

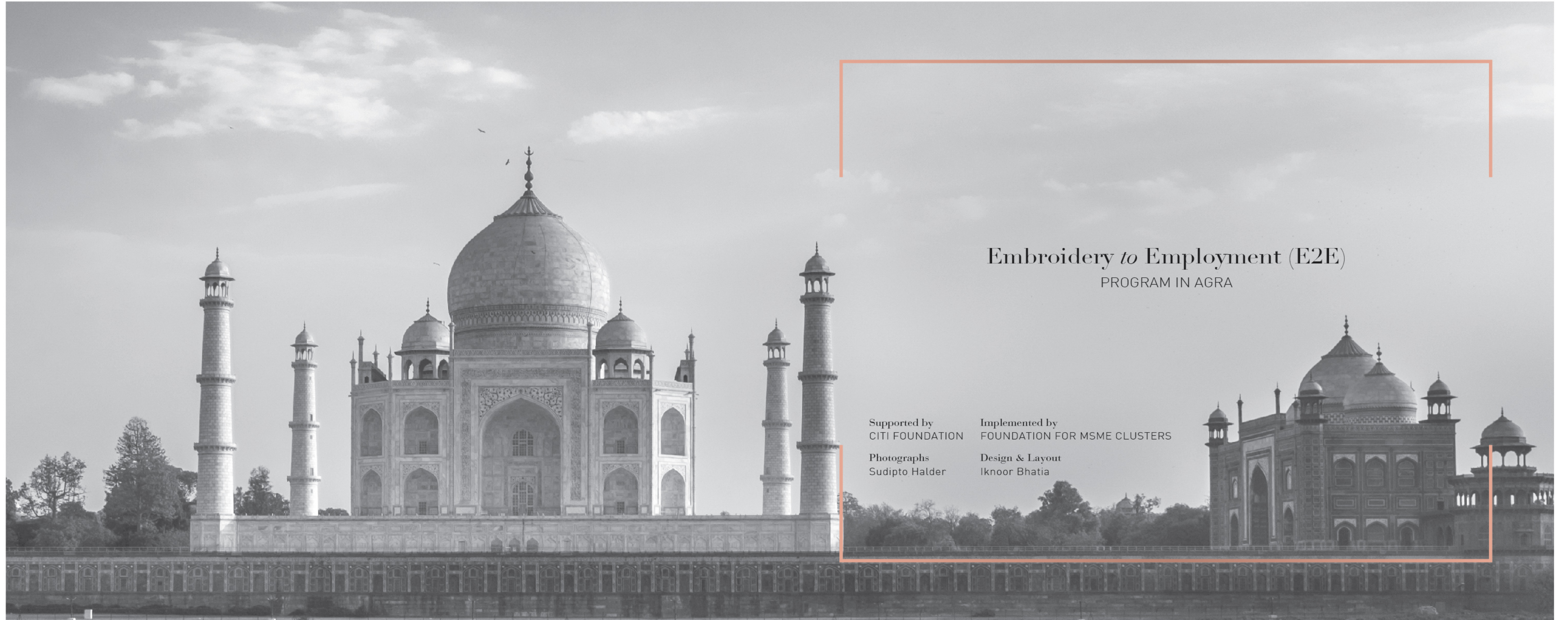


EMBROIDERY TO EMPLOYMENT

— AGRA —



Foundation for MSME Clusters
(A 120 UNIT 1984 Certified Organisation)



Embroidery *to* Employment (E2E)
PROGRAM IN AGRA

Supported by
CITI FOUNDATION

Implemented by
FOUNDATION FOR MSME CLUSTERS

Photographs
Sudipto Halder

Design & Layout
Iknoor Bhatia

FORGROWN

Embroidery to Employment (E2E) Program, Agra has been conceptualised by Foundation for MSME Clusters (FMC) and supported by Citi Foundation under its India Innovation Grant Programme 2016. The program has been modelled itself on a cluster-based approach - a group of enterprises/artisans in a given geographical area that produce the same or similar kind products who are surrounded by an ecosystem that consists of different stakeholders, that include primary producers, networks (group of enterprises), institutions, service providers etc. The growth of a cluster depends on the readiness of these stakeholders being in sync with the market requirements.

