

Institute for Global and
International Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Prospects for Women's Economic Empowerment

Trends and Models for Sustainability
in the Artisanal Sector

Elizabeth Andrews, Nicoletta Barbera, Morgan Mickle,
and Hilary Novik

IGIS WP 07/GGP WP 05
July 2013

Institute for Global and International Studies
1957 E Street NW, Suite 501
The Elliott School of International Affairs
The George Washington University
Washington, DC 20052
www.gwu.edu/~igis

Abstract

This report examines the prospects for women's economic empowerment through the artisanal sector. Through interviews with members of nongovernmental, governmental, and non-for-profit organizations in Washington, D.C., an online survey to organizations in Afghanistan, field research by one of the authors in Rwanda, and team field research in Bogotá, Colombia, in April 2013, it is evident that the artisanal sector is not a sustainable method of economic empowerment for women on its own. Artisanal work must be linked with at least one other income generating activity. Our research illustrates the challenges and dynamic opportunities within the artisanal sector. We provide recommendations to address problems in order to increase the sustainability and efficiency of the women's economic empowerment movement through the artisanal sector.

Key words: Women's economic empowerment, sustainable development, artisanal sector, Colombia.

Elizabeth Andrews obtained her Master's Degree from the Elliott School of International Affairs in 2013, concentrating in International Economic Affairs. She has worked with various organizations that deal exclusively with women's empowerment such as Indego Africa, a social enterprise that empowers Rwandan female artisans through economic development and professional skills training, and interned at Vital Voices Global Partnership where she worked on the Political and Public Leadership team.

Nicoletta Barbera is the Program Assistant for the Center for Gender & Peacebuilding at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Nicoletta obtained her Master's Degree from the Elliott School of International Affairs in 2013, concentrating in Conflict Resolution and specializing in gender and development studies. Prior to graduate school she worked at the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs in Baltimore, MD, and interned at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations in Washington, D.C.

Morgan Mickle obtained her Master's Degree from the Elliott School of International Affairs in 2013, concentrating in International Development and Conflict Resolution. She currently works for CARE USA's Gender and Empowerment Team. Previously, she worked for the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration, on Gender Integration with USAID's Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean, the National Defense University, Visions in Action, and the Millennium Water Alliance.

Hilary Novik obtained her Master's Degree from the Elliott School of International Affairs in 2013, concentrating in Conflict Resolution. She is currently an International Affairs Intern at Occidental Petroleum. Previously, she worked for the U.S. Department State's Bureau of International Organizations Affairs, the Office of United Nations Political Affairs, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the National Defense University.

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Acknowledgements

We thank the following people and organizations who made invaluable contributions to our capstone research and report: Professors Barbara Miller and David Gow who advised and guided our capstone, Angelina Klouthis and Gustavo Posada for their assistance and insight during our field research in Bogotá, and Dr. Kathleen Kuehnast of the United States Institute of Peace and Ambassador Steven E. Steiner for their encouragement and support. We thank the Global Gender Program of the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University for financial support for the field research and the Florida Association for Volunteer Action for the Caribbean and the Americas (FAVACA) for giving us the opportunity for the field research. We are extremely grateful to the following organizations which we met with and interviewed while in Bogotá, Colombia; Artesanias de Colombia, Escuela de Artes y Oficios Santo Domingo, Mujer Tejer y Saberes (MUTESA), Organizaciones Solidarias, and Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia. Finally, we thank the organizations who participated in our online survey and/or interviews in Rwanda and Washington, D.C.; Artizan Sarai, Afghanistan, FINCA, Indego Africa, Kandahar Treasure, Afghanistan, Institute for the Economic Empowerment of Women (IEEW), The International Center for Research of Women, Opportunity International, PLAN International, USA, The U.S. Institute of Peace's Center for Gender & Peacebuilding, U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, Women in Foreign Policy Program, and the Council on Foreign Relations.



Capstone Team members with some research participants in Bogotá, Colombia, April 2013.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our capstone project and field research in Bogotá, Colombia prescribes the following recommendations to mitigate the key challenges discussed in this report.

Key Findings

- It is imperative to understand the local market
- There is a lack of a consistent market
- Transition from local to international market is very difficult
- High transportation and import costs impede upon the creation of profits
- There is an evident lack of communication and collaboration between parties involved
- Among the women artisans who had been displaced, one of the highest priorities is the importance of preservation of tradition and culture in local communities
- There is a constant threat of cheap foreign knockoffs

Recommendations

- Increase collaboration and communication between all parties
- Protect artisans' intellectual property rights
- Subsidize transport costs
- Include female artisans in all stages of planning
- Incorporate clear monitoring and evaluation policies
- Incorporate business training
- Use local natural resources, where economically viable
- Artisan sector must be paired with another income generating activity

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The artisanal sector is the second largest employer, behind agriculture, in the developing world (Aspen Institute, 2012). Without it, many women would be unemployed and living under worse conditions. As emphasized by former Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, at the launch of the Alliance for Artisan Enterprise on November 27, 2012, the "the global market for artisan goods is significant and continues to expand." She states that, "even when the global demand plummeted and international trade contracted by 12 percent in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis, exports of art crafts actually rose to \$32 billion in 2008, a figure that is nearly double the 2002 figure" (Vermeer, 2012).

For women in developing countries, the artisanal sector provides employment, generates income, preserves traditional techniques, and fosters a sense of community (Aspen Institute, 2012). Developing countries, the Aspen Institute notes, have a comparative advantage in the artisanal sector "due to their diverse cultural traditions, distinct indigenous designs and products, and local materials and resources" (Aspen Institute, 2012).

Besides being a source of income for women, the artisanal sector offers flexibility and the affordability to work from home and alongside other indigenous women. This means less risk associated with traveling alone as well as the ability to care for their children while they work.

