

Impact Reporting

The Culture and Conflict Project

# PAKISTAN



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*Culture and Conflict Project*

## **Background**

PAIMAN Alumni Trust has played a vital role as one of the key implementers in the Gender Justice and Security Hub's Culture and Conflict project within Pakistan. Focusing its efforts on artisans in Peshawar, Charsadda, and Swat, PAIMAN has chosen to work in regions that have been conflict-prone and continue to grapple with the aftermath of violent extremism. These areas have experienced significant challenges, including ongoing military operations aimed at stabilizing the region.

By engaging with craft persons in these conflict-affected regions, PAIMAN aims to promote economic opportunities, preserve cultural traditions, and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. The organization's commitment to these communities reflects a broader mission to address the multifaceted issues surrounding conflict, security, and gender equality in Pakistan.

The conflict in KP has had a profound on craftswomen in Swat and Charsadda. These effects have proven to be very negative and far-reaching, thereby impacting various aspects of their lives and livelihoods.

Conflict disrupts local economies, leading to a loss of income for craftswomen/persons. Furthermore tourism, which had been a significant source of income for artisans, was affected severely and dwindled down to no tourism.

In such volatile and uncertain conditions access to markets was severely limited due to security concerns and transportation disruptions, made it difficult for craftswomen to sell their products.

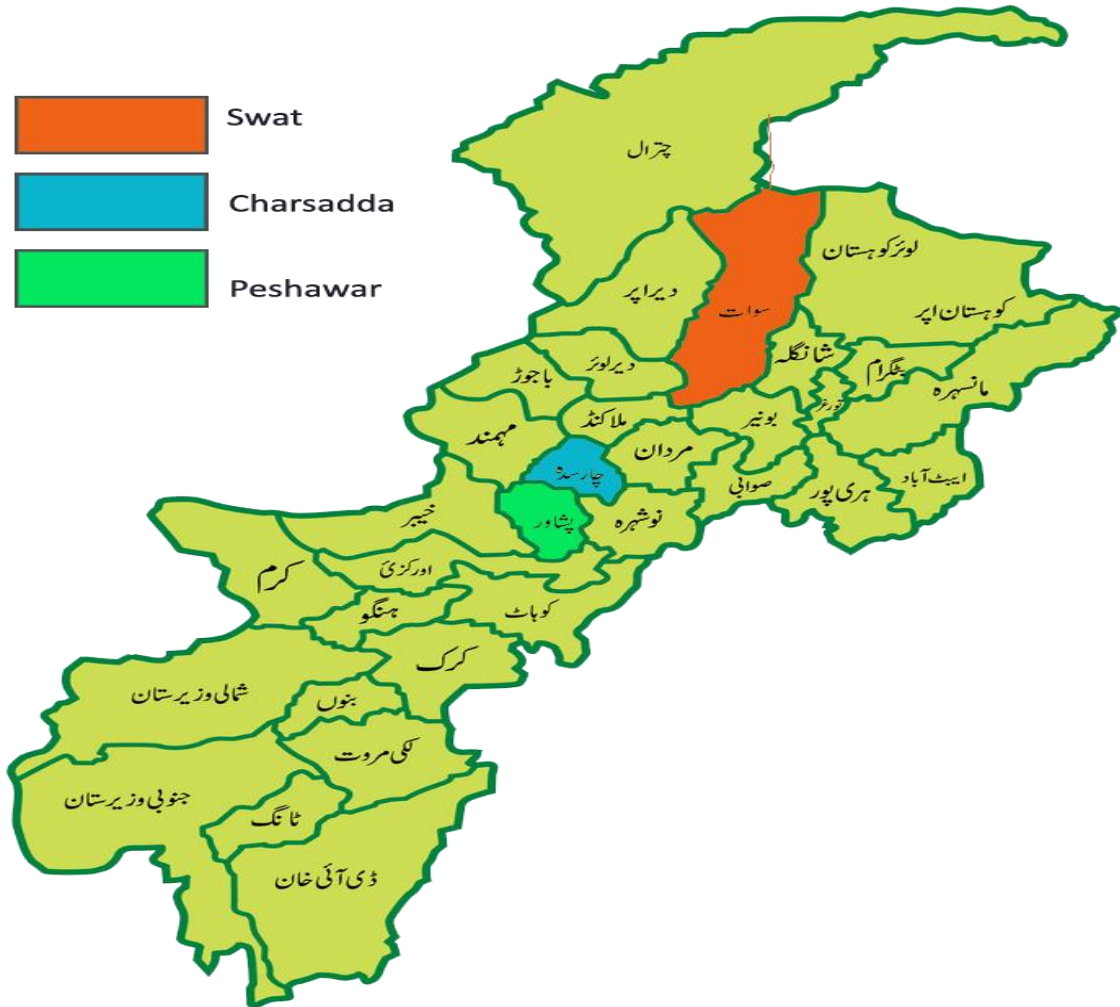
The craftswomen faced physical threats and violence during the extremist group's takeover of Swat and during and after the military operation while women in Charsadda have to deal with violent extremism and violent extremist groups on daily basis. In fact prolonged conflict led to stress, anxiety, and trauma, affecting the mental health of craftswomen and their families.