Zari embroidery cluster of Agra was a perfect example of that. Surrounded by limited market opportunities, artisans were quitting the century old work which once used to be pride of Agra. In India, there are thousands of own account enterprises (OAEs) and majority of them are unorganised. Out of these, a substantial number of them belong to textile-based craft work which can be broadly understood as embroidery-based work. We realised, if this Project becomes successful as a model in Agra zari embroidery cluster then it can easily be replicated or upscaled among other similar type of embroidery clusters of India. That was the strategy behind selection of this particular cluster to showcase a new beginning of a successful model to make unorganised sector part of mainstream economy through market route.

The program has infused new skill sets as per market requirement and enhanced income opportunities by 30 per cent among 500 embroidery artisans in Agra (250 embroidery artisans directly and another 250 artisans indirectly). Programme introduced 2 unique model one being ensuring market where new buyers were identified first and order ensured to enhance income and secondly, directly trained artisans were selected on condition of engaging and trained 1 fellow artisan thus by ensuring employment generation. This in itself a self-propelling skill development model where 1 artisans will train 1 fellow artisan and the cycle will continue. The program has introduced solutions at two levels, one at an artisan level and another at a community level. A community led enterprise has been established which is functioning as a Design/Product Innovation Centre and marketing networks for future market linkage beyond project period. This enterprise is an aggregator for the artisans which are now being run and managed by the artisans themselves as the Programme gets over. It is expected that all 500 potential beneficiaries will become members of this enterprise in near future,

however currently 25 artisans have already become member. Community members will select their board members for governing of the enterprise which would comprise of the 25 top lead artisans. At the very outset, new market opportunities were identified which includes new set of buyers as well as new marketing channels. Identification of market need was critical as it ensured income opportunities for the artisans at the beginning of the intervention. This encouraged artisans to adopt the new set of skills and invest their time to learn new skill set. Once the buyers were fixed, and the demand assessed, the new skill sets in design, product as well as in entrepreneurship were imparted to 250 artisans who became lead artisans over a period of next 9-10 months. This enabled the artisans to get new income opportunities as soon as they delivered products. New income opportunities created business trust among the artisans as well as adopting new skill set.

Around 12th month of the program, once trust was gained through enhanced income, concept of community led enterprise "aari" was introduced, which would work as a product innovation centre and market network agency. In near future, Agra embroidery cluster will become one of the leading innovative embroidery clusters in India, which not only create unique designs, but at the same time offer a competitive price as well. "Aari" will be functioning as a sustainable vehicle beyond project period which is generating new business orders/income opportunities for the fellow artisans.

Project has created some major impacts both economically as well as socially. Like, it has enhanced income level by 30 percent for 500 artisans, generated employment for 250 artisans and more than 50% of the artisans are women. At the same, the Project has also created some social impacts. Lot of artisans like Ayesha or Tanveer or Sameena were struggling to manage their livelihoods and forcefully had to migrate to other cities by quitting job. They have been able to overturn their fortune to some extent with the support of this intervention. Project has given a lot of possibilities to upscale or replicate the model in similar textile-based craft clusters of India and create more enterprises like "aari". These community enterprises can become interconnected and agglomerate at State/national level and be part of bigger supply chain. This will enable them to create employment opportunities for thousands of artisans and eventually part of mainstream economy and help them out of their vicious cycle of struggling livelihood.



I N T R O D U C T I O N

Agra is a popular tourist destination for its presence of historical monuments, situated approximately 250 km south of Delhi, capital of India. Agra, primarily came into its prominence when Emperor Sikander Lodi shifted the then Capital from Delhi to Agra during early 16 th century. Ever since, Agra has been one of the major hub of business activities and handicrafts product like zari-zardousi, leather jooti and marble inlay work flourished under the patronage of Mughal emperor. During, 20 th century and particularly post-independence era, Agra witnessed establishment of lot of industries (mostly MSME units) among which engineering, food processing, leather and tourism are of prominence. However, with the flourishing of industries and rapid change in contemporary market showed gradual decline of handicrafts, particularly zari embroidery work which used to be glory and pride of Agra.