Still, "artisan enterprises [that] have achieved scale and become viable and sustained industries...are the exception, and not the rule," writes the Alliance for Artisan Enterprise (Aspen Institute, 2012).

Depending on a number of factors, including demand and the amount of time it takes to produce a product, daily, weekly and even monthly revenues can fluctuate for a woman. If it takes a woman two or three days to make a single product that is the only income she will earn during that time, granted she is not employed in any other sector. This is why John Hatch, Founder of FINCA, emphasizes the importance of women pairing artisan work with another income generating activity. For example, Hatch recommends women work during the day and produce handicraft products at night once they return from the field (Hatch, 2013).¹

Because the returns on many handicraft products are small, demand must be consistent in order for these small businesses to survive. To create a business, says John Hatch of FINCA, you need to have local demand. Hatch says he has never seen a project with international demand succeed in the long-run (Hatch, 2013). It is important, then, for organizations to teach women skills that are transferable to the local market. Quality control, he adds, is another critical factor. Once women gain access to a larger, international market, women will be expected to produce at a faster rate, albeit at the same level of

¹ We conducted six in-person interviews with primarily DC-based think tanks and institutions whose research features economic empowerment for women. The collection of survey results described below contributed to our initial understanding of the barriers and challenges that limit sustainability of the artisanal sector, and helped to frame our interview questions for our field research in Colombia. See Appendix B for complete list of interview questions.

quality as before. It can be hard for many of these women and small businesses to keep up with high international standards and demand. Creating one beautifully handcrafted bag is very different than making 6,000 of the same bags under a tight deadline for an international buyer. “[A] project can go to hell very quickly,” said Hatch (Hatch, 2013). It is imperative, then, to find a local market first, which is why it is so important to analyze and understand the market before production begins. Through our research, however, we conclude that the artisanal sector is not sustainable by itself in order to empower women economically. Instead, we propose the following formula: the artisan sector needs to be supported by business training and coupled with at least one additional income generating activity, such as tourism, ecotourism, agriculture, or food services. Ultimately this proposal must be supported by increased communication, mutual respect and understanding between all parties, and a government’s responsibility to protect its artisan’s intellectual property. This report illustrates the dynamics and challenges of the artisanal sector within the women’s economic empowerment movement, and on the measures necessary for making empowerment effective and sustainable over time.

Ultimately, we believe that the sustainability of the artisanal sector must adopt a community-based approach, providing opportunities for both men and women. However, for the purposes of this report we chose to focus on examining obstacles and providing recommendations for the economic empowerment of women artisans.

DEFINING KEY TERMS

The research for our capstone was primarily guided by the notion that women’s economic empowerment has increasingly been recognized by development paradigms as a key mechanism for not only the empowerment of women, but also in the global effort to mitigate and eventually eradicate poverty. Due to the more recent increased attention on women’s empowerment by governments, governmental development agencies, think tanks, non-governmental organizations and academia, our research has been greatly influenced by the theoretical underpinnings that surround the debate over empowerment and how it can be measured.

Economic Empowerment

To illustrate the complexity of defining the term *empowerment*, Dee Jupp, Sohel Ibn Ali, and Carlos Barahona state that, “economists look for greater efficiencies resulting from participation (better designed products, ownership, and long-term interest in outcomes and sustainability), whereas sociologists and activists, despite seemingly using the same lexicon as economists, seek different outcomes, social justice, realization of rights, reduction of power distance, and improved civic and state interaction” (p.28). Evidently there is controversy in a universally agreed upon definition of empowerment, thus we have prescribed to the definition that combines both an economic and social perspective, such as the one used by Alsop and Heinsohn’s definition that through a more “capacity-building view of empowerment,” it can be defined as the enhancement “of an individual’s or group’s capacity to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Alsop and Heinsohn, p.5). Ultimately, we agree that “economic empowerment is one of the most powerful routes

for women to achieve their potential and advance their rights” (Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra, p.3), which has ultimately been a main motivation for our research and the production of the capstone.

However, as “empowerment is a contested concept and a moving target” (Jupp, Ali, and Barahona, p.16), we have adapted the definition of empowerment further, in terms of how successful women’s empowerment can be measured. Thus, the definition must include the important elements of economic empowerment as well as sustainability and a long-term perspective. For our research, economic empowerment can be defined as increasing fiscal means and power in a women’s life such as an increase in income as well as position in the household. With this increase, we agree with Anne Marie Golla, Anju Malhotra, Priya Nanda, and Rekha Mehra in their report for the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) that a woman can thus be considered economically empowered when “she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and has the power to make and act on economic decisions” (Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra, p.4). In addition, empowerment would also contribute to the ability for a woman to gain the agency to have authority over the events in her life.

Furthermore, we concur again with Golla, Malhotra, Nanda and Mehra that “there is increasing recognition that economically empowering women is essential both to realize women’s rights and to achieve broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education and welfare” (Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra, p.3). For example, “working with women makes good business sense. When women have the right skills and opportunities, they can help businesses and markets grow.” Also, referred to as the golden rule of development, it has been widely seen that “women who are economically empowered contribute more to their families, societies, and national economies. It has been shown that women invest extra income in their children, providing a route to sustainable development” (Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra, p.3).

Sustainability

Therefore, for women’s economic empowerment to be considered successful we have determined that it must be sustainable; meaning the power and the effects must be transferable to a second generation. For example, if a woman gains the means and agency to become economically empowered, then the effects should be seen by providing increased opportunities for her child or children. If a woman does not have children, then the effects should be retained for the duration of her life. We also define sustainability in terms of the wide array of effects economic empowerment can have on a community. Thus, when designing a developmental and empowerment program that will be implemented into a local community, we agree again with Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra that “understanding the wider opportunities and challenges women face in the specific context of the project is important in order to determine where resources are best spent to meet goals, to design best intervention and to identify areas outside of the project focus that may help or hinder its success” (Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra, p.5).

