

# The Role of NGOs in Supporting Women Artisans of Zardozi Craft in Agra

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## Abstract

Zardozi craft, a traditional form of embroidery utilizing gold and silver threads, holds significant cultural importance in India. Despite its rich heritage, women artisans involved in this craft face numerous challenges, including socio-economic marginalization, limited market access, and inadequate skill development opportunities. This study examines the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in empowering these women artisans through various interventions. A mixed-method approach was employed, encompassing qualitative interviews and quantitative data analysis conducted in Tajganj, Agra district, Uttar Pradesh. The findings indicate that NGOs play a pivotal role in enhancing the artisans' skills, providing financial support, and facilitating better market access, thereby improving their livelihoods and preserving the traditional Zardozi craft. The study underscores the need for sustained and comprehensive support from NGOs and policymakers to ensure the continued empowerment of women artisans in the Zardozi industry.

**Keywords:** 1. Zardozi Craft, 2. Women Artisans, 3. NGOs, 4. Skill Development, 5. Market Access and Financial Support.

## 1. Introduction

Zardozi embroidery, an intricate art form involving gold and silver threads, has been an integral part of India's cultural and artistic heritage for centuries. Originating in the royal courts, this craft has traditionally been practiced by skilled artisans, with techniques and designs passed down through generations. In recent decades, women have increasingly become involved in Zardozi work, contributing significantly to the preservation and evolution of this art form.

Despite their crucial role, women artisans often face numerous challenges that hinder their socio-economic advancement and the sustainable development of the craft. These challenges include socio-economic marginalization, limited access to markets, inadequate skill development opportunities, and lack of financial support. Such obstacles not only affect the livelihoods of the artisans but also threaten the continuity and vitality of the Zardozi tradition.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as key stakeholders in addressing these challenges by implementing various initiatives aimed at empowering women artisans. Through skill development programs, market linkage initiatives, financial support, and advocacy efforts, NGOs strive to enhance the artisans' capabilities and improve their quality of life.

## Objectives of the Study

- To identify and analyze the challenges faced by women artisans engaged in Zardozi craft.
- To Connecting artisans with NGOs for their better development.
- To examine the role of NGOs in providing support through skill development, market access, and financial assistance to these artisans.
- To evaluate the impact of interventions on the socio-economic status of women artisans and the preservation of the Zardozi craft.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. Women's Involvement in Zardozi Craft

Historically, Zardozi embroidery was predominantly practiced by male artisans within royal workshops, symbolizing luxury and opulence (Bhatnagar, 2005). Economic transformations and social changes have led to increased participation of women, particularly in regions such as Lucknow, Varanasi, Bareilly, and Agra. Women's involvement has been instrumental in sustaining the craft; however, they continue to face disparities in wages, recognition, and access to resources (Jain, 2012).

The transition of Zardozi from royal patronage to commercial markets has created both opportunities and challenges. While demand has expanded, artisans, especially women, often lack the necessary support systems to compete effectively, leading to exploitation and economic instability (Dhamija, 2004).

### 2.2. Challenges Faced by Women Artisans

Several studies have highlighted the multifaceted challenges confronted by women in the Zardozi industry:

- **Socio-Economic Marginalization:** Women artisans typically belong to economically disadvantaged backgrounds with limited access to education and healthcare, restricting their opportunities for advancement (Waghmare, 2016).
- **Limited Market Access:** Traditional artisans often rely on intermediaries to sell their products, resulting in unfair compensation and exploitation. Lack of direct market access hampers their ability to secure better profits and recognition (Kumar, 1999).
- **Inadequate Skill Development:** While artisans inherit traditional skills, they often lack exposure to contemporary designs and techniques necessary to meet evolving market demands, leading to reduced competitiveness (UNESCO, 2012).
- **Financial Constraints:** Limited access to credit and financial services prevents artisans from investing in quality materials and expanding their businesses, perpetuating cycles of poverty (Jain, 2012).

### 2.3. Role of NGOs in Empowering Women Artisans

NGOs have been proactive in implementing programs to address the aforementioned challenges:

- **SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association):** SEWA has adopted a holistic approach by providing training, facilitating market linkages, and offering financial services to women artisans. Their initiatives have resulted in improved incomes, enhanced skills, and greater social empowerment (SEWA, 2020).
- **Dastkar:** Focused on preserving traditional crafts, Dastkar organizes design workshops, exhibitions, and fairs that connect artisans directly with consumers. This exposure has increased demand for Zardozi products and improved the economic conditions of artisans (Dastkar, 2021).

These organizations demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted interventions in uplifting women artisans and sustaining traditional crafts.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods to comprehensively understand the role of NGOs in supporting women artisans of Zardozi craft.

