

CASE STUDY 3

Women's Enterprise Development. Potters' Colony Hastal Village, New Delhi, India.



INDUSTRY: Micro-enterprise development

THE PROJECT: Partnership between Deakin University and Kalakar Artists Trust

THE BACKGROUND:

In 2001 Professor Joe Remenyi (Head of Deakin University Studies for Community and International Development and a specialist in micro-enterprise) was invited to send a colleague to India who could undertake a project in partnership with Kalakar Artists Trust to create enterprises for impoverished women in a potters' slum. The potters' colony was populated by people who had moved to Delhi over a twenty year period, fleeing their homelands in Rajasthan due to poverty and lack of food.

The Kalakar Trust (i.e. Artists' Trust) is a non-profit organisation working towards the improvement of the lives of poor artists in Delhi's slums. Mrs. Sterre Sharma and her sister Dr. Mei Zegers, founded the Trust in 1992. The aim of the Trust in India is to keep the traditional arts of artist communities alive by providing them with services to meet the basic needs they have identified.

www.kalakartrust.org/index.htm

The potters' colony was located in the Hastal Village in the area known as Uttam Nagar, approximately ten kilometres from the centre of Delhi.

At the time that Professor Remenyi received the invitation, Jennifer was undertaking her Masters in Community and International Development with Deakin University, and the focus of her research interest was Culture and Development. Due to Jennifer's experience working with communities to develop enterprises, and her strong interest and belief in cultural identity and the important role it plays in sustaining and strengthening communities, Professor Remenyi asked Jennifer if she would undertake the opportunity to assist the women and the Trust and utilise participatory methods (PRA) of Development.

Jennifer travelled to Delhi with the intention of spending two months working with the women of the potters' colony to map their local assets and opportunities. The Kalakar Artists Trust would provide accommodation, a vehicle and a local social worker to support her in the work, which would be undertaken in collaboration with the Trust.

OBJECTIVES:

The objective of this project was to find a way to create new enterprises for the women of the potter's colony, and to do so using a participatory framework. The intention was for all parties involved to utilise participatory mapping techniques to identify the available resources of the colony and to investigate what it was the women wanted to achieve.

THE SITUATION:

Initially Jennifer had to negotiate with the men of the village before she could meet with the women, as they wanted to know in detail what would occur before they would allow it. At the time of Jennifer's visit the women were only responsible for the labour-intensive work of managing the raw resources (moving and sifting mounds of clay), however after the mapping methods had been facilitated it became known that women aspired to develop businesses for themselves. The women considered that they could add value to the pots already created by the men, by decorating the simple and unadorned pots in a way that could create a new niche enterprise, and new markets, for them. The pots were very basic and used for religious purposes. The women had extremely limited resources available to them so working with what was available would make a lot of sense unfortunately the women had no skills in applying design to the pots, they had tried on several occasions and they showed Jennifer the results which they were disappointed with as they did not have the right materials or skills to achieve what they hoped to.

After getting to know the women and their story, it became apparent that they wanted to express themselves culturally; that they wanted to create something that represented their Rajasthan heritage. There were many potters in Delhi, but the women wanted to use their resources to create a new product with its own identity. The women also expressed a sense of loss and grief over their displacement from their traditional environment.

CHALLENGES:

There were two aspects of the project that needed to be achieved. One was to find a way to deliver the technical skills in pottery decoration (surface design, glazes etc.) to the women, and the second aspect was to find a way to reconnect the women to their land of origin so they could draw the physical and spiritual inspiration they needed to embellish their pots.

Another challenge went unnoticed initially, Jennifer had not realised at the time that the different castes in India can impact projects, depending on who is undertaking what role. Once realised Jennifer later reflected on the power plays that she saw frequently during her many years of working with Australian Indigenous communities and the impact they too had on projects.

"Every aspect of a potter's life contributes to his identification and treatment within society" (Huylar, 1996, p.28)

The women therefore were not just coping with being the less empowered gender in their small village society, they also were marginalised by their caste and how society viewed them, and they were also displaced people removed from their traditional environments and whatever recognition or respect that afforded them. In a 'development' context these issues explained a lot about these women and their difficulties in becoming engaged or empowered.

OUTCOMES:

The social worker appointed by Kalakar Trust and Jennifer went to explore any opportunities to market the women's potential new products at the local craft market Dili Haart and reported back to the women that this was a potentially good market, we also visited the Government craft body to investigate possible funding for the women to receive training. Jennifer then went alone to seek out the professional potting association in Delhi, Delhi Blue Pottery Trust, to see what was possible. However there is quite a divide between what is seen to be the industry of professional arts potters and the industry of the lower caste potting societies, the Trust was established for the former.

On her return to Australia Jennifer initially attempted to build a partnership with an Australian university school of Arts (Pottery), which would have provided the opportunity for students to work with the women to teach them the technical skills – a valuable two-way learning opportunity. This did not eventuate because, at the time, Jennifer's skills in developing partnerships were underdeveloped – lessons that were never forgotten or repeated. She approached the university with a priority of benefitting the impoverished women, rather than emphasising how the partnership would benefit the university.

Jennifer then approached Sandra Bowkett, a professional potter in Australia who knew of Jennifer's project and had expressed an interest in becoming involved as she recognised the project's value. Once briefed on the project and the intention of creating new products and markets for the women, Sandra travelled alone to India to meet the women and deliver the training in surface design that they desired in the hope of creating their new products.

Sandra embraced the opportunity and once there also engaged with other professional potters in India. This eventually led to many cultural exchange opportunities, both in India and Australia. This was indeed a great outcome for the potters involved and a lot of good things came from what developed as can be seen on Sandra's website, and a long association ensued for Sandra. <http://www.sandrabowkett.com/index.htm>



1. Typical housing. 2. Map of Delhi. 3. Red Fort Panel. 4. Typical street. 5. Pottery. 6. Red Fort, Old Delhi. 7. Local industry – rag pickers. 8. PRA Mapping, Hastal Village. 9. Vimia and Kailashi and kids, Potters' Colony, Delhi. 10. Rajasthan women. 11. Local industry – rickshaw puller.