, May 2012, Report of the Steering Committee on Handlooms and Handicrafts constituted for the 12th five year plan (2012-17)
\(^9\) Ibid
\(^10\) Ibid
\(^11\) Nathan India and FICCI, July 2013, Unleashing the potential: Internet’s role in the performance of India’s small and medium enterprise
2. About the survey

UNESCO New Delhi, in the framework of its activities on ‘culture and development’, conducted this survey to understand the status of the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) among organisations operating in the handicrafts and handloom sector in India. In this survey we focused on the following - phones, computers, and internet.

The survey aimed to understand the following:

- Availability of infrastructure for information and communication technologies (ICT) with the artisan based organisations
- To what extent and for what purposes are ICT being used by the organisations?
- Availability of skills to work on computers and internet in the organisations

**Methodology**

The survey focused on organisations and enterprises working in the handicraft and handloom sector across India. The questionnaire was disseminated through two partner organisations who are working with a large number of artisan based organisations across different geographical locations – All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA) and GoCoop. AIACA is a membership-based NGO and GoCoop is an online social marketplace for handloom weavers. Majority of the respondents thus comprise of organisations associated with these two organisations.

It was a voluntary survey conducted through email and face-to-face data collection.

A total of 62 organisations that are working with about 0.3 million artisans responded to the survey questionnaire.
3. **Profile of organisations that responded to our survey**

The organisations are based in both rural and urban areas located in 16 states that include Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, and Assam.

Most of them are working with artisans based in rural areas who are engaged in traditional craft practices that are being transmitted through generations.

Of the total, cooperatives form the largest group of 24 organisations followed closely by 21 private enterprises. 9 organisations are Registered Societies while 4 are Trusts.

The private enterprises are composed mainly of sole proprietorship and partnership firms. About half of the private entities are about 10 years old, established after 2005, indicating a growing number of entrepreneurs in this sector. Among Cooperatives, half of them are more than 30 years old. 14 organisations have at least 1 field or branch office that includes either a production centre, field office, or sales outlet.

About 61% of the total organisations are engaged in production and marketing of handlooms. About 29% work with handicrafts that includes metal crafts, jewellery, pottery, natural fibre crafts, etc. Other crafts represented in our sample include hand block printing, hand embroidery, and hand knitting (Figure 2). Some of the organisations are engaged in multiple crafts including both handlooms and handicrafts.

In terms of product range, 58% produce stoles, scarves, and dupattas. About 48% are making sarees and 44% are making home textiles and decorative items (curtains, cushion covers, bedspreads, paintings, etc).
There is a lot of variation in terms of number of artisans that the respondent organisations are working with. On an average, the number of artisans working with the respondent organisations is about 257. The average number of female artisans is about 144 and male artisans is 113.

In case of staff employed with the organisations, the average number of staff in our sample is 9. The average number of female staff is 3 and male staff is 6.

While annual sales data could not be collected from all the organisations, among those who reported the figures, the range is very wide with minimum sales at Rs. 1.6 lakhs and maximum sales at about Rs. 410 crores.
4. Survey Findings

4a. Infrastructure for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) with the respondent organisations: Availability status of electricity, phone, computer, and internet

Electricity is a prerequisite for the uptake and use of ICT. It is especially relevant as a factor in rural areas in India where full electrification is yet to be achieved in some states.12

Among the respondent organisations located across urban and rural areas, 98% have reported having an electricity connection.

However, frequent power cuts seems to be a recurrent issue. While 44% said they rarely face power cuts, an almost equal proportion of 44% have reported the problem of frequent power cuts. Moreover, 34% face power cuts several times in a day.

The issue of inconsistent power supply thus seems to be a challenge for the use of ICT in our sample. For instance, 77% of organisations that use email less frequently suffer from frequent power cuts.

A little more than half i.e. 55% of the total organisations surveyed have a landline telephone.

The mobile phone ownership among staff in the organisations seems to be quite good. On an average, the number of staff with mobile phones is 5 males and 3 females, against the average male and female staff numbers of 6 and 3 respectively.

The smartphone ownership across staff is slightly lower, at 3 males and 2 females on an average.

