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Research

Reimagining the Craft Economy Post Covid-19

Recommendations for a Sustainable Roadmap to Recovery

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Foreword

by Jonathan Kennedy, Director Arts India, British Council

This craft report has been developed by Fashion Revolution India with British Council.

The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed how we live, work, make and experience arts and culture. Covid-19 has changed us all and while I write this the future remains uncertain.

In India and the UK, we understand this has been and remains a very difficult time for the crafts sector and artisans. At this time of uncertainty, the British Council in partnership with Fashion Revolution India has explored innovation in digital technology and brought expert artisans and craft organisations to the fore.

This report documents the experience of the artisan and through follow-up surveys records the impact of the pandemic on the crafts sector in India. This report provides valuable insight on:

- The depth and scale of the impact on artisans, designers and craft organisations.
- Systemic actions the sector has taken during Covid-19
- The potential of international collaboration between India and the UK.
- The possibility of digital innovation and a re-imagined sustainable supply chain.
- Recommendations for building capacity and resilience while there is a risk from economic recession and climate change.

In the past year, India's crafts and design entrepreneurs have demonstrated resilience during the global challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic.

British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities – this is echoed in the long-term ambitions for the crafts programme in India. Our digital series Crafting Connections responded to the pandemic in 2020-2021 and brought together crafts organisations in

India and the UK to share expertise and insight online.

There are 200 million artisans in India. British Council's creative economy research, Taking the Temperature, confirmed the impact of Covid-19 on the 88% of MSMEs who make up the creative industries in India has been significant with many organisations closing permanently. It's more important than ever that with Fashion Revolution we look to understand what a roadmap for recovery offers for the crafts economy.

The report spans the craft supply chain with valuable insights from consumers to artisans. The report highlights the challenges faced by the sector and its market silos. The pandemic to some extent united many artisans and organisations and precipitated new ways of working to develop market opportunities through collaboration.

Social media campaigns like 'Handmade in India' set the pulse for new collaborations for the first time. However, the long-term resilience of the crafts sector remains uncertain. We hope this report will be a valuable and useful part of a roadmap to recovery.

Many thanks to Fashion Revolution and the artisans, crafts organisations, and stakeholders who have contributed to this research and continue to represent the fabulous diversity of India's crafts economy.



Foreword

by Suki Dusanj-Lenz, Country Head & Co-Founder,
Fashion Revolution India

There is much to navigate in this report which highlights the complexities of a craft sector as it journeys into the simplicity and vastness of crafting communities and its path to the endless length of fashion supply chains, it echos the narrative of those dignified voices that are the making of India's cultural craft heritage and the embodiment of its rich history in textiles, art and craft. We saw before us a shift, an almost revolution of enablement and a call to action when Covid-19 struck. It was a sink or swim moment for many industries and in India the heartbeat of the craft sector was felt, heard and imagined.

On our journey through this report we speak to experts and talk to artisans, educators and policy makers to deepen our dialogue around the craft economy. This report is especially poignant in the wake of the Vocal for Local campaign and in conjunction with our globally charged #WhoMadeMyClothes campaign. More pertinent is recognising what the craft industry needs for a sustainable future and we hope that together with the British Council and extended stakeholders our findings will find their way to avenues of change in the hope of making a difference.

Our report is rich in dialogue and findings that help show the collaborative nature of the industry, cross sector regulation and ultimately provides the simplest solutions to leverage digital transformation for the betterment of all. I recommend this report to understand how technology is an enabler for the transformation of craft communities and to appreciate the importance of accessibility to craft knowledge and products therefore redistributing an equal power and balance across the sector and shifting to a system where the artisan is no longer in the shadows but can be in the forefront of their practice. Fashion Revolution India developed a series called "The Shift" in March 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic was rife and then furthered with a series of activities for the Crafting Connections program. Now to further that combined exploration our findings have culminated into one place.

We are excited by the camaraderie that was seen amongst the chaos and turmoil of the impact of Covid-19 and how legislative action played a part in that. We hope that our recommendations help steer decision makers and enablers to value people over growth and profit and we wish to conserve and restore values that are very much upheld by our heritage, craftsmanship and local wisdom.



Partners

British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We work with over 100 countries in the fields of arts and culture, the English language, education, and civil society. Last year we reached over 80 million people directly and 791 million people overall including online, and through broadcasts and publications. We make a positive contribution to the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections, and engendering trust. Founded in 1934, we are a **UK charity governed by the Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive a 15 percent core funding grant from the UK government.**

Fashion Revolution

Fashion Revolution was founded in the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, Fashion Revolution has become the world's largest fashion activism movement, mobilising citizens, industry and policymakers through our research, education and advocacy work.

Our Vision

A global fashion industry that conserves and restores the environment and values people over growth and profit.

Our Aims

- An end to human and environmental exploitation in the global fashion industry
- Safe, dignified working conditions and living wages for all people in the supply chain
- Redistributed and more equal balance of power across the global fashion industry
- A bigger and stronger labour movement in the global fashion industry
- A global fashion industry that works to conserve precious resources and regenerate ecosystems
- A culture of transparency and accountability across the value chain
- An end to throwaway culture and shift to a system where materials are used for much longer and nothing goes to waste
- Heritage, craftsmanship and local wisdom are recognised and valued

www.fashionrevolution.org

Acknowledgments

**by Aliya Curmally, Head of Strategy & Project Producer,
Fashion Revolution India**

When Fashion Revolution India was entrusted with the responsibility of preparing a series of on-line talks and a report on the effects of Covid-19 on the craft sector we understood that we were entering a space that many have studied and addressed before us, and which meant a lot to the larger Indian cultural identity for many different stakeholders.

The distress of the craft sector during lockdown had been made known to us by our community of fashion designers who ordinarily would have been working closely with artisans on creating the most exquisite bridal collections for their fashion houses. We felt compelled to act and respond to the needs of the community and are grateful for having been given the opportunity to do our small bit for them.

We would like to thank Devika Purandare and Jonathan Kennedy at the British Council for putting their trust in us towards creating the Crafting Connections online series and this report.

We would like to thank Professor Toolika Gupta, Mayank Shekhar Kaul, Priya Krishnamoorthy, and Ekta Rajani for steering us through the editorial programming as we worked hard to understand the different issues such as the value of the hand-made in a sustainable global economy as well as the historical value of Craft.

We would like to thank all our panelists, all the participants of the IICD Workshop, everyone who made a video for Crafty Christmas, and all who filled out the survey which led to the creation of this report.

We would like to thank the author of the report and our Head of Policy, Shruti Singh, and the research team who helped her carry out the work behind the writing of this report.

We would like to thank our Fashion Revolution Team Members, the graphic design team, and the British Council India team for all their support.

We hope that our team's interdisciplinary approach towards creating this report serves to benefit the community of India's artisans and India's valuable craft traditions. We hope that all who read it find themselves leaving with deeper insights on the challenges that were faced and are still being faced by artisans who practice a traditional way of employment that is beautiful, sustainable, and economically viable under the right market conditions.



Executive Summary

India's craft sector, the second largest employer in India (after agriculture) with over 200 million artisans, has experienced dramatic changes because of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. Consumption dropped, orders were cancelled, payments were stalled, traditional supply chains broke down, while unsold stocks accumulated, offline modes of selling products (exhibitions and fairs) stopped, and craft organisations financial reserves were drawn down to survive. In some instances, craft clusters relied on State Government intervention for micro-grants and food parcels.

According to initial estimations by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), the handicrafts sector could suffer a loss of Rs 80-100 billion post pandemic¹. Several months after the lockdown restrictions were revoked, many arts and culture sectors continue to struggle to remain resilient from the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown.

This report is a culmination of dialogues with stakeholders from the craft sector - the artisans, craft organisations, civil societies, designers, brands, and social entrepreneurs. It highlights the struggles of artisans, deep problems within the sector, response to the pandemic, recovery roadmap and recommendations for building long term resilience and sustainability in crafts.

Key insights from the report

- The pandemic and lockdown forced the most vulnerable artisans to choose between safeguarding lives or livelihoods. It triggered mass exodus of artisans from cities to the villages, and 22 percent of the sector lost 75 percent of their annual income.
- According to the survey of 50 craft organisations and artisans, 44 percent faced cancellation of orders by the buyers and delay in payments, 58 percent made new products during the pandemic, and 76 percent shared that their work was negatively impacted due to the pandemic.
- The Central Government supported the sector by providing immediate relief (food and finance) and by raising awareness on supporting craftspeople through #VocalForLocal campaign. States with higher concentration of artisans launched schemes specifically for craft clusters and artisans.
- Craft organisations adapted to new realities and pivoted to digital platforms, introduced new products according to changed consumer behavior and switched to D2C (Direct to Consumer) business model.

- The uncertainty during the pandemic brought fragmented stakeholders together for collective action. This fostered innovation, skills exchange, skills development and collaboration amongst stakeholders that usually work in silos.

- Access to working capital and credit is largely through informal channels and money lenders at exorbitant interest rates. During the pandemic, Two percent of the sector had accessed bank loans and One percent had accessed government grants.

Key recommendations

Several recommendations have been identified to shape the recovery of the craft sector, some of which have been summarised below:

- The sector recovery has started but will take a long time to completely recover from the impact. Continued financial support should be provided to artisans and organisations through CSR funds, low interest loans and grants from global organisations.
- Capacity building for artisans should reflect the current and emerging market needs. The curriculum should include digital and financial skills literacy.
- Artisan welfare and progress should be focused with instituting living wages, representation of artisans in decision forums, developing opportunities for alternative income streams and scaling up access to formal credit and Government schemes.
- The visibility and value of crafts can be amplified through craft tourism, cultural districts, virtual tours and craft education in schools.
- Incentivize innovation and investment in craft to accelerate development. Public-private partnerships could be built to support financially, administratively or for strengthening business models. '.
- Nation-wide artisan mapping to assess the number of artisans in India, their social and financial and bridge the data gap. This will enable targeted interventions and policies.
- There is a need to shift the perspective and approach of the craft sector from informal, unorganized, and charitable to recognized, business-oriented, and important contributors to the Indian economy.

¹ Mozumdar, "Pandemic Delivered A More Severe Blow To Smaller, Individual Artisans: AIACA - The Statesman."

Introduction

01: Background

In January 2020, China confirmed the outbreak of a new strain of coronavirus (Covid-19) which was spreading rapidly and posed serious health risk to those infected by it. Several countries took active measures to contain the spread of the virus. It started with travel restrictions and ban on import/export of goods, lockdown and social distancing measures.

In March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a pandemic. Many countries took strict measures to limit international travel. While this worked to slow down the infection rate, it precipitated a global economic recession.

With great economic uncertainty, many people lost their jobs, demand dropped, supply chains were disrupted and for many daily wage workers in India, they faced a stark choice – which was the greater risk to their lives and livelihoods – Covid-19 or lack of economic opportunities to support their families. Some Governments supported basic necessities and food security while contending with hugely increased pressure on healthcare resources. Private institutions, civil society NGOs and individuals joined forces in providing relief to the most vulnerable communities.

According to initial estimations by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), the handicrafts sector could suffer a loss of Rs 80-100 billion post pandemic². Several months after the lockdown restrictions were revoked, many arts and culture sectors continue to struggle to remain resilient from the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown.

India's craft sector, the second largest employer in India (after agriculture) with over 200 million artisans, has experienced dramatic changes because of the pandemic. Consumption dropped, orders were cancelled, payments were pending, traditional supply chains broke-down, while unsold stocks accumulated, offline modes of selling products (exhibitions and fairs) stopped, and craft organisations financial reserves were drawn-down in order to survive. In some instances crafts clusters relied on State Government intervention for micro-grants and food parcels.