Our interviews with senior researchers for the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) revealed that agency is a driving factor for women’s economic empowerment. Women must have

abilities, skills, control over resources, power, and agency to become economically empowered. ICRW does not support one specific way to measure women's economic empowerment, but expressed the reality that due to the nature of context specificity, there cannot be only one way to measure empowerment successfully. Approaches should be open-ended and offer clear examination of their potential risk (Golla and Mehra, 2012).

Furthermore, in accordance with Jupp, Ali, and Barahona, we agree that "empowerment is a process" (Jupp, Ali, and Barahona, p.38) with many different stakeholders, yet for the purpose of our research, we have focused on the stakeholders who are attempting to facilitate empowerment initiatives and the participants of empowerment themselves. When designing or measuring the progress of an empowerment project, the qualitative and quantitative measurements must have "an emphasis on meaning and interpretation from the perspective of the participants" (Denzin and Lincoln, p.3) in order to gain true predictive powers. Yet, the perspective of the third-party implementers and facilitators must also be analyzed, as it is through this lens that the empowerment projects are usually created and implemented.

Organizations have evidently realized "that economically empowering women is a win-win that can benefit not only women, but society more broadly" (Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra, p.3). In fact, most organizations in this field now begin with the assumption that "women may well be the most important agents of economic development" ("One Women = One Business", ICRW). However, we have discovered that for success through empowerment and sustainability, it is imperative for participants to be present at all levels, such as planning, design, and implementation of the organizational empowerment project.

Business Training

Throughout our research, and especially evident in our field research in Bogotá, Colombia, we became aware of the importance of business training and management programs that can benefit women in our chosen sector of analysis, the artisanal handicraft sector. In accordance with the ICRW report, "One Woman = One Business," we agree that "the benefits conveyed by business and management training for women go far beyond technical skills building. Training programs can equip women with the skills they need to grow their enterprises, which in turn can generate social and economic benefits for women, their families, and societies as a whole" ("One Women = One Business", ICRW). The importance of business training demonstrates the necessity of power and agency that can be products of economic empowerment, which in turn contributes to the increase of financial independence and improved livelihood of women (Golla, Malhorta, Nanda, and Mehra, p.6). This ultimately exemplifies the multidimensionality of our research and findings, as well as the very nature of women's economic empowerment.

Community-Based Tourism

Finally, our research and analysis explores the impacts of tourism, specifically volunteer tourism, heritage tourism, and ecotourism, on the artisanal sector. Pierre Walter, in his article, "Gender Analysis

in Community-based Ecotourism,” emphasizes the necessity of community-based tourism initiatives for achieving sustainable development. According to Walter, community-based tourism shares the criteria of aiming to “ensure that members of local communities have a high degree of control over the activities taking place, and a significant proportion of the benefits accrue to them” (Walter, p.160). This includes, “principles of local participation, control or ownership of tourism and/or ecotourism initiatives, the promotion of customary and indigenous cultures, and the promotion of local and indigenous human rights and sovereignty over traditional territories and resources” (Walter, p.160).

We also agree with Emily Höckert's definition in her report, “Sociocultural Sustainability of Rural Community-Based Tourism”, that rural community-based tourism is small-scale tourism in less-economically developed rural areas, where the local people are active actors in tourism development. For the purposes of our paper, we will refer to community-based tourism, both rural and urban, as CBT. Furthermore, in congruence with CBT, we also came across the issue of volunteer tourism, in which we agree with the notion that volunteers can contribute to CBT by donating their time and efforts to improving local conditions and empowerment initiatives in various communities. In accordance with Cassandra Wright and Belinda Lewis in their report “On the Edge of Crisis: Contending Perspectives on Development, Tourism, and Community Participation on Rote Island, Indonesia”, we argue that CBT and volunteer tourism “provide an alternative to traditional top-down development” (Wright and Lewis, p.107), and empowerment models.

ONLINE SURVEY TO ORGANIZATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Our capstone group dispersed an online survey to 25 national and international organizations, all of which work to improve women’s position in the home and community via support of artisanal production and through business training.² The majority of the eight responses we received from the online survey were from Afghan organizations, or ones that work primarily in Afghanistan. Lessons learned from the responses highlighting challenges and opportunities for artisans in Afghanistan produced mixed results. Afghanistan contains many natural resources, has a rich artisanal sector, and has received increased international attention and support by way of economic empowerment programs for women over recent years. However, the country’s security and stability issues are severe. Several of the organizations that responded to our survey, such as Kandahar Treasure and Artizan Sarai, promote the production and sale of artisanal products on the international market. Others, such as the U.S. - Afghan Women’s Council and the Institute for the Economic Empowerment of Women, promote Afghan women entrepreneurs through training and mentoring programs. Our initial survey questions attempted to understand what local conditions facilitate and hinder successful implementation of organizations’ work in country. One key reflection emphasized that investments in long-term development and the enhancement of women and families take time. It is vital to realize that investing in artisanal production may not yield immediate short-term results, as indicated by survey responses. Furthermore, the importance and long-term impact of local partnerships, coalitions, and private sector partners must be emphasized.

² See Appendix C the online survey questions.

