



Indo-Global
Social Service Society



K-CALEEN:

Measuring the Woven
Impact

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Indo-Global Social Service Society

Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) is a not for profit development organization established in 1961 to support development programs across India, especially providing services to the vulnerable communities and grass root community based organizations. Our vision is to establish a humane social order based on the tenets of equity, liberty and justice in which the human rights and dignity of every individual is upheld. IGSSS is an autonomous, secular and apolitical organization and its programs do not discriminate people on the basis of their caste, creed, gender and ethnicity. IGSSS implements and supports quality development programs across 22 States and one Union Territory of India.

IGSSS reaches out to more than one lakh families every year through its programs on sustainable livelihood, disaster risk reduction, gender equity, urban poverty reduction and youth development. The programs at IGSSS are targeted towards the poor, marginalized and vulnerable sections of the society with special emphasis on women and children.

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Gratitude is indeed a small word to describe all that I feel for the people I have interacted with while working on this report. And hence the dilemma I am in, forces me to acknowledge the humble situation I am in. This report would have been a distant dream if not for the hard working, calloused carpet weavers; the people who crush their own dreams to weave magic on the looms and create dreams that adorn the living rooms of others. The soul moving and back breaking work of carpet weavers, their involvement and participation in the project is what has made an otherwise difficult project implementation relatively easy. A salute to those people who are caught in an unending debt trap, and yet live their lives with optimism and are part of bringing about a positive change for themselves and for others and also for taking time out of their hectic schedule to answer my questions.

A special thanks to IGSSS for allowing me the opportunity to document the impact K CALEEN, a unique and pioneering project has brought about. Heartfelt thanks to Mr. Yasir Qureshi, Senior Manager Programmes, and Ms. Nusrat Ali, Project Head - K CALEEN for guiding and providing me with all the relevant information that I required and to the volunteers who accompanied me to the field through rain and sun and were patient with me.

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A collective bow to the donors and all the people associated with the project from the beginning, at all stages, for creating a space for carpet weavers and making them the change agents in the community. You have surely touched a lot of lives.

Essar Batool



Foreword

The Kashmir carpet weaving has a very long historical origin. The carpets made in Kashmir were largely influenced by Persian motifs. However, in the 16th and 17th centuries, artisans in Kashmir began giving specialized touches to the carpets produced in the region, giving them a distinctive character of their own. In spite of its historical glory, the artisans whose families have been engaged in the preparation of carpets for generations are slowly turning to other professions on account of the low profitability involved in carpet making.

The Kashmiri Carpets for Artisans' Livelihood and Empowerment Needs (K-CALEEN) programme of IGSSS focuses on improving the living conditions and workplace of the carpet weavers so that they can live and earn in a better way.

Given the hazardous nature of work of carpet weavers and the rigid redundant structure of production and income in the carpet industry, trying to bring a change that leaves a long term impact is a difficult, if not impossible task. Aiming to bring about changes at grassroots level, with carpet weavers, beginning from

the seemingly simple task of changing their damaging work habits to actually altering the structure and flow of the production to selling process, KCALEEN has claimed an enviable size of territory with its work.

Having worked with the weavers in the last three years, we attempted a study to map the impact of our work among the artisans and how the project has impacted their lives. The study articulates how the programme attempted to bring about holistic changes in the lives of the community. And we are very happy to share this with you.

IGSSS wish to thank Caritas Italiana for their financial support which made this programme possible. We also greatly acknowledge the contributions of the hundred of weavers in our programme areas and IGSSS Kashmir team who made this programme a successful and sustainable model.

John Peter Nelson
Executive Director

Part I: Carpet Weaving: Kashmir Perspective

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir is the most popular state in India, both in terms of its polity and for the handicrafts and artisans it is home to. Kashmir boasts of a rich history of handicrafts and arts that were mainly introduced and encouraged during the reign of Zainul Abideen, the king of Kashmir. Zainul Abideen was instrumental in introducing various kinds of handicrafts in Kashmir, mostly brought in from Iran, that was a very close architectural and arts associate of Kashmir, along the silk route. Carpet weaving was also introduced and encouraged around this time, with many of the designs named after and influenced by Iran. Kashmiri papier mache, shawls and carpets are world renowned for their beauty, quality, durability and hand worked intricate designs. Ironically though the end products that often are sold at exorbitant prices, and are often considered assets given their resale value, because of the hard work and intricacy that goes into making

those products, the artisan receives the lowest price for his/her work.

The artisan is by far the most vulnerable in the chain of the process of product making, finishing and buying and gets paid less for the extensive efforts and back breaking work as most of the profit goes directly to the dealer who buys the products at a reasonable and often low rate from the artisan, gets it finished and sells it at a high price. Over the years, as a major blow to the artisan industry in Kashmir the market for Kashmiri arts and handicrafts has declined massively, reducing the earnings of the artisans further than before. The local market for Kashmiri handicrafts is almost non-existent and mostly the tourists from India and outside India are the buyers for the local handicrafts. But this market has deteriorated as well given the recession in the West and the sale of fake handicrafts in the name of

Kashmiri ones. All of these reasons have only been affecting the artisans, who often come from lower socioeconomic background and don't have an understanding of the market trends.

Carpet industry makes for about 34.4 % of the total composition of handicrafts. ¹Carpet weaving industry has also been hit hard by the recession in western markets and also due to a growing trust deficit against the local product. The boom period in carpet industry lasted till 1981 and after that the industry spiraled downwards, because of the competition from low cost production centers in Bhadohi in north India, neighbouring countries, economic recession in the West and the substandard quality of Kashmiri carpets.² The standard of the carpets produced in Kashmir has gone down due to in built defects in carpets by weavers who in order to save time and get out of the debt of master weaver weave sub-standard carpets. Apart from the sludge in the markets the carpet weavers are at the receiving end of a process that is beneficial only to the dealers and not the artisans. The working conditions of carpet weavers like many other artisans is poor and not in tune with international standards leading to major health issues and decreased productivity. In this sector which is usually family based and dominated by men, women often work as helpers and don't get any wages. More often than not, the children in the family also are found working on the carpets to help finish a carpet, most usually on a traditional loom. Overall the carpet weavers' condition is as deplorable as it gets with insufficient wages, major health issues, gender inequality and lack of acceptable working conditions.

K-Caleen Programme

The K-CALEEN project started in 10 villages; eight in Bandipora and two in Baramulla

- 1 Mohiu Din. T, Dr. Bhushan.S, 'Role of Handicraft in Jammu and Kashmir Economy: An Economic Analysis'.
- 2 'Growth and Development of Carpet Industry in Kashmir'.

district of Kashmir valley after an initial pilot project that focused on studying the needs and requirements of carpet weavers in three villages in Bandipora with the maximum number of carpet weavers. The study, participatory in nature, brought forth various issues faced by the carpet weavers and the support they needed to bring positive changes in their lives. Keeping in view the difficulty of working with carpet weavers, where an intervention would mean a massive shift in the structure, the project started with awareness among carpet weavers as its primary goal. It was found that most of the carpet weavers didn't have their own carpets to weave but would work on the raw material provided by the master weaver or the contractor, who would lend them money in lieu of getting a carpet completed. This gave birth to a cycle of debt trap from which the carpet weavers seldom come out.

It wouldn't be out of place to say that carpet weavers in these areas are rather 'bonded labourers' working on weaving their way out of debt. Moreover, a very disappointing fact was that the carpet weavers were found to be unaware of their basic rights and entitlements as artisans and had no knowledge of the carpet industry or their role in it. The project focused on improving the working standards of the weavers, on improving their awareness and of making them knowledgeable stakeholders in the industry. The specific objectives of K CALEEN are:

Create an enabling environment for weavers and other stakeholders to improve the working and workplace conditions as per the established Standards through participatory approach

To mobilize and organize vulnerable carpet weavers for increased awareness towards, services, entitlements, rights and duties through capacity development

To promote multi-stakeholder dialogue between carpet weavers, government



officials and representatives from civil society and resource organizations for better understanding and development of the industry as whole.³

The project has gradually shifted its approach from mere awareness generation to shifting structures in an industry that has existed for centuries now. Whereas earlier there was no attempt to remove the wostakaar or the contractor now the attempt is to make the weavers independent of the wostakaar and to link them directly with the market. In order to reduce the dependency of the weavers on the wostakaar, SHGs have been made to help members in need, thereby rotating money within the group. These and efforts at linking weavers with relevant departments for gaining benefit from existing schemes and programs have also been a major part of the project.