Laila Tyabji, Chairperson and Founder Member of Dastkar shared in a Voice of Fashion article that “any calamity, political decision, or economic downturn first impacts those who are outside the safety net of secure jobs, insurance, provident funds or pensions. Craftspeople are among the most vulnerable.”³

2020 accelerated the need for transformation of the craft economy in India. However, the future remains

very uncertain. Several short initiatives were undertaken by sector stakeholders to lay the foundation for rethinking, reshaping and rejuvenating the Craft sector for long-term resilience and sustainability.

02: Report Objective

Through this report, we aim to consider the impact of Covid-19 on the craft economy in India and make recommendations for long-term resilience and sustainability of the crafts and design sector.

The reports focus:

- Economic and social impact of Covid-19 on the Indian craft sector
- Challenges to employment, economic opportunities and market linkages
- Interventions by National and State Governments and Industry during Covid-19
- Good practices and emerging business models in the craft sector
- Recommendations for the long-term resilience, skills and capacity of the crafts economy



Photo © Freepik

² Mozumdar, “Pandemic Delivered A More Severe Blow To Smaller, Individual Artisans: AIACA - The Statesman.”

³ Khubchandani, “Coronavirus Impact On Indian Crafts And Handlooms.”

03: Scope and Limitations

- There is limited robust data of artisans and the crafts economy in India. The information represented in this report has been collected from independent research studies.
- The definition of craftspeople and artisans is not defined in India. For this report, the definition of artisans includes craftspeople that directly design, make and sell into the fashion value chain. This includes, but not limited to, artisans engaged in weaving, printing, dyeing, sewing and embroidery. The report does not consider the impact of Covid-19 on the many other Indian crafts.
- The survey was disseminated through existing networks to craft organisations in India and the UK. Due to limited participation from UK based respondents during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey findings have now focussed on findings from Indian respondents. Future editions of the report will include inputs from UK based artisans and organisations.
- The online survey was available in English only. This will have limited reach to artisans and craftspeople in India who do not have English as their second language or have access to robust WIFI and digital skills.
- Up until 30th March 2021, the survey had 156 respondents (106 consumers and 50 craft organisations). This equates to about 14% of the total 1100 surveys sent to individuals and organisations.

04: Research Methodology

This report was conducted through the following primary and secondary research methodologies:

Primary

- An online survey was conducted focussed on understanding the experiences, behaviour, and challenges of artisans, artisan organisations, and consumers during and post-Covid-19.
- One to one interviews were conducted with organisations and stakeholders in the craft supply chain. Sector stakeholders include artisans, artisan organisations, academics, researchers, consultants, designers, government officials and NGOs with a craft sector focus. The purpose of interviews was to understand the challenges in reviving work, market linkages and skills gaps in current business models.
- A set of focus-group panel discussions were conducted as part of the Crafting Connections online series from November 2020 to March 2021. Panels included representation from Indian Institute of Crafts and Design, Creative Dignity, designers, e-commerce websites and design institutions including Pearl Academy, Manchester Metropolitan University and CEPT.

Secondary

- Review of secondary literature, debates in public forum and news related to craft sector
- Good practice examples were identified to understand their impact on the sector.
- Insights from Fashion Revolution India's series - The Shift, on the impact of covid on creative sector, has been reviewed for this report.



Craft and Covid-19

Key insights from the survey - Impact of Covid on the Craft Sector

A survey was conducted to understand the impact of covid on artisans, craft organisations and buying behavior of the consumers.

28%

Craft organisations had to deal with deadstock

40%

Artisans faced loss of employment

16%

Organisations saw their incomes reduced

46%

Organisations faced delay in payment from buyers

48%

Organisations faced issues in logistics

44%

Organisations faced cancellation of orders by the buyers

28%

Organisations say they are doing same or better than before the pandemic

58%

Organisations made new products such as masks, gifts, PPE, stoles, tote bags

76%

Respondents said that their work was impacted negatively due to covid

69%

Consumers shared that their frequency of buying craft products decreased post Covid-19

- Better connectivity of craft clusters with the industry
- Access to funds and working capital
- Access to loans at low or no interest rates
- Capacity building initiatives
- Introducing new skills in training programs such as digital skills, social media promotion etc.
- Access to raw materials
- Increasing visibility of innovators and social entrepreneurs

Asks from the Government

Artisans and craft organisations shared that post pandemic they have engaged in selling products online, working remotely, collaborating actively and promoting conscious consumption.

Profile of Survey Respondents

Consumers: 106

Artisans and Craft organisations: 50

Respondents work in the following Crafts : Chikankari, Ikat, handloom, kalamkari, khadi, ajrakh, bandhani

Crafting the Road to Recovery

Exploring good practices, case studies and recommendations to build long term sustainability and resilience in the Indian craft sector





01: The Indian Craft Sector Identity & Structure

There is a need to shift the perspective and approach of the craft sector from informal, unorganized, and charitable to recognized, business-oriented, and important contributors to the Indian economy





“Craft and creativity have been devalued for a long time” - Priya Krishnamoorthy, 200 Million Artisans

Craft is not part of the organized sector in India and therefore had several identity-related and structural challenges even before the Covid-19 hit.

Craft as an independent sector

Looking at the expanse of the people associated with craft, this sector should have an independent identity from a policymaking perspective, rather than being grouped under the several industries it intersects with such as textile and fashion. Parts of the textile, fashion, and retail value chain come under the organized sector. The workers and organisations in the informal economy require different interventions and support systems as compared to those part of the formal economy. Structure, supply chain, logistics, finance, skill interventions should be modelled according to the unique needs of the sector which itself has distributed and diverse needs based on craft, location, language, etc.

The systematic support system provided to agriculture could be extended to craftspeople. “Craft and agriculture are interconnected because the same rural families work on the farm and in craftwork”, says Roopa Mehta, President of AIACA (All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association)

Recognizing the value and significance of crafting skills

In the fashion and textile industry, the craftspeople and artisans are often considered as laborers and vendors instead of being given due respect and credit befitting creative professionals who add tremendous value to the product through their skill. Their skill, techniques, and design acumen are not recognized and/or credited. This mindset towards craftspeople is deeply ingrained as the norm in the industry and is one of the dominant root causes of several other challenges.

The handloom and handcrafted products require high-level skill and technical expertise to produce products. Globally, these products are valued and the same artisans produce garments and products sold in luxury stores. Yet in India, the same products are not valued at the same level. Ramesh Menon, the founder of Save the Loom, during the The Shift dialogue series⁴ shared that these products deserve ‘the highest pedestal of luxury and unfortunately in this country, we never gave that space because we always salvage in excess. When we touch or when we feel something which is made in Italy, made in Australia or

anywhere else, we are happy to pay a premium price’.

Radhi Parekh, Founder Director of Artisans, believes that “Craft is not easy as a business because the numbers are much lower than say, fashion or luxury fashion and other FMCGs as it should be. And one of the things that we really worked hard on is to change the perception of craft in India as cheap and cheerful, particularly in the world outside. We have to value the artisans. If we don’t, we are going to be at a point where we are going to lose these high skills particularly”.

When craftsmanship is not treasured, the younger generations no longer want to associate with it and do not consider it as an aspirational career path. “It is not going to be a viable proposition for the artisans unless it is going to ensure a life of dignity to their families -until then the younger generation is no longer going to step into the sector. They are very bright when it comes to digital literacy so they will catch on. And when you combine the skills with say, entrepreneurship capacity enhancement and online literacy and social media networks, there are no limits to what the younger generation of artisans can achieve”, says Siva Devireddy, Founder and Managing Director, Gocoop.com.

During a panel discussion, Jay Thakkar, Executive Director of Design Innovation & Craft Resource Center, CEPT University, observed that craft has been looked at in a patronizing manner where it is romanticized without due acknowledgement of the people who need to be in focus. The craftspeople have this legacy of craft knowledge passed on to them for generations and it needs to be respected.

⁴ The Shift - Episode 4 with Susan Bhaktul, Industree Foundation and Ramesh Menon, Save The Loom, 2021



“Japan recognizes their artisans as a national treasure and that changes the way society views them. We can bring about such recognition for our artisans too.”

**- Monica Shah,
Co-Founder and Creative Lead - JADE,
Co-Founder at Chanakya School of Craft**

In Japan, skilled artisans are given the title of ‘national treasures’. It fosters the feeling of respect and attributes value to the work produced by their artisans. In India, the craft is valued in small pockets by the patrons of the arts community.

“When we say value we are saying the value of the crafts in terms of the economic values but also value in terms of appreciating the heritage and the culture that is deep within the textiles” adds Alison Welsh, Head of Fashion Research, Manchester Fashion Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University. There needs to be a fundamental shift in the way we perceive craft and artisans.

Mindset approach to craft

This sector has primarily been supported by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Government support. Over time, consumers associate craft with social welfare schemes and philanthropy rather than associating it with the business potential of contributing to the growth of the Indian economy. There are a handful of private institutions and public-private partnerships fostered for the growth of this sector. “We need to move away from the story of ‘please help the crafts person’ and build a story of ‘this is going to save our planet’ and ‘this is something our children need to and we need to know in terms of fabulous techniques’”, adds Anshu Arora, Design Partner, Small Shop.

“Most interventions in the craft sector have been through philanthropy and donor funding, and while those efforts have sustained the industry thus far, they have the tendency to lead to a ‘charity’ mindset. In recent years we can see more NGOs working on skill development models with eventual exit plans,

where artisans are supported but also empowered to run their own businesses. Charity leads to complacency, but the opportunity in this sector is for thriving businesses to emerge & grow”, shared Divya Rai, Operational Anchor, Creative Dignity.

This handloom and handicraft Rs. 10,000 crore annually to exports and is a Rs. 24,300 crore industry⁵. Aditi Shah Aman, Co-Founder, The Rare Earth shares that “the government needs to view the industry as something that can add to the GDP and India’s growth story and not something that is looking for subsidy but something that needs productive investments, certifications, and a clear distinction between the power loom and machine-made products. And those systems need to be put in place and implemented by the government and the industry.”

Radhika Gupta, founder of Raaha, reiterated the importance of shifting mindsets starting with focus on how we talk about the sector. She says, “the language we hear in the craft industry has a strong influence of not-for-profit and we have shied away from using words like growth, marketing, scalability, profitability etc. To scale any product offering, there is a need to integrate the language of business.”

⁵ Mozumdar, “Battle For Survival.”

Key Recommendations



- **Craft Sector recognition:** This sector should be recognised as a crucial sector on similar lines to agriculture, textile, retail amongst others. National action plan and systematic support should be mobilised to strengthen the craft economy as this sector is one of the largest employment generators in the country after agriculture.
- **Artisan representation:** Representation of artisan voices in decision forums and policymaking bodies such as the Government and industry bodies shaping this sector. This will help bring the artisan community to the forefront of representing themselves and their interests and increase their visibility and recognition.
- **Craft value perception:** Consciously build an approach around this sector that promotes the cultural significance and business potential, celebrates the high quality skills and elevates the status of craft products in consumer eyes from 'let's buy to support craftspeople' to 'let's buy because of craftsmanship'. This vocabulary should be resonated in every talk, publication and discussion forum.
- **Craft education:** Raise awareness on handcrafted products and craftsmanship of products, their differentiation from similar looking cheaper machine-made products. Craft education can be included in school curriculums to create an appreciation for crafts from early childhood.

02: Lives and Livelihoods

When the pandemic broke out, the most vulnerable artisans were faced with a dilemma on what was more dangerous for their lives - the novel coronavirus or not having economic opportunities to support livelihoods.



“

“The challenge that we faced over lockdown was unforgettable. The team that we have consisted of 40 to 50 artisans in it. And it was difficult to manage everything at once; things went from bad to worse. And after the lockdown, it was all over. We are in a place where there is no going back.”