In such circumstances the craftswomen had very limited access to resources such as raw materials and financial support, making it challenging to sustain their craft businesses.

Owing to the multiple issues faced by crafts women, the Gender Justice and Security Hub's Culture and Conflict project intervention was a wonderful effort to mitigate these negative impacts on craftswomen in Swat and Charsadda. The project basically focused on access to economic opportunities and initiatives aimed at preserving traditional crafts and cultural heritage.

## Location/Mapping of groups

The geographical location of the Gender Justice and Security Hub’s Culture and Conflict project are the selected districts in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.



Map of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa with location of crafts person’s groups

**Peshawar:** Three Pukhtun, two Hindko speaking Muslim women and two Christian women doing embroidery on stroller/dopattas

**Charsadda:** Six Pukhtun women doing embroidery on tunics, shirts. Two Pukhtun women and two men making organic khaddar on handloom

**Swat:**Eight Pukhtun women doing ASTARI (Swati) embroidery on shawls

## Challenges

1. COVID 19, acts of violent extremism including suicidal attacks, bomb blasts, political instability and flood remain the main challenges during the lifetime of the project. Women access to material and market was badly affected by these happenings.
2. The institutional ecosystem for the craft sector in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa comprises a wide range of agencies and organizations. The governance of its diverse components is spread over several provincial departments while implemental players primarily include NGOs, market organizations, financial agencies, and social enterprises. The challenge for the sector is to achieve convergence of policies and schemes to optimize production and marketing in a manner that will benefit the most vulnerable members of the value chain, i.e. the craft persons and their families. It is also important to achieve scale and sustainability in craft production in order to attain a stable market environment with its related fields of the fiscal regime and quality control.
3. Craftswomen are usually restricted to their homes and access to markets to sell their products is difficult.
4. Craft persons face significant challenges in accessing new skills, designs, technology, and markets, which ultimately hinder their professional growth.
5. Craftswomen from rural areas and small towns don't get opportunities as well permission to participate in trainings that are usually held in distant cities.

## Impact Meetings

PAIMAN team has held several meetings with various stakeholders in the last five years of the project. The nature and purpose of each meeting was different. Details are as follows:

## Government Departments

Pakistan is a federal parliamentary republic. Powers are shared between the Federal government, regional territories and the provinces. All of Pakistan's provinces and territories are subdivided into divisions, which are further subdivided into districts, and then tehsils, which are again further subdivided into union councils. PAIMAN has been interacting with provincial and district levels authorities and departments of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province.

### **Social Welfare, Special Education & Women Empowerment Department, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (SWDKP)**

PAIMAN signed Memorandum of understanding with SWDKP regarding public-private partnership for training, marketing and collaboration. Under this MOU PAIMAN trained 26 women trainers of 26 SWDKP vocational Centers located in 21 districts across Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. PAIMAN Trainers after relieving training from Neelam and Puish in Sri Lanka trained these women in modification of their product as per market requirements, digital literacy and formation of Self Help groups.

The impact of this initiative is that out of 21 dormant Vocational Training institute of SWDKP, 16 have become very active and started imparting the newly learned skills to women trainees. Besides, this public-private partnership has opened doors for further collaboration and networking. A joint exhibition of PAIMAN's crafts persons and SWDKP vocational Centers is being planned for February 2024.