3 Source: K CALEEN livelihood proposal

The project started off as a pilot study of two major villages in Sumbal block in Bandipora; Zalpora and Nowgam. After successfully starting work in these two villages, the project then extended to 10 other villages in two districts of Baramulla and Bandipora. The expansion in other villages was based on the success in the first two villages. It is indeed very difficult to keep beneficiaries involved in the project when you have nothing to offer in terms of monetary assistance but K CALEEN managed to do just that. The weavers were organised in groups and reaped other benefits from the project. The quantitative achievements^{**4} of the project so far are as under:

4 Figures in table are as per project documents

S. No	Village	Weaver Group Member		SHG Members		Support in APDC		FLC Learners	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Odina	26	0	12	0	12	0	12	16
2	Yakmanpora	0	23	0	23	0	11	0	30
3	Tularzoo	18	0	12	0	12	0	18	18
4	Gadakhud	20	0	13	0	0	0	12	19
5	Najan	29	0	15	0	15	0	25	8
6	Beighpora	22	0	10	0	10	0	24	0
7	Shiganpora	20	0	10	0	10	0	14	5
8	Nowgam Bala	31	0	22	0	22	0	9	13
9	Nowgam Payeen	44	20	16	20	16	0	18	24
10	Zalpora	20	0	10	0	10	0	8	17
TOTAL		230	43	120	43	107	11	140	150

Impact Study: Methodology

The impact of any project cannot be measured within a short time period; however there are certain parameters against which the success and impact of the project can be standardized. Usually quantitative outputs are easy to identify and measure against the given results and expected outcomes but in order to understand the impact of the project on the lives of carpet weavers, the qualitative outputs must be taken into consideration. In any project quantitative outputs are only a means to a larger end, the qualitative changes in the lives of the beneficiaries. To understand and document these quantitative and qualitative outputs of the project, following tools will be used:

Review of literature: In order to first understand the background of carpet industry and the project, a review of existing literature, on carpet weaving was done. These included scholarly articles, news reports and books on carpet weaving in Kashmir. Apart from this, reviews of the project proposal and various reports of the project were also done in order

to understand the objectives of the project and its progress over the years.

Background study of the project areas: It is imperative to study the background of the project areas where the project is being implemented in order to view the beneficiaries in the larger context of 'whole' rather than just as project beneficiaries. Since IGSSS has been working in the target areas for many years now, the socioeconomic conditions of the areas have been well documented. However firsthand observations during field visits and information from beneficiaries were also used as a source of background study.

Field visits: Field visits formed the major part of the study, since the impact of the work done could only be gauged by observing on ground happenings and progress. The field visits were conducted in various intervention areas such as Odina, Yakwanpora, Nowgam, Tularzoo, Najan and Nowgam Payeen. These villages were taken as representative sample for all 10 villages since the work done is similar in all the villages.



Group discussions, interviews and case studies: To gather relevant data group discussions were held with various stakeholders of the project which included the project coordinator, project beneficiaries both direct and indirect and officials from departments which whom linkages have been made under the project. Group discussions have mostly been used with carpet weaver groups, APDC groups, families of carpet weavers, and FLC beneficiaries. Interviews were used for getting information for case studies, and from FLC teachers and government officials. Case studies have been used to specifically capture the impact of the project on the lives of the carpet weavers, in various aspects of their lives.

Bandipora and Baramulla, Kashmir: Background of Intervention Area

K CALEEN is implemented in 10 villages in Bandipora and Baramulla. Surrounded mostly either by rice fields or by orchards the villages present a look of idyllic villages, picturesque, with mud houses and concrete houses both dotting the roads and no evidence of walls between houses existing anywhere. The villages are evidently a composition of socio economically backward villages and inhabited majorly by Shiite Muslims.⁵ A preliminary look at the local studies indicates a low level of literacy, hygiene and sanitation and less

⁵ Shiite sect is a school of thought within Muslims and is a minority in Kashmir.

avenues of income in these villages. The villages lack basic facilities in terms of safe drinking water, electricity and roads. The infrastructure of schools as well in these villages is very poor, coupled with a general lack of sanitation facilities. The villages lack proper toilet facilities and most of the villages still use 'dry latirines' as it provides manure to be used in vegetable gardens and orchards. There are no drinking water facilities available in most of the villages and water has to be fetched by women from river sources, sometimes as far as from 4 kilometers away. The same is true of firewood and fuel for cooking. The villagers usually stock these supplies for the winter time which is harsh and worsens transportation, already a dismal scenario in these villages. Transportation is scarce and people are often seen walking miles together to reach health facilities especially since these are far from villages.

The villages primarily are involved in carpet weaving, pashmina weaving, sozini work and small time handicrafts that don't fetch much money to improve their living standards. The land holdings in the villages may come as a surprise to many; the land, both agricultural and orchards form an essential part of almost every household. But the produce from the land is used for self-consumption and not sold. Sometimes the produce doesn't last even a whole year, and as such staple food like rice has to be brought from the market.

The conditions have worsened after the devastating September floods, that left agriculture land and orchards destroyed. Even though the farmers have grown paddy in the fields, the yield is still doubtful. Whatever semblance of infrastructure there was has been destroyed by the floods last year that left the people in these villages completely bankrupt and without even basics for living. The carpet weavers were hard hit during this disaster as most of the traditional looms were washed away by the floods along with half or fully made carpets. If anything was left of the wooden looms decayed slowly, leaving people

in general and carpet weavers in particular reeling in debt, hopeless about the future. The floods pushed back these villages back by a century, not just taking away lives but also their sources of livelihood and earnings of a lifetime.

Carpet Weaving in Bandipura And Baramulla

As mentioned above the history of carpet weaving in Kashmir dates back to the rule of the king Zainul Abideen in Kashmir, who is credited for having introduced and encouraged carpet weaving in Kashmir. Other sources also indicate that carpet weaving was brought to Kashmir by a saint called Akhuna Rehnuma from Iran in 1600s. However it is assumed that Akhuna Rehnuma revived the dying carpet industry under the governorship of Ahmad Beg.⁶ Whosoever the person who actually brought carpet weaving to Kashmir, the fact remains that people took to carpet weaving immediately, with people from lower socioeconomic background becoming artisans and taking it up as a family profession. Generations after generations were trained in carpet weaving and it became a norm.

In the intervention areas, there is a consensus among all the villages that carpet weaving in the belt was started in 1958 in Odina village in Baramulla and from there spread out to neighbouring villages. People were trained in carpet weaving who then went back to their villages and started weaving their carpets. Carpet weaving gradually took over as the prime source of income for the villagers who preferred it over better job opportunities in the hope of making a sustainable business out of it.⁷ However, soon they were caught in

6 'Growth and Development of Carpet Industry in Kashmir'. http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/32962/8/08_chapter%201.pdf. Accessed 13 September 2015.

7 In conversation with elderly carpet weavers, who maintain that in earlier times, carpet weaving was considered to be a better source of income than a government job and many people declined job offers to instead become carpet weavers.

a vicious trap of never ending debt and carpet weaving became more of a liability than an asset. Carpet weaving has now become a sophisticated form of bonded labour, with the weavers struggling hard to make their ends meet. The change has been brought about by the inflation and rising living standards and day to day expenses.

Carpet Weaving: Making of a Dream

Carpet weaving is essentially a beautiful craft; it is almost magical to watch a family sitting on a loom, weaving knots on tightly strung white threads, with spools of different colours hanging from the top of the loom, making shadows of varied kinds on the white foreground. Carpets in Kashmir are hand knotted which means that an increase in the number of knots per square inch is an increase in the quality of the carpet. The least acceptable standard is 18 knots called *ardah taar waar* in Kashmiri and any number of knots below this is considered sub-standard and defective. The highest quality and the most expensive carpet will technically be a 24 taar waar carpet.

The master weaver winds the warp around the loom and reads from a paper that has an unintelligible handwriting, colours and numbers of knots per square inch symbolized on the chart. Others follow the directions and repeat the instructions to be sure that the knots are properly placed. In Kashmir usually 16 colours are used as opposed to 36 colours in Persian carpets. This coded chart is called the Talim and is the design spelled out for the weavers. The loom gives shape to the carpet. The base should be 90 degrees, a straight line; otherwise the whole carpet will be misaligned. As the knotting proceeds, the carpet is rolled to the back of the loom. The best textile to be used in carpets is silk often called *yaen yaer in* Kashmiri; other textiles that are used are wool, cotton, and staple, with staple being the lowest in quality and silk, the highest. These

are often used in combinations to weave a carpet. A typical standard of silk used per feet in a carpet is 150 grams.

After a *waar* (layer) is completed a *waethpood* (woof thread) is passed across the carpet to separate the layers. The weavers use a *panje* (a comb like tool) to force the knots tightly into their place. Spacing is the lifeline of carpet weaving and if spacing goes wrong the carpet will come out as a defective piece. After the carpet is completed the *maval* (the edge of the carpet) is closed and the carpet is ready to be sent for further processing. At this stage the carpet looks shabby and the design is only comprehensible from the back side; a lovely combination of colours and an intricate design.

The size of the carpet is determined at the beginning and usually comes in the sizes (in feet): **2x3, 2.5x4, 3x5, 4x6, 6x9, 7x10, 8x10, 9x12, 10x14, 12x18**

Although here the work of the weaver usually ends in Kashmir, for the carpet however it is a beginning of many more processes that improve its looks. The carpet is handed over to the contractor or taken for washing with water, soap, bleaching powder and natural chemicals to rid the carpet of the dirt accumulated at the loom. After drying the carpet is sent for clipping where excess textile is chipped off and the carpet is polished and sent to the showroom to be sold or directly sold to a buyer.

The design of every carpet is different, with the tree of life being very commonly used. The design maker is usually a person with experiences in making designs and Talim for the weavers. There are designs that are less intricate than the others and take less time to make. However designs like Hamadan, Kashan are more intricate and take longer to make. The beauty and the price of the carpet also depend on the size, and the intricacy of the design used in the carpet. The more intricate the design, more are the chances of the carpet fetching good money.

