

Hand Embellished Fabrics – An Adoptable Potential to Empower Household Women in Balochistan

Social Sciences and Humanities

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Abstract

The descriptive research study examines the deprived economic conditions of women with possible measures to address the economic fluctuations pertaining to women through traditional hand embellished industry. Economic scarcity with low purchasing power has always been the striking factor for determining the standards of living and direction for social behaviors from individual to global tier. In local context prevailing economic disparities due to scarcity of liquidated financial assets accompany adverse effects on their social inclusions along with economic dependency resulting in little engagement towards decision making. Furthermore, women in rural communities are exploited and extremely vulnerable to the poverty incidence lacking Micro-credit facility for input factors, social restriction on mobility and access to market linkages including gender based discrimination. The devised way forward to address the volatile conditions may include promotion by responsible institutions of endowed skills towards hand embellished fabrics that are relatively in access and well commanded across the male dominated society for centuries.

Keywords: Economic fluctuations, purchasing power, social behaviors, global tier, economic disparities, social inclusions, poverty incidence, Micro credit, input factors, market linkages, gender based discrimination.

Introduction & Background

Balochistan comprises approximately 44% of the total land area of Pakistan but yet revealed as poor (48% of the province's population) including worst level of rural poverty (51%), 25% of the population has access to electricity. The male literary rate is 18.3% & female recorded as 7%. (Shujaat, July 2015). Balochistan has significant reserves of minerals ranging from coal, marble, copper, Zink and Gold. It has not yet attracted public or private

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investment in proportion to its wealth due to physical, institutional, and regulatory infrastructure. (WB, May 2008)

Most women in rural Balochistan are marginalized by poverty, home confinement, and geographic isolation. They are largely unpaid for their work in agriculture, non-farm activities, household duties, and cottage industry production. Balochistan is a very conservative province and interventions into a community are not easily attained. Concerted efforts are required to bring a change in the attitudes towards women rights and their empowerment in the prevailing conservative and restricted culture. (REPORT N. , 2012). Balochistan has its own embroidery stitches, while Afghan refugees have brought their own heritage of different embroidery stitches in silk, gold, and silver thread, as well as shells and mirrors are used in the embroideries of these regions of Balochistan. The cultural environment is the single most important factor influencing the women participation in business (DEEBA, JAN 2011).

The prevalent culture, based on the tribal system and enforced through the tradition of purdah, restricts women's mobility and participation in social and economic activities. Thus culture assigns women the role limited to reproduction, child care, and household duties which confines them to their homes, while at the same time the culture bestows legitimacy to men's running of public affairs, production, and economic activities outside the home? (Naz, JULY 2012)

Balochistan is proud of having rich cultural heritage of handicrafts. There are thousands of poor women all over Balochistan who work from home, producing handicraft predominantly embroidery. The unique Balochi embroidery is well known across Pakistan and abroad. There is some variation in apparel among tribes, in specific embroidery designs and in the terminology applied to fabrics and embroidery patterns. There are a number of designs and each tribe has a favorite set of ornaments. Balochi embroidery in its diverse form is done on a vast variety of items including ladies' dresses, bed sets, cushion covers, tea-cozies, tray covers and dining sets, table cloths, shawls, dupatta (scarf), Balochi cap, jackets, belts, ladies purse, shoulder bags, and many items of decorative ornamentation including Carpet weaving, Tailoring, quilt making, Embroidery, wool spinning (Treasures, 2011).

The majority of women in Balochistan have technical skills in embroidery. They have been practicing needlework for centuries but still their work is not mainstreamed. Women are not getting enough benefits from their work, which does not allow them to encourage development of their skills further. Home producers of embroidery tend to be marginalized by resource

constraints, home confinement and geographic isolation. As a result, despite the quality of their skills being excellent, their products often do not reach markets or cannot compete with more fashionable imported products. Quality tends to be poor as women are unable to interact with the market, products are therefore generally sold into low value traditional markets through buying channels that rely on male family members. Women by and large are therefore unaware of ever growing market opportunities. Sustainable measures to address this supply-demand gap will have significant impact on income and livelihoods of homebound women. (ILO, 2013)

