

Advocacy Meeting Report

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

Sultanpur, Kota, Rajasthan, April 22, 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 Sultanpur 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 20 participants comprising weavers and master weavers 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 has conducted surveys on *Kota Doria* in of *Kaithun, Siswali, 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.

Noorja Bano, Weaver, Sultanpur Kota, said that original *Kota Doria* is not being sold at a good price in the market, due to the competition from power loom products. She added that because they all worked out of their home, there were no health or safety regulations in place for them. If there is an issue with the infrastructure of their home (that could affect production), they would have to bear the cost of repairs.

Nasrin Bano, Weaver, Sultanpur Kota, said that the weavers in this village work under a government initiative called *Rajasthan Khadi Sanstha Sangh* (RKSS). RKSS provides the weaver families with handlooms as well as raw materials. The weaver families under this initiative just produce plain *saris* and fabric, which RKSS buys back from them. However, the weavers have to travel to Kaithun to get the raw materials as well as to sell the woven product with no travel reimbursement from RKSS. This reduces the already minimal amount they receive for the woven products.

Chandra kala, Weaver, Sultanpur Kota, said that they only came to know about G.I. when CUTS conducted the field study. She informed the group that they were not aware of its benefits. She also added that due to lack of education and knowledge they were not even aware where to sell the *saris*.

Heena, Weaver, Sultanpur Kota, informed that none of the weavers in the village get *bunkar* identity cards. She added that they had paid to get identity cards three years ago, but did not receive them.

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

- The participants reported that their biggest health concern was weak eyesight. They did not know of any health benefits available to them.
- One of the other concerns was poor working conditions. The work is done out of homes and in Sultanpur most of the houses are poorly built, with rainwater seepage being a major problem – a factor which adversely affects production.

CUTS Recommendations

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

- The Government of Rajasthan need to put in place pro-active measures to protect *Kota Doria* from duplicate power loom products.
- Proper information dissemination regarding the importance and implementation of GI.
- Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC) should be more pro-active with respect to *Kota Doria* and arrange regular buyer-seller meetings to create better market linkages. HEPC should also play a major role in showcasing *Kota Doria* to the international market, so as to utilise the product's export potential.
- Weavers should be paid higher wages for their work to entice young people to get into or stay in the weaving profession.
- The media (both print and electronic) should inform the plight of the *Kota Doria* industry to the wider community.
- Self Help Groups (SHGs) should fully understand the pivotal role they can play in improving the working conditions of the weavers.