The survey also asked organizations to discuss the main conditions that hinder implementation of their work in country. Afghan survey respondents reached an almost unanimous consensus that in Afghanistan, security issues are the main concern and inhibitor of successful work. Hostilities at the local and national level between government forces and the Taliban are widespread, and significant backlash especially exists for women working to advance their socioeconomic statuses (Gienger, p.1). One organization noted that a woman participating in the organization's business skills training program was kidnapped and tortured because of her actions. Violence and lack of women's mobility were the number one inhibitor of female participants' engagement in economic empowerment activities, as noted in our survey. It is difficult to emphasize the need for international support of economic empowerment programs when security concerns are so high. Survey respondents maintained that in theory it is understood that women's involvement in the business sector will benefit the economy, yet in practice it is not universally accepted amongst more traditional tribal and religious elders. Finally, respondents noted that high transport costs and high import tariffs were significant barriers to the sustainability of artisanal production, especially in more remote provinces.³

FIELD RESEARCH: COLOMBIA

In March 2013, our group traveled to Bogotá, Colombia to gain firsthand accounts of the challenges and opportunities in handicraft production and sales as a means towards the empowerment of women in conflict and post-conflict countries. Our field research was sponsored by the Elliott School of International Affairs' Global Gender Program and facilitated by Angelina Klouthis, who was living in Bogotá, Colombia and working for the Florida Association for Volunteer Action for the Caribbean and the Americas (FAVACA). During our time in Colombia, we held meetings with a variety of actors involved in the growing field of supporting artisanal production, especially among indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Our intention was to gain insight from representatives of different sectors such as government agencies, public-private partnerships, private organizations, and from local artisans themselves, so as to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges of maintaining growth and support for the artisanal sector. We met with government agencies, specifically Organizaciones Solidarias, Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia, and Artesanias de Colombia, public-private organizations, specifically One Village, One Product (OVOP), private organizations teaching artisan work, such as Escuela de Artes y Oficios Santo Domingo, and a government-sponsored collective for displaced indigenous women, the *Casa Cultural Mujer Tejer y Saberes* (MUTESA).

Methods

Organizaciones Solidarias, Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia, Artesanias de Colombia, and One Village One Product (OVOP) work to formalize the artisanal sectors throughout Colombia. Each of these programs is all or partly government sponsored, and has offices across the country to attempt to reach indigenous communities. Organizaciones Solidarias, funded by the Colombian Ministry of Labor, works

³ Due to the time constraints, no additional follow-up was conducted with the Afghan organizations to determine the level of government or Taliban involvement in the programming processes.

specifically to provide business training to community artisans wishing to formalize and sell their products on a national or international market. Similarly, Artesanias de Colombia, funded by the Colombian Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, supports the commercialization of Colombian crafts by reaching community-based artisans in 10 regions of the country. Artesanias de Colombia aims to promote the sale of artisanal products by posting pictures of handicrafts on its website and returns the profit to the local artisan who produced it. Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia spoke specifically in regards to a program to support Afro-Colombian artisans who reside in western Colombia, and attempt to promote ecotourism throughout the region. One Village One Product (OVOP), a program based on a pre-existing model implemented in Oita Prefecture in Japan, seeks to create sustainable strategies among communities of artisans for social development, especially in rural Colombia.

The collective *Casa Cultural Mujer Tejer y Saberes* receives fiscal support from the government, by providing indigenous displaced women a venue to engage in cultural activities as a means of supporting themselves. Currently, 21 women engage in the activities of the collective, which include a restaurant program where each day's lunch menu features a meal from one of the indigenous communities represented in the house, a storefront that houses artisanal goods for sale, and a center for learning indigenous languages. The house is expanding its activities to include a wellness center, which will feature massages and a meditation room for the public.

Organizational interview questions we crafted assessed: how the organization defines successful empowerment of women; what local conditions they see as facilitating and/or hindering implementation of their work in-country; what they consider are the pros and cons of empowering women through the handicraft sector and/or through skills training programs; where outside organizations should be focusing their efforts, and if other approaches to economic empowerment of women should be supported; and what are the most useful or needed skills training programs for women in developing countries. We attempted to glean whether, in the organizations' experiences, female participants of programs face any negative repercussions for engaging in economic empowerment activities. Finally, we asked each organization if they foresee economic barriers to the success and duration of their organization or program's work.⁴

Participant interviews first captured demographic information such as age, education level, marital status, and number of children. Questions varied from asking about participants' history with the organization and what skills or opportunities the organization has provided to them. Additionally, we asked how the ability to generate income has affected their lifestyles or lifestyle of their family; if women in Colombia are respected as income earners in their families and communities; if, in their opinion, it is important for women to earn their own wages; and whether they would encourage other

⁴ Interview questions asked to organizations supporting economic empowerment programs in Colombia were the same as the interview questions asked to the DC based research and think tank organizations. For reference, see Appendix B.

women or their children to join economic empowerment programs based on artisanal production. Finally, participants were asked to briefly discuss their long-term career goals.⁵

Interviews with Organizations and Artisans in Bogotá

One Village One Product (OVOP), Gustavo Posada, (March 10, 2013)

Posada previously worked on a project focused on understanding the value chain for women making *mochilas* (traditional woven bag) in an indigenous community. Every bag takes three months to make and has a story behind it. Posada worked on critical questions such as: how often do you order string, can you make orders together, is there a way to get materials at a cheaper cost, etc. Assistance by a third party is provided once barriers are identified, however, problems persist. For example, some women were given sheep to access cheaper wool, but due to a crop problem that year, the women ate the sheep as they viewed as necessary for survival. Posada highlighted that example to demonstrate obstacles to sustainability of artisan work when people prioritize their daily needs. Had the women undergone sheep utilization training, that problem may have been mitigated. Alternatively, had the organization implementing the sheep program understood the local needs better, they may have opted not to use sheep for a wool program from the start.

Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia, Maria Juliana Hoyos, (March 11, 2013)

Juliana Hoyos works with low-income communities of both men and women, but principally with afro-Colombians and indigenous peoples residing on the Pacific coast through two main programs, ecotourism and handicraft. One of the groups Hoyos works with is the Embera, the largest indigenous ethnic group in Colombia. Throughout the history of the Emberas, women have been in charge, and their principle artisanal products are beaded accessories. Men make items that use wood such as tools, baskets, cooking utensils, and basic furniture. One of the main challenges Hoyos identified for the Embera is that they used to make their beads from mud (ceramic beads), but now they import beads in bulk from nearby city centers. They also have to buy the needles and threads. Considering many of these communities are located in isolated areas, importation and transportation of materials are costly. During the summer months, when tourism is high, communities are able to sell their products; but during the rest of the year, sales are low. Other challenges include a decrease in agricultural production and use of middlemen due to language barriers. Middlemen come to the communities and negotiate prices, but then sell the products for a higher price, so that the artisan barely ends up making a profit.