- Tahir Siddiqui, Artisan Entrepreneur, Bidri Craft

Due to the pandemic and nationwide lockdown, there was a lot of uncertainty about the future. Markets came to a halt, stocks piled up, orders were deferred or cancelled, payments were pending and artisans faced an issue in cashflow to make their ends meet. In this financial struggle, artisans were desperate to sell their products at the lowest price to get money to sustain their livelihoods. There was no work for the artisans and looms were left idle. Even after the lockdown was lifted, there was lack of work due to less number and volume of orders and on the other hand artisans were faced with a dilemma on what was more dangerous for their lives - the novel coronavirus or not having economic opportunities to support livelihoods.

Post lockdown, “despite the relaxations and opening up of the economy, income streams for the creative workforce remain inconsistent and sporadic, with 22 percent of the sector due to loss of 75 percent of their annual income. This points towards a bleak outlook for India’s informal and formal creative economy.” - Jonathan Kennedy, Director of Arts, British Council India⁶.

Artisans working in larger supply chains migrated back to their villages due to lack of work avenues. The move was triggered due to the fear of Covid and partly due to lack of work for many who were dependent on daily wages to make ends meet. “In large businesses, the priority is to conserve the business. Orders got cancelled, shipments were not lifted - When the supply chain is so long, one does not have a personalised relationship through the supply chain and the human aspect is missing”, says Roopa Mehta, President of AIACA.

Vinod Kumar Pandey, CEO of Mijwan Welfare Society (MWS) shared that, “we were facing a dilemma - protection from covid or ensuring economic support - which was more critical to work towards. What were the risks we should take? Many rural workers working on daily wages came back to the villages during covid. We had more than 700 people who reached out seeking jobs but there were no opportunities in the rural areas. We helped them get access to Government relief schemes”.

“

“The craft sector ecosystem needs to abide by a moral-ethical code that is self-motivated”

- Binil Mohan, Professor at IICD

Covid added to the already existing economic challenges faced by the artisans. Remuneration and economic incentives given to artisans are not adequate when compared to the time, effort, and value they contribute to the execution of the design. Radhi Parekh, Founder Director of Artisans, shares that “Most artisans are weak in support on the local NREGA level because there has been a great migration of high skilled artisans to low-skill construction work because NREGA offers more per day.”

Most of these craft workers are employed informally and do not have contractual agreements protecting them in case of such eventuality. Lack of formal agreement or legal contract outlining the work, responsibilities, process, outcome expected, timelines, provisions for contingencies, conflict resolution mechanism and jurisdiction, intellectual property rights, etc. impacts smooth execution of work with adequate protection of rights of all parties involved.

⁶ Khatib, “How The Crafts Economy Can Stay Resilient During The COVID-19 Pandemic.”



“Currently the relationship works only on trust. Many times the designers take time to fulfill the payment. That affects our working capital and everyone’s salaries. Due to lack of contract, we cannot do anything.” - An artisan entrepreneur*

Covid added to the already existing economic challenges faced by the artisans. Remuneration and economic incentives given to artisans are not adequate when compared to the time, effort, and value they contribute to the execution of the design. Radhi Parekh, Founder Director of Artisans, shares that Most of these craft workers are employed informally and do not have contractual agreements protecting them in case of such eventuality. Lack of formal agreement or legal contract outlining the work, responsibilities, process, outcome expected, timelines, provisions for contingencies, conflict resolution mechanism and jurisdiction, intellectual property rights, etc. impacts smooth execution of work with adequate protection of rights of all parties involved.

Lack of fair wages and remuneration is a sector-wide issue that needs to be addressed systematically including health and welfare protections provided in the formal industry such as covering healthcare support insurance for artisan families. “We’ve noticed that artisans don’t get a fair share of the sales unless they have direct contact with the customers. The artisan income level remains around Rs. 3000-5000 per month whenever a market interface works for them whether its master weavers, collectives or not-for-profits. Hence, we didn’t want Antaran to be another intermediary between the artisans and the markets. All the efforts therefore from day 1 has been towards creating direct connect of artisans with buyers”, shares Sharda Gautam, Head of Crafts at Tata Trust.

Photo © twenty20photos

Although the Government has instituted minimum wages (Rs. 477), it is not sufficient to cover all the basic needs of the people and to ensure they have savings. Many workers who are employed from home or are informally contracted are often paid below minimum wages. Tamil Nadu Alliance in the Fashion Transparency Report 2021 highlights that “in reality, many experienced workers are paid less than half of this”⁷. According to a report by the Society for Labour & Development, 3.6 million garment workers withdrew a total of Rs. 11,540 crores from their Employee Provident Fund (EPF) savings account, which is usually saved for their children’s education and for emergencies⁸.



“The next generation is not willing to practice block printing because of not receiving fair wages.” - An artisan*



*The artisan requested to remain anonymous

⁷ Fashion Revolution, Fashion Transparency Index.

⁸ Society for Labour & Development, Garment Workers In India’S Lockdown.

Case Study: Mijwan Welfare Society (MWS)

Mijwan is a remote village in the Azamgarh district of eastern Uttar Pradesh. Mijwan Welfare Society, started in 1993, trains and works with 300 women artisans on producing high quality chikankari embroidery. They do work for leading designers Manish Malhotra, Neeta Lulla among others. During the pandemic, they created 70,000 masks with orders from organisations such as Loreal, Manish Malhotra, Manish Tripathi and support from HDFC, HSBC and Rotary International.

“Initially there was a confusion on usage of masks and which materials could be used. Once PM Modi came on television wearing a ‘gamcha’ (cloth wrapped around covering like a mask), we realised that this is something the women can make to cater the new needs”, shares Vinod Kumar Pandey, CEO, MWS.

The society earned 7,50,000 Rs. income at a time when orders and other sources of income was negligible. Before Covid 325 women were working with them and post covid there are 450 women across 200 villages. As women could not come to the production centre, kits were prepared and sent to their houses. Once they made the products, the masks were collected from them and then distributed to those who needed them.



Photo © Mijwan Welfare Society

“

“When everyone was losing jobs and had pay cuts, women in MWS saw an increase in their salaries which almost doubled.”

- Vinod Kumar Pandey, CEO, MWS

They taught women how to handle the end to end supply chain. They know how to design, embroider, sew, do accounts, use wifi and the internet, and sell online. They ensured that all women who work with them have their Aadhar card and bank accounts. All their earnings are transferred directly to them, giving them financial control over their income. They know how to use a bank, and debit card. Women are also given counselling on how to manage money for household expenses and they attend mindfulness workshops.

“

“I was lucky to have a supportive family that supported my work at the Mijwan Welfare Society. During the pandemic, it gives me great pride to share that the women of MWS were primarily taking care of the household expenses.”

- Sanjogita, chikankari artisan at MWS

Sanjogita was the first artisan to join MWS and shared that working here has changed the direction of her life. She used to work in the fields and do household work. When she was given the opportunity to train herself and other women in the craft of chikankari, she did not know the potential it had.

Learning about the bank system, accounts and how to manage household expenses, she shared with a big grin on her face, “Earlier we had to ask money from our husbands and after a week they would ask for ‘hisaab’ (accounts). Now we do not have to answer to anyone on the money we have earned ourselves. Some women have been able to support their parents’ healthcare expenses, some are funding their own education, and we now have the independence to fulfill our dreams.”

“

“Between household work and field (agriculture) work, I did not know that my destiny was in this needle and thread”

-Sanjogita, chikankari artisan at MWS

She also added how being employed has changed her worldview. Now she encourages women in her family to study further and think of building a career and supporting their household financially. She adds that “all women who are associated with us here feel proud of what we create. **Doing chikankari work has given us self-respect, confidence, and identity.**”

While talking about the journey of MWS during Covid, Vinod shares, “how we adapted during Covid has strengthened the organisation. We started with a lot of fear due to uncertainty, but today we are ready to handle such a crisis again. **Artisan-led brand Samriddhi was launched during covid to ensure that even if we do not have orders tomorrow, we are self-reliant and self-sustainable.**”



Case Study: Care for Karigars

Care for Karigars was launched in 2020 as a joint initiative of designers Kresha Bajaj and Shubhika Davda of Papa Don't Preach to support the migrant labourers through the impact of the pandemic⁹.



Several artisans went back to their villages after the lockdown was announced. They had no source of livelihood or savings to cover their basic necessities. The designers launched a fundraiser on social media to raise funds to support the artisans. They featured their best-selling products and their sales were 100% pledged for the artisans welfare.

Kresha Bajaj created a limited edition cape and Papa Don't Preach offered their signature embroidered belt bag, both priced at INR 5,000 each. Every purchase either of Bag or Cape of INR 5,000 provided food, ration, basic medical and sanitation supplies for a family of 4-5 members in the village for upto 2 months. The initiative gave karigars a lifeline to get through these uncertain next few months and work to develop beautiful bags and capes when they come back from their village.

Several designers and brands created similar fundraising initiatives and donated the funds to artisans and their families.

Photo © May Ee Fong for Matter x Iro Iro

⁹ The Shift - Episode 3 with Shubhika, Founder - Papa Don't Preach and Kresha - Kresha Bajaj, 2021

Key Recommendations



Short term:

• **Emergency relief:** The artisans and organisations continue to require financial support and working capital to sustain during the pandemic. They should be supported through

- Mobilisation of CSR funds in the craft sector.
- Low interest or Interest free loans and subsidies from the Government.
- Grants from global organisations working in this sector.

• **Excess stock and e-commerce:** The number of artisans on the Government run e-commerce platform (GeM and TRIFED) should be scaled up to reach more artisans and help them sell their excess stock and new inventories and generate continuous cash flow. Initiatives like Antaran and their model (that are connecting the artisans in remote parts and helping them sell on e-commerce platforms) should be scaled to other parts of India.

• **Artisan Helpline:** Setting up artisan helplines which can guide artisans on how to deal with the pandemic, issues related to inventory, raw materials, health and safety.

Medium to long term:

• **Institutional procurement:** All Government institutions and bodies should procure craft products for offices and gifting. This will ensure that there is a regular demand for craft products and their visibility is improved.

• **Living wages:** Ensure that all workers in the craft value chain receive living wages. Although minimum wage has been set by the Government for employment, they are not sufficient to cover basic needs and at a lot of places the workforce receive less than the minimum wage. There should also be an initiative to raise awareness on minimum and living wages.

• **Health and safety at workplaces:** Post pandemic it is even more important to ensure that the working conditions and environment at workplaces is safe and hygienic. The guidelines for the working environment should be met by all organisations and the Government should set up grievance redressal mechanisms to report and address if the guidelines are not met. It is also important for organisations to provide health insurance and basic medical support.

03: Regulatory Framework

The Government support has been crucial for the sector, especially during Covid in providing immediate relief and in raising awareness on supporting craftspeople through the **#VocalForLocal** campaign



After the announcement of lockdown, there was a lot of panic amongst the migrant workers who had travelled to cities from rural areas. In light of uncertainty about the coronavirus threat and the economic opportunities, there was a mass exodus of migrant workers. Those in rural areas without digital inclusion were left disconnected with the world as traditional supply chains shut down. The immediate focus of the Government was to support the most vulnerable population through food and financial support.



“The central and state governments, through a systemic decentralised approach, played a big role in providing immediate

relief.” - Roopa Mehta, President of All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA)

Through the relief and support measures taken by the Central and State Governments during Covid for the general population, artisans were able to get food and monetary support during lockdown.

State Governments with higher concentration of craft communities have been proactive with policy making and driving support on ground. A few of the dedicated initiatives for artisans through Central and State Government and industry bodies include:

One District One Product (ODOP) scheme by the Uttar Pradesh State Government was launched in 2018 with the aim to ‘preserve, develop and promote local arts, crafts and traditional skills of communities spread across each district of Uttar Pradesh’¹⁰. During Covid, they have assisted craftspeople to sell their products through online channels. They have conducted training sessions in 60 districts of UP where artisans live. ODOP has tied up with Amazon, Flipkart and other ecommerce websites to promote craft products. More than 10,000 products have been listed on Amazon directly by artisans and sales are to the tune of Rs. 24 crores¹¹.