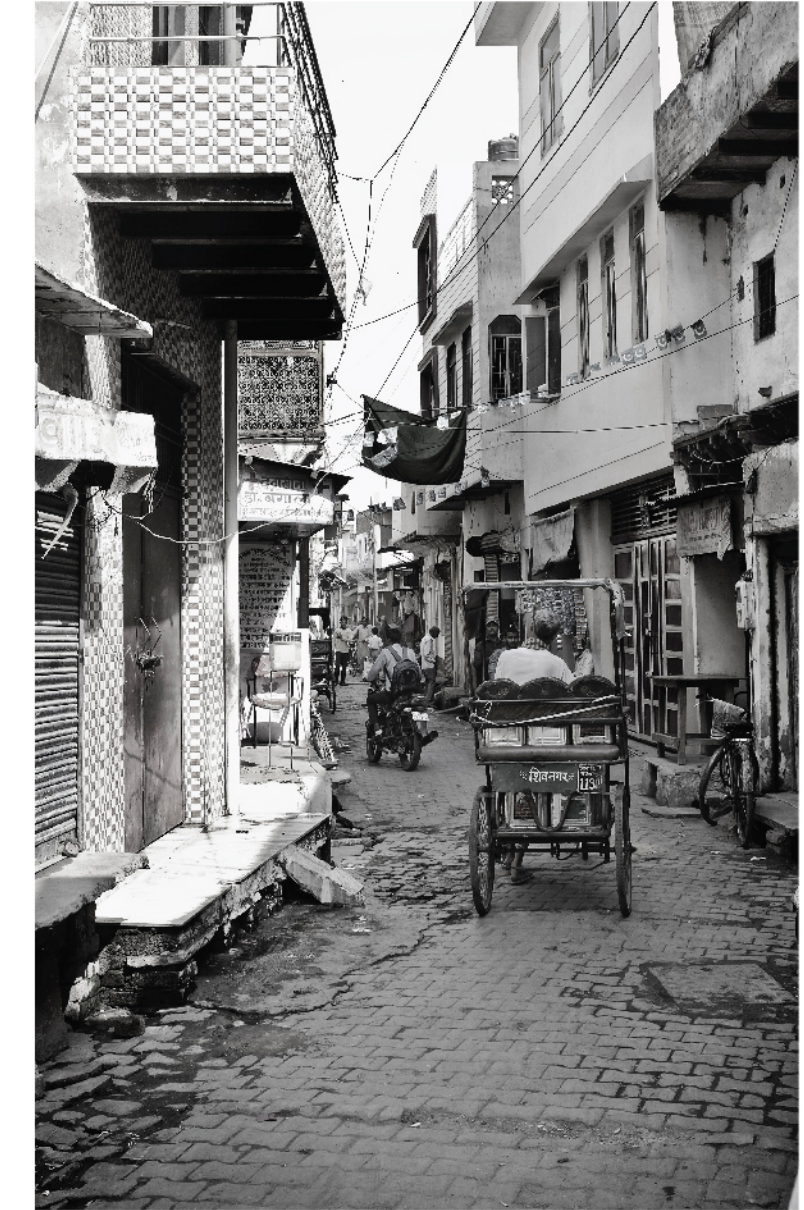
Hand embroidered work has been in existence in India since ancient time and first reference of it can be traced in the writing of Megasthese in 3 rd century B.C. where he mentioned 'flowered muslin' to describe the art of embroidery. Zari and Zardousi, uses gold or silver thread along with precious and semi-precious stones to create a pattern on a fabric with help of a needle in the form of embroidery. It is believed that origin of zari and zardousi belong to Persia (currently known as Iran), introduced and propelled in Agra as well as all over India during 16 th century by the Mughal Emperor Akbar. During this period, value addition in the form of zari and zardousi with embroidery has been introduced to cater to the royal family. Artisans, living around the city fort, would sit cross-legged around the Addaa, the wooden framework, with their nimble hands effortlessly working with the needle to create extraordinary pieces of art on fine cloth. Over a period of time, zari-zardousin found its acceptance beyond royal family and bloomed through its artistic mastery and became resonance of festival dresses.