Organizaciones Solidarias – Pilar Rivera, Gloria Medina, and Ricardo Ramirez

Ricardo Ramirez is the Director of Development at Organizaciones Solidarias. He reported that Organizaciones Solidarias' projects focus on tourism, ecotourism, artisans, credit unions, and the northern region of Colombia through financing and support from the Ministry of Labor in the Colombian government. They are specifically focused on helping communities organize within the formal sector.

⁵ See Appendix D for complete list of interview questions asked of participants in Colombia.

According to Ramirez, development projects must start at the community level. Additionally, he stated that it is better to have a project where a skill already exists, when people have a community, and when people are motivated to build it up. Ramirez believes that project implementers need to cooperate more creatively with local authorities and involve actors such as the mayor or the local university to increase sustainability. One of the major challenges OS faces is selling their model and explaining the benefits of working together. Oftentimes community's still opt for using a middleman to sell their products. OS wants to help modify this viewpoint, but realizes that they need to be sensitive to change, local history, and culture. A major challenge for artisans everywhere is the need and ability to sell their products commercially.

Mujer, Tejer y Saberes (MUTESA), Maria Clemencia Herrera Nemerayema, Laura Tumiña, and Luz Edilma Andrade M., (March 12, 2013)

According to Clemencia Herrera, the founder and director of the collective, the women face many problems. Herrera, former Director of the Colombian National Indigenous Organization, recognized the special need to help women. In 2003, she founded MUTESA by herself and is proud of the growth she has seen. Today, Herrera believes that the way MUTESA is supporting artisan work is sustainable. However, she worries about women from MUTESA selling their products on the street because of the lack of bartering and price negotiation protection. Herrera sees negotiating as degrading because outsiders put a price on their work. Herrera dreams one day of having a store that has products from each of the 102 tribes in Colombia accompanied by an explanation about the individual product. Herrera is living her dream; she has never stopped and claims she will never give up.

Herrera identified direct challenges that women in MUTESA face. 1) Transportation: The restaurant, where they serve traditional Amazonian food, is the largest incoming generating activity for the organization. However, the women incur high costs for importing the foods, as many of the areas are only accessible via plane, and shipping costs are extraordinarily high. 2) Government: MUTESA is currently working with Artesanias de Colombia, under the auspices of Organizaciones Solidarias, who Herrera says state a price of a product without considering the materials and the story behind it. Herrera believes that AC is mass producing, stealing, and selling their traditional products and others like them for three times the price at which they are valued. She stated that it is ironic that the government promotes intellectual property rights then robs others. Herrera emphasized the importance of protecting cultural knowledge and helping indigenous women understand this concept. 3) Armed Conflict: The armed conflict has been a significant factor resulting in whole family displacement and increased violence against women. 4) Language: Many of the women do not speak English or Spanish, but instead their specific indigenous language, which makes it harder for them to interact with international customers.

Laura Tumiña is a participant and works with MUTESA. Tumiña says that there are not many resources for indigenous women, especially in Bogotá, and is grateful to be a part of MUTESA which has provided her with the ability to sell and commercialize. Tumiña makes bracelets and is learning to make *mochilas*.

One of the major challenges Tumíña believes women have when displaced is loss of their indigenous identity.

Luz Edilma is a participant and works with MUTESA, as chef and manager of the restaurant program. She recalled that working with MUTESA is like being at home where you are able to build social networks. She says that the restaurant has given her opportunities she may not otherwise have had such as sending her children to school. When the restaurant is empty, Edilma weaves products for the artisan fairs that MUTESA is invited to. Edilma believes that in the last five years women have gained respect in Colombia as income earners. However, in her community it is very different and traditional; machismo persists. According to Edilma, women are expected to be in the home taking care of the husband and the kids. Men do not have a second income, instead they will take the artisanal products that the wives make and spend the profit on themselves. Edilma thinks it is very important for women to earn their won wages because women cannot solely depend on men.

Artesanias de Colombia, Alexander Parra, (March 13, 2013)

According to Alexander Parra, 60% of artisans in Colombia are women. Artesanias de Colombia (AC) is working to help with fashion, design, production, and intellectual property rights. Parra highlighted the organization's website, which allows artisans to put their work online for free, including a photo and information about the specific product. He noted that while there are other places to buy products at a cheaper price, the quality is different and this concept should be stressed for to potential buyers. Additionally, Colombia hosts the largest artisan international expo fair in Latin America. In 2012, the fair brought in 6 million dollars. Parra is confident that people will begin to see products internationally and stresses the importance of product branding. Colombia makes trades every day with potential for cheap knock-off copies, such as the straw hats imported by the Chinese to mimic one of the traditional Colombian sombreros. Authentic products are important to Parra, to deter confusion with similar products from other countries and to claim identifying Colombian ownership as Colombian. Today AC has helped brand 45 products and is starting a new rural women's project that will attempt to link agriculture with artisans and tourism. One of the biggest challenges for the artisan sector in Colombia is the lack of trust artisans feels towards the government. Artesanias de Colombia claims that some artisans believe AC mass produces copies of their designs. Others believe that AC sells products at a higher price, thereby making a profit. While the organization has a previous history of mismanagement and profiting from original artisanal work, Alexander Parra is striving to build new relationships with artisans that is slowly catching on. The new focus of AC is to help artisans organize and to promote their crafts towards a larger audience.