Gender inequality is a common issue for women in Pakistan, especially in the culturally rigid society of Balochistan. Women face severe gender inequities, socio-cultural restrictions, and barriers placing them squarely in their reproductive roles and the home further with the negative mainstream view of society, adversely affecting their mobility and their ability of taking charge of their lives. There are not many opportunities that exist for home-bound women in the rural areas to take on equitable productive roles. (USAID, JULY 2012)

Literature Review

Official statistics show women embellishers form a large percentage of the 8.52 million home-bound workers in Pakistan. This number has been estimated by other sources to be much higher. Although the contribution of these homebound workers to the economy is significant, they remain the most unprivileged segment of population in Pakistan. Inputs used for embellishment work include fabrics, threads, buttons, sequins, mirrors, trims and laces, cowries' shells, and use of these inputs is commonly influenced by the tradition, designs, or customer preferences. Quality and pricing of inputs significantly affect the finished quality of the product, which is highly correlated with pricing of the embellished products and thus the competitiveness of the Women Embellishers to access markets. (PILDAT, 2009)

Eight main segments of the supply chain have emerged and are classified as market types that operate at both the regional and national level.

Wholesaler	Informal Suitcase Export
Small Retailer	National Retail Store Chain
Home Boutique	Exhibitions
Retailer / Exporter	Formal Export

On the demand side, the Women embellishers cannot afford the cost of the services. Some embellishers have attempted to introduce the urban-based

elite designers to the women but in most cases, this proves to be unsustainable due to the high fees charged by these designers. (Elms, 2013)

Whereas downstream actors that are discouraging the value-added services for wastage personal interest with centered major earning role affecting women embellishers are given as.

Wholesalers

Retailers

Home based Boutiques

Formal Exporters/Processors

Briefcase Exporters

National Retail Store Chains/Outlets

Support Organizations

Business Service Providers

Micro-Financing Institutions operating in Balochistan have experienced mixed performance results. Khushali Bank has closed its branches in Sibi, Nasirabad, Gwadar, and Jaffarabad; Human Development Foundation also closed its microfinance operations in Zhob. The main reasons for closing their branches/reducing operations are apparently defaults in payments and a deteriorating law & order situation and loan repayment behavior. Baloch-belt people do not have the will/tendency to repay loans. Comparatively, MFIs' performance and scope in the Pashtoon-belt seems encouraging. (PPAF, 2013)

Women do have surplus time after performing household errands for embellishment work. There is a need to further increase their market linkages and outreach so that they can get additional work to optimally utilize their surplus time for income generation. Analysis further reveals that production-related problems faced by Women Embellishers are related to quality inputs issues, awareness on prevailing designs, costing, time management, and maintaining high quality. A comparatively high prevalence of post-production problems indicates a serious need of support on building capacity further and helping them in accessing market linkages and business development services. (Sinha, January 2011)

The traditional hand embroidery work of Balochistan is seen on kameez and shalwar of children and women, on caps, on bed sheets and pillow covers, etc. Those women who are engaged in embroidery work sell their products within the community or to some extent bring their finished work to local

shopkeepers. There exists generally no opportunity for them to sell outside the district. (GoB, 2014)