Covid-19 Artisans Help Fund¹² by the Delhi Crafts Council was created to support artisans for daily sustenance, mobilising unsold inventories and help in procurement of raw materials and online marketing of products.

Government e-Market place (GeM) - The central government launched an e-marketplace to enable artisans to sell their products directly to various government departments and organisations. By the end of 2020, 1.7 lac artisans had registered on the website¹³.

#Vocal4Local¹⁴ - The Ministry of Textiles launched a social media campaign on the 9th November 2020 (the National Handloom Day) to garner support for the weavers, artisans and SMEs. This was done in partnership with all industry stakeholders, and social influencers to promote the handloom legacy of India and encourage procurement of craft products for diwali. This was aligned to the Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) initiative. It has been reported that the social media campaign has resulted in renewed interest of the Indian public in handlooms and several e-commerce players have reported increase in sale of Indian handloom products.

Design Resource Centres (DRCs) are being set up in Weavers Service Centres (WSCs) in collaboration with the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT). The aim is to help artisans through design interventions. These have been setup in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Varanasi, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar and Mumbai.¹⁵

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs relief scheme¹⁶ was launched under the TRIFED (The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India) to support artisans from tribal communities through the following:

- Purchasing unsold stocks and tying up with buyers
- Distributing monthly ration in association with the Art of Living foundation
- Providing working capital to artisans
- Providing masks, gloves and soaps

A stakeholder from the industry shared that “the Government support does not necessarily turn into sales. It can help the sector survive, but we need private investments and support of social entrepreneurs to help the sector thrive”.



“None of the policies made for the artisans include anyone at the policy table from the actual field of

work” - Jay Thakkar, Executive Director, Design Innovation & Craft Resource Center, CEPT University

¹⁰ “Official Website Of One District One Product Uttar Pradesh.”

¹¹ Ara, “As COVID-19 Impact Continues, UP Artisans Are Selling Their Goods Online.”

¹² Singh, “Covid-19 Artisans Help Fund — Delhi Crafts Council.”

¹³ The Press Information Bureau, Impact Of Covid-19 Pandemic On Textile Industry.

¹⁴ The Press Information Bureau, Impact Of Covid-19 Pandemic On Textile Industry.

¹⁵ Ministry of Textiles, Monthly Summary To The Cabinet For The Month Of December, 2020

¹⁶ The Press Information Bureau, Impact Of Covid-19 Pandemic On Textile Industry

Key Recommendations



Short term

- **Financial support:** The Government should continue to provide financial and food security. They should further provide low interest or interest free loans to artisans to ensure they are able to come out of this impact of the pandemic.
- **Institutional procurement:** Encourage the use of handmade, handloom, and handicraft products in all Government offices. Government institutions and bodies should procure craft products for the upcoming festival gifting. This will generate demand for products, keep working capital running and kickstart production.
- **Artisan ID cards:** Conduct registration drives to help artisans register for the Government's Artisan ID card to facilitate access to social welfare schemes built for the artisans.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Access to Government schemes (specifically related to the pandemic) needs to be amplified. This can start through building awareness of policies and schemes that can be availed by the artisans. Dedicated support can be extended through existing self-help groups and organisations working with the artisans on ground.

Medium to long term

- **Artisan representation:** Representation of artisan voices in decision forums and policymaking bodies such as the Government and industry bodies shaping this sector. This will help bring the artisan community to the forefront of representing themselves and their interests and increase their visibility and recognition.
- **Artisan data:** Include artisans in the national consensus 2021 to correctly represent the number of artisans in India.
- **Promote craft innovation:** Government should invest in and promote innovations in the craft sector and help scaling of solutions with proven impact records. The Government can identify these innovations and help them scale through the State Governments and local bodies. Public-private partnerships could be built to support financially, administratively or for strengthening business models.
- **Craft knowledge preservation:** Build online systems to document and preserve dying arts in a format that can be accessible to larger populations across the globe.
- **Incentivize investment in craft:** The Government should provide additional benefits (tax benefits or rebates) to companies investing significantly in the development of the craft sector. Startups, MSMEs and entrepreneurs with impactful practices and proven good business models should be scaled up in other regions through financial support from the Government and private sector.

04: Collaborative Ecosystem

The craft sector was working in silos pre Covid. There was a shift in the nature of the support network that evolved during the pandemic which will be the defining foundation for the partnerships that will be forged in the next chapter of the craft ecosystem





“What was really important was the feeling of collaboration and solidarity through this crisis - buyers reached out to collect the balance stocks, online stores doing well reached out to sell artisan-made products on their platform, visibility was increased.” - Roopa Mehta, President of All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA)

In the craft sector there was a lack of collaborative networks proactively synergizing and sharing knowledge before the pandemic. The common challenges and uncertainty faced during the lockdown encouraged people to reach out to each other in solidarity and build collection ideas on solving the issues faced by artisans and organisations. Covid led to creation of unexpected partnerships and allies. There was a feeling of ‘we are in this together’ which turned competitors also into collaborators. “If we collaborate, we can achieve so much more” shared Divya Rai, Operational Anchor, Creative Dignity

Individuals and organisations offered their skills, ideas, and network to mobilise support where needed. From helping artisans take photographs of products to teaching them how to sell online or to innovative fundraising campaigns on social media - there was engagement throughout the ecosystem and beyond. Consumers conscious needs of the artisan inspired many more to support through word of mouth.

Creative dignity started as a response to the pandemic with a group of like-minded people involved in the artisan sector who were connected on WhatsApp and were discussing how the situation was very grim. Artisans did not have work. Their product was lying unsold, traditional marketing linkages were no longer functional, exhibitions were not happening, buyers had cancelled orders, payments were not forthcoming, so on and so forth. “It began as a conversation borne out of deep anxiety, empathy and concern of the need to do something for the sector. And somewhere it grew into a voluntary movement. And before we knew it, it became a movement pan India”, shared Aditi Shah Aman, Co-Founder, The Rare Earth.

“Last year when COVID lockdown was announced, artisans were stuck with a lot of inventory. This happened because several buyers were not able to honour their commitment related to payments and offline events were uncertain in the midst of the pandemic. As artisans were earlier educated on digital literacy, artisans could quickly do photography, costing and upload the products on the free website from ‘google sites’. Within 3 months (April to June) we saw 12.5 lacs footfalls on the website. Artisans did a business of about 4 .25 crores which is a 100% YoY increase from last year (1.8 crores), despite this being a covid impacted year.”, shared Sharda Gautam, Head of Crafts at Tata Trusts.

Another trend which was seen during the pandemic was the involvement of the younger generation within the artisan communities. They were breathing fresh blood into the ways of working and encouraging their parents to set up an ecommerce platform. They helped take photographs, set up sales channels digitally. An artisan entrepreneur specialising in Bidri craft shared that he created a video explaining about craft methodology and highlighting his products. His wife gave a voiceover of the video and his son helped him shoot and edit it.

Most interviewees shared that an interconnected network of stakeholders will play an important role in the next chapter of the craft sector. When smaller organisations are connected with each other through networks like Creative Dignity, AIACA among others, they get access to larger organisations, funds, resources.



“Today is the time we need to create systems around craft that it can help it sustain and flourish” - Ramesh Menon, Founder, Save The Loom¹⁷

on mobilising support, generating ideas and building new collaborations. They conducted mentorship programs and ecommerce training sessions with experts. There are existing solutions which require structures Government and private player support to scale up and support the entire ecosystem. “The Government and private sector can play a key role in facilitating execution of solutions at scale”, added Priya Krishnamoorthy, 200 Million Artisans.

“Maybe a time like this is good to look at where the structure can be reformed, how much outside help is required, how much of the resilience needs to be built in the community. It’s not just about being able to sell your product to an urban customer, it is also about how to build local linkages, back in place.” - Anshu Arora, Design Partner, Small Shop.

¹⁷ The Shift - Episode 4 with Susan Bhaktul, Industree Foundation and Ramesh Menon, Save The Loom, 2021

Case Study: Creative Dignity

Creative Dignity (CD) is a voluntary movement that aims to empower and rejuvenate the craft sector of India in a post Covid era. Started as a Whatsapp group by a bunch of like-minded individuals, the movement brings together creative producers, practitioners, students and professionals, from the diverse fields within the industry, to provide 'relief, rehabilitation and rejuvenation to the artisans in a bid to ensure their sustained prosperity'¹⁸.



Photo © May Ee Fong for Matter x Iro Iro

Unlike other non-profit organisations, the creative dignity movement was borne out of a spontaneous, desperate need to support the artisans in the handicraft sector. As the pandemic ravaged our economy, the craft artisans bore the brunt with stocks worth crores lying unsold and lack of work. With grit and active engagement, the Whatsapp group soon grew into a pan-India movement and Creative Dignity was born, in March, with 'a vision to enable artisans to become equal and active participants in building a thriving ecosystem of the future'¹⁹.

Aditi Shah Aman, Co-Founder, The Rare Earth and a volunteer for Creative Dignity shared that "What we did essentially learn was that when you come and do an intervention, at the end of it you have to be able to make yourself redundant. So if you make yourself redundant at the end of the intervention, you have done the job well. Our endeavour was to equip the artisans to be able to shoot their own photographs and make their own catalogues". Creative Dignity went in with a no dependence model and focussed on empowerment of artisans using accessible technology of smartphones. This led to confidence and increased self-esteem amongst the artisans engaged.

“Creative dignity has given us hope during very difficult times by training us, and helping us sell our stock”-Tahir Siddiqui, Artisan Entrepreneur, Bidri Craft

Today, the movement is still growing with a network of over 160 members and 250 student interns. Creative Dignity has a wide presence in 21 states and up to 3200 families have been supported via continuous engagement and skill development, as of November 2020. The Creative Dignity movement has been endorsed by the Government, industry experts and creative producers and practitioners from across India. Some of the names include Asian Heritage Foundation, Association of Designers of India, Crafts Council of India, Dastka, EPCH, Fair Trade Forum India, and NID.

¹⁸ "Creative Dignity - Our Journey."

¹⁹ *ibid.*

In the past few months, Creative Dignity has taken several initiatives for the artisans with several strategic partners and driven strong impact on the ground:

- Creative Dignity has empowered hundreds of artisans through skill development, market training, and education and support with respect to design, innovation and financial inclusion.
- They have established strategic partnerships for funding, marketing, artisan support, design and program development. Some strategic partners include TISS, IMG Reliance, Ketto, JLF and FICCI Flo.
- Creative Dignity is advocating for more inclusive policies for artisans and to include them in Census 2021.
- They have enabled craft product sales of over Rs. 1 crore between March and October 2020 through B2C and B2B channels²⁰.
- Creative Dignity has connected small-scale craft entrepreneurs, artisans and craft clusters with 12 established marketing channels including TATA Cliq, Okhai, Freedom Tree, LAI10, GoCoop, among others.

- Okhai collaborated with Creative Dignity to launch a helpline to support artisans in rural and tribal areas to support them with their concerns. Additionally, they helped artisans through the opportunity to catalog their products along with facilitation of access to newer markets to improve their visibility. With 6 months from March to October, Okhai increased the number of artisans showcasing on their website from 2300 to 16000²¹.

What started as a spontaneous and sporadic movement transformed into a systematic and structured approach linking the entire ecosystem of craft. Creative Dignity has set an example of the power of community engagement through a decentralised network of voluntary efforts in a limited time period. Although it started as a movement to support artisans during Covid, what they have created is a system much needed by the artisan community long after Covid is gone.