KEY FINDINGS

Our study and investigation of women's economic empowerment via the artisanal sector used a multi-faceted approach to determine if the artisanal sector is a means to sustainably empower women. We incorporated opinions from academics and practitioners, project implementers, and participants of empowerment programs and initiatives gained though in-person interviews, phone-interviews, virtual

systems, and on-the-ground field experience. Our key findings reflect the challenges and opportunities faced by artisans and organizations that implement programs in support of handicraft production and sale.⁶

- **Understanding the local market**
 - Organizations need to do their due diligence and analyze the local market, resources, needs, and overall conditions before they begin production. Our interviews concluded that organizations may enter a community, implement a project for a number of years, leave, and determine the project failed because there was lack of demand for the product. Oftentimes local communities have more knowledge than implementers in terms of why they pursue certain avenues and not others, and are likely doing things for a reason. While it may be lucrative to cater to the international market, it is important for the implementing organization to teach skills that are transferable and sustainable in the local market after they leave.
- **Lack of a consistent market**
 - Many of the organizations we interviewed said that a lack of access to markets is a significant challenge that the artisan sector faces. Without consistent demand, women and cooperatives cannot earn stable incomes. Even if a woman or cooperative is fortunate enough to gain access to the international market, which in many cases is the exception, demand may be intermittent and/or seasonal, and returns are small. Similarly, facilitators of production must be mindful that the local or regional market is not already saturated with a particular handicraft. Implementers should consider what and where demand is.
- **Transition from local to international market**
 - If the woman or cooperative gains access to the international market, all parties must comply with international standards and deadlines. Artisans often have a hard time adjusting to rigid quality control standards and time constraints. Producing one basket is very different than producing 500 identical baskets for an international buyer.
- **High transportation and import costs**
 - This impediment was brought to our attention numerous times in Colombia, especially in our interviews with Artesanias de Colombia, but most notably during our meeting with Clemencia Herrera, founder of Mujer, Tejer y Saberes (MUTESA). Herrera lamented to our group about how one of the largest obstacles her organization faced were high costs of transportation of raw materials for their handicraft products and food for their restaurant. Often times, the transportation costs clearly outweighed the profits, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the business.
 - International organizations may also incur high tariffs when importing raw materials into a country for production of artisanal goods. For example, the Hand in Hand project, a partnership between Kate Spade New York and Women for Women International, noted that the cost of importing wool into Bosnia & Herzegovina, Rwanda, and Afghanistan

⁶ The key findings are based solely on our field experience in Colombia, however, the interviews we gathered in Rwanda and Afghanistan impacted our research methodology and overall direction.

has minimized their profits to such an extent that their program has now become a charity rather than a sustainable business model.

- **Lack of communication and collaboration between parties**
 - A disconnect between the Colombian government and local communities/artisans was evident during our field research. Even though governmental organizations, such as Organizaciones Solidarias, were assisting indigenous communities and the artisan sector, they seldom would return to these communities to check on their progress. Additionally, we learned of the lack of trust between artisans and the government. Herrera suspects the governmental organization Artesanias de Colombia is exploiting and breaching the intellectual property rights of the artisans by taking their products and selling them for a profit in the local and international markets. Although we were assured by Artesanias de Colombia that this was not true today, we saw that the contentious relationship between the organization and local communities was a hindrance to a potential working relationship.

- **Importance of preservation of tradition and culture in local communities**
 - Through our interviews with several indigenous displaced women in the casa cultural MUTESA, it became increasingly clear that production of handicrafts is not merely a trade or skill. Rather, the process of artisanal production is a way for individuals who fear their traditions are slowly being lost to preserve identity and culture. In the face of displacement and homogeneity of cultures in major city centers, the products artisans produce tell a story, and often times have a value far beyond the asking price.

- **Threat of cheap foreign knockoffs**
 - In January 2013 it was reported that almost one million knock-off sombrero vueltiao hats were legally imported into Colombia from China. The hat, made from natural cane fibers by Zenu indigenous people in the northwest province of Cordoba and Sucre, usually sells for anywhere between \$40 and \$400 dollars. Artisans cannot compete against \$8 imposters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through our research we conclude that the artisanal sector is not sustainable by itself in order to empower women economically. Instead, we propose the following formula: the artisan sector needs to be supported by business training and coupled with at least one additional income generating activity, such as tourism, ecotourism, agriculture, or food services. MUTESA, with their revenue making restaurant and artisanal storefront, embodies this recommendation. However, we have determined that there are two exceptions to the success of our proposed model, based on our limited findings. First, due to potential barriers such as high operating costs and low returns, we feel our formula cannot successfully be applied to international charity-based models. Secondly, we conclude that the formula we have put forth works in “post-conflict” settings or environments in which security and stability has been achieved, with stability being defined as the ability for nationals and foreigners to work inside the

country.⁷ Ultimately this proposal must be supported by increased communication, mutual respect and understanding between all parties, and a government's responsibility to protect its artisan's intellectual property.

- **Increase collaboration and communication between all parties:**
 - Female community leaders should be part of the political and implementation processes of any international or national level programming initiatives. Much of the mistrust and confusion that is often time felt by the artisans, third-party organizations, and government officials could be ameliorated if women were present in all stages of the decision-making process. For example, in a meeting with Artesanias de Colombia, it was brought to our attention that the artisans were unaware of why the government had to increase the prices of the original handicrafts that the artisans had sold to them. The price increase was due to typical regulations, overhead costs, and procedures that a business must incorporate in their planning. Better communication between MUTESA and the government on this issue would alleviate the mistrust the artisans feel towards Artesanias de Colombia. For example, Artesanias de Colombia, which already has regional outreach programs throughout rural Colombia, demonstrates a model for which effective communication could occur. If Artesanias de Colombia held monthly forums in each regional center where all parties could address their respective concerns, it could maximize the impact of the regional and local work.
 - To avoid confusion about production expectations, implementing organizations should cooperate with community artisans to adopt deadlines that are understood and valued in the local context. To mitigate the challenges women face in meeting production deadlines, deadlines should be created around significant events, such as Mother's Day, for example. Choosing deadlines with valuable context-specific meanings will create incentives and a better sense of understanding for local artisans.