Purpose

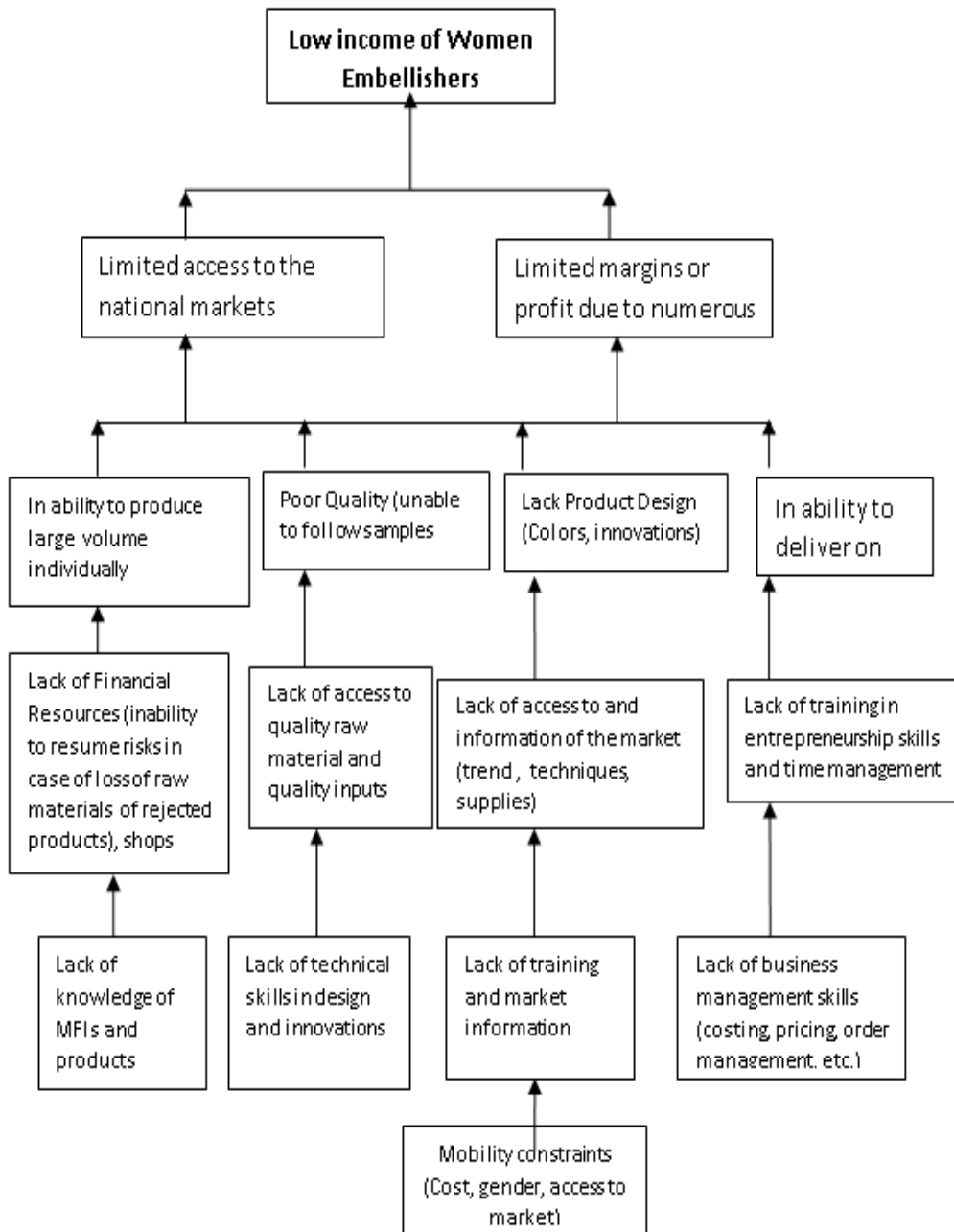
- To understand the contemporary circumstances pertaining to the trend of Women Embellishers in Hand Embellished Fabrics.
- To identify potential gaps and opportunities in existing structure that will support interested entrepreneurs to showcase their skills with definite earnings.