### **Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA)**

PAIMAN Team held two meetings with directors and staff of TEVTA in Charsadda and Swat with a purpose to share Culture and Conflict project details and seek opportunities for collaboration.

### **The Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KP-CTA)**

Held discussions with Riaz Khan, Director Culture Khyber Pukhtunkhwaregarding joint exhibitions at various national levels fairs. The first of this exhibition was held in March 2023 at LokVirsa where products of PAIMAN Crafts person were displayed. Riaz Khan has requested PAIMAN to train their 20 male female youth craft persons as master trainers in modification of

cultural and traditional handicrafts as per market requirements. PAIMAN also has entered into an agreement with Cultural department to help displaced craftswomen from merged districts of Kurram and Orakzai in preservation and modification of their traditional crafts.

### **Handicrafts Association of Pakistan - HAP**

PAIMAN Team met Miss Maryam Iqbal, Chairperson HAP and shared information about culture and craft project as well as discussed possible ways of collaboration. Both have agreed to promote Pakistani handicrafts abroad and had a meeting with Ambassador of Turkey in Islamabad in this regard.

### **Women Chambers of Commerce**

PAIMAN team has been regularly interacting with Women Chamber of Commerce of Rawalpindi, Mardan, Charsadda and Peshawar. PAIMAN invited Azra Jamshed, President Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Peshawar (WCCIP), Frahat Yasin Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Charsadda (WCCIC), Aqeela Sumbal, President Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mardan (WCCIM) and Saima Khalid, member of Women Chamber of Commerce Rawalpindi for a discussion and future collaboration.

The impact of this collaboration is that two of the craftswomen have started providing embroidered products to two members of WCCIP. Aqeela Sumbal of WCCIM has asked PAIMAN to enter into a strategic partnership with WCCIM and have planned a joint exhibition in Mardan in February. Besides, entrepreneurial opportunities, all craftswomen have found a forum to voice their concern, seek assistance, develop linkages and promote their product.

### **Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP)**

PAIMAN team held series of meetings with Director General gender empowerment and directors international trade of TDAP and entered into strategic public private partnership. Under this partnership TDAP will train PAIMAN entrepreneurs in e-marketing, branding, use of social media for promotion of business and provide PAIMAN with opportunities for linkages development with key stakeholders and exhibitions in Pakistan and abroad. The first exhibition

in this regard was held in Lahore where shawls, khaddar and embroidered apparels were exhibited.

### **Swat Handloom Industry**

PAIMAN's Executive Director, Mossarat Qadeem, met with Mr. Abdul Ghaffar, a representative of the Swat Handloom Industry. The focus of their discussion revolved around enhancing the quality of traditional crafts produced in Swat and the potential for introducing these crafts into Western markets.

During this conversation, Mossarat Qadeem proposed a collaborative initiative to uplift the local artisans' skills. She suggested that PAIMAN could facilitate training sessions for Swat's craftsmen, leveraging the expertise of PAIMAN's trained artisans. These training programs would empower the local artisans to embrace new color palettes and abstract designs, aligning their creations with the preferences of Western customers.

By bridging the gap between traditional craftsmanship and contemporary market demands, this collaborative effort aimed to not only preserve Swat's rich heritage but also open new avenues for economic growth and cultural exchange. The meeting marked the beginning of a promising partnership that had the potential to empower local artisans and promote Swat's crafts on a global scale.

## **PAIMAN OUTPUT**

### **1. Training on Color and Design**

PAIMAN selected four skilled crafts persons from Peshawar, Charsadda and Swat to Sri Lanka for specialized training in color and design. This was a significant step towards expanding their horizons and meeting the demands of both local and Western markets. This initiative underscores PAIMAN's commitment to enhancing the quality and marketability of their craftwork.

Color and design play pivotal roles in the appeal of handmade crafts, and by investing in this training, PAIMAN aimed to infuse fresh creativity and innovation into the crafts produced by these artisans.

By equipping these artisans with new skills, PAIMAN not only helped them refine their craft but also ensured that they are able cater to the discerning tastes of Western markets. This move aligns with the global trend of appreciating and supporting traditional and handmade products. The artisans can bring back their newfound expertise to their communities in Peshawar, Charsadda and Swat, potentially revitalizing local craftsmanship and contributing to economic development.

