

Advocacy Meeting Report

Grassroots Reachout & Networking in India on Trade & Economics (GRANITE)

Kaithun, Kota, Rajasthan, April 21, 2010

Introduction

CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment (CUTS CITEE) with the support from Royal Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi and Oxfam India conducted a case study on the *Kota Doria* fabric, primarily to identify the channels facilitating the trickle down effects of international trade (specifically through the Foreign Trade Policy 2009-14) on the various actors involved in the making of the *Kota Doria* fabric and *saris*. The study was conducted under the project entitled *Grassroots Reachout & Networking in India on Trade & Economics (GRANITE)*.

On the basis of the findings, the Centre organised a half-day advocacy workshop in Kaithun with the weavers/master weavers involved in *Kota Doria* work.

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- present the research findings;
- share views on what could be done to increase demand for *Kota Doria saris*, which would lead to more employment in the industry; and
- develop a strategy where the weavers are able to gain a larger proportion of the final product's price, an aspect which would improve their livelihoods.

Participants

More than 30 participants comprising weavers, master weavers and local *panchayat* members attended the meeting.

Proceedings

Madan Giri Goswami, Field Coordinator, CUTS Centre for Human Development (CHD), provided a brief overview of the objectives and activities of the project and explained the purpose of the meeting. He mentioned that CUTS had conducted surveys on *Kota Doria* in *Kaithun, Sismali, Mangrol, Roteda* and *Sultanpur* villages. More than 100 respondents from different groups such as weavers, traders and government representatives were interviewed.

Anutosh Biswas, Programme Officer, CUTS International, said that though international trade is supposed to foster economic development of a country yet the grassroots realities are quite different from theoretical perspectives. In order to understand the impact of the National Foreign Trade Policy on the grassroots stakeholders, CUTS conducted a case study on *Kota Doria* in Rajasthan. He added that the idea was to identify various channels through which benefits of international trade trickle down to the grassroots and generate employment opportunities, especially for women. He also described some of the schemes available for the handloom sector under the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2009-14.

Kritika Kapil, Research Associate CUTS International, shared her learnings from the field study. She said that the weavers involved in *Kota Doria* work are getting very low wages and because of this the younger generation of these weaver families are not willing to continue in the weaving profession, opting instead for other types of employment, especially opportunities presented by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). She also described how most of the work done in the Kota Doria industry was home based work where almost 80% of the weavers were women. Since the work is entirely home based, no effort was being made to make working conditions suitable for long hours of work.

Asgar Ali, Master Weaver, Kaithun, said that CUTS advocacy work on *Kota Doria* helped them understand to a large extent, the types of schemes available to them especially those aimed at the handloom sector. He emphasised on market linkages and said that the weavers in Kota needed a larger and more accessible market to sell their products. He urged that the state government should make necessary efforts to protect genuine *Kota Doria* from the power loom products, in order to ensure the preservation of this age-old tradition.

Abdul Wahid Ansari, Member, *Kota Doria* Development Hadauti Foundation (KDHF), briefed about the history of *Kota Doria* in Rajasthan. He informed the group that KDHF had applied for a Geographical Indication (G.I.) with the assistance of United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). The application was accepted and *Kota Doria* was granted a G.I. in July 2005 under the Geographical Registration Act 1999. However, because the G.I. was not being implemented properly by the KDHF, power loom products were quickly replacing genuine *Kota Doria* on the market, leading to a shrinking of the *Kota Doria* industry.

Following are some important issues raised by the participants during the meeting:

- The master weavers said that the profit margin in *Kota Doria* is very low because they bear travel and accommodation expenses in order to travel to different cities to sell the products.
- Participation in various exhibitions is too costly and the organisers only target big exporters.
- The master weavers mentioned that they are not well versed with various government policies available to them. They also added that KDHF was quite inactive and rarely discussed schemes to help them or the weavers, and brochures on various schemes were only distributed to a handful of people. The Foundation did not even discuss methods to promote *Kota Doria* so that the condition of the industry could be improved.

CUTS Recommendations

On the basis of the issues raised and the discussions that ensued, CUTS recommends the following:

- Proper implementation of G.I. to protect *Kota Doria* from power loom products.
- Proactive role of state government to develop better market for the master weavers.
- State government and the WTO Cell to provide information on various government policies/schemes available to the handloom industry through the FTP or even through other policies.
- Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC) to inform the exporters about market conditions and help them to take part in different buyer-seller meets.