- **Protect artisans' intellectual property rights:**
 - Governments should play an active role in protecting the artisanal sector by requiring and enforcing intellectual property laws. This protects both the identity and culture of the specific handicraft and its producers, as well as the host government's claim to authentically produced products.

- **Include female artisans in all stages of planning:**
 - In some indigenous Colombian communities, women are more concerned with preserving their tradition and culture than mass producing their products in the international market. To ensure that a woman's identity, traditions, culture, and products are not exploited by international organizations, government officials, or international buyers, cooperatives should be represented and involved in every stage of the production process. This means an indigenous/cooperative representative has a seat at the table alongside government ministries and international organizations so that the women's voices and concerns can be heard.

⁷ We do not provide specific recommendations for organizations currently operating in Afghanistan, because the country's security situation does not qualify as stable, based on our definition.

- **Incorporate clear monitoring and evaluation policies:**
 - Our experience discussing effective programming policies with representatives of Colombian governmental organizations demonstrated that there is no follow up by way of monitoring and evaluation procedures in place to account for the program’s effectiveness. Due to limited funding for programming, emphasis is placed solely on developing new projects, rather than following up to see if current ones are producing effective results. In this way, programming will not evolve to meet the local communities’ needs. To counter this, governments and third-party organizations must implement clear monitoring and evaluating plans, such as conducting surveys and interviews with the women to assess economic growth of the artisanal project and to determine the challenges that women are still facing at the local level.

- **Incorporate business training:**
 - Business training should be integrated into any program that promotes the artisanal sector. This includes an understanding of quality control, international standards, supply chain, pricing and marketing, and other entrepreneurial skills. For example, women should understand how to incorporate the value of their labor into the price. This would include information about how to assess the local market for opportunities and how to establish other sorts of small businesses such as stalls and stores. However, as John Hatch of FINCA said, “business training may be a luxury that woman cannot afford” (Hatch, 2013). Organizations should be aware of a woman’s opportunity cost and respect her decision not to participate in the trainings as trainings may take away valuable production time or time spent on another income generating activity. Organizations should be mindful that some of these women tend to think short-term instead of long-term as well as may not have the entrepreneurial spirit as others.

- **Use local natural resources, where economically viable:**
 - At the community level, it may be more profitable and sustainable for artisans of rural or indigenous communities to rely on their natural resources for production, rather than importing raw materials. Hoyos, of Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia, reinforced this point by discussing the handicraft production of a community in Utría, a region in western Colombia, which is plentiful in trees. The community knows how to use the trees and regrow them in a sustainable manner, yet relies heavily on the imports of small plastic beads for crafting bracelets. Hoyos claims if they utilized their natural resources for making products, the community would profit more, as they are losing money and time as they wait for their plastic beads to arrive.

- **Incorporate additional income generating activities:**
 - Following MUTESA’s example, tourism could provide an outlet for the artisanal sector by creating an experience based on the history, culture, and traditions of the local artisans. The artisanal sector, through the selling of handicrafts to tourists, also enhances the overall tourist experience associated with a certain country.⁸

⁸ In accordance with our formula, in our recommendations we will demonstrate how tourism, specifically, can be used as an example of an additional income-generating activity. In recent years, there has been an increase in research and attention towards the prospects of using tourism as a tool for development, especially in terms of poverty alleviation and the empowerment of women. Tourism is an income generating activity for both national

CONCLUSION

We conclude that relying on the artisanal sector as a sole source of income does not ensure the economic empowerment of women. Rather, we believe that pairing the artisanal sector with at least one additional income generating activity, such as tourism, agriculture, or other small-scale creative enterprises, can increase the livelihood of an artisanal community. Ultimately, this suggestion must be supported by increased communication, mutual respect and understanding between all parties, and a government's responsibility to protect its artisan's intellectual property. Pairing the artisanal sector with additional income-generating activities, supplemented by business training, will lead to savings and long-term investments for women, ultimately benefitting both future generations and local communities at large.

Appendix A: Description of Teammate's Independent Field Research in Rwanda

Our understanding of some of the challenges and overall dynamics of the artisanal sector was aided by one of our teammate's work in Kigali, Rwanda during the summer of 2012 with Indego Africa. Indego Africa is social enterprise that connects Rwandan women artisans with global markets and provides training programs in management and entrepreneurship, literacy, and health to help women-owned businesses in Rwanda become economically sustainable and independent. In 2012, Indego partnered with eleven cooperatives around the county, working with a total of 435 women that specialized in handicraft products, including woven baskets, knitted products, and beaded bracelets (Indego, 2013). While interning with Indego Africa in the summer of 2012, one of our teammates had the chance to interview some of the female artisans on how income generation has impacted their lives and roles within the family and community, providing an inside look at the effectiveness and economic sustainability of the artisan sector from the worker's perspective.