Methodology

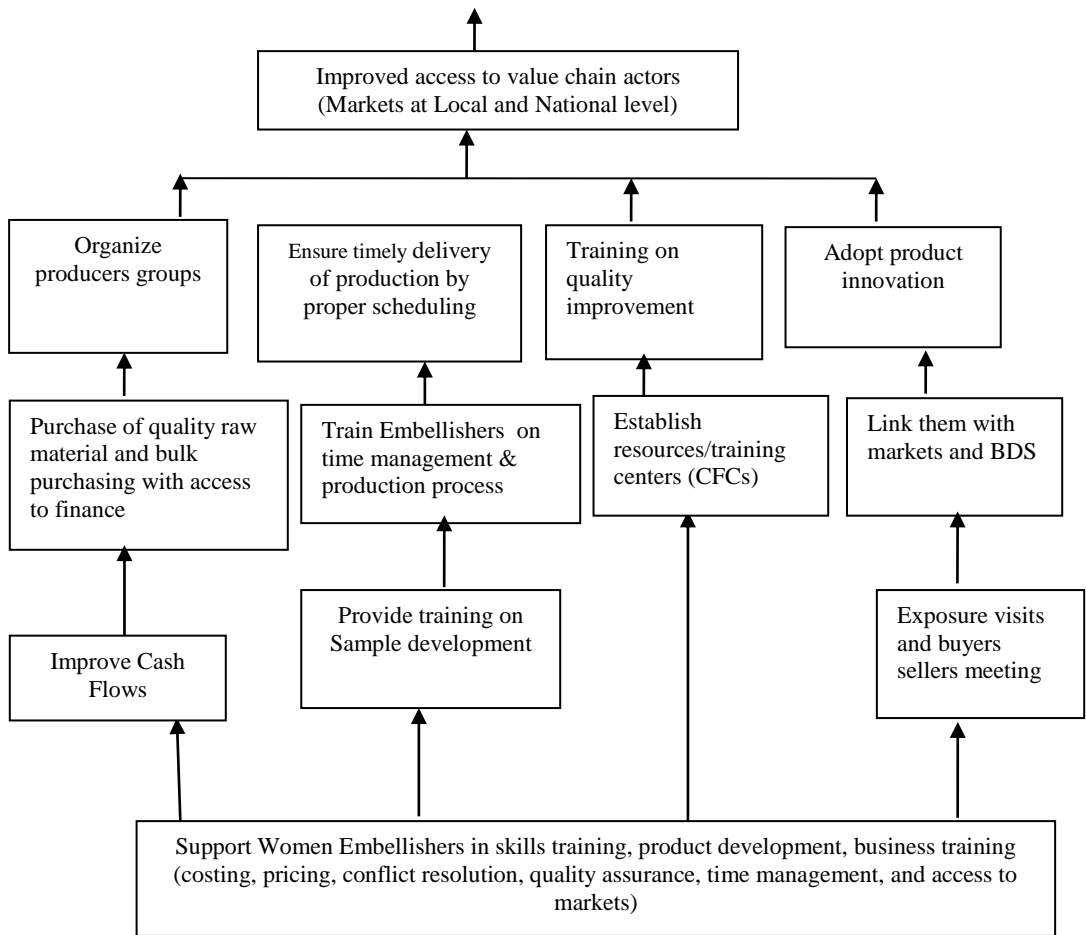
The methodology adopted in this research article is case study method along with desk review of the relevant articles & literature. The scope of the study is limited to Quetta District only because of time and resources constraints. The paper is a descriptive study approach to examine the hand embellished products that are practiced by women in Balochistan aiming to support themselves for better earnings that will ultimately result in social inclusion and economic independence to contribute the graph of decision making impacts in their routine life, besides assessing the trend for the domain focused in terms of their achievements, strengths, weakness and challenges genuinely effecting the concept of value added services to this sector. The author will also attempt to explore the impact of the value chain development in their lives and contribution towards the poor women.

Constraints & Opportunities

Drawing cause-and-effect relationships of various constraints, a problem tree provides a systematic approach to understand the core problem of low income women embellishers. Low margins and limited access to higher end markets are two major problems attributed to low income, which are caused by inability to produce large quantity, inability to follow samples, lack of skills in designing and innovation, inability to meet timely production and delivery, and ensuring good quality. Lack of access to quality raw material/inputs, lack of access to finance and required business development support services and lack of technical and entrepreneurial skills are the major limitations. (CONTRERAS, 2004)



In order to increase the income of targeted Women Embellishers, concerted efforts and effective measures are required through various interventions related to capacity building, improved production following market trends, better access to markets, timely delivery, following samples, and minimizing mobility constraints. Coordinated actions and interventions are presented in a solution tree diagram demonstrating logical relationships of various interventions as depicted below:



(REPORT W. E., FEB, 2012)