In essence, PAIMAN's investment in the training of these craftspeople represents a valuable opportunity for skill development, cultural exchange, and market expansion, fostering a brighter future for these artisans and their communities.

*I learnt how to improve my products using the latest design trends, eye-catching colour combinations and maintaining the quality of my products.*

Zara

## 2. Training on Digital Marketing

Furthermore, to empower the craftspeople to venture into markets beyond their hometowns, an additional training program on digital marketing was thoughtfully organized for them. This comprehensive training equipped the participants with the skills and knowledge needed to tap into the vast potential of online commerce and leverage the power of social media for marketing their exquisite handmade products.

In today's interconnected world, the ability to navigate e-commerce platforms and effectively utilize social media has become imperative for artisans. The training not only exposed them to the intricacies of online marketplaces but also provided insights into crafting compelling product descriptions, captivating visuals, and engaging content to attract a global audience.



The training covered a wide range of essential topics, including:

1. **Introduction to Digital Marketing:** Providing a foundational understanding of digital marketing, its numerous benefits, and practical applications.
2. **Company Account Setup:** Guiding participants through the process of creating and managing company accounts on various digital platforms.
3. **Product Presentation:** Teaching trainees how to effectively showcase products by uploading images, adding detailed descriptions, and crafting engaging social media posts.
4. **Mobile Accessibility:** Demonstrating how to handle digital marketing accounts using mobile devices for greater accessibility and convenience.
5. **Customer Interaction:** Equipping participants with the skills to efficiently respond to customer inquiries and feedback.

The training approach was highly interactive, incorporating hands-on activities that allowed trainees to directly apply what they learned. Practical exercises were instrumental in ensuring a thorough comprehension of the training content.

Moreover, the program delved into advanced topics, including Facebook and Instagram ad campaigns, the creation of YouTube and TikTok channels, and effective use of these platforms. These advanced skills were taught to enable participants to reach a broader online audience, engage potential customers, and forge meaningful connections.

Beyond digital marketing techniques, the training aimed to empower trainees with comprehensive knowledge and skills for building and managing successful businesses. Trainees learned the art of brand development; including identifying their target audience and crafting compelling brand narratives.

The trainer provided valuable insights into successful business practices and equipped participants with the tools and knowledge required to design distinctive brand logos. Additionally, trainees were guided in establishing their individual social media pages and devising relevant hash tags to enhance their online visibility.

Throughout the training, participants were encouraged to articulate their company's vision in their own words, fostering a deep sense of ownership and creativity.

In conclusion, the digital literacy and marketing training program was designed to empower Afghan women with the knowledge and skills needed to establish and grow their businesses successfully. It aimed to equip them not only with digital marketing expertise but also with the ability to craft compelling brand stories, connect with customers, and make a meaningful impact in the digital marketplace.

With this newfound expertise, these artisans are now poised to transcend geographical boundaries and reach a broader customer base, including those in Western markets. This not only augments their income potential but also preserves and promotes their traditional crafts on a global scale. It's a testament to PAIMAN's commitment to fostering sustainable livelihoods and preserving cultural heritage while embracing the opportunities presented by the digital age.

### **3. Training on Entrepreneurship and Business Development**

Taking their holistic development a step further, the four craftspersons were also provided with training in entrepreneurship and business development. This aspect of their education aimed to empower them not only as skilled artisans but also as budding business owners. It marked a transformative journey from being artisans to becoming self-reliant entrepreneurs.

The training curriculum encompassed a comprehensive range of topics, designed to provide the women with a well-rounded understanding of entrepreneurship and business development.

**Day 1:** The training commenced with an introduction to entrepreneurship, defining what it means to be an entrepreneur, and elucidating the benefits of entrepreneurship. The participants delved into developing a business idea, crafting a mission statement, conducting needs analysis, gathering essential information, identifying target markets, and rigorously testing their business concepts.

**Day 2:** The focus shifted to the practicalities of setting up a business, creating a comprehensive business plan, securing necessary financing, and ultimately establishing an online retail store.

**Day 3:** The training delved deeper into the intricacies of running a business, including pricing strategies, managing finances, collaborating with strategic partners or vendors, working alongside support staff, and exploring avenues for business expansion.