When discussing the importance of earning their own wages, one of the Rwandan artisans said that women are more likely to report domestic abuse to the police as a result of having their own income. Before Rwandan female artisans had opportunities to earn their own income, Emelienne Nyiramana from Cocoki cooperative said that if the husband ended up in jail, no one was able to support the family and everyone would suffer. But now, with a second income, it is relatively easier for a woman to survive financially if her husband is incarcerated (Nyiramana, 2012) Nyiramana also thinks domestic abuse might

and local communities, and has the potential to yield many positive benefits such as being an additional market to sell artisanal products. Tourism development, however, can also create potential for exploitation and unintended consequences unless effectuated with a conscious effort to mitigate possible negative effects on a community. Primarily, there must be a heavy emphasis on community-based tourism that works from the bottom-up in terms of decision-making and design. Tourism that is locally owned, meaning the local communities have input in many, if not all, aspects of how tourism will be integrated into their society, can ultimately boost the local and national economies and increase marketability of artisanal products. The following recommendations are solely based on our research and are not prescriptions for any specific audience. Rather, they are intended for all parties engaged in the artisanal sector of the women's economic empowerment movement.

actually decrease in some households. Before, some women were beaten by their husbands because they were viewed as not “bringing anything to the family,” but now “husbands do not beat their wives [if] they are earning money” (Nyiramana, 2012). Others, such as Rose Manirarora from Ingenzi Knit Union said that besides not having to ask her husband for money all the time, one of the best perks of earning her own income is having the ability to buy airtime for her cell phone (Manirarora, 2012).

One of the biggest changes these women feel as a result of their earned income is the amount of respect they receive from their children, husbands, and communities. Some of the women that were raped during the genocide were subsequently ostracized within their own communities. Now that they are businesswomen, Eugene Ufitekirezi from Abasangiyе, another Indego Africa partner cooperative, says they move around with more confidence and the community “accepts them for who they are,” as they are “seen as achieving something” (Ufitekirezi, 2012).

However, one of the biggest challenges the cooperatives and artisans face is lack of demand. While the cooperatives are free, and even encouraged by Indego staff, to take on other orders from different clients, if Indego is unable to renew one of its previous orders, then the women will be out of work. That is, if Indego is the cooperative’s only client. Even when the women are busy with an Indego order, however, the money they earn may only be enough to pay for basic necessities, and not enough to save for the future (Ufitekirezi, 2012). To alleviate this problem, some of the cooperatives developed a system where women must allocate a certain percentage of their earned income to the cooperative at large. This pot of money is then used to pay for the cooperative’s operating costs as well as provide interest-free loans to members for their children’s education expenses (Nyiramana, 2012). One cooperative—such as Cocoki—has developed a more sustainable business model to deal with this issue: they supplement the income they receive from Indego orders by designing and tailoring garments for individual clients. Additionally, they recently started another side business where they rent out Imikenyerо— a traditional Rwandan formal dresses worn for special functions— for about 8 USD/day (Soul, 2013). Still, intermittent orders and lack of local demand is a concern for many of the other cooperatives. Besides lack of local and international demand, another main challenge associated with the artisan sector is the high cost of importing and transporting materials. Limited manufacturing facilities and production capacity are also inhibitors to achieving scale and economic sustainability (French, 2013).

The model that we have proposed in this report could work in Rwanda due to Rwanda’s growing tourism and ecotourism industries.

Appendix B: Organization Interview Questionnaire

Organization Name:

Date:

Main Interviewer:

Is Interview Recorded?

Does organization wish to be anonymous?

1. How does your organization define successful empowerment of women?
2. What local conditions facilitate economic empowerment efforts in-country? Anecdotal evidence?
3. What local conditions hinder successful implementation of an organization's work in-country?
4. What are the pros of empowering women through the handicraft sector?
5. What are the cons of empowering women through the handicraft sector?
6. What are the pros of skills training programs?
7. What are the cons of skills training programs?
8. Do you foresee any economic barriers to the success of your organization?
9. In your experience, what are the most useful skills training programs women in developing countries need? Does business training need to be paired with another method of economic empowerment or it is practical by itself? (Since business training is not an immediate source of income)
10. Besides the handicraft sector and business training, in your opinion, is another method of women's economic empowerment preferred/proven to be more successful?
11. Where should outside organizations be focusing their efforts? Do you support any other approaches?
12. In your experience, do female participants of an in-country program face any negative repercussions for engaging in economic empowerment activities?
13. What role should men be playing in this movement to empower women economically?

Appendix C: Online Survey Questions

1. What is the name of your organization?
2. How does your organization define successful empowerment of women?
3. What local conditions have facilitated your organization's work in-country?
4. What local conditions have hindered successful implementation of your organization's work in-country?
5. What are the greatest obstacles to implementing your organization's mission and/or barriers to sustainability? (Select all that apply)
 - a) Political or Legal

- b) Social or Cultural
- c) Economic or Trade
- d) Organization Budgetary Constraints

6. Do the female participants of your in-country program face any negative repercussions for engaging in economic empowerment activities? (Select all that apply)

- a) Increased Violence in the Home
- b) Alienation within the Community
- c) Usurping of Generated Income
- d) Other

7. What types of skills training does your organization provide or employ?

8. What industry does your organization target? Please explain.

- a) Agriculture
- b) Handicraft
- c) Textile
- d) Other

9. Are you willing to be contacted for follow-up?

10. Do you prefer to keep your organization anonymous in our final paper?

Appendix D: Participant Questions for Field Research in Colombia

Organization Name:

Date:

Main Interviewer:

Is Interview Recorded?

Does participant wish to be anonymous?

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Education level:

4. Number of children:

5. Marital Status:

6. How did you start your relationship with organization X?

7. Has organization X provided you with new skills or opportunities? What are they? Which have been most helpful to you?

8. How long have you been involved in the activities or programs of organization X?
9. How has the ability to generate income affected your lifestyle and that of your family?
(If they ask for examples: Has it affected your ability to buy food for your family? Educate your children? Ensure adequate healthcare for your family?)
10. Are women in Colombia respected as income earners in their families? In their communities?
11. Do you think it is important for women to earn their own wages? Why?
12. Would you encourage or have you encouraged other women to join this program? Why or why not?
13. Would you encourage your children or children of friends to join this program? Why or why not?
14. If you have long term career goals, would you share some with us?
15. Do you have questions for us?

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