A carpet usually takes 3 months to some years to make, given the size, design and the number of people working on the carpet. Carpet weaving is labour intensive and a weaver usually gives more than just his/her time to weave a carpet. The weaver gives up the hope of an education and instead finds his fate in the threads on the loom, giving up his/her comfort and health to weave a beautiful carpet that will in the future adorn someone's guest room as s/he sits crouched uncomfortably on a *wagoo* (straw mat) in a poorly lit room in a far off village.

Working Conditions of the Carpet Weavers and Introduction of K-Caleen Programme

The process of carpet weaving is both romantic and enchantingly romantic to an observer who will often wonder at the fluency of the weavers in reading out and spelling instructions to other weavers, notwithstanding the fact that they are illiterate. The working conditions of the weavers are inhumane to the core with many aspects contributing to it. This section aims at analyzing these conditions and thereby the ground laid for the project to work in. This segment will give the reader an insight into what the project is trying to change and what is the magnitude of the change the project is trying to bring about.

The Bonded Labourers

As lucrative and aesthetic as it may sound, carpet weaving has become a life sucking occupation for weavers who have given it their life, health, time and energy. For the common artisan nothing is to be gained by weaving a carpet, apart from a hope that he might finish the carpet to earn a living. Even if a carpet weaver is lucky enough to not be working on a carpet of *wosta* (contractor) he would hardly earn 200 INR a day for back breaking work. This is not even close to being enough for the hard work that goes into the weaving of a

beautiful intricate carpet. The usual working hours of a carpet weaver stretch from 8 to 12 hours a day, given the availability of lighting facilities in the house. The weavers are often caught in a debt trap where to put up with day to day expenses such as education, and marriage of children and medical emergencies force them to take advance payment from the contractor for the carpet that they are working on. This arrangement suits the contractor just fine as he is aware that a weaver is now at his beck and call. The weavers struggle to complete the carpet and pay off the debt, in the meantime earning almost nothing which again leaves them at the mercy of the *wosta*. As such a never ending cycle of poverty ensues from which a carpet weaver finds it impossible to come out. Given the high price of looms and raw materials the carpet weaver doesn't even think of starting working independently. As a weaver, Mohamed Ibrahim from Najan village remarks ruefully, ***'My son wanted to go out for his studies but I didn't allow him to go as it would mean taking another loan from the wosta. I am yet to pay the recent loan I took. I don't want to die weaving and trying to pay off my loan like many others.'*** The unfortunate trend of the debt cycle has led many weavers to death with the debt still unpaid. In such circumstances the family is left to pay off the debt of the *wosta* and as such the cycle continues.

The project is faced with the task of shifting a structure that has been present for centuries now and seeks to eliminate the dependence of the weaver on the *wosta*. It is imperative to mention that such structures that have become socially acceptable are not easy to change especially as they require presenting an alternate solution and system that is artisan friendly.

Health concerns:

As brought forth by the study conducted in the pilot phase of the project, the carpet weavers battle with poor working conditions on traditional wooden looms called *waan*, as

the space for the loom is usually not much. The traditional loom also means an impending disaster as it involves moving heavy chains and logs to adjust the carpet. The sitting portion for the traditional loom is insufficient which coupled with poor ventilation and lighting poses serious threats to the health of the carpet weavers. Carpet weaving also produces dust invisible to the naked eye which causes serious respiratory problems among the weavers. The weavers prefer not wearing a mask since that will hamper the *talim*. Carpet weaving also leads to skeletal deformations, severe respiratory failure, and there is a looming threat of being injured by the loom.

The project has had to struggle with bringing about an attitudinal change among the weavers regarding their own safety, even when they regard health issues as a baggage that comes along with the work of weaving carpets. The initiation of the weavers to international artisan standards, to appropriate working conditions and to better health practices has not been easy as is always the case with behavior changes. The project has had to deal with a populace largely deprived of health facilities and education and thus resistant to any change that aims at changing their way of working.

Unawareness about international standards, rights, entitlements and knowledge about the carpet industry:

Unfortunately like most of the artisans, carpet weavers were unaware of the role they play in the carpet industry. They have always considered themselves as labourers working to make their ends meet. They were also unaware of the many other processes that complement the process of weaving and thereby also considered themselves free of any impact on the market. This unawareness was also coupled with no knowledge about the international standards for artisans, rights and entitlements by the government and actually put the weavers in a very vulnerable position.

The project has had to grapple with this unawareness and lack of knowledge and has had to start from scratch to educate the artisans, implement international standards of working for artisans and had to link them with relevant entitlements. It involves a huge effort in terms of mobilization and acceptance for the new learning.

Illiteracy

It has often been seen that a low socioeconomic status is often accompanied by illiteracy. This is mostly due to the fact that education is unaffordable and for each person who isn't getting an education, there is a person earning for the family. In case of carpet weavers, the children often help their parents in the process of weaving and this often leads to them dropping out of the school or not studying at all. Poor economic conditions make the survival of the family an even more important aspect of life than a good education and a chance at a better life. Even though in many families, the present generation has started understanding the value of education, the older generation remains illiterate. Because of their inability to read and write, they have been vulnerable for years now and prone to being deceived. This illiteracy also hampers their understanding of the carpet industry and their own significant role in it. This disadvantage has not only left the weavers open to exploitation but also has reduced their sense of self-respect and esteem.

Adult education in any society, particularly in the sub-continent is a tough nut to crack as the adults have mostly lost their motivation for learning and also the fact that adult education is seen as a taboo, doesn't help much. So here, the major task of the project was to motivate the weavers, all above 35 years of age to take up reading and writing and that too in their busy schedule. The teachers in the FLCs were half their age, young enough to be their children. It required massive efforts to set up a community based adult school and to run it continuously.

Part II: K-Caleen - Impact Analysis





K Caleen: A Change Agent

Given the hazardous nature of work of carpet weavers and the rigid redundant structure of production and income in the carpet industry, trying to bring a change that leaves a long term impact is a difficult, if not impossible task. Anyone who is remotely aware of the way the carpet industry in Kashmir works and of its downward spiral post the 1981 period, will definitely also comment on the hectic nature of improving this industry. Aiming to bring about changes at grassroots level, with carpet weavers, beginning from the seemingly simple task of changing their damaging work habits to actually altering the structure and flow of the production to selling process, K CALEEN has claimed an envious size of territory with its work. The thought of working with artisans, particularly carpet weavers in itself is a revolutionary and a path breaking idea; this is the road less traveled given the apprehensions of not obtaining required outputs and changes expected. But the project has challenged the notion of difficulty and led the way to understand how the working of an industry in a particular area can be positively altered to benefit the artisan community without creating destructive conflicts.

The biggest appeal of the project is its inclusion and recognition of artisans. The project has successfully identified the stakeholders in the process of production and has also managed to bring them together for a common cause. The support and recognition to female carpet weavers, who are usually ignored because of the fact that they are 'wage-less workers', is an encouraging trend that should be emulated while working in any community. What is particularly appreciable in this unique project is the fact that for a good part of the duration of the project, the thrust has not been on providing incentives and assets to the carpet

weaving community but on awareness about rights, entitlements, international standard and on raising the self esteem of the weavers in terms of enhancing their understanding their roles and responsibility in the industry, thus making them 'self- accountable' for their work.

In its current stage, where the project is now handholding the carpet weavers to establish their own weaving centers and thus eliminate the 'middle man and low wages' concept, carpet weavers own the ground to choose the designs, innovate and thus produce specimens that are acceptable in terms of both quality and marketability. Quite interestingly and very appreciably the impact of the project is evidently multidimensional:

Elevation of working standards of artisans and an increased insight into the carpet industry

The carpet weavers, according to a study conducted earlier in the project were found to be unaware of any other process involved in making a carpet other than weaving. They lacked any knowledge about the process of dyeing, washing, and finishing etc. This account was corroborated by the weavers in interviews and discussions where they confessed that for them the whole process of carpet weaving seemed to be concentrated in that piece of silk or wool that hung on their traditional loom, as a result of which they didn't have an understanding of the market, the rates of the carpets and their own important role in the process. The weavers seemed to live in a cocoon, detached from the realities of the world, unaware of the fact that there existed international standards for the welfare of artisans like them. For them, terms like 'rights' and 'acceptable standards of working' were unfamiliar and alien and didn't hold much meaning. It was generally deemed that suffering from physical pain, discomfort, stress was in fact a 'necessary evil', a sacrifice that you gave for producing a carpet. The idea

of modern looms being available was also lacking and so were the funds to buy such a loom.

