

AIACA: Report of Activities from July, 2005 to March 31st, 2006

- **Strengthening Network** – AIACA has continued to build ties with its member NGOs across the country, building their capacity to advocate on issues at the state level and to flag issues that need to be taken up by AIACA at the national level. During the past six months, AIACA has identified the need to increase regular interactions with members so as to strengthen the network.
- **Creation of Committees to Oversee Research** – AIACA has instituted two committees to oversee its research and advocacy work in two focus areas : access to credit and handlooms. The handloom committee – headed by Dastkar Andhra - has already met twice and has charted a research plan for the coming year that focuses on raw material supply (yarn) and on cooperative reform measures. This committee is the strongest committee in terms of having the capacity to deliberate on issues and to make strategic decisions.

A third committee on Macroeconomic issues is in the process of being formed. A base study examining census data to arrive at accurate figures of employment and production in the handloom sector will be conducted in collaboration with NCAER. Under this research area, AIACA has also initiated work on creating a database of BDS providers relevant to the handloom and handicraft sectors and making this database accessible through a web-site.

- **Research Studies** - AIACA commissioned a base report on credit flows to the handloom sector to serve as the basis for future research efforts in this area. That study was completed in April 2006 and formally launched on April 26, 2006.
- **Workshops** – AIACA had organized a workshop for AIACA member NGOs in November, coinciding with the Nature Bazaar held at Delhi, to invite their inputs into creating AIACA's plan of action for the coming year, to discuss key challenges faced by the handloom and handicraft sectors and to arrive at a consensus for an advocacy strategy to tackle these problems.
- **Inputs into new Handloom Policy** – AIACA participated in the Prime Ministers Task Force set up to draft a new national policy for the handloom sector. In addition to attending regular meetings of the task force and voicing concerns of AIACA members, AIACA also gave a formal written response suggesting changes that were required in the new draft handloom policy. AIACA argued for greater budgetary outlays for the sector and more of a capacity-building approach to help build the competitiveness of small-scale entrepreneurs in the sector. One key recommendation made by AIACA was of building a yarn exchange to bring greater transparency and more efficient price setting for yarn generated significant discussion and follow-up action by the government. AIACA's suggestion that the credit approval process for handloom cooperatives also be amended to ensure more timely delivery of credit was also accepted by the government.
- **Regular interactions with the Office of the Development Commissioner Handlooms, Office of the Development Commissioner Handlooms and the Planning Commission**

AIACA has been building the foundation for educating policy makers on the ground realities and the problems faced by handloom weavers and craft workers through establishing regular interactions with the office of the DC handlooms, the office of the DC handicrafts and the planning commission.

Recently, AIACA has held another round of presentations to key government staff in these departments to brief them on the findings of the Access to Credit base study commissioned by AIACA.

The Craftmark Initiative

In November, after pilot testing the Craftmark in five organizations, AIACA formally launched the Craftmark nationally. The number of users of the certification trademark has grown from 5 to 22 from November 2005 to April 2006.

AIACA is now working on creating a product catalogue of its members NGOs who are part of the Craftmark Initiative, and promoting this catalogue both in India and in the United States, leveraging its member network to procure more product orders for these NGOs.

Since the Craftmark Initiative is entirely funded through user fees at the moment, AIACA is seeking to raise grant funding to help strengthen the initiative and to provide a greater range of support services to organizations that are a part of the Craftmark Initiative.

Collaboration with Aid to Artisans (ATA) to offer marketing assistance to selected groups

AIACA developed a partnership with Aid to Artisans (ATA), an international crafts support NGO, to jointly develop an Artisan Enterprise Development Alliance Program (AEDAP) in India. ATA (www.aidtoartisans.org) is an US based organization which works with artisan groups all over the world. ATA assists artisan groups by providing various inputs that help in accessing local, regional and international mainstream commercial markets.

Under the AEDAP program, ATA will be working with selected groups over the course of one year, providing inputs in a range of areas including design and new product development. One of the most valuable resources ATA would bring to artisan groups is access to its network of buyers and importers. AIACA's role in the partnership is to identify and recommend crafts groups for inclusion in the program based on their current operating level, potential for growth, ability to participate in the program and commitment to making the changes required to sell to commercial buyers. AIACA will also be providing logistical and managerial support for the program components that will be carried out in India. Under this program, AIACA has already recommended 30 crafts groups to be apart of this program after collating detailed information about them. AIACA has also coordinated field visits to these 30 groups for the purpose of evaluating their operations.