

## Women artisans stitch Kashmir's first artisan-owned company

### 'Noorbagh Artisan Cluster' of crewel/ chain stitch products gets certification from GoI, has FAB India and IKEA as clients

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A first-of-its-kind artisan-owned producer company has emerged in the valley after receiving certification by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Govt of India.

This significant step towards the self-reliance of the artisan clusters developed under the World Bank-funded Jhelum Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JTFRP) has happened with the Crewel/Chain Stitch Artisan Cluster at Noorbagh, now registered as a "Producers Owned Company" with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

The artisan cluster has been issued a certificate of incorporation by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs under the name "Nooraari Crafts Producer Company Limited".

With this "Artisan Craft Cluster" obtaining the coveted registration from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, the artisans associated with the cluster now see prospects of a renewal in the traditional crafts of

crewel/chain stitching.

Shaheena, one of the artisans at the cluster, is a divorced woman with two kids to raise. "I was totally dependent on my relatives financially, but after having received the skill enhancement training at the Noorbagh artisan cluster, I am now able to earn handsomely to sustain my family of three without any assistance," she said.

About 600 artisans associated with the Crewel/Chain stitch Cluster at Noorbagh see their certification as an achievement and as a milestone towards the development of the first artisan-owned producer company in the valley.

The artisan cluster was conceived and developed under the component of "Restoration and Strengthening of Livelihoods" of the JTFRP, with an objective of reviving traditional crafts and providing gainful employment opportunities to youth.

The artisan cluster is now in its third year of existence. After initial skill assessment of the artisans as-



sociated with the crafts of crewel and chain stitch, the project has been focussing on imparting skill enhancement training in areas of product development to the artisans.

The artisans are now focusing on developing new prototypes, use of latest colour schemes, utilisation

of newly developed good quality raw materials, new techniques, besides honing their managerial skills and obtaining marketing linkages for their products.

Dr Syed Abid Rasheed Shah, Chief Executive Officer, JKERA/JTFRP, said that for the holistic development

of the artisans, craft clusters under JTFRP are designed in a such a manner as to bring a group of scattered artisans under one umbrella and to impart them with as much skill sets related to their craft as possible, and also to develop their managerial capabilities as these would enable them to function as sustainable and profitable business enterprises.

"It is indeed a moment of immense satisfaction to see the Noorbagh Artisan Cluster registered as a "producers owned company" he added.

He further said that JTFRP has taken up the development of more clusters for different traditional crafts like papier mache (in Zadibal), willow wicker (in Ganderbal), wool and pashmina (in Bandipore) to provide artisans with skill enhancement and product development trainings and to develop market linkages for their products with an objective of promoting sustainable livelihoods under the traditional cottage industry sector.

JTFRP has engaged the services

of a consultancy firm for the development of the crewel/chain stitch cluster at Noorbagh. The consultancy firm has been tasked with the responsibility of developing the capacities of the artisans in all aspects of skill development, developing managerial skills, and developing market linkages for their products, and also to undertake necessary formalities for the registration of the cluster as "Producer Owned Company".

"I had given up the craft due to its diminishing economic returns and exploitation by the middle men, but after having received training in product development, we and other artisans have become aware about the latest design trends in the market. Also, with the assured market support for our products, I see a lot of hope in the craft," said Maimoona, an artisan associated with the cluster.

One of the significant aspects of the cluster has been the development

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of market linkages for its products, for which the consultancy has been set a target of providing the cluster with business of at least Rs 1 crore in a year. Over the last one year the Noorbagh cluster has produced and sold products worth around Rs 30 lakh. At present the cluster is working on a consignment of products for FAB India and is also negotiating with another marketing giant, the IKEA group, for marketing of its products.

Besides being instrumental in the revival of crewel and chain stitch crafts, the craft cluster at Noorbagh comprises mostly women, and in this way has also become an agent of social change. The women associated with the craft cluster now see themselves as self-reliant and contributing members of society.

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