Healthy working: Improving weavers' health and promoting community based monitoring through Surveillance Committees

Coming from a socioeconomically deprived background, comfort and cleanliness are not the priorities for both the weavers and their families. The villages in which the carpet weaving community is concentrated are unclean, lack sanitation and turn into cesspools and mud pools with a little rain. Even though a standard cleanliness is maintained inside the house, it does not conform to the standards of basic cleanliness to avoid diseases and promote good health. Add to this the traditional looms that weavers work on; these are huge, immovable and occupy a considerable space in the room, thereby making cleaning the loom and room both an inconvenient and a difficult job. Teaching the weavers international standards for carpet weavers both in work and for their own wellbeing is as such difficult as it aims at changing the habits of weavers formed over the years. However K CALEEN has taken some concrete steps towards ensuring that at least some doable, basic standards are met. With most of the houses small and built with poor lighting, it wasn't possible to create extra room to make the weavers comfortable; however the weavers were trained in taking some steps towards warding off the physical discomfort they experience. The artisans have addressed the issues that they had ignored as a part of their work, especially as it concerns their health and wellbeing. Weavers have reported to have adopted some basic habits such as:

- Taking breaks while working to allow physical movement and thus help relax
- Keep the loom and are around it clean. Sweeping the room with loom every day at the end to keep it clean

- Place the loom near the window to allow for better ventilation and lighting
- Eat and drink in a separate place from the loom so as to keep the workplace clean
- Keep children away from the workplace for their safety and to prevent them from participating in carpet weaving
- Set proper working hours with breaks in between and adhere to these
- Ensure adequate artificial lighting in case of longer working hours

There is also apprehension that with advent in time the weavers might not adhere to these standards and might go back to old practices that are harmful for them. To address this problem, surveillance committees have been formed that act as local monitoring bodies for implementation of the international standards in carpet weaving families. The committees make rounds of families involved in carpet weaving to ensure that the basic standards of cleanliness and positive health habits are adhered to. This step has actually ensured the sustainability of the trainings given to the weavers as a community based, self-monitoring body increases the participation of the beneficiaries in the project and also hands over the responsibility to the community itself.

An important achievement of the project has been the reduction in the participation of children in carpet weaving. Children in these villages used to lend a helping hand in the carpet weaving process, often leading to their leaving education and becoming professional carpet weavers. After the project intervention and adoption of international standards, children have been discouraged from helping with carpet weaving and a decline in children participating in carpet weaving has been observed. The change has come after the stress laid on the importance of formal education for children of carpet weavers and the downsides of having children work in

disastrous environment of carpet weaving without wages.

Regaining dignity with responsibility: Weavers understanding the industry and their role

The project has been successful in enhancing the understanding of the weavers regarding the overall holistic understanding of the carpet industry and the position they occupy within it. This has helped the weavers gain a sense of dignity, respect and responsibility, as previously they thought of themselves as mere 'labourers' with no interest in the impact they have on the market and the product. The weavers are now acutely aware of the fact that in the production chain they form the most important part, the one responsible for the quality, look and the price of the carpet. This has also led to knowledge of how the market works and how various trends affect the market. The weavers are now in a position to understand how a simple thing like the design of a carpet, if it is intricate and less used, can actually raise the price of the end product. Furthermore, the weavers also have come face to face with a harsh reality of how they also have been responsible in the dwindling of the market for Kashmiri carpets. Because of the need to pay off the debt of the wostakaar, the weavers have confessed that they often compromise with the quality of the carpet. They easily saved time by reducing the number of knots, which wouldn't even come across as a defect to even the most experienced person and would pass for a quality product in the market. However, such a carpet would wear out easily and when washed would shrink considerably, thereby giving a huge blow to the trust created by 'brand Kashmir'. Now it is comprehended by the weavers that such a deception has not only contributed to the market of Kashmiri carpets going down but also has led to a marked decrease in the wages they earn out of weaving a carpet. Such an understanding among the artisans is

hugely beneficial for the industry as it makes them responsible contributors to sustain the brand and quality of the product that make. The increased awareness and understanding therefore is also a step towards restoring the dignity of artisans while making them more responsible and accountable for their production.

There is a renewed sense of potential and worth among the weavers that has encouraged them to study the market trends in order to establish direct contact with the market. A new awakening regarding their contribution to the building of a trusted brand in the market has made the weavers realize that one small mistake in the carpet can cost the industry some 20 to 25 years of trust in the international market. The weavers see themselves not only as artisans but as stakeholders in recreating the brand of trust and quality that the Kashmiri carpets are known for worldwide. To foster information accessibility IEC material containing international standards and government programmes for the weavers has been produced in the form of booklets that are available at every APDC.

Functional literacy: A step towards sustainable empowerment

In the far flung areas in Baramulla and Bandipora, education is a dream for many; generations have passed without an education and cannot read and write. Though times are changing now and education is becoming a must for the new generation, there is a huge chunk of the population that remains illiterate. The literacy rate in the carpet weaving villages is dismally low with boys and girls dropping out to help in generating income for the family. The carpet weavers, both men and women are able to read out the talim, a coded encryption of a design but that is only because it is more symbolic and they have learned it over the years. When it comes to basic things such as writing one's name or reading a board,

the weavers fail miserably since any alphabet, Urdu or English is alien to them. The weavers tell stories of how they feel the need to be educated and how they have often been cheated and deceived because of their being illiterate. For the weavers, receiving a basic education at their ages was an incomprehensible reality, an impossible scenario given their age and the social disapproval for adult education. It took a lot of convincing for the project to finally have the weavers join the functional literacy centers and open their minds to learn the basics of literacy. But eventually they did turn up, however reluctantly.

Functional literacy centers: Birthplaces of a new beginning

The functional literacy component was started in the project keeping in view the holistic development of the carpet weavers and the significance of literacy in raising their confidence and dignity. This was also a step towards empowering the weavers socially and for providing them with an opportunity

At present the **FLCs** benefit **140** males and **150** females in **10** villages of the intervention area.



to have what they rightfully deserved; a chance at learning that they had missed in their own lives due to various reasons. This step has however, exceeded all expectations and humble outcomes that were expected of it and has become the center of activity in the villages. The center hosts not only the carpet weavers but also the villagers who think of the centers as 'schools' where they can get an education. Initially there were some challenges such as motivating the weavers,

all of them above 35 years of age, to come and learn at the centers and also to find time for conducting the classes. But slowly ways were devised, suggested by the community. The classes started to be held in the evenings after evening prayers, for two hours after all work was finished by the weavers in a centrally located point in the village, easily accessible to all the people enrolled there. Apprehensions were high that the classes wouldn't continue given the busy schedule and other pressing priorities of the weavers but the doubts were soon put to ease by the weavers themselves with their eagerness and high levels of motivation for learning. The centers soon came alive with men and women, with calloused hands and dwindling eyesight learning to write and read alphabets. 'After the prayers I would be eager to rush to the center. ***The thought of learning something new made me impatient and childlike***, says a weaver in his middle age, laughing at the excitement evident in his tone.

At present the FLCs benefit 140 males and 150 females in 10 villages of the intervention area. The functional literacy component has successfully brought together the illiterate carpet weavers, bound together by a common deficiency and the young teachers from the community to together bring about a change that will impact not only the lives of the weavers but also the overall education scenario in the community. The elderly in the community are leading the change by fighting social norms and working for individual and collective development. It inspires the younger generation who feel elated at the way their parents and at times even grandparents have taken up studying. The functional literacy component focuses on teaching the weavers basics of mathematical calculations needed for their daily use, urdu language and english language. What we, educated people almost miss every time we do a calculation on our fingers is its importance. The pride that the weavers take in adding numbers, reading boards and signing their names is infectious and encouraging at the same time. For

them the functional literacy means reduced vulnerability and increased confidence. Prior to learning and being part of the change, life was difficult for the artisans who felt humiliated and inferior when they failed to guide their children in studies, or when in the city, couldn't read the board of the bus they had to board home. The use of thumb impression instead of the signature would be a cause for humiliation as such people are usually called 'angootha chap' in the local parlance. The term is loaded with degrading connotations, referring to a person as being devoid of any intellectual capacity. Being illiterate had also caused the weavers to undermine the importance of education for their own children. Now that they have found a new way, a new life

'We were treated as 'cows', as people with no sense or intelligence. But now we are literate and that whole perception has changed'

*- Mohammed Afzal Chakan,
Nowgam Payeen*

after being literate, where they sign the bank documents, read boards, names of medicines and keep accounts, the artisans have also felt the need of encouraging their own children to pursue their studies. 'Often before we would ask our children to miss a day at school and help us with weaving but now that we are students ourselves we understand how important it is for them to learn and study', says Mohd Maqbool, a weaver in Shiganpora village. The project has brought about an innovative change where the reversal of roles has encouraged the weavers to understand the importance of being literate at least and educated at the most. The comparison that

the adults make of literacy helping them with their personal and everyday lives, with that of an education that their children receive has made all the difference in their lives.

Recently a national level exam for functional literacy was held where the weavers got their names enrolled with much enthusiasm. The clearing of that exam would make clear the first level in functional literacy bringing them at par with other functional literates throughout the country. The worry was the same as young students have but the enthusiasm to appear in the exams much more than that. An important lesson that introducing functional literacy in a community has brought to the fore is that innovation is sometimes the key to change; that changing structures within a community can be acceptable to the community and that if the community itself is involved in planning, as it was here, then the initiative can never be a failure.

Another encouraging trend that can be seen in this component is the participation of women, both young and old in the centers. The women are very vocal about how they finish off all of their work till the evening so that they can attend their classes. They eagerly show off their homework as they comment on how being functionally literate has led to a boost in their confidence and has enhanced their safety and security. It often happens that the women have to go out of the village or to the town to run errands. At such times being able to figure out the way by themselves means asking around less for directions from strangers thereby reducing chances of falling into wrong hands. The literacy of women also means that the children have someone to guide and lead them which exactly what the mothers enjoy the most.