Photo © Storyloom Films

²⁰ "Creative Dignity - Our Journey."

²¹ "Okhai Launches Helpline For Rural Artisans Across India - CSR Mandate."

Case Study: Crafting Futures, India

Crafting Futures is a global programme run by the British Council which aims for a sustainable future through making and collaboration – supporting a future for craft by understanding its value in our history, culture and world today. The programme is currently active in over 22 countries across East Asia, South Asia, Latin America and Wider Europe and brings together craft practitioners, designers and organisations from around the world to explore possibilities for this future together.



In India, specifically, the programme has been developed to be a grant scheme instrumental in bringing together Indian and UK partners to co-develop and collaborate on projects which explore new futures for craft in India (with a deep focus on new ecosystems, women's empowerment and leadership, environmental challenges, craft tourism, digital technology). From 52 applications, 6 projects were selected for Crafting Futures.

The projects were originally planned as face to face activities; however, the sudden onset of the pandemic posed several challenges in project delivery. Most of the programmes were scheduled to take place in small villages and rural parts of the country with limited access to digital technology and the internet. In such a challenging and uncertain time, the British Council along with the support of outstanding partners was able to break these barriers and show resilience and solidarity to the craft communities across India.

Below are some striking examples of how the sector pivoted on new avenues in digital technology and built strong collaborations to support the craft sector.

1. Raising awareness of value of craft and women in India

Pearl Academy (India) and Manchester Metropolitan University (UK) launched a pilot project to support female craft makers in Gujarat to improve their livelihoods through product innovation and new forms of marketing. The project aimed to benefit the core community of women artisans, their families, their communities, production networks in India and consumers in India and elsewhere, through a shared understanding of the unique value of the craft. The partners reached out to over 100 women artisans, and over 30 male artisans by exposing them to quality training and design interventions.

“Due to the pandemic and lockdown we have had to make a few changes to our approach while still trying to maintain the integrity of the project aims and outcomes. The Project team met regularly, online, to understand the implications of this pandemic on our project and on the future of craft in India overall. This has motivated us to see the opportunities we can create for the group we are working with in Gujarat which could possibly translate into a model for the other craft clusters as well”, shared Shalini Gupta, Crafting Futures Grantee and Head of Department, Styling & Beauty, Pearl Academy, India.

The project focused on knowledge exchange and collaboration between academics from Manchester Metropolitan University and at Pearl Academy and craftswomen alongside their families in craft clusters in Kutch. The researchers worked in collaboration with Qasab Kutch Craftswomen to formulate a plan for the production of new product designs ideas. The research team facilitated virtual co-creation workshops in conjunction with Qasab and the craftswomen. The focus of the workshops was on methods of exploring new design ideas for the Indian and European market, and also to instigate a separate agenda to develop a labelling system to authenticate handmade Indian goods using co-production methods of design. With the sudden shift to online mediums of engagement and e-platforms, the trainers also worked on empowering the women of Qasab with simple toolkits consisting of a phone, tripod and studio lights along with foundational training in how to click pictures of their products and advertise on social media. The community took to this rather readily and they are now in the process of maximising their reach on social media.

Photo © Mijwan Welfare Society

2. Empowering Through Crafts: using craft heritage and sustainable processes to train women and enhance the design process

Swami Sivanananda Memorial Institute (SSMI) and Goldsmiths University London is focused on training women artisans working at SSMI in design and the creative process, natural dyeing techniques and exploring the future of their craft. Key craftswomen will attend a virtual design workshop run by Goldsmith University and use this to improve the quality of the creative practices at SSMI and create a collection driven by the women's development and inspiration. The design workshops will also explore making its products more environmentally sustainable and the associated creative design opportunities of using natural and traditional techniques. The project is currently underway and aims at reaching out directly to 100 women craft practitioners in New Delhi and indirectly to 7500 people from the community.

3. Living Crafts

UnBox Culture Futures (India) and Future Everything (UK) conceptualised a project focused on urban crafts and developed opportunities for meaningful collaborations in the local context as a way to find new inspiration and potential for reviving and revitalising craft. The project

explored the questions - Where does craft live in our cities today? What are places or hubs where people are practicing craft?

“‘Living Crafts’ is an exploratory design and speculation project to discover and document a range of crafts that are being practiced in the cities of Bangalore, Kolkata and Delhi. We are also looking to examine what types of ‘making’ qualifies as crafts through this research and explore the boundaries of the term. At the same time, we are also looking at how the making practices in the urban areas have evolved and continue to flourish in the modern economy and then building scenarios of what may be interesting future directions given the sudden shift due to the Covid-19 pandemic.” – Neha Singh – Crafting Futures Grantee and Co-Founder UnBox Festival

The project highlight was a craft mapping exercise in localities in three diverse cities in India – Kolkata, Goa and Bangalore. In each location, a craft sector and organisation was identified and paired with a local design creative/digital professional to develop a collaboration that unfolds over four months, much like a residency with an equitable exchange of ideas, skills and tools. The results of the crafts products created are scheduled to be showcased at the Unbox Festival.



Key Recommendations



- **Strengthening the collaborations and partnerships** created during the pandemic to build a robust artisan ecosystem which is structured to support each other's needs and exchange knowledge.
- **Build collective access to resources** to foster mutual support for advocacy, shared learning and to build scale. For example, collaborate on building corporate gift hampers and use the network to advocate for procuring from the artisans. The activities could be planned in advance and executed with a structured approach.
- **Cultural districts or hubs:** The State Governments can create dedicated spaces in every city for craft creators to work together, learn from each other, and promote their products. It can be a vibrant place for displaying cultural heritage, co-working and facilitating experiential craft workshops. This will also promote tourism and craft education.

05: The Future is Digital

The power of technology, social media, and ecommerce websites was leveraged during the pandemic to enable artisans and craft organisations to reach out to consumers and sell products





“I have always believed that technology can be a real enabler. It can connect a remote artisan to a consumer in San Francisco. Technology can remove a lot of intermediaries in the value chain by directly connecting artisan or artisan groups to consumers and buyers online.” -Siva Devireddy, Founder and Managing Director, Gocoop.com

Due to the advent of Covid, the traditional methods such as exhibitions and brick and mortar were no longer the route available to the artisan organisations. Pre-pandemic there were many organisations who had adopted technology in several aspects of their businesses. The lockdown during Covid accelerated the transition to digitization in the majority of the sector. “India entered a new era of digital marketing. Everyone realized that brick and mortar stores aren’t the only avenues to reach out to wider audiences.” - Monica, Co-Founder and Creative Lead- JADE, Co-Founder at Chanakya School of Craft



“The greatest disruption the pandemic has provided is digital space to people regardless of who they are and where they come from. It has provided a platform for craftspeople to share their stories.” -Jay Thakkar, Executive Director, Design Innovation & Craft Resource Center, CEPT University

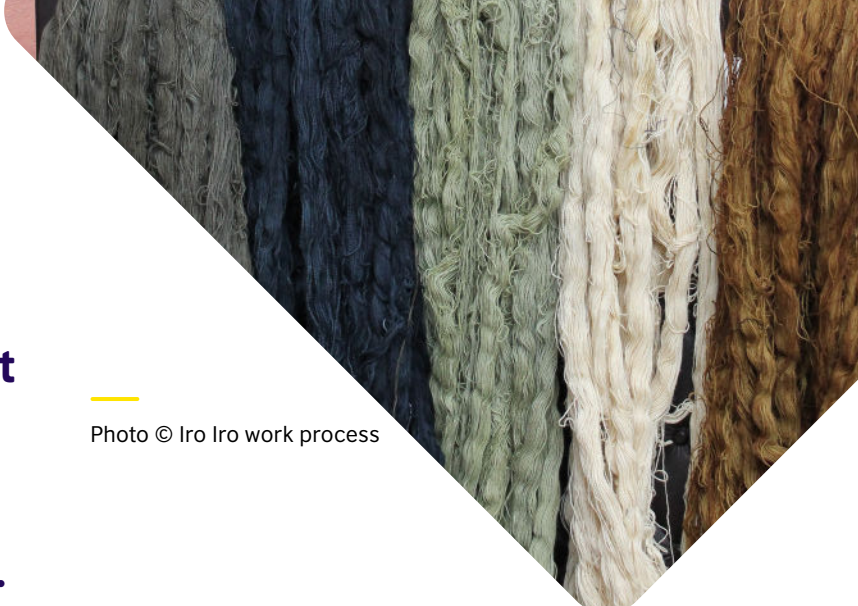


Photo © Iro Iro work process

“The big shift that happened because of COVID, though it has been a terrible thing-it brought the entire sector to a standstill- but the relevance of online commerce got really understood. People both on the consumer side as well as on the creative producers, the artisans started realising that online is probably the only way forwards us” shared Siva Devireddy, Founder and Managing Director, Gocoop.com.

Even though offline markets are opening up, there is still a lot of apprehension to travel for exhibitions especially with no guarantee of customer footfalls and/or sales. Industry experts believe that while stores will continue to be in existence, there is no doubt that digital technologies will be defining the future.

Not all artisan communities have access to the digital market and resources. Lack of digital inclusion excludes artisans from many opportunities such as e-commerce, WhatsApp selling, trend mapping, and understanding global trends. There are artisan communities living in remote areas where there is no internet making it impossible to include them in the digital revolution. Another issue artisans face is that of packaging their product efficiently to ensure there is no damage or breakage (in case of accessories). An artisan shared that “It is important to make our packaging stronger if we want to do well online”.

Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) has been facilitating internet connection in rural areas especially at the time of pandemic where almost everything was transitioning to digital platforms. Digital mediums also allow the craft organisations to work in an agile and lean mode. They do not have to keep large inventories or stock and can produce products on demand, making a positive impact on sustainability.

From ecommerce to webinars, virtual tours to digital fashion shows, technology played a key role in connecting everyone when the world was at a standstill. IMG Reliance recreated the Lakme Fashion week virtually. Darshana Gajare, IMG Reliance, shared that they developed the virtual space named the Lakme Fashion Week hub. The participants could navigate within that virtual space and interact with community members. The hub also had a virtual showroom which garnered a positive response from the audience that the IMG team decided to keep it as a constant feature for future shows.

06: Rethinking the Supply Chain

Covid-19 disrupted the conventional supply chains and highlighted the fractures in the existing systems of procurement of raw materials, resource allocation and logistics. There is a need to move from long supply chains to shorter supply chains to enable circularity and sustainability



Craft supply chains are long and fragmented. Many artisan communities live in remote villages that are disconnected digitally and hard to reach logistically. During the lockdown logistics and transportation companies were not operating except for those services mandated by the Government for movement of essential commodities. Raw materials could not be sent to artisans and finished products could not reach the buyers. This led to accumulation of stocks and delay in payment cycles as payment terms state that only once the finished products reach the buyers, will the payment be processed.

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“Earlier our fabrics were procured from Delhi and Mumbai, during covid we looked at procuring locally due to constraints in transportation. We found new vendors who we will continue to work with”.
Sanjogita, chikankari artisan at MWS

Access to raw materials was a problem during the pandemic. There has been an increase in raw materials prices and transportation which does not reflect on the final selling price of the product. Consumers are not sensitized to these changes and are not willing to pay more. This further shrinks the artisan margins and impacts their livelihoods.

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“I believe that COVID will create a lot of disruptions for us, in the supply chain, on the demand side. But I am absolutely convinced that there will also be a new generation of conscious consumers that will come out fresh from this experience.”-Stefano Funari, Founder, I was a sari²²

Shorter supply chains and circular design are key building resilient supply chains for the future. It not only makes business sense but has a great environmental impact. “Brands such as Sadhna that procured locally and is run by artisans and sold through online and offline channels faced little problem as compared to brands which had longer supply chains and had to depend on different State logistics restrictions and thus were not able to operate seamlessly”, shared Roopa Mehta, President of AIACA.