There are thousands of artisans engaged with embroidery work in Agra and surrounding villages. Although, not more than 50 years ago, a flourishing trade and sound of needles can be heard in every gully of Agra, now confined in its own shadow. Artisans are facing challenges to sustain livelihoods only on the basis of embroidery work. The limited market opportunity and more importantly, the lack of design/product innovation and influx of machine made embroidery products have made it difficult to remain competitive in the market. One of the key issues, artisans face is that of an irregular income through their embroidery work due to limited market opportunity. Their average income is less than Rs. 1,000 or USD 20 per month as FMC found out during their survey in 2016. Handcrafted embroidery is an age-old prized tradition of India, deeply embedded into the country's cultural fabric, and the artisans of those days were revered masters of craft.

CHALLENGES/NEED

However due to the lack of income opportunities, artisans are forced to adopt other work like agriculture, working as labor in other industries etc. Additionally, the lack of market knowledge and poor linkages with the market, do not allow the artisans to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty. Further, due to the lack of funds, the community is unable to invest in new designs, modern techniques or product innovations. The lack of institutional linkages also is a hindrance to them acquiring knowledge. Lack of collectivism amongst the cohort makes them less likely to become competitive in the market. This has made the future of these artisans uncertain and forcing the youth to migrate and divert to other sectors which are not natural to them.





Supported by the Citi Foundation under its India Innovation Grant Program 2016, The project intends to create a sustainable pilot framework which can enhance livelihood opportunities and generate employment by reinstating the embroidery work of Agra. Once succeed, program can further be scaled up for other embroidery artisans of Agra and hopefully will spur policy level change for this cohort.

TARGET

Program will infuse new skill sets as per market requirement and enhance income opportunities by 30 to 50 per cent among 500 embroidery artisans in Agra (250 embroidery artisans directly and another 250 artisans indirectly) through a self-propelling model. A community led enterprise will also be promoted which will function as a Design/Product Innovation Centre and as a marketing network for future market linkages beyond the project period.



MARKET FIRST

The program was model on a cluster-based approach - a group of enterprises/artisans in a given geographical area that produce the same or similar kind of products who are surrounded by an ecosystem that consists of different stakeholders, that include primary producers, networks (group of enterprises), institutions, service providers etc.

The growth of a cluster depends on the readiness of these stakeholders being in sync with the market requirements. It has been observed that most of the artisans in Agra, lack this awareness, creating around them a weak ecosystem which eventually translates into weak market linkages and limited income opportunities. Given the scenario, Project aimed to hit the core issue i.e. market right at the beginning. Project realised rather than going through conventional skill development route, Project will make in roads through market route which is identification of potential buyers and assurance of order. This will not only ensure introduction of new markets but more importantly assurance of income to the artisans and encouragement among the artisans to get associated with work who otherwise were migrating to other sectors. This was the major uniqueness of the programme where income enhancement is ensured by assuring market.



PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION & NEW DESIGNS

Program started by developing required samples under the guidance of senior designs with select skilled artisans, selected on the basis of willingness to provide time with no additional wages. Our assessment and interaction with the buyers suggested that products diversification was required to tap the new market. Artisans were mostly producing wall hanging on traditional motifs which depicts form of animal, floral design with heavy work of zari and zardousi.



This not only limited the market opportunity, in terms of reaching out to new buyer but most importantly it required lot of time to complete one product. We decided to bring in product diversification from wall hanging to home furnishing product like cushion covers, table mat runners, hand bags, kurtis and secondly, introduced limited design which will consume less time and can increase the productivity of the artisans. Few samples were developed and several interactions took place with multiple buyers and accordingly iteration in the samples to meet the buyer's preference.