As far as another impact of the functional literacy component is considered, it needs to be taken into account that the FLCs were started for the adult illiterate carpet weavers but has also catered to other people in the community including those young girls who

couldn't join a formal school. The functional literacy component is doing much more than it was expected to do.

Artisan Production and Development Centers: Putting the artisan at the center of the power equation

As already discussed at many places in the report the main issue with the carpet weavers in Kashmir is the cycle of debt that they are caught in. Many people have died trying to get out of the cycle of debt. If we look at the process closely, it resembles 'bonded labour' concept only too well, even though it is not called by that name. However the carpet weaving sector has seen artisans laboring in harsh working conditions throughout the year, barring the agricultural season when they have to tend to their fields to get food for the family. A considerable halt in the carpet weaving activity is also seen in the month of mourning, the first month of the Islamic calendar, Muharram. Given such obstacles, the weavers are left caught in between the devil and the deep sea, where they can't earn enough through weaving carpets and they can't opt for working as labourers.

The September floods proved deadly and devastating for the valley as a whole as it left entire life savings and infrastructure of the victims in shambles. The already marginalized community of carpet weavers had the worst of the disaster too. The traditional looms were washed away, along with the carpets that were being woven. The ones that were salvaged however were in decay, and the weavers found themselves more in debt than ever with huge costs to be incurred on procuring new looms and taking more loans from the wostakaar. The situation was grim with no respite in view for the weavers. However K CALEEN came up with a timely support for the rescue of the weavers. The long standing issue of placing the artisans in the most significant and beneficial position could now take off. Backed by years of

hard work with weavers and the community, the project finally adopted an approach that would eliminate the middleman and source the benefits to weavers directly. The approach was both radical as well as full of risks, but it was long overdue and the floods only paved way for the initiative to take off. The weavers were organized into groups of 10s, 12s and 15s, with one weaver from each family in the group, to work on a common modern loom. It needs to be mentioned that this was drastically different from the traditional weaving process where carpet weaving is family based and not a community based activity. An important strategy in this was exploring the 'we feeling', and the cohesion of the community; the fact that weavers belonged to one village and knew each other was the basis for laying the foundation for the Artisan Production and Development Centers. These APDCs, one in every village of the intervention area of the project were then supported with modern looms, raw materials, and other tools needed for weaving. The weavers were trained and oriented in operating the modern looms as they were used to working on traditional looms. The weavers chose a design for the carpet, one that would sell in the market and began working in teams of three or four people at a time, depending upon the size of the carpet they were weaving. Each APDC is currently in the process of weaving a total of 30 square feet of carpet, which could come as two sets of 3*5 or three sets of 2.5*4.

The actual idea behind this massive support to weavers which almost costs 1 lakh INR to each APDC is making the artisan the focal point in the carpet industry. The establishment of APDCs is an attempt to revive the carpet industry out of its slump by restoring power and dignity to the actual labourer, the artisan. Since the carpet weaving profession is labour intensive it is imperative that the capital and the profits reach those who put in their lives into making a carpet, and that is what the project has started doing. Since this is comparatively a new component in the project, the work done so far has been

in terms of carpet weavers from the weaver groups working together on a carpet which is then aimed to sold in market. The profits thus obtained will go directly to the carpet weavers thereby increasing the profit that they earn from weaving and selling the carpet. Since the weavers work in a group, the money earned from the carpets will go to a collective bank account of the group, based on which they can buy material to start working on more carpets. This is the vision that the project is working on right now; to start a sustainable market based production of carpets that the weavers can sustain on their own. The idea is to start a capital intensive venture by the carpet weavers supported by the project.

The production of carpets in APDCs is also a step towards ensuring the quality of carpets and inculcating positive practices in the weavers. The carpets in the APDCs are all 18*18 knottage, which is the minimum acceptable quality in the market for carpets. This has been done so as to change the habits of the weavers and stop the production of sub-standard carpets and also to inculcate a sense of responsibility in the carpet weavers. To ensure that the quality of the product is maintained the project has linked up with the Indian Institute of Carpet Technology to carry out the monitoring and inspection of the carpets being produced in APDCs.

The production of the carpets doesn't end with the weaving process only; the carpet is then dyed, washed and clipped to produce a final finished product. As of now the project is working on training 4 weavers among 10 villages in dyeing, washing, cutting and finishing and to set up a washing unit in the village. This will complete the process of carpet production and will turn the ten villages into model carpet producing units, not only generating employment within the village but also transferring the ownership to the community, ensuring sustainability. At the present stage the project is preparing ground for linkages so as to foster artisan-buyer ties for increasing benefits to the carpet weavers.

In addition the APDCs also target the other issues that the weavers face such as major health issues they had because of the traditional looms. The APDCs are a benchmark for quality workplace and some common features are:

- The APDCs are equipped with modern looms that have a bench to accommodate sitting carpet weavers, thus allowing a straighter posture and vast leg space for the weavers. This is different from the traditional looms where the weavers had to crouch into a minimal space, resulting in severe skeletal problems.
- The looms are placed in large rooms with ample space for the weavers to move with ease as opposed to traditional looms which are often cramped in small rooms with no possible free movement.
- The modern looms are easy to operate as they work partly on machines that make it easier for the weavers to change the settings. In the traditional loom made of wooden logs, it was very difficult to bring about changes and the fear of the whole structure collapsing always loomed large.
- The APDCs are well lit and well ventilated, easing out the pressure on the weavers while weaving. This has also helped in reducing the effect of the dust produced by the weaving, as the particles get disbursed because of the room being well ventilated.
- The APDCs all feature time tables produced by the carpet weavers for themselves, along with charts that depict various correct positions of working as well as the international standards for artisans.
- In case of problems arising in the modern looms that the weavers find difficult to solve, the company that has supplied the looms to the project is at service. The phone numbers for the maintenance personnel have been

handed over to each APDC so that any issue in the loom is immediately sorted out.

- The APDC in Najan is acting as the storehouse for materials required by the APDCs that haven't started working yet.

According to the weavers the APDCs have encouraged hope and a desire to break free of the chains of debt that tie them down. They are enthusiastic about the results that the project will produce and look forward to functioning as production units within villages. The APDCs have lifted a huge burden off the shoulders of the weavers and has given them a chance to work their debt off and start new ventures. The new way of working introduced by the project that of working in groups on the carpet instead of in families has also been taken well by the community who rotate their working hours so that they can divide their time equally in producing carpets in APDCs, in their own homes and also give time to agricultural activities.

Recognizing the 'she power': The significant contribution of women in the carpet industry

It is very unfortunate that whenever we talk or write about the carpet industry in Kashmiri, most of the people think of men working in the sector. The actual scenario is quite different from this and as the project found out after its pilot study was that in fact the majority of the workforce in the carpet industry constitutes women. Men working on carpets do get wages, however minimum but women working on carpets are called 'helpers' and don't get the wages that men get. It is a classical example of how exploitation works in systems and sub systems. So here you have a class of artisans exploited and then within that class you have gender based exploitation. The project however has been very active in changing the perspective of people towards women working in this industry and have

brought to fore the important 'behind the scenes workers', the women. Carpet weaving is essentially considered a male dominated field given the physical strength required to weave the carpets and deal with the loom. However, women have been for most part the major contributors to weaving, especially when the men have some other work to do. In helping out the family carpet to be completed, women work without ever being acknowledged and of course without ever being paid.

It was the need to give women the recognition they deserve in the field that an all women group was formed in the village Yakmanpora. These women also form the part of the APDC in the village and are working on weaving the project together. When we come to discuss the challenges faced by carpet weavers, women carpet weavers have a whole new dimension of issues that they face. It is but obvious that women, along with working on carpets have also to take care of children, tend to chores in the house, look after the needs of men and also work in the fields. This puts an additional pressure on the women who are over worked and unpaid, both in terms of physical and mental stability. Even then the women suffer anonymity and no credit for the work they do.

The project has taken up one of the most serious aspects that concerns carpet weaving women; their health and more particularly, reproductive health. The project has conducted many programs for women to train them and answer questions on reproductive health. Given the poor sanitation and hygiene scenario in these villages, it is appreciative that the project has promoted good reproductive health practices in intervention areas.

Linkages of beneficiaries with artisan schemes and affiliated departments

India being a welfare state has the responsibility of catering to the common

masses and this is usually done through programs and schemes for the benefit of the people. India has some of the best schemes for both different marginalized and vulnerable sections of the society. However most of the times the government fails to implement these schemes due lack of grassroots level knowledge and corruption. Another factor that is a hurdle in implementation of these schemes is the unawareness of the beneficiaries about such programs which eventually causes the funds to lapse due to non-usage of funds. NGOs on the other side have the required knowledge and skill base as well as the experience of working

The schemes are all good on paper but when the time for implementation comes, most of these are defunct and the weavers are left seething. An example of this is the provision of insurance and free health checkups to the weavers. It is a very good program but in reality the scheme is defunct.

– Ms. Nusrat Ali
Project Coordinator, KCALEEN

on the ground. The one thing that they lack is resources; NGOs can't cater to all the needs of the beneficiaries as they lack the resources to do so. Hence the only logical solution to such a situation is collaboration between NGOs and government departments resulting in linkages that benefit the people. The artisans in the intervention villages of K CALEEN are illiterate and mostly unaware of the benefits provided by the government through schemes and programs.