“Worldwide there are several conversations on sustainability and the craft sector is built on the foundation of sustainability yet we are not talking about it as much as we should be.”, shared Priya Krishnamoorthy, 200 Million Artisans. Industry stakeholders interviewed agreed that with the right approach, craft will lead the way for sustainable fashion.



BRITISH COUNCIL

²² THE SHIFT series - Episode 2 with Stefano Funari, 2020

Key Recommendations



- **Better connectivity of craft clusters:** The Government should improve the last mile connectivity of the artisans with the industry and global market. Strengthening market linkages, partnerships, and logistical support will be instrumental in connecting global audiences with artisans working from remote rural areas.
- **Hyper-local procurement:** Brands should build shorter supply chains and procure raw materials locally to reduce carbon footprint and improve accessibility to resources. The Government can share a list of raw material suppliers and incentivize local procurement. Craft has the potential to integrate circularity in their businesses. Organisations should integrate circularity from the concept stage of the product and within their brand ethos to reduce impact on the environment.
- **Consolidate supply chain:** Start-ups, brands and craft organisations working on a smaller scale can consolidate their procurement, and marketing activities to reduce costs. The savings in collective work will increase profit margins that can be shared with artisans.

07: Connecting the Missing Link - Data

In an age where data is the new oil, there is dearth of data collection, impact assessment and monitoring and evaluation initiatives which hinders data driven targeted solution building in this sector



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“There is a different number quoted in each article for the number of craftspeople in the country. Having impact reports and data is crucial to inspire trust as it leads to transparency.” - Radhika Gupta, founder at Raaha

Data is the big missing link in this sector. The census does not capture the number of artisans working as craftspeople. The reports and articles published about artisans quote anywhere between 7 - 200 million artisans which does not inspire trust in numbers and questions the credibility of data available in the public domain. Artisan communities are spread out throughout the country and have different needs and challenges. There are limited research activities undertaken to map the unique needs of the artisan community and build solutions tailored to them. Lack of data hinders right help from reaching the right people at the right time.

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“A systematic policy framework for mapping the craft economy and its contribution to India’s GDP is lacking. As yet, crafts and the wider creative economy is not systematically recorded within the formal economic structure, in part because of the challenge of its diverse nature.” - Jonathan Kennedy, Director of Arts, British Council India²³

Targeted solutions should be built through continuous research and impact evaluation support in the ecosystem. Having credible data leads to mobilising action in the impact investment space. A business pitch needs data to mobilise funds and resources in solutions that can drive measurable change on the ground.

Setting up monitoring and evaluation systems, impact assessment mechanisms and periodic data collection activities leads to transparency and will be instrumental in mobilising funds from private companies. Bridging the data gap will also enable inclusive policies and attract private sector investment opportunities.



²³ Khatib, “How The Crafts Economy Can Stay Resilient During The COVID-19 Pandemic.”




Photo © Storyloom Films

Case Study: Save the Loom



Save the Loom's work during the Kerala floods was to map the weaver's needs and mobilise adequate support where required. Ramesh Menon, Founder, Save The Loom explained that, "We managed to kind of create a parallel system which the government started to rely on because our information was factual. When the government numbers started faltering, we had a template ready that had a specific form which got filled by every single weaver who told about their background, what they lost in the flood, what happened to them, what exactly is the money that they require and what is their bank account²⁴".

²⁴ THE SHIFT - Episode 4 with Susan Bhaktul, Industree Foundation and Ramesh Menon, Save The Loom, 2021

Key Recommendations



- **Nation-wide artisan mapping** should be undertaken by the Government to structure their policies and schemes to the needs and requirements of craftspeople. This data will help the Government make targeted interventions. This can be executed through a decentralised approach with the help of the State Government. Periodic stakeholder consultations can be conducted through the self help groups, the State Governments and the industry bodies to review the data and map missing links.
- **Open source platforms** can be developed to share information collected at grassroots level by independent organisations and co-relate it with other efforts to enable crowdsourcing credible data. Private funds can be mobilised to support think tanks and research institutes working in the sector. These reports and insights can be made available in the public domain.
- **Knowledge Bank and Market Intelligence:** The Government can create an information repository for craftspeople. This would be a source for new trends, product pricing, product innovation, upcoming opportunities, Government tenders and artisan rights. It should also include the Central and State Government policies and schemes.

08: Artisans First- Building Capacity and Resilience

Through the crisis, it is evident that the solutions in the craft sector need to keep the artisans at the centre. The key to building long-term resilience in the sector is through strengthening the artisan communities





“Artisans do not have the agency to represent themselves” - Priya Krishnamoorthy, 200 Million Artisans

The immediate impact of the pandemic was crushing and devastating for the artisan sector. Closing down traditional avenues of selling, having no access to raw materials and resources, and the uncertainty of the future were tremendous challenges that the sector had to overcome in a time bound manner. At the beginning of the pandemic, most artisans did not know how to reach consumers, take photographs or make videos and/or sell through digital platforms.



“Culture of continuous learning and collaboration will take time. The approach has to be nuanced” - Priya Krishnamoorthy, 200 Million Artisans

Through the support of a facilitating ecosystem, artisans have had a sharp learning curve from new product innovation, to learning new skills - they have adapted rapidly to the new reality.

Creative Dignity conducted training where they taught the artisans to shoot their products using their own smartphones and in near to natural light conditions. They did this training with a photographer from Hyderabad who came on board and were very mindful of the fact that the training has to be in the local language and keeping cultural context in mind. They further helped artisans learn how to make product catalogues. These training sessions were attended by the artisans and they also put it into the application and created their own catalogues.

Mijwan Welfare society (MWS) had helped women in their training centers open bank accounts to ensure they got access to their salaries and financial independence. They taught them skills of finance, accounts, how to use bank accounts and ATM cards. They further helped them get Aadhaar cards made so that they could avail benefit of Government schemes during Covid. Before the pandemic, MWS used to do

chikankari work for designers such as Manish Malhotra, Anita Dongre and Neeta Lulla. During the pandemic when the order dried up, MWS sought help from NIFT graduates to train women in design, trends and digital market knowledge. Today they have launched their own label called Samriddhi which is 100% artisan led.



“How we adapted during Covid has strengthened the organisation. We started with a lot of fear due to uncertainty, but today we are ready to handle such a crisis again. Artisan-led brand Samriddhi was launched during covid to ensure that even if we do not have orders tomorrow, we are self-reliant and self-sustainable” - Vinod Kumar Pandey, CEO, MWS

Ramesh Menon, founder of Save The Loom, supported the same view and added that “a weaver is a fabulous designer in themselves because they have the skill set without going to any school or common education. They make the finest products. We guide them with the market information as to what is the trend forecast or what kind of colours to use so that a product comes in which is universally acceptable rather than being sold in a specific area or space or attracting a certain limited market²⁵”. Jay Thakkar, Executive Director, Design Innovation & Craft Resource Center, CEPT University, feels that artisans should be empowered to have “the freedom to express themselves and take the design a notch higher”. “It is really important to build strength in the community while they’re being educated as well as a primary knowledge and understanding or a certain written on written code within that community of what their rights are, how they’re creating and how they’re going to protect those rights”, adds Rafael Pereira, Lawyer & Managing Partner at Tinnuts.

²⁵ THE SHIFT - Episode 4 with Susan Bhaktul, Industree Foundation and Ramesh Menon, Save The Loom, 2021

There is a counterview to the emphasis being placed on teaching all skills to the artisans. One craftsman shared, “Why do we need to learn all these new skills like taking photographs, marketing online and WhatsApp selling? My talent is my craftwork - instead of me can other community members be trained so that a support system is made around us that will stay long after the pandemic is gone?”.

This point circles back to the need to build a robust supporting ecosystem around the craftspeople. It has also brought to forefront the need to have a holistic and continuously evolving approach to capacity building; not just of the artisan but the entire supporting communities. This will be crucial to start bridging the ecosystem gaps and create more opportunities for other people looking for means of building a livelihood in this sector.

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“Artisans should have agency to choose how they want to run the business, who they want to work with and the means to support their ambitions” - Divya Rai, Operational Anchor, Creative Dignity

Rafael Pereira further shares the importance of developing artisan solidarity, “When you look at creative communities which are rural or neglected where the rate of literacy is quite low or the resources they have are quite limited, you often tend to see that in sum and substance you’re judged by your weakest link. That’s normally where you lose out as a community and essentially if the artists come together and put a code in place and everyone decides to abide by that code in terms of how their art can be licensed, at what rate it can be licensed, etc. It works really well when as a collective they come together and everyone follows the same set of principles and tariffs. However, even if one or a few of those artisans and artists stop abiding by that code you find that market forces are able to take advantage of that”.

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“Unless there is a viable proposition for the artisans that ensures a life of dignity to their families, the younger generation is no longer going to step into the sector. The next generation is very bright when it comes to digital literacy so they will catch on.” - Siva Devireddy, Founder and Managing Director, Gocoop.com

Case Study: Antaran

Tata Trusts' Craft-based Livelihood Programme

Antaran is a key intervention of the Trusts' Craft-based Livelihood Programme, initiated to bring seminal changes in craft development. The initiative works towards strengthening craft ecosystems, building core strength of handloom textiles such as natural fibres, handspun yarn and natural dyes, while reviving and reinterpreting the traditional weave designs in these selected clusters for wider markets. Artisans also learn about design and business, and are empowered towards entrepreneurship and self-employment²⁶.



Sharda Gautam, Tata Trust explains that “whenever a discussion on handlooms is there, our knowledge and thoughts hover around the popular clusters like Varanasi, Pochampalli, Chanderi etc. All key designers and buyers work in these popular clusters and hence these clusters despite falling business have strong hope to rejuvenate. However, several clusters (the lesser-known clusters) are dying a slow death due to their lack of visibility outside their local geographies. Nobody would notice if these clusters disappeared from the map. Antaran is deliberately focussing on these clusters”.

“Craft sector requires patient and intensive work. We have, therefore, launched a longer duration engagement program from 2018-2023 (5 years) in four states which are Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Assam, and Nagaland. Normally we tend to bucket artisans as ‘monoliths’ but they are not. In the Antaran program, we identify artisans who are aspirational and creative and give them education on business management, and digital literacy, costing, photography, colour interaction, translating fashion requirements on the loom, etc. All artisans in a cohort come from different socio-economic backgrounds, therefore their learning journey will be different. Education remains cognizant of these individual needs and focuses on creating individual ‘design identities’ as USP. This journey builds with practical exposure with buyers like Taneira, Nalli, Raymond and several boutique design stores. All commercials happen directly between artisan entrepreneurs and buyers. As a part of hands-on education, our team of business and design professionals observes the transactions in the background and bridges the gap in knowledge, skill and behaviour as required”, adds Sharda.

Last year when COVID lockdown was announced, artisans were stuck with a lot of inventory. This happened because several buyers were not able to honour their commitment related to payments and offline events were uncertain in the midst of the pandemic. Help was mobilised through ‘Antaran Artisan Connect’ (AAC), a marketplace created by the Tata Trusts, conceived and developed in-house by the Trusts’ Crafts team. The marketing team leveraged social media to promote the website ‘www.antaranartisanconnect.in’ and urged consumers to buy hand weaves at wholesale prices directly from artisans from Antaran clusters.

Antaran’s cluster teams and designers took care of the back end – they connected online with artisan entrepreneurs, assessed each artisan’s inventory, guided them on product photography, uploading images, product pricing, communication with customers, payment system invoices, note addresses for delivery, etc. Teams also actively worked to facilitate interacting between customers and artisans where required and kept track of sales. Sharda shared that “as artisans were earlier educated on digital literacy, artisans could quickly do photography, costing and upload the products on the free website from google sites”.