TRAINING ON APPROVED SAMPLES

On one hand, negotiations/discussion were on going with buyers while on the other hand, realising and assuming potential order knocking at the door, training manuals were prepared keeping in mind the taste of contemporary market. Training programmes were organised in batches having 25 artisans in each batch. 10 such groups/batches were formed for the training programmes. Artisans were selected on the basis of willingness to provide time without any additional wages and also on assurance that each of the trained artisans will engage and train 1 fellow artisan during production time.

Trainings were provided on approved sample and not on random basis so that artisans can brush up their skill set and reach to required production capacity once the order is received. This was done to make the artisans production ready so that when order is received it can be delivered on time and more importantly, payment can be received from the buyers at the earliest. Designer undertook the training programme for 45 days which include 15 days of class room training and 30 days of practice at home. In this process, total 250 artisans were trained directly and made market/production



HAND-HOLDING IN PRODUCTION

Once the order was received, artisans were distributed the work and given a timeframe to complete the order as required by the buyer. As mentioned earlier, each of the trained artisans engaged 1 fellow/support artisan during production under the regular guidance of our designer.

A SELF-PROPELLING SKILL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

This was another uniqueness of the model where skill development was not merely a training program but a learning process which has ensured employment generation as trained artisan has trained 1 fellow artisans and engage during production time which had provided income for the lead as well as fellow artisans as well.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY: A COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE

Once, new market was created and streamlined, additional income for the artisans started flowing and new employment generated by engaging the support artisans this has created a lot of buzz among the artisan's community in Agra as more and more number of artisans were started showing their interest to be part of the program. At that time. Project touched the right chord which it wanted to create. However, bigger question was, how to systematised the new beginnings and empower the artisans by bringing them under one platform and more importantly, to continue the initiatives undertaken in this Project.

To answer this, Feb Agra Zari Embroidery Work Forum Pvt. Ltd. under section 8 was created having 3 lead artisans as promoters/directors and another 25 lead artisans became members to the newly formed enterprise. It was also decided to popularise the company as **aari** an urdu word of needle. The company will work towards order generation for the embroidery artisans of Agra and increase its member base on yearly basis. The company will also work as a common design centre and common production centre.





SUPPORT & SYSTEM CREATION FOR THE COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE

To make the newly formed company "aari" equipped with required facilities, Project provided machineries which include stitching machines, semi-automated embroidery machine, computerised embroidery machine and CAD software. This will enable them to become competitive in the market as they can produce machine made work and in hand embroidery work now they can produce end to end product including patter cutting, stitching and hand embroidery. This will provide an additional edge to the 'aari' when they approach new buyers. This blending and having provision of both hand as well as machine embroidery facilities have been created keeping in mind the current market trend where adaptability and innovation are key to become success as well as viable and relevant.

Similarly, business manual, hr manual and other policy documents for the company were created which company will abide by it. Select artisans were trained in marketing and leadership skills as well as on the usage of social media as one of the important tool. In this regard, a website in the name of www.aariembroidery.in has also been created for reaching out larger and possibly global market.



IMPACT

The Project was full of new experiences for artisans. Through this Project, some new models have been created some numbers have been achieved which at the beginning of the Project looked challenging. However, these are not mere numbers. These are beginning of a new system by which unorganised sector can become part of mainstream economy which can be called as "mainstreaming of unorganised sector".

In total, 500 artisans have been impacted whose income level has been increased by 30%. To look it another way, before the intervention, artisans used to work less than 4-5 months in a year. However, with the support of the Project, they now work at least 1-2 months more.

On yearly basis, as suggested by the artisans at least 10% of the total artisans in Agra were leaving this art form. This Project has allowed these 500 artisans to stay with the embroidery work for some more years and hopefully for years to come, who otherwise would have migrated to other cities in some other sectors and question on survival of these art would have loomed large a little more.

Among 500 artisans, all of them are young artisans, below the age of 30-32 and more importantly more than 50% of them are women. Additional income which these women earned through this Project has helped them in contributing to their household work which has reduced their struggle for livelihood to some extent.

This Project has enabled 250 artisans to earn for the 1st time hence created thus many employment opportunities who are now linked with the market through their respective lead artisans.