The project has successfully identified the various departments, linkages with which

could benefit the weavers. The project has successfully established linkages with the Indian Institute of Carpet Technology, the State Resource Cell of Kashmir University and the Department of Handicrafts. 102 weavers have been registered with the department of Handicrafts under the Artisan Registration scheme where the artisans are provided benefits such as loans, medical check-ups and insurance. The other schemes with which the weavers have been linked are Modern loom scheme and Artisan credit scheme, under which the weavers have a provision of being provided with modern looms and credit respectively. 6 weavers have been so far provided with modern looms and 5 weavers have been granted credit.

The project in collaboration with the State Resource Center has conducted trainings for the teachers of FLCs and provided study material for the centers. Similarly trainings for the weavers have been conducted with IICT, to engage with them and to provide weavers information about new trends in carpet weaving industry.

The project has also worked with Sher-I-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences to create awareness among the weavers regarding the occupational hazards that come at the cost of carpet weaving and the remedial measures to tackle these.

Bringing forth loopholes and preparing ground for advocacy of an artisan friendly policy

Although we have discussed the linkages the project has successfully managed to establish with various government departments and the schemes weavers have been linked with, a sad reality remains that there are in fact many problems that the weavers have to face when it comes to availing these benefits. The project as mentioned above has been extensively affiliated with the relevant government departments and schemes for weavers, and as such has been able to witness firsthand the loopholes in the schemes and programs. As the project coordinator, Ms. Nusrat puts it, 'The schemes are all good on paper but when the time for implementation comes, most of these are defunct and the weavers are left seething. An example of this is the provision of insurance and free health checkups to the weavers. It is a very good program but in reality the scheme is defunct'.

The weavers corroborate with this statement as frequent trips to these departments to avail the many benefits mentioned on paper have yielded nothing but unnecessary expense and frustration at unavailability of services. The project has been able to point out the lacking and shortcomings of the schemes for carpet weavers. This however means that there is a scope in the project to use advocacy as a tool in the near future, to press for starting these programs and for an artisan friendly policy in the state. The most significant aspect is that the project, through awareness and sensitization has emboldened and empowered the weavers enough to take up their own cause by forming a representative front. The weavers have expressed a strong willingness to take up the issue with authorities if they are guided in the matter. This also means a chance to organize the weavers into a strong front able to defend their rights and bring changes in the system.

Part III:
Stories of Success and Innovation

Views from Stakeholders

No project can ever work in isolation and as such collaboration, networking and linkages become an important part of the project intervention. The report has already mentioned various other stakeholders involved in the project. It is important that there be balanced views from other important stakeholders in the project. The three major departments involved in the project have been included in the report to have their views on the project and the work done.

State resource centre: The state resource center in KU works with an agenda of providing trainings, materials, IEC to relevant departments and NGOs working on the field for benefit of people. The department has been instrumental in providing trainings for FLC teachers, and in providing books and syllabi for functional literacy for the weavers. The department considers the functional literacy component very important for carpet weavers who are gullible and vulnerable to be cheated; the opportunity to learn and become literate at later stages of life is considered to be a big achievement. As the project Director, Mr. Yousuf remarks, 'It is wonderful that the project is not only focusing on one aspect of the weavers but has also taken up their literacy as a priority. It will supplement the work they are doing and will only empower the artisans. The important part is that other adults in the village can also benefit from it. We have had a healthy collaboration with the project and have been happy to provide our services for it.'

Best Practices

A best practice is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result. A commitment to using the best practices in any field is a commitment to using all the knowledge and technology at one's disposal to ensure success. Best practices are often those practices where innovation and creativity have been used to achieve desired results. Often in

the field trusted ways or prescribed ways of working fail different difference in context and relevance. K CALEEN has also used some strategies that can also be classified as best practices to achieve maximum output from the field both quantitatively and qualitatively. The best practices as observed in the project are:

Flexibility in changing strategies; being able to spot needs on the basis of changes happening on the field:

The major lapse in projects often is sticking to knowledge of the books, to traditional, rigid approaches despite their futility. This often stems from the thought that since these are tested methods they must be right. However that is not always the case and the project often fails because of this rigid notion. K CALEEN however has started by challenging this notion and being very open to changing strategies as and when required. Broadly classified, that in itself becomes the biggest best practice that the project has followed, even while implementing and not completely disregarding traditional approaches such as group work.

Group approach instead of individual support:

Some people might argue that since K CALEEN is a project for carpet weavers, it should focus on individual artisans. However the belt in which K CALEEN works is completely a 'carpet weavers' belt and as such switching to group approach has been very useful. Even though carpet weaving in Kashmir is a family affair, confined mostly to families working on a carpet together, the project has brought together the weavers as homogenous groups sharing common goals and purposes. This has brought about a sense of self help among the weavers apart from encouraging 'we-feeling' among them, making them more responsible not only individually but as a collective. The best example of this is Rehmat group in

Nowgam Payeen (refer to case study below) that has emerged as a strong group not only in terms of becoming economically strong but also as a community based leader group. The group approach has started the reduction of the weavers on the wosta for petty loans as the money of the group is circulated in times of need.

Ensuring creation of community based structures and involvement of community:

Many projects fail when they assume that the role of the community should be limited to receiving services that are provided by the project and this is what usually leads to the failure of the project. K CALEEN however has been very careful of the way it involves community in planning and discussion. The project has created some CBOs such as weaver groups and APDCs that are rooted in the community and therefore have a good understanding of the issues and their probable solutions. Furthermore K CALEEN has not merely involved carpet weavers in the project but the community as a whole, including the families of the carpet weavers. Such an involvement has led to an understanding of the project among the community and as such the support of the community to the project is a given.

Gender mainstreaming:

Ironically the carpet industry in Kashmir is known as a male bastion which is completely degrading and unfair to the women in every carpet weaving family who works day and night on the carpet. The project has been especially careful of how it projects the women. The project has been especially careful of gender mainstreaming. The contribution of women has been highlighted through proper mechanisms and they have been considered as major stakeholders in the process of change. An exclusive group of women carpet weavers has also been formed in village Yakmanpora

where all the carpet weaving work is done by women alone.

Integrating reproductive health in the project

As discussed at various places in the report, the intervention area lacks basic amenities to an extent that health in general and reproductive health is ignored to a large extent. The project has excellently taken up the issue of reproductive health in terms of enhancing the awareness of the adolescent girls and women, young and old about their reproductive rights. Taking care of the reproductive health of women and girls associated with the project, directly or indirectly, is an exemplary lead in a project of its kind. It has set an example for others to follow that reproductive health is an issue that nobody takes too seriously, an elephant in the room that nobody talks about even though it is very important especially in rural areas where the knowledge of girls and women and the practice is reproductive health is disappointing and alarmingly disastrous to health.

Shifting to modern technologies in carpet weaving, modern loom for increasing efficiency in production

With support to APDCs in terms of modern looms and knowledge about international standards, K CALEEN has taken the weavers out of their disastrous work practices towards a path that is full of benefits for them, as well as increases their production thereby leading to an increase in the efficiency in production. At the same time this doesn't compromise with the health of the weavers and thereby leads to a balance in both productions oriented approach and a welfare approach for weavers. The linkages with various departments have also helped the weavers obtain the modern looms for individual families and this has led a shift in the approach of the weavers towards their own health and safety, something that was painfully missing before the project.

Understanding local context and using culture relevant factors for motivating weavers

Using religion in a project is a practice that is usually discouraged given the apprehensions that it might breed religious bias or intolerance but an equally awe inspiring skill in a project is to identify where religion can play a key role in helping the beneficiaries. The target population in the project is deeply inclined towards religion and considers work as important as worshipping. An example for understanding this is a statement by a weaver during an interaction, "We do not listen to music when we are weaving carpets because it is hara'am in religion; we listen instead to na'ats and marsiyah that infuses a spirit of fair working in us. When we are listening to religious hymns not one of us thinks of compromising on the quality of the work."⁸ With beneficiaries considering religion their life blood it is only wise to use religion to motivate them say, for betterment of work conditions and cleanliness, both of which are encouraged by Islam. In such conditions allowing religion to become a motivation for beneficiaries for their own betterment is a commendable example set by K CALEEN as instead of changing or influencing the ideology of the beneficiaries, it has used that very ideology for their welfare.

8 The target population is mostly from shia school of thought of muslims where marsiyah are mourning hymns for the tragedy of Karbala and na'ats are hymns devotional songs that preach righteousness and justice. In Islam music is generally considered 'hara'am' i.e. forbidden and Muslims consider it a sin and a cause for decline in sustenance.

CASE STUDIES

From energy to experience, with love: The story of a young teacher

Fayaz is a young, energetic boy in his early twenties, 23 years to be precise; skinny and yet active as he leads us to the Functional Literacy Center in Nowgam, Sumbal. There is no trace, no evidence that would allow a random stranger to guess that the lean boy walking expertly through the muddy compound, leading us and a few older men into a house, is a teacher and not a student. Fayaz teaches at the FLC in Nowgam and some of his students sit in front of him, demure and happy at the same time. I remember Fayaz, even younger and a nervous soul, two years before as I interviewed him for filling up the post of the FLC teacher. At that time he said he could manage the weavers, all adults, his father's age. The interpretation of that statement is about to be revealed as we enter the center, decorated with charts screaming out the numbers, alphabets, in Urdu and English. The students all in their 30s, 40s, and 50s come and take a seat near the wall looking with an endearing reverence at the boy who has taught them to read and write. And they begin sharing their experiences.