Within 3 months (April to June) the website saw 12.5 lacs footfalls on the website. Artisans did a business of about 4 .25 crores which is a 100 percent YoY increase from last year (1.8 crores), despite this being a covid impacted year.

Photo © Mijwan Welfare Society

²⁶ Antaran - Tata Trusts

Case Study: The Pinguli Story

Culture Aangan Tourism (India) and Applied Arts Scotland (UK), as part of British Council's Crafting Futures programme, developed a project aimed at upskilling the artisan community in Pinguli and enabling them to use digital mediums to showcase their work.



Pinguli is a small town between Maharashtra and Goa that hosts several artisan communities. When the village was hit by the pandemic, it became hard for artisans to continue their work as the supply chain had completely come to a halt. It was also challenging to work within a community that has little or no access to smartphones and the internet and changing mindsets and attitudes around digital access was one of the biggest achievements of the project.



“In 2006, a cow shed was created into a puppet showcasing gallery where we put up original puppets, chitrakati paintings and the shadow puppets which became the first avenue of livelihood earnings for the community of Pinguli.”

- Rashmi Sawant, Founder, Culture Aangan

Through phases, the project was successful in identifying and training community leaders in design skills, experiencing interactive sustainable tourism models and developing a detailed design skills and digital marketing toolkit for the artisans to develop their businesses.



“In terms of Pinguli puppetry’s context in fashion, I feel like there is no boundary and its adaptation lies in the hands of the people who engage with these crafts people. I think a bridge definitely needs to be created whether that comes in the form of a dedicated person working on the ground and constantly bringing people from the fashion fraternity into this village.” - Ekta Rajani, Creative Consultant & Slow Fashion Advocate

The project benefitted 2000 artisans living in the village of Pinguli. 30 percent of which were women. The project scaled across India and the UK and built the foundation for a long-term partnership and legacy between the artisans of Pinguli and the master artisans from Applied Arts Scotland.

Photo © Mijwan Welfare Society

Key Recommendations



- **Capacity building and training programs** for artisans should reflect the market needs. For example, skills of storytelling, photography, social media promotion and WhatsApp selling are important for artisan organisations in today's date. Curriculum should also focus on trends, colors, product pricing and introduction to new resources. There should be dedicated courses for those who want to build careers within the craft ecosystem to support the artisans. These courses can focus on business knowledge specific to crafts.
- **Artisan agency:** Artisans should be empowered to make decisions for themselves. The Government and the industry bodies should encourage artisan participation on the business and policy side of discussions in various forums.
- **Value of an artisan's work** should be appropriate and proportional to the time, effort and skill level. Raising awareness on the true value of their work and promoting fairer distribution of profit in the craft value chain will ensure artisans are compensated well. New business models with equity for artisans should be promoted.
- **Second Generation:** To support the next generation of artisans, the Government can subsidize their education, impart business and design knowledge, and give access to resources and a network of mentors and/or industry experts. They can be given access to design education in leading design institutes such as NIFT and NID.

09: Product Innovation and Design

It is said that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’ and covid has forced organisations to rethink products and design to meet the rapidly changing landscape of consumer behavior, consumption patterns and new realities



Consumption had slowed down during the lockdown phase. People were living at homes, working remotely and were facing pay cuts or loss of jobs. There was a slump in consumption patterns of craft products, and frugal consumer behaviour which interrupted the production. There were unused fabrics, deadstocks, half finished products and workers that required work which could cover their pay and keep establishments running. It was also a time for the industry to face the reality and strategize on navigating the drastic shift caused due to covid-19. The uncertainty and the need to find creative solutions led to new products, new business models and new design interventions.

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“Designers have a responsibility to make craft products more relevant and spotlight crafts that need revival - contemporize them to today’s market and consumer needs.” - Monica Shah, Co-Founder and Creative Lead - JADE, Co-Founder at Chanakya School of Craft.

Once the industry realized that there was going to be a rise in demand for cloth masks and PPE kits for frontline workers, they targeted their efforts in procuring materials (reassigning deadstock to masks), training artisans to make masks from home, and building logistical systems to support this new model of production. This activity was supported by several companies that mobilized funds for mask manufacturing and then distributed them within communities that were in need of them.

“During the lockdown, we started making masks and hair scrunchies using leftover fabric-to keep artisans engaged during lockdown, to enable them to earn livelihoods while working from their home”, shared Saloni Sinha, Founder & Creative Director- Tarasha. Masks were also made using traditional craft techniques and weaves such as ikkat, madhubani, kalamkari, chikankari. According to our survey of 50 craft organisations, 29 organisations started making new products such as masks, gifts, ppe, stoles, tote bags etc.

While many organisations started making masks to meet its rising demand, others built strategies to adapt to changing consumer behaviors.

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“The consumption patterns are changing and more younger customers are interested in crafts.” - Siva Devireddy, Founder and Managing Director, Gocoop.com

As the majority of consumers worked from home, the organisations started diversifying products. “To preserve craft, we need to make products that are relevant for the current and global market. While collaborating with artisans and craft in developing & sourcing products, we need to focus on products that are functional, price friendly and have a universal appeal- to keep the craft tradition alive while being relevant for the market”, shared Saloni Sinha, Founder & Creative Director- Tarasha. Consumers had increased focus on mindfulness and wellness as well. New collections were developed to cater to home and wellness, comfortable workwear and loungewear segments. “Sasha diversified products to focus on home and wellness. Mapping the new needs of the consumers we focussed on loungewear, home products and gifting” - Roopa Mehta, President of All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA). Monica Shah from Jade shared that they switched their packaging from vegan leather to batik printed fabric done by artisans in Bagru, Rajasthan.

E-commerce and social media platforms became important modes of selling. Organisations that earlier had no online presence, started selling through WhatsApp, Instagram and e-commerce websites such as GoCoop.com, Okhai and several others. Craft focussed organisations worked actively to engage, train and onboard artisans and help them sell their stocks. “We conducted a series of training, starting from online e-commerce training for our artisan groups. We conducted this training in up to 300 groups” shared Siva Devireddy, Founder and Managing Director, Gocoop.com.

To increase the visibility of craft products, visual platforms such as Instagram were leveraged to communicate the value of craft products to a global audience.

Awareness was raised through visually engaging stories on the craft product, the processes and the artisans. “It is evident that we cannot discount the importance of platforms like Instagram in communicating the value of craft products to a larger audience. We try to understand what that value is and how nuanced narratives could help in engaging your audiences”, shared Shalini Gupta, Head of Department - Styling & Beauty at Pearl Academy. Furthermore, industry bodies and designers actively supported artisans through online fundraisers, design training and creating more opportunities for work through social media.

Roopa Mehta added that the consumers are becoming sensitized to climate change and circularity, and said “If we put together Diwali hampers with artisanal products and reach out to 1000 companies, I am confident that they will choose to pick these hampers instead of mass-produced products”.



“For the craft sector to succeed the focus of developmental interventions has to be on creativity and not productivity. Crafts can become the biggest contributor to the economy and inclusive growth.”

- Sharda Gautam, Head of Crafts at Tata Trusts

Sharda Gautam further explained that “the distinctive commercial advantage of handloom over powerloom lies between 0-100 meters. Powerloom needs minimum quantities to become cost-effective whereas on handlooms literally at every 5 meters a new design can be woven without any investment”. Creative interventions keeping this commercial advantage in mind can help propel this sector’s growth.

Several stakeholders resonated with the need for new interventions and increased visibility. Priya Krishnamoorthy shared that, “craft consumer market is shrinking in India. Large volumes of the crafts are exported. There is a need to create more visibility for the crafts and their role in our day to day life. Options like craft tourism, and craft demonstration should be explored”.

Pre-covid, craft tourism concept had been gaining popularity globally due to the immersive nature of craft engagement to impart knowledge and exchange of culture and craft processes. It also serves as an opportunity for artisans to add an additional source of livelihood. During covid, many tourism related initiatives have been impacted and forced organisations to think of blended models online and offline. During the pandemic, many museums conducted online tours leveraging multimedia content like videos, audio guides and AR/VR (Artificial Reality/ Virtual Reality) to create engaging experiences. Similar experiences can be created in the craft sector.

The Ministry of Textiles has undertaken the development of Craft Villages to promote immersive experience of handloom and handicraft. 12 villages

have been identified on tourist circuits for ‘integrated sustainable development of handlooms, crafts, and tourism’ in order to ‘offer traditional hand-woven products to the consumers and tourists by inspiring knowledge about authentic weaving technique through “hands on” experience’²⁷. India’s craft diversity offers tremendous potential to contribute to artisans growth through systemic support and collaboration between the Government, craft institutions and social entrepreneurs.

Education can play a big role in facilitating preservation of craft techniques and innovation in craft designs while keeping the core ethos and authenticity of the craft in focus. “When we talk about craft knowledge, it is tacit knowledge. The chain to pass this knowledge down is becoming weaker day by day” shared Jay Thakkar, Executive Director, Design Innovation & Craft Resource Center, CEPT University. He adds that “there is a generation that really wants to work with the craftspeople. It is important to inculcate this knowledge of craft with dignity, from a young age by formalizing it through the education system”. He believes that there should be no difference in the dignity and fulfillment of someone saying “I am a carpenter” and “I am a CEO”.

India has a number of design institutes focussed on teaching fashion and textiles. With regards to their curriculum, Pooja Gupta, Founder Door of Mai, observed that “craft cannot be taught in its entirety through theory. It’s very tactile. The experiential learning cannot be substituted. Having a specialisation in craft knowledge would change the integration of craft in design, instead of having it only as an add-on in the curriculum”. Education systems should facilitate the transfer of craft knowledge. Indian Institute of Craft and Design (IICD, Jaipur) offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in craft and design. Chanakya school of arts has been working on formalizing craft education and integrating it with fashion education. There is a holistic approach where students learn 1000 craft techniques, get exposure to different cultures of the world, and learn mindfulness. India needs more education institutes aligned on the same vision to catalyse sustained growth of the sector.



“Craft should be promoted as slow fashion, handmade, bespoke, valuable, and unique to attract younger generations to it.” - Sharda Gautam, Head of Crafts at Tata Trusts

²⁷ Press Information Bureau, Year End Review 2020 - Ministry Of Textiles.

Case Study: Crafting Futures Grant project 'Celebrating Clay'

As part of the British Council's Crafting Futures programme, Design Innovation and Craft Resource Centre (CEPT University, India) and the British Ceramics Biennale (UK, Stoke-on-Trent) developed 'Celebrating Clay' to generate new forms of cultural production for craft experiential tourism. This project took place in the terracotta craft cluster at Gundiya, a district in Gujarat. Both partners worked through a period of 8 months with the aim to sustain and develop contemporary ceramic practices in India and the UK, while successfully fostering a creative dialogue between the 2 cultures. The project also aimed at promoting craft experiential tourism by positioning Gundiya as an immersive tourism experience for visitors.



"As a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of the on-field activities have taken a pause - especially our International Craft Exchange Residency and organising a Craft Walk. Craftspeople at Gundiya are severely affected by Covid-19. Their annual sales of craft products which mainly take place in the summer season did not take place this year as the supply chain was broken with imposed lockdowns. Although this has deeply affected many of our activities as part of the Celebrating Clay project, it has also opened up avenues for more areas of knowledge exchange. Converting this crisis into an opportunity, the project activities have been re-imagined keeping digital engagements as a strategy and in the interest of the terracotta craftspeople." – Jay Thakkar, Executive Director, Design Innovation & Craft Resource Center, CEPT University

Through direct engagement with the artisan communities, they worked towards empowering artisans by hosting international craft exchange residencies (virtual) that focussed on capacity building and exchange of skills. A striking example of transforming a tangible experience to an online platform was the development of a virtual exhibition showcasing the products designed by the artisans of the community. The project reached out to 72 Muslim Potter families living in Gundiya, Kutch.