#### 3.1. Study Area

The research was conducted in Tajganj, a locality in the Agra district of Uttar Pradesh, known for its rich tradition of Zardozi embroidery. The area hosts a significant population of women artisans engaged in this craft.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

- **Qualitative Data:** In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with women artisans, NGO representatives, and other stakeholders. These interactions aimed to capture personal experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding NGO interventions.
- **Quantitative Data:** Surveys were administered to a sample of 100 women artisans to gather data on socio-economic status, income levels, skill proficiency, and access to markets before and after NGO involvement.

#### 3.3. Sampling Technique

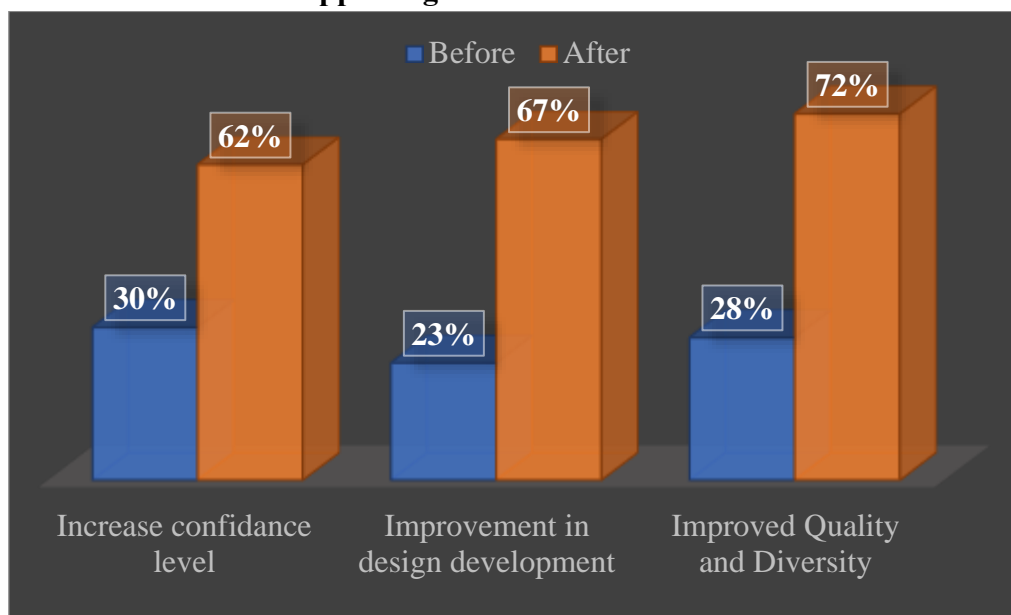
Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who have directly benefited from NGO programs, ensuring relevant and insightful data.

#### 3.4. Data Analysis

- **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis was conducted to identify common patterns and insights from interviews and discussions.
- **Quantitative Data:** Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics and paired t-tests, were utilized to measure changes in income, skill levels, and market access resulting from NGO interventions.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Impact of intervention after supporting NGO



**Figure 1**

- All three indicators show significant improvement after the intervention.
- The **biggest improvement** was in "Improved Quality and Diversity" (from 28% to 72%).

- The **smallest initial value** was in "Improvement in design development" at 23%, but it rose substantially to 67%.
- Each category almost **doubled or more** in percentage after the intervention.

#### 4.1.1. Skill Development

Researcher have conducted extensive training programs with the help of NGO to focusing on enhancing traditional embroidery techniques and introducing modern designs. The study found that:

- **Improved Quality and Diversity:** Post-training, artisans demonstrated significant improvement in the quality of their work and the ability to produce diverse designs appealing to contemporary markets.
- **Increased Confidence:** Skill enhancement led to increased self-confidence among artisans, encouraging them to take on more complex projects and pursue leadership roles within their communities.

These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of skill development in artisan empowerment (Dhamija, 2004).