'We are happy to be studying with Fayaz saab. He scolds us when we don't do our homework', chuckles Mohammed Altaf, a weaver in his 30s. Fayaz is jubilant, and there are no traces of the nervousness I had seen two years before. He thinks he has achieved a lot. The weavers were completely illiterate, and the FLCs have come to them as an opportunity to complete what they couldn't when they were children. The functional literacy centers were started to eliminate the vulnerability that the weavers feel given their inability to read or write. The teachers are all young men from the same village, who like Fayaz are students pursuing higher education or have completed their education. It is a unique role reversal, where the elders who have taught everything to the youngsters, including the art of living, are now students, learning from these youngsters the art of reading and writing.



Figure 3: Fayaz Ahmad Chakan, the FLC teacher at Nowgam talking about his experience

The FLC in Nowgam has 22 students registered within age group 18 to 45 years; some of these are young girls who help with carpet weaving in families and haven't attended school. After overcoming the initial challenge of motivating the weavers to come to the center, the journey has been relatively smooth. The weavers registered in the center as 'illiterates' and today the word can no longer be attached to

'The weavers, when they came here first, were eager to read. They said they wanted to be able to read a newspaper and not just stare at the images. It was something that I took up as a mission', says Fayaz looking quite subdued.

Today after months of labour and toil the 10 out of the 22 weavers are able to read an Urdu newspaper quite well.

them. They attend the center every evening after the prayers and shed their outer skin of elderly, worldly people to become little kids, grappling with alphabets. Fayaz is vocal about how when the weavers started learning, they had no idea or recognition of the numbers or alphabets. Fayaz admits to getting a little impatient with his students, who took more time than children to understand the basics of numbers and language and yet he didn't give up. 'The weavers, when they came here first, were eager to read. They said they wanted to be able to read a newspaper and not just stare at the images. It was something that I took up as a mission', says Fayaz looking quite subdued. Today after months of labour and toil the 10 out of the 22 weavers are able to read an Urdu newspaper quite well. Fayaz looks proud of this achievement; it is a mission he and the weavers have accomplished together.

The weavers are overly enthusiastic about their classes, driven by a thirst to learn and a religious obligation to obtain knowledge. An even more encouraging trend and a heart-warming 'ritual' can be seen in the weavers arriving 15 minutes earlier than the FLC teacher to practice what they have previously learnt. Fayaz is all smiles as he tells us how he has now handed over the board and the marker pens to the weavers as they always outdo him in reaching the FLC. 'They just keep writing and practicing among themselves. I can't stop them. The energy is infectious'. The weavers recently appeared in an exam that tested their learning, reading and writing skills imbibed so far. The exam was a national level exam and Fayaz narrates how excited the weavers were to appear in the exam. He is proud of the fact that most of them did very well in the exam. For the weavers their lives

have changed because of the new experience they are gaining. Mohammed Altaf, a young weaver in his 30s says, 'My children go to the local anganwadi center and are learning alphabets currently. Right now I consider myself like them, a child with no knowledge. I hope to learn enough here so that I can teach my children as well.' For the weavers being able to sign instead of using their thumb impression is an elevation of their status. It is the removal of vulnerability and shame associated with being illiterate. Literacy has made them powerful and aware of the fact that they can in fact bring about a change if they will.

For Fayaz being an FLC teacher has not been just an employment opportunity but also a way to fulfill his moral and social responsibilities. He has come a long way from struggling with the idea of teaching elderly men and women to actually being a proud teacher. The experience has made him more confident, and has increased his self respect. 'I feel respected and confident of doing anything now. Honestly even I was skeptic about the success of the center but now alhamdulillah, I can proudly say that I can take up any challenge that I come across in my life.' Fayaz says about his experience as a teacher in the FLC. Fayaz feels being a teacher has shattered a lot of his biases and assumptions about people. Now he knows that change is only a will away. 'I feel happy of being capable of changing someone's life and also of the fact that even in this age and with such a tight schedule, my students have achieved so much. This is bliss.' And indeed the happiness is evident on Fayaz's face, as his unusual, elderly students open their notebooks to show him the homework they have done, looking at him with love and respect.



Figure 6: Mohammed Ibrahim, the bright student of FLC Najan and an expert weaver.

Age is just a number and this weaver can now read and write it as well.

Mohammed Ibrahim is a lean man, almost skinny in his late 50s. He looks unkempt and dons the traditional kameez salwar; he introduces himself as the president of the Artisan Production and Development Center in Najan, a village in Sumbal. Najan like any other village is a carpet weaving village and occasionally a glimpse of the traditional wooden loom can be caught on the roof or in a room. Like any other village in this belt, Najan is swished in mud, cattle move around unattended and most importantly there are no walls anywhere. Mohammed Ibrahim has been associated with carpet weaving for as long as he can remember and is known both for his skills in weaving and for being an eager and a sharp student at the Functional Literacy

Center in Najan. He lives up to his reputation in both as we first see him work furiously at the loom in the APDC and later as he shows off his 'literal skills', quite literally.

The story of Mohammed Ibrahim is awe inspiring and fascinating. He comes from a very poor family and he has never been to a school as all his time was taken up by working on a carpet to provide for the family. His condition is no different right now; he still lives in poverty as is evident from his tattered 'pheran'. He has been a weaver for life and is working to pay off debt taken from a wostakar. He talks dejectedly about the trials and tribulations of working in the carpet industry. 'I didn't let my child go outside the state because that would mean I'd have to take another loan from the wosta. I don't want to die trying to work off the loan', Ibrahim says while chocking on his words. The project has been a ray of

new hope for him that has brought about a new experience and a new understanding about the industry he has been working in for nearly 5 decades of his life. However the most significant part of being involved in the project has definitely been the functional literacy component. He like many other weavers was skeptical about getting enrolled in the center. He is the oldest student and is proud of it now. There was a time when Ibrahim could not recognise alphabets or numbers. 'I didn't understand the world of words. It confused me and there was a time when I used to wonder why my children wasted their time in studying', he says recalling his earlier days in the FLC. He was driven to the center by the thought of learning being a religious duty and in part to inspire youngsters to join the center as well. He wanted to become a change and an inspiration for the younger generation which he has become.

Initially it was very difficult for him to grasp with new concepts, new language and a new world of literacy, however he didn't give up and soon the world became clearer and more beautiful. Ibrahim quotes many examples of how his life has changed in many small ways. He has started keeping the accounts for his family and questioning them about the use of family funds. He can better understand the need for his children to study and to move forward in his life. Ibrahim says he never misses a class as

it might set a bad example for others. 'I attend the class every day and encourage others to attend as well especially young girls who had to leave their studies midway. Nobody should be bereft of this wonderful experience of learning' Ibrahim tells us how his family has supported him throughout his new journey. His children feel proud of his progress and he now feels confident enough to sit with them when they are studying and discuss their studies with them.

The ability to read and write has not eliminated only the need to be dependent on others for simple things but also instilled the confidence to question. 'I feel a lot different than before. I feel powerful, intelligent and confident enough to question anyone. I am sure now that nobody can exploit my illiteracy'. Mohammed Ibrahim writes with an enviable fluency of the pen as we ask him to demonstrate what he has learnt. Taking the diary and the pen he expertly writes down his name and residence in Urdu and beams as he shows it to us. 'Now I don't feel inferior to my own children. In fact I now correct them often and at times even when there is nothing to correct I just jump in. They really get irritated sometimes', he laughs merrily as his eyes twinkle with joy. The center to him is a second home where he is impatient to reach, a home that is more sacred to him than his first home.

Hajira: The mother who dreamt a second time through FLC

For many of us who live in a comfortable bubble of facilities and opportunities, imagining a life that is full of lost opportunities is unfathomable and far more tough for us is to understand how much a lost chance to be literate to someone means. Not everything comes as easily to everyone; some people have missed out on the most basic rights of their lives such as education. The situation gets even more complex when we talk about girls and women living in far flung rural areas. For many, education is a dream that can never be realized due to multiple reasons, poverty, unawareness and contribution to family income being some of those. However what happens when a girl child is involved? The stakes double, the responsibilities double as well as the roles leading to an increased risk of the girl child missing her education. How many chances will the girl child get in the future when she is all grown up and has kids of her own? None, you say with some understanding of the world such a girl must have grown up in. However you are about to read the story of a mother who grabbed the chance she had missed and has turned her world around.

Hajira- the name is one of the most common in Muslim world; however the Hajira we have here is uncommonly determined. She is like any other young village woman; beautiful, radiant, hard working and strong. For a woman in her early thirties Hajira is contradictory; shy in speaking but surprisingly bold in writing. A mother of three children, Hajira never got a chance to get educated. "Back then we didn't go to school, none of us, both boys and girls. We just helped around with the household chores", she speaks in a regretful tone of her childhood where she couldn't even go to school, even though it was a dream. She talks



about how helpless she felt when she watched her children read and write and couldn't teach them or correct them. Illiteracy makes children think that they are superior to their parents and can deceive them. It was then that the FLC in Odina started and she got enrolled in the center as a student. Talking about the early struggles, she says that her husband was skeptic about her wanting to join the center. 'He was more concerned about what the people would say. He thought they'd taunt him for sending his wife to a center as a student so late in life that too to study what her kids studied as well', Hajira tells us with a smile on her face. Later though her husband relented and allowed her to join the center. That started the huge change Hajira was about to witness in her life. She has been a devoted student, an ardent scholar ever since, and never fails to attend her classes and never leaves her homework undone. For her life has become infinitely beautiful now that she can read and

write. Her teacher, Abid also reaffirms that she is the most brilliant student in the class. The other students, some young girls, middle aged women and men all nod in approval and acquiesce that Hajira is the best among them when it comes to learning. Hajira blushes when her teacher tells us how ardently she does her homework and sometimes goes to his house so that he can help her out with a sum.