**Day 4:** Participants were immersed in the world of marketing, learning about various marketing tools, techniques, and community outreach strategies to effectively promote their businesses.

**Day 5:** The training culminated with insights into customer engagement, teaching the women how to interact with clients and customers, sell their services, and implement effective customer service protocols.

This intensive training not only provided the women with theoretical knowledge but also offered practical insights and strategies to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship successfully.

With the knowledge gained from this training, these artisans are now well-prepared to launch and manage their small business initiatives. They have learned the intricacies of business planning, financial management, market analysis, and customer engagement. This newfound skill set not only enables them to create and sell their own products but also allows them to retain the profits generated from their sales.

This transition from craftspeople to business owners has not only boosted their income potential but also instilled a sense of self-sufficiency and ownership over their work. They are now better positioned to market their unique handmade products, both locally and internationally, ensuring the preservation and continued growth of their traditional crafts while contributing to economic development in their communities.

#### **4. Linkages Development with Financial Entities**

Recognizing the crucial role that seed funding plays in kickstarting small business enterprises, PAIMAN took proactive steps to empower its artisans. They arranged for officials from NRSP Bank, a prominent microfinance institution, to provide valuable insights into accessing government schemes and funds available to support start-ups. This session not only informed the crafters about financial resources but also shed light on the process of securing microfinance.



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In addition to NRSP Bank, PAIMAN invited representatives from Kashf Foundation, another notable microfinance entity, to share their expertise. This dual perspective allowed the crafters to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various options at their disposal for securing financial assistance to launch their businesses.

The PAIMAN team also conducted meetings with First Women Bank to gain insights into the process of opening a group bank account and accessing streamlined procedures for obtaining easy loans. These discussions aimed to facilitate the crafters financial empowerment, fostering a greater understanding of financial services and promoting economic independence among them. Collaborating with First Women Bank underscores PAIMAN's commitment to empowering it's crafts persons through access to essential financial resources and knowledge.

Furthermore, recognizing the importance of mentorship and real-world guidance, PAIMAN facilitated a meeting between the crafters and members of Women Chamber of Commerce, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa as well influential and seasoned women entrepreneur. This interaction provided the crafters with invaluable insights into the challenges they might encounter in their entrepreneurial journey. Learning from businesswomen who has successfully navigated the complexities of business was an inspiring and educational experience, equipping the crafters with practical knowledge and motivation.

In sum, PAIMAN's holistic approach not only provided artisans with creative skills but also empowered them with the knowledge and support needed to transform their skills into viable and sustainable businesses. These initiatives reflect PAIMAN's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and economic independence within its community.

## **IMPACT**

### **Economic Impact**

The impact of PAIMAN Alumni Trust's initiatives on the craftspeople from Peshawar, Charsadda, and Swat is profound and multifaceted. Beyond the acquisition of technical skills in color, design, entrepreneurship, and business development, these artisans have undergone a profound transformation in their personal and professional lives.

ArifUllah's journey from a skilled khaddar weaver in Charsadda to an innovative textile artisan gained momentum following his participation in a transformative training program in Sri Lanka. Equipped with a repertoire of fresh weaving techniques, he set out to redefine khaddar cloth production by infusing it with intricate, contemporary designs.

Arif's dedication and craftsmanship shone through in his creations, impressing the local vendors with their unique appeal. The response was overwhelmingly positive, as these vendors recognized the potential of this innovative weave. Encouraged by their enthusiasm, they eagerly placed orders for more khaddar fabric featuring Arif's inventive techniques.

This success story not only highlighted ArifUllah's talent but also served as a testament to the transformative power of skill enhancement programs. Such initiatives not only empower artisans to blend tradition with innovation but also contribute to the economic growth of their communities, paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future for skilled artisans like Arif.

First and foremost, the training programs have empowered these craftspersons with newfound confidence. They now possess the self-assurance to make informed decisions aimed at improving their craft, whether it be through innovative patterns, captivating designs, or more harmonious color schemes. This heightened self-confidence has had a ripple effect, strengthening their overall agency and power as craftspeople. They approach their work with a renewed sense of purpose and creativity, which not only elevates the quality of their products