Conclusions & Recommendations

- Balochistan has scattered population in all the districts. Women are culturally bound to remain home. They do not have access to quality inputs, access to information, and due to long distances women cannot travel out of their villages. Community Facilitating Centers should be established. These will be the place for meetings, sharing and updating information and also a forum for developing linkages with Micro-Financing Institutions and sample development. In these centers groups from the adjacent villages will be able to participate in various activities & owned by the Women entrepreneurs.
- Embroidery is traditionally done at home by most women in Baluchistan with different market opportunities existing locally, regionally, and in international markets. Where quality and design of products that can lead to substantial impact gains by meeting the demands of more lucrative markets, both domestic and international.
- All the linkages of relevant stakeholders and actors of the value chain are based on a win-win situation and market/ commercial considerations. Linkages with Small & Medium Entrepreneurs to allow house hold embellishers to expand their business initiatives.
- Introductory workshops in exploring entrepreneurial skills, product development including tracing and designing, presentation techniques, market/intelligence fashion trends, innovation and diversification in embellished textiles, quality control, and time management to enable women entrepreneurs to facilitate & fully grasp the Production process.
- Training on marketing, business planning, advertising & business management/entrepreneurship using case studies/role model methods. Training on how to identify, train, and collaborate with value-adding services such as stitching, tailoring, dyeing, and input supply services to enable the establishment of a resource pool of value-adding service providers and in-put supply services.
- Training on how to strengthen home-based centers /Common Facility Centers (CFCs) to enable the availability of physical work locations and collective work. Awareness about the current marketing situation in the high-end market of major cities of Pakistan through exploring the current trends, fashion and product line in the high end markets. Analyzing the market needs, demands, usage of fine material & designs by getting information about the points of inputs.

- Community Based Saving Group (CBSG) of Entrepreneurs in order to develop their own committee system (pool their savings) in an organized way. Most of the Women Embellishers belong to poor families. They are constrained to invest money to scale up their business. Access to finance is one of the major problems to address business needs.
- Access to finance is the limited number of MFIs that service the target areas. In Quetta district, there are few micro finance institutions including but not limited to Khushali Bank, First Microfinance Bank and BRAC Pakistan. The banks have their complex terms and conditions such as lengthy procedure, collateral/security deposit, high interest rates, and government official as guaranty person. Even if all the requirements are met, the approval process is too long. This entire process is difficult to be accomplished by a poor woman embellisher.
- Through Providing necessary support and technical assistance in developing a sample bank, promote the hand embellished fabric products to local and national level. Sample preparation is an important tool of marketing of products. Product samples help women embellishers to show their products during market visits, buyer/seller meetings, and in exhibitions. It helps the market value chain actors to decide and order accordingly. Display of their samples in the market will help them to create new contacts with the passage of time. The samples will increase their marketing options through the buyers in markets, shops, and boutiques owner can select and place orders of the selected samples of the products.
- There are a great number of designs, colors, stitches women have been practicing this needlework since centuries in Balochistan but still their work is not mainstreamed as such. Women are not getting enough wages of their work and the low earning did not allow them to encourage this skill. Home producers of embroidery tend to be marginalized by poverty, home confinement and, in the case of rural women, geographic isolation. As a result, although the quality of their skills can be excellent, their products often do not reach markets or cannot compete with more fashionable imports.
- Catalogues and brochures are an important part of the marketing process. These depict style of hand embellishment and differentiation from the machine work. To show and share the product of hand embellished products, women need to have a catalogue of samples that showcase their embroidery reflecting the color, design, and

quality of the material in work. It will help the Women Embellishers to decide and dialogue on their product for sale and order rather it also would help the market players (shops, boutiques, etc.) to see, choose, and decided the product according to the buyers demand.

- Exhibitions are one of the most effective tools in trade promotion. Leading trade centers of the world provide permanent exhibition facilities to encourage buyer-seller interactions among the following key actors:
 - Retailers
 - Business development service providers and
 - Boutiques
- Programming to support the economic empowerment and development of women embellished fabrics producers with the cultural context of Balochistan is not without its challenges and risks. Longstanding traditional differentiation in the role of men and women in the society, underdeveloped market conditions, political and economic instability, and culturally-dictated lack of access to educational and business opportunities for women are among the challenges the Entrepreneur is likely to face.
- There may be value chain players (buyers or input suppliers) that are dismissive of women's potential higher value contribution within the value chain and/or engagement in market activities. Therefore relationship-building and working with value chain actors to alleviate constraints of various origin. Information and demonstration of the win-win benefits that will accrue to value chain participants will educate and influence market uptake of women's participation.

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