For Hajira it is a blessing that she has a second chance in life at learning and being educated; a chance that she lost in her childhood. 'I couldn't go to school and that thought haunted me forever because that was the chance I'd never get again. But here I am today and I feel lucky that I am a student in this FLC, living my days of childhood and my dream'. When asked about what changes she has felt in her life after being illiterate, she reiterates what many FLC weaver students have to say; that they are no more illiterate, they can sign instead of using their thumb impression, they feel dignified and important, and not vulnerable and inferior. Being literate, and being able to read and write has led to an evolution within the weavers as a collective, raising their self-esteem and their position among their peers

as well. For Hajira though, the victory is more personal for now she doesn't feel the shame of not being able to guide or help her kids with their studies. She is not even shy of admitting that sometimes she sits with her kids to complete her homework. She tells us with a certain tilt of her head, indicative of the pride she takes in her new student life, 'Nobody can call me an illiterate now. I am a literate (smiles proudly). Now I talk to my children, spell out their names and they look at me with a look of pride and surprise both. Sometimes we all sit together and do our homework. At times they teach me and at other times I teach them.' Hajira is not just good at Urdu but equally excels at English and Mathematics as well. We give her a diary to write her name down and to solve a sum that her teacher has written down for her. She holds the pen with utmost reverence and starts writing. In no time she hands over the diary with her name neatly written both in Urdu and English and the sum flawlessly done. The dimpled smile and the happiness on her face is unmistakably those of a woman who has realized her dream with her own hands and the dream lays scribbled across the pages of my diary.



Figure 10: Members of the Rehmat group

Rehmat weaver group Nowgam Payeen: Beyond weaving hopes, leading by example

Nowgam Payeen, the lower part of the larger village Nowgam is a perfect picture of abject poverty, dismal facilities and a proof of neglect and disregard in a nation that calls itself a welfare state. The road leading to the village is all mud and dirt, the houses are one storied and unkempt, children walk around dirty and there is water pooled in huge puddles inviting bacteria and insects and often ducks to waddle through. The majority of the household live off carpet weaving; this village is among the first ones where K CALEEN was implemented. The weaver group present in the village goes by the name 'Rehmat group' with Mohammed Afzal Chakan as its president. Like other villages the villagers here face acute shortage of basic amenities and strive even for their basic human rights. Unawareness about government schemes, vulnerability due to illiteracy have been among the reasons that the villagers remain far removed from prosperity.

One of the primary reasons of forming weaver groups in villages was to instill a sense of 'we-feeling', group working and collective efforts in the weavers. This was done to organize them as entities that are trained and made aware of their rights. The group approach was also based on the logic that fighting for rights of the community would become easy if taken up by the group that would supplement the local leadership bodies in the village. The Rehmat group has been under the aegis of the project for four long years and during this time they have saved over 40,000 INR as a group collectively which is deposited in a bank account in the name of the group. The group has been a pioneer in exemplifying the basic advantages of forming the weavers group. The members in the group have lent money to other members during times of need thereby eliminating the need to take loans from the wosta. This has instilled a confidence and a sense of independence among the weavers apart from creating a support system for the weavers that they can fall back on.

The group has not been active in helping each other but has also been acting as a community

vigilante and preventing the misuse of funds by the local leadership. 'After we became part of the group, we also became aware of our responsibilities towards our society. Earlier we used to silently watch as the panchayat misused funds meant for public work in the village. But then having undergone trainings and having gained knowledge about what our rights are, we decided to stop this.' Mohammed Afzal says explaining their transition from passive recipients of events to active participators. The power of collective has turned the group into responsible members of the community with a knack for making the governance community friendly and accountable. This is not the case with Rehmat group alone but also with other groups, who have found their strength by being together. Rehmat group has been able to bring forth misuse of public money, highlight the need for accountability and increase the trust of people on them.

Rehmat group has gone a step further than the other groups, given the fact that it is one of the oldest groups supported by the chapter. Even before the concept of APDC started the group had long back woven 3 pieces of carpet, a total of 30 ft and sold it to the market. Because the carpets were not washed and finished they did not fetch as completed carpets would but the earning from that deal was the biggest contribution to the group funds. The help thus didn't stop at it. After the floods of September 2014, the group came up with the idea of helping each member with a cash support of 2000 INR to help them get through the tough times thereby promoting self help approach.

The group is right now preparing for the establishment of the APDC in their village as well and is hopeful of leading the way in that as well. The story of Rehmat group is awe inspiring and a testimony to how self sustenance and community participation can lead to sustainable development.

**PART IV:
CONCLUSION**

Conclusion



“The beauty of the carpet lies not in its intricate design but in the gashes that adorn the fingers of the weavers”

K CALEEN has worked in some of the toughest conditions a project can face and has come out strong and successful. The beauty and the strength of the project lies in the fact that it has taken up a unique and difficult issue that of the carpet weavers and has tried to change their lives for the better. It is well known that any work with artisans who are mainly subjugated and oppressed by the capitalistic system requires a massive change in the structure. K CALEEN has brought about that change by starting APDCs to make the weavers independent masters of their own profits and eliminate the factor of vulnerability and debt that has plagued them for long. However the project also does well to focus not only on just bettering the working conditions of the weavers but also has taken up other issues associated with the weavers, the major among them being illiteracy. The multiple pronged approaches to the issues that the weavers face has ensured sustainable development of the community as a whole and not just service delivery to meet the project needs. Apart from this the project has also been significantly

useful in highlighting the issues of women and more importantly their contribution to the carpet industry that often goes unnoticed and unappreciated. Focusing on health of women and formation of exclusive women SHG is also a step forward towards ensuring gender balance in the project and of reducing discrimination within vulnerable classes. There has been a considerable improvement in the working standards of the weavers after involvement in the project, the most important of which is the non-involvement of children in working on carpets. Overall the project has done wonderful qualitative work on the ground that if looked at with critical perspective and realist thought is not very easy to achieve because of the humungous challenges that stare the project in its eyes. Despite all these challenges the project has been successful in changing lives and in achieving its objectives.

One of the major focuses of the project in the coming days will be the APDCs, which have now become not only the centers for

production of carpets but also centers for hope and optimism. The weavers are very optimistic about working in APDCs as a group and have understood how they can take the production forward. The training of the weavers in finishing, washing and dyeing will lead to independence from the market and the establishment of 3 units of these centers common to all 10 villages will make the belt an independent carpet producing area thereby increasing their profits massively. The success of the APDCs will also be responsible for encouraging other weavers who have been reluctant to join the APDC because of concerns to start enterprises on their own, supported by the APDC. Given the bright future and successful prospects of the APDC component, it is but expected that the weavers be taken into confidence and a participatory way be evolved to make APDCs even better. Market linkages are the priority as a lot of hope is riding on the carpets that are finished, in most of the APDCs. The project should

continue working on the gender component but the major work for the project now should be advocacy for artisan rights. Organizing various weaver groups into an artisan front will help the weavers stand up for their own cause and the documentation of the loopholes of the government programmes will help put pressure on the government to review these.

All said, project K CALEEN has brought about some major changes in the lives of the weavers inflicted with debt and disease. The project has understood the need for participation of the beneficiaries in the project and has used their opinion to the maximum. The project meets all the standards that any project working on artisans in a community should. With its presence K CALEEN has not just made advances on the ground in implementing better conditions but has also instilled a strong sense of hope, dignity and strength among the weavers.

Acronyms and Lexicon

K CALEEN	Kashmiri Carpets for Artisans' Livelihood Enhancement and Empowerment Needs
FLC	Functional Literacy Center
APDC	Artisan Production and Development Center
CWG	Carpet Weaver Group
SHG	Self Help Group
SC	Surveillance Committee
SRC	State Resource Cell
IICT	Indian Institute of Carpet Technology
Kaleen baaf	Carpet weaver (in kashmiri)
Wosta/wostakaar	Master weaver/contractor
Taalim	The design written on paper that guides a weaver through the process of weaving
Waan	Carpet weaving loom
Nov Waan	Modern Loom
18 taar waar	18*18 knottage; the standard and acceptable quality for a carpet in the market
Panja, sambal, khood, gote, phaharwaav	The tools used in carpet weaving for, tightening a layer, weaving, cutting the knots and sharpening other tools.
Sooti	Staple; a kind of textile used in waving which causes respiratory issues among weavers
Hamdan, Kashan, Dabbaar	Names of designs used on carpets. Among these Kashan and Hamdaan are intricate designs
Inder	Spinning wheel used to spool the threads for weaving
Shia	A school of thought among Muslims; a minority in within the majority
Waethpood	Woof thread



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