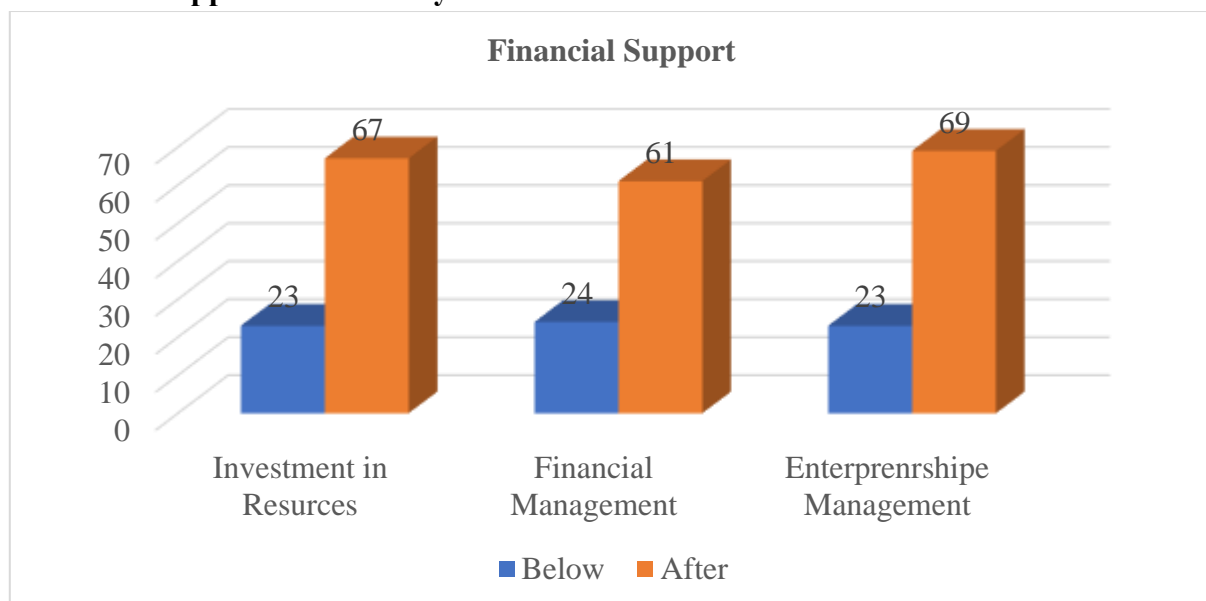
#### 4.1.2. Market Access Enhancement

Through exhibitions, fairs, and online platforms facilitated by NGOs, artisans gained direct access to national and international markets:

- **Increased Earnings:** Artisans reported an average income increase of 40% after participating in NGO-led market initiatives.
- **Elimination of Middlemen:** Direct sales opportunities reduced dependency on intermediaries, ensuring fair compensation for the artisans' work.
- **Brand Recognition:** Participation in prominent events elevated the profile of both the artisans and the Zardozi craft, attracting new customer segments.

These outcomes underscore the critical role of market access in achieving economic sustainability for traditional artisans (Waghmare, 2016).

#### 4.1.3. Financial Support and Literacy



**Figure 2**

- **Investment in Resources:** 67% access to affordable credit enabled artisans to purchase high-quality materials and tools, enhancing productivity and product quality.

- **Financial Management:** Training in budgeting and savings 61% improved the artisans' ability to manage finances effectively, leading to greater economic stability.
- **Entrepreneurship Development:** 69% members stated that they get financial support to establish their own small businesses and contributing to community economic development.

These interventions demonstrate the multifaceted benefits of financial empowerment initiatives (Jain, 2012).

#### 4.2. Socio-Economic Empowerment

Beyond economic benefits, NGO interventions contributed to broader socio-economic empowerment:

- **Improved Social Status:** Enhanced income and recognition elevated the social standing of women artisans within their families and communities.
- **Gender Equality:** Empowerment initiatives challenged traditional gender roles, promoting greater gender equality and autonomy for women.
- **Community Development:** The collective success of artisans fostered community cohesion and inspired others to pursue skill development opportunities.

These findings highlight the transformative potential of targeted support programs in promoting inclusive development (SEWA, 2020).

#### 4.3. Preservation and Innovation of Zardozi Craft

NGOs played a crucial role in preserving the traditional essence of Zardozi while fostering innovation:

- **Revival of Traditional Techniques:** Training programs emphasized the importance of traditional methods, ensuring their continuation and appreciation.
- **Integration of Modern Designs:** Exposure to contemporary trends enabled artisans to innovate, making Zardozi products more relevant and appealing to modern consumers.
- **Sustainable Practices:** NGOs promoted sustainable sourcing of materials and environmentally friendly production processes, aligning the craft with global sustainability standards.

These efforts contribute significantly to the resilience and evolution of the Zardozi craft in the modern era (UNESCO, 2012).

#### 5. Conclusion

The study illustrates that NGOs are instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by women artisans in the Zardozi craft industry. Through comprehensive programs encompassing skill development, market access, financial support, and advocacy, NGOs have significantly improved the socio-economic conditions of these artisans. The interventions have not only enhanced individual livelihoods but also contributed to the preservation and modernization of a valuable cultural heritage.

For sustained impact, it is essential that such support is continuous and adaptive to evolving challenges. Collaboration between NGOs, government agencies, and private sectors can further amplify these efforts, ensuring that women artisans receive the recognition, support, and opportunities necessary to thrive. Policymakers should consider integrating successful NGO strategies into broader development programs to promote inclusive and sustainable growth within traditional craft sectors.

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