At the community level, this Project has created an umbrella platform through a community enterprise, aari which has enabled the artisans to aggregate and initiated common marketing as one of the key challenge for limited market opportunity was artisans were working in isolation or in small group and over dependence of local buyer. The community enterprise has now enabled them to reach out to new buyers and created production strength of 500 artisans and possibly more.



CASE STUDIES

Tanveer Alam, already shifted to Mumbai as a daily wage worker in a factory in Mumbai, 2 years back. He came to Agra on a leave for few days in the sultry summer of 2017. Never he imagined, summer of 2017 will become one of the pleasant summer of his life. Tanveer, famous at stitching and patter cutting work once saw his father and grandfather provided employee to hundreds of fellow artisans.

However, with the time, everything is gone and he was merely surviving on his own on 1-2 stitching machines that too less than half year work which was becoming harder to remain alive in this world. Without any choice, forcefully, he had to shift to Mumbai and pick up daily wage labour work where he has no interest neither has any skill. He always wanted to expand his grandfather business and become one the leading tailors/master in Agra. In 2016, when he shifted to Mumbai his dream came to an end and only to be revived with the help of this Project a year later.

The Project has provided lumpsum income, which has helped Tanveer to buy 5 new stitching machines and 5 new embroidery machines and employed 10 person whom he can now provide regular income. This Project has certainly revived his dream to become successful entrepreneur in Agra and more importantly can stay with his family in his most loved town.



CASE STUDIES

Tanveer Alam, already shifted to Mumbai as a daily wage worker in a factory in Mumbai, 2 years back. He came to Agra on a leave for few days in the sultry summer of 2017. Never he imagined, summer of 2017 will become one of the pleasant summer of his life. Tanveer, famous at stitching and patter cutting work once saw his father and grandfather provided employee to hundreds of fellow artisans.

However, with the time, everything is gone and he was merely surviving on his own on 1-2 stitching machines that too less than half year work which was becoming harder to remain alive in this world. Without any choice, forcefully, he had to shift to Mumbai and pick up daily wage labour work where he has no interest neither has any skill. He always wanted to expand his grandfather business and become one the leading tailors/master in Agra. In 2016, when he shifted to Mumbai his dream came to an end and only to be revived with the help of this Project a year later.

The Project has provided lumpsum income, which has helped Tanveer to buy 5 new stitching machines and 5 new embroidery machines and employed 10 person whom he can now provide regular income. This Project has certainly revived his dream to become successful entrepreneur in Agra and more importantly can stay with his family in his most loved town.

WAY FORWARD

The Project "Embroidery to Employment (E2E) Programme, Agra has showcased some unique models and created enough spark which can be upscaled in his cluster or replicate it with higher outreach in similar type of clusters in India. There are thousands of artisans present in India out of which large chunk of artisans belong to textile- based handicraft or embroidery. Unique model like ensuring market route, self-propelling skill development model are just 2 such examples which can ensure income enhancement and job creation to meet out one of the largest challenge of our country.

There are thousands of artisans like Ayesha or Tanveer who are waiting for such handholding to change their lifestyle and provide them with renewed hope otherwise they are struggling with limited income opportunities.

Through this Project, it has been showcased that unorganised sector can be made part of mainstream economy and can be brought under one umbrella to make them competitive in the market. Aari is one such example which has been created. It requires similar handholding measures to create many more such examples like "aari" and strengthen such producer networks so that they can be inter-connected and part of bigger and possibly international market.

ABOUT FMC

Foundation for MSME Clusters (FMC) is a pioneering organisation specialising in promoting of MSMEs through cluster and value chain led development. Established as a trust in June 2005, FMC has experience of working directly and indirectly with over 100,000 MSMEs in around 200 clusters in over 15 other countries across the globe. FMC has its head office in Delhi and branch/representative offices in the states of Andhra Pradesh/Telangana, Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

Foundation for MSME Clusters, USO House, 2nd Floor, USO Road, 6 Special Institutional Area, Off Shaheed Jeet Singh Marg, New Delhi - 110067

Phone: +91-11-40563323/2 | Website: www.fmc.org.in