Photo © Iro Iro work process

Photo © Storyloom Films

Case Study: DESI UNN

Khamir Crafts (India) and Fieldwork (UK, Wales), as part of the British Council Crafting Futures programme, developed a project for the revival of indigenous wool fiber value chain through local craft skills of spinning, weaving and hand felting



Originally, the project was aimed at an exchange of raw material within both countries followed by upskilling the artisan community with contemporary design ideas. Considering the Covid-19 pandemic the project had to be pivoted to online platforms. The artisans were supportive and eager to explore these new avenues in digital technology, which prompted the partners to innovate and think of alternative ways of engaging with each other.

Socially distant workshops, sanitisation of raw materials sourced from outside Kutch and strict Covid-19 protocol was followed through ensuring a successful outcome. Based on the feedback

received, over 100 spinners say they can produce better quality yarn and have increasingly started using locally sourced raw material. This can be considered as a revival of hand spinning within the community. With design interventions that took place during the project, weavers are now able to link themselves with this indigenous and local material and produce their own designs, rather than having to rely on third-party designers. This enabled weavers to think with Desi oon i.e. wool from camels and create new designs keeping in mind the uniqueness of local materials. The project reached out to 100 women weavers in Kutch.

Key Recommendations



- **Foster innovation:** The Central and State Governments should develop a one-source resource for innovation in craft. This should include new developments in technique, design trends, products or business approach. Incubation programs can be institutionalised to promote craft-based entrepreneurship. Annual awards can work to increase visibility of innovators and social entrepreneurs in this sector.
- **Craft and design schools:** To scale up craft and design education, more avenues for learning should be built on lines of Indian Institute of Craft and Design (IICD), Somaiya Kala Vidyalaya of Kala raksha or the Handloom School by Women Weave. Technology can be leveraged to accelerate learning and improve accessibility to education while artisans continue to work.
- **Strengthen design interventions:** The craft cluster initiative by the Government connects design students from National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) with craftspeople across India. The objective is to increase exposure of students to craft and strengthen design innovation. Such programs can be scaled up with other design schools, include more craft clusters and increase the duration of engagement to make the impact more meaningful. This can support the creation of new products and new designs keeping in sync with the global trends.
- **Support D2C Artisan brands:** With the rise in Instagram, WhatsApp and other social media there are more opportunities to create D2C (direct to consumer) brands with the potential to reach global audiences. There should be training on how to build such brands individually or at cluster level with guidance on creating a support system for fulfillment and backend.

10. Financial Investment and Support

Craft sector in India has traditionally been dependent on grants, CSR funds and Government support to sustain its growth. Considering the potential of this sector to contribute to national GDP, this sector needs functional partnerships, private sector funds, and structural financial reforms to scale up





Artisans and craft organisations faced financial struggles during the lockdown due to cancelled orders, lack of work, and pending payments. Many of those working in urban areas migrated to their home towns and villages to protect themselves from covid and to be able to save on living expenses in the cities. Even as the lockdowns eased and the economy started up, the income of the creative organisations and individuals was intermittent and unstable. The pandemic has put a deep strain on the financial stability of this sector.

According to the Taking the Temperature report (released by FICCI, the Art X Company and British Council), the creative economy is shrinking and many organisations have shut down permanently to avoid bankruptcy²⁸. Report further highlights that “22 percent of the sector is forecasted to lose 75 percent of their annual income”. Others are struggling to keep afloat and are faced with difficult choices of reducing overheads and/or letting go of the workforce. Working capital and cash-in-hand has been a persistent problem and access to credit is largely through informal channels and money lenders. During this state of emergency, Taking the Temperature report found that 2 percent of the sector had accessed bank loans and 1 percent had accessed government grants. This highlights the need for streamlining access to formal financial institutions.

Emergency relief from the Government, civil societies, and good samaritans helped cover the creative workforce’s basic necessities. Creative organisations and industry bodies gave support through online fundraisers. “In the short term, collaborative emergency action by governments and companies’ contributions through loans and grants is necessary to help the creative industry workforce and artists. The allocation of CSR arts funding, the provision of micro-grants to gig employees and artisans can be incredibly useful to help these professionals sustain in the short-term” says Jonathan Kennedy, Director of Arts, British Council India²⁹.

“There is a clear need for greater concerted action, improved networks, increased pooling of resources, and collaboration and institutional investment pivoted to the sector to sustain it during the emergency.” - Jonathan Kennedy, Director of Arts, British Council India ³⁰

During the pandemic, there was a renewed focus on the survival of artisans and gave rise to awareness campaigns, collaborative networks and new initiatives to support the craft sector.

The Indian handloom and handicrafts are estimated to be a Rs. 24,300 crore industry. According to the Twelfth Five Year Plan, this sector contributes Rs. 10,000 crores to India’s export earnings³¹. The creative economy in India is 88 per cent MSME—they are the lifeblood of enterprise, wealth creation and livelihoods³². The craft sector has traditionally been dependent on grants, CSR funds and Government support to sustain its growth. Considering the potential of this sector to contribute to national GDP, this sector needs functional partnerships, private sector funds, and structural financial reforms to scale up. There are existing solutions which require structured Government and private player support to scale up and uplift the entire ecosystem. Sharda Gautam, Tata Trusts adds that “in order to make the craft sector attractive for private sector investment, we need to demonstrate evidence of successful models at scale”.

²⁸ “Taking The Temperature: Report And Survey | British Council.”

²⁹ Khatib, “How The Crafts Economy Can Stay Resilient During The COVID-19 Pandemic.”

³⁰ Taking The Temperature Report.

³¹ Mozumdar, “Battle For Survival.”

³² Khatib, “How The Crafts Economy Can Stay Resilient During The COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Key Recommendations



- **Emergency relief:** The artisans and organisations continue to require financial support and working capital to sustain during the pandemic. They should be supported through
 - Mobilisation of CSR funds in the craft sector
 - Low interest or Interest free loans and subsidies from the Government
 - Grants from global organisations working in this sector
- **Access to formal credit systems and Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs):** The Government has instituted several schemes (like the credit guarantee scheme) to support artisans and weavers and to connect them with financial services and products. The access to these schemes can be scaled up through awareness campaigns to reduce dependency on informal money-lenders who provide funds at excessively high interest rates.
- **Incentivize investment and innovation:** The Government should provide additional benefits (tax benefits or rebates) to companies investing significantly in the development of the craft sector. Startups, MSMEs and entrepreneurs with impactful practices and proven good business models should be scaled up in other regions through Government and private sector support. Incubation programs can be institutionalised to promote craft-based entrepreneurship.
- **Financial and policy literacy** courses should be extended by organisations to all artisans working in their value chain. This will improve their accessibility to formal financial credit systems as well as Government schemes linked to direct subsidies.

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic has transformed the way craft sector functions, highlighted the areas that need improvement, and brought in fresh perspectives for accelerating growth. During these testing times, collaborative ecosystems have played an important role in providing emergency relief and as a result created new symbiotic relationships and partnerships between the community, industry stakeholders and the consumers that will shape the future of craft economy. Artisans are adapting to technology and digital avenues to find newer opportunities in the absence and uncertainty regarding the traditional offline models. There is a renewed focus and interest in craft which opens new business and alternative livelihoods opportunities in craft education, tourism and virtual workshops. The fragmented supply chains are being integrated by social entrepreneurs and new business models. There is still a lot to be done to develop this sector back better and build resilience for long term sustainability. Recovery from the devastating impact of the pandemic will take time, structured investment and ecosystem support. With renewed focus on circularity and consumer demand for ethical, environmentally conscious products, crafts have the potential of contributing to the national GDP and to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It is time to rejuvenate the craft sector by reshaping the approach towards a value-based craft economy, with artisan craftsmanship, welfare, and progress at the heart of the transition.

“

“If you give artisans a living wage, credit, upskilling opportunities, ecosystem support - why would the artisan quit their craft?”

- Priya Krishnamoorthy, 200 Million Artisans



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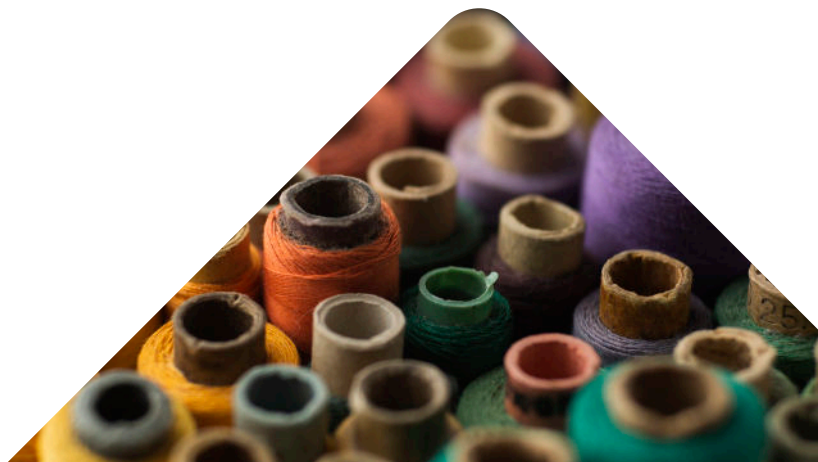
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Glossary of terms

Artisan

A person who practices or is highly skilled in a craft

B2B

Business-to-Business (B2B), also called B-to-B, is a form of transaction between businesses

B2C

Business-to-Consumer (B2C), also called B-to-C, is a form of transaction between business and consumer

Bandhani

A traditional tie-and-dye art from India, predominant in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan

Bidri craft

Bidri craft or Bidriware is a metal handicraft from Bidar in Karnataka, India. In 'Bidri', the metals silver, gold or brass are overlaid or inlaid in the designs to decorate objects made out of an alloy of zinc and copper

Craft

A craft is an activity such as weaving, carving, or pottery that involves making things skilfully with your hands

Chikankari

Chikankari is the embroidery work done with white cotton thread on fine white cotton material. It is also called as shadow work. Chikankari is a traditional embroidery style from Lucknow, India

D2C

Direct-to-Consumer (D2C), is a form of strategy in which a company promotes and sells a product or service directly to consumers, cutting out any intermediaries

Living wage

A living wage is the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs like shelter, food, and other necessities

Handloom

A handloom is a loom that is used to weave cloth without the use of any electricity. Hand weaving is done on pit looms or frame looms generally located in weavers' homes.

Handicraft

Handicraft is an art or craft (as weaving or pottery making) in which the skilled use of one's hands is required

INR

Indian National Rupee

Ikat

Ikat is a resist dyeing technique used to pattern textiles. The word 'ikat' comes from the Malay-Indonesian word which means to 'tie'

Kalamkari

Kalamkari is a type of hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile. It is an ancient style of hand painting done on cotton or silk fabric with a tamarind pen, using natural dyes. Literal meaning of Kalamkari is kalam, which means pen and kari which refers to craftsmanship

Weaver

Weaver is an artisan who weaves fabric by interlacing of two sets of yarn – the warp (length) and the weft (width)



List of Abbreviations

AIACA: All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association

CCI: Craft Council of India

CD: Creative Dignity

CEPT: Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology

CRDF: CEPT Research and Development Foundation

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

DICRC: Design Innovation & Craft Resource Center

DRC: Design Resource Centre

EPCH: Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts

FICCI: Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GeM: Government e-Marketplace

INR: Indian Rupee

MoT: Ministry of Textiles

MSME: Micro, Medium and Small Enterprises

NGO: Non Government Organization

ODOP: One District One Product

TRIFED: Tribal Cooperative Marketing Federation of India

WFTO: World Fair Trade Organization

WSC : Weavers Service Centres

Photo © Storyloom Films



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