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12 98% of Census villages in India are electrified (Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, Ministry of Power, Government of India)
While 32% of the total organisations own one computer each - either a desktop, laptop, tablet, or iPad – about 29% do not have a single computer.

About 73% of the total organisations have an internet connection. Of those with an internet connection, more than 75% are using broadband i.e. high speed internet connection with minimum download speed of 512 kbps (Table 1). However, many respondents have reported the issue of slow internet speed. Of those broadband users who reported the internet speed, half mentioned 512 kbps or lower, while the national average internet speed in India is 2.8 mbps, also the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region.\(^\text{13}\) The average monthly payment for internet is about Rs. 1325 in our sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Respondent organisations and type of internet connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wireless broadband (Wi-Fi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fixed broadband</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet on mobile phones</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dial-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For those without an internet connection, about 65% have access to it in their vicinity or at home. For instance, about 45% of them have an internet café in their locality. In a couple of cases, however, the internet facility is located at least 5-10 kms away. About

14% of organisation representatives who answered the questionnaire have internet access at home.

It is interesting to note that the organisations without a computer comprise of ‘artisan’ proprietors and cooperatives. The absence of computer ownership among this group is noticeable and perhaps indicative of financial constraints as well as a lack of computer literacy at the artisan level.

Majority of the organisations in our sample continue to rely on face-to-face meetings as most frequently used method to communicate with the artisans they work with. However, with increasing mobile phone penetration, mobiles are becoming an equally important option for organisations to coordinate work with artisans who are often distantly located (Table 2). Mobiles and smartphones are enabling faster and cost effective communication and instant sharing of data like design and product photos that is likely to positively influence coordination between organisations and artisans during production and marketing.

| Table 2: Communication methods used by organisations to coordinate with artisans |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Methods used by organisations to communicate with artisans | Number of organisations that use the method the most | Number of organisations that use the method the least |
| Face-to-face meeting                          | 44              | 2               |
| Calling on artisans’ mobile phones            | 35              | 8               |
| Calling on artisans’ landline phone           | 6               | 8               |
| Email                                         | 5               | 6               |
| Social media                                  | 2               | 10              |
4b. Purposes for which computer and internet is used among respondent organisations

Among the respondent organisations in our survey that are equipped with computers, 64% are maintaining accounting records on the computer. About half are using computers for inventory management and design related work.

The usage of a software for accounts, inventory, or design is lower. About 41% is using a software like Tally for accounting. It could be possible that the smaller organisations do not have a dedicated accounts person and are outsourcing the accounts function.

A software for inventory/stock management including Excel is being used by 23% of the organisations equipped with computers. This is striking as the average annual sales of organisations who are equipped with computers (and reported their sales figures) is about 90 lakhs which means that they are dealing with a substantial volume of stock.

Many of the organisations could be relying on text files like Word or manual stock registers to maintain their inventory records.

The manual registers are a must in a setting where not all staff may be computer literate and field offices may not be computer equipped. However, the absence of a computerised inventory in a format like Excel or other software is likely to make information management tedious and limit the possibilities of analysing production and sales data for effective decision making.
### Out of organisations that have internet access:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sell online</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use internet to know about market trends</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of internet usage in our sample, email is being used by about 82% of those with internet access. It is possible that the rest may have an email account but are not using it actively. About 28% of those who reported using email use it only few times a month or even less than that, while 49% use it daily.

Out of 56 organisations with access to internet\(^{14}\), 24 have their own website.\(^{15}\) In terms of outreach by organisations through social media, Facebook is being used by about 41% of the internet users. WhatsApp seems to be relatively more popular with half of them using it. Less than half have indicated using internet to get information on market trends.

18 of these organisations i.e. 32% have an e-catalogue to disseminate information to potential buyers about their products. Out of these 18 organisations, 15 are among those that have a website.

Thus, among organisations with internet access that do not have a website, the use of other online alternatives for market outreach seems to be very low. Only 5 such organisations are using Facebook and 3 have an e-catalogue.

E-commerce is emerging as an important marketing channel for retailers in India. The e-commerce market in India is estimated to cross $100 billion by 2020 of which 35% is expected to be contributed by the fashion segment alone (Live Mint, 2015). There is thus a huge potential for producers making textiles and fashion accessories to sell online.

In our sample, out of 62 organisations that are largely producing textiles, 23 are selling online.\(^{16}\) While 12 have their own online store, 11 are selling through an e-retailer or an online marketplace (GoCoop.com). 8 of the 23 online

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\(^{14}\) Access to internet refers to either having a personal internet connection or internet access outside office

\(^{15}\) 18 organisations, all cooperatives except 1, have webpages hosted on an online marketplace.

\(^{16}\) As GoCoop was one of our partners for survey dissemination, many of the organisations who responded have a presence on its online marketplace called gocoop.com
sellers sell through their own online store as well as through other e-commerce platforms.

About one-fourth of respondents with internet access are not using any of the internet and social media tools shown in the figure below (Figure 4).

The private enterprises owned by ‘non-artisan’ entrepreneurs seem to be most adaptive to emerging online avenues in our sample. They lead in terms of usage of maximum internet tools with 8 entities using at least four of the above internet/social media tools, most of them using 5-6. They are followed by 3 NGOs (1 Registered Society and 2 Trusts) and 3 Cooperatives.

Interestingly three organisations that neither have a computer nor internet access are also selling online. These three cooperatives have been facilitated by GoCoop to host their products and information on its site. It is a positive scenario that organisations with such little ICT infrastructure have an online presence due to the facilitating role played by an online marketplace entity. However, a limitation could be that such organisations are not able to actively utilise their online presence.
It is also interesting to observe that organisations that are very active on the internet, i.e. those using at least four or more internet/social media tools (listed in figure 4), show higher annual sales on average, than the total average\(^\text{17}\). On average, their annual sales is slightly more than 10 million against the total average of about 7.9 million. In comparison, the organisations that are not very active on internet, i.e. those using only one or none of the internet/social media tools, show a much lower average annual sales of about 1.4 million.

\(^{17}\) Total average here refers to 38 organisations from whom we could collect annual sales figures
4c. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) skills among respondent organisations

About 55% of respondents have a staff with internet skills who can manage the online presence of the organisation like uploading text and photos on website, facebook, etc.

Among respondents with internet access, about 70% seem to have a staff with such internet skills. Out of these 29 organisations that have both internet connection and staff with internet skills, almost half are using four or more internet tools, while about one-fourth are either using one internet tool or they are not using any. There seems to be a scope for organisations to further utilise the internet skills that are already available with them to explore the maximum potential of online for the growth of their enterprises.

In terms of staff with basic computer skills i.e. those who can work on MS-Word, basic Excel, etc the number seems to be limited.

In organisations equipped with computers, while the average number of staff is about 10, the staff members with basic computer skills is about 2 on average. It may be possible that not all staff members have a work profile that requires them to work on computers. However, there still appears to be a scope for organisations to improve the basic computer literacy among the staff.

About 57% of organisations have a computer training institute in their area. Majority of those who do not have access to computer training facility are located in rural areas.

About 70% of organisations with internet connection have staff who can manage their online presence

Among organisations that have computers, on average about 2 out of 10 staff have basic computer skills (MS-Word, basic excel)
5. Conclusion

i. **Artisan owned organisations like cooperatives and small artisan proprietorships seem to lack basic ICT infrastructure like computers and internet connection.** The lack of financial capacity, illiteracy generally observed among the artisans and lack of digital literacy could be important factors that limit their engagement with the ICT technologies. Another serious challenge is that about 57% of all internet content is in English.\(^\text{18}\)

The scenario could perhaps be different in the case of organisations run by the younger generation of artisans who are perhaps more savvy with online technologies. Within artisan owned organisations, the artisans manage the entire value chain of production, promotion, and marketing of their products. The ICT can potentially play a valuable role in such organisations that have limited resources and lesser exposure to markets.

ii. **Many of the organisations that have the ICT infrastructure like computers and internet access are using them in a limited way.** The lack of staff with basic computer skills seems to be one of the reasons. In terms of online usage, it could be that organisations do not feel comfortable putting their products on the web for fear of their designs being copied. It could also be that some organisations do not have backend systems like easy access to courier services to be able to deliver products on time and therefore shy away from promoting their products online. The level of information about or adaptiveness to emerging online technologies/applications, particularly among older entities like some Cooperatives or NGOs could be other factors determining the extent to which ICT is being used by organisations.

The absence of basic online presence like website, facebook, or tools like e-catalogue of products among organisations that have the ICT infrastructure can limit their market opportunities in an increasingly digital and e-commerce driven environment.

iii. **There seems to be a scope in many organisations to improve the basic computer literacy of their staff like Word, Excel, etc.** For instance, while not all organisations can perhaps afford customised inventory software, the usage of Excel can greatly improve the management of stock related data.

6. Next steps

i. Promote education and digital literacy among the youth in the artisan communities to ensure that they can participate in the digital space.

ii. Identify young staff members in the organisations who are likely to be more savvy with computers and internet and train them.

iii. Invite volunteers/interns to assist the organisation in getting online and to train the staff members in using online tools.

iv. Trainings can be organised through which organisations can become more aware of the potential of ICT to promote their enterprise, the various digital tools that are available, and learn from similar organisations that are successfully using ICT.

v. Low-cost and user-friendly inventory management softwares can be explored and promoted among the organisations.

vi. Support the organisations to address issues like transportation and product packaging and to develop good order management and customer service practices to enable them to respond effectively to customer requirements and market competition.

vii. Organisations can explore online marketplaces (buyer-seller platforms) that enable sellers to have webpages with their product photos, contact information, etc and link them to potential buyers, both retail and wholesale.
**Annexure: List of organisations that participated in the survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Organisation Name and Location</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Organisation Name and Location</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Organisation Name and Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Aavaran (Rajasthan)</td>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Kayef Stitching Project LLP (Rajasthan)</td>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Shanti Sewa Sharm Mahila Sansthan (Gujarat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Anwesha Tribal Arts and Crafts (Orissa)</td>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Kritenya (Delhi)</td>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Shree Hari WCS (Orissa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Artisans Alliance Jawaja (Rajasthan)</td>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Maheswari Weavers Cooperative Society (Orissa)</td>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Shri Chamundeshwari Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society (Karnataka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Blossoms of Heaven (Delhi/Jammu &amp; Kashmir)</td>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Manzil/Craftkari (Delhi)</td>
<td>51.</td>
<td>Sri Gauri Creations (Karnataka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Chaya Nisarga (Karnataka)</td>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Natraj Mutually Aided Cooperative Society (Telangana)</td>
<td>52.</td>
<td>Sri Markandeshwar WCS Ltd. (Karnataka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Fabric Plus Pvt. Ltd. (Assam)</td>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Okhai Center for Empowerment (Gujarat)</td>
<td>54.</td>
<td>Srijani (Bihar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Federation of Tibetan Cooperative in India Ltd (FTCI) (Delhi)</td>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Over Nice Cooperative (Uttar Pradesh)</td>
<td>55.</td>
<td>Swami Sivananda Memorial Institute (Delhi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Gauri International (Uttarakhand)</td>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Padmavathi Handlooms (Telangana)</td>
<td>56.</td>
<td>The Design Forge (Delhi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>GoCoop - Social Marketplace (Andhra Pradesh)</td>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Pochampally Handloom Weavers Cooperative Production and Sales Society Ltd (Telangana)</td>
<td>57.</td>
<td>Threads (Gurgaon, Haryana)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Hao Crafts Society (Delhi/Manipur)</td>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Punarnawa Crafts (Orissa)</td>
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<td>Unnayan (Orissa)</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Himalayan Weavers Cooperative Society (Himachal Pradesh)</td>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Qadeem Sufi Shawls (Jammu &amp; Kashmir)</td>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Utkal ECP Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd (Orissa)</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Itiee Kritee (Madhya Pradesh)</td>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Sadhna (Rajasthan)</td>
<td>62.</td>
<td>Vijetha Mutually Aided Cooperative Society (Telangana)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Jagriti Cooperative (Uttarakhand)</td>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra (Karnataka)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Jai Maa Glass Beads (Uttar Pradesh)</td>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Sasha Association for Craft Producers (West Bengal)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Jayashree Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd.</td>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Shakambhari Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd. (Karnataka)</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Kalliasseri Weavers Industrial Cooperative Society Ltd</td>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Shankar Das (West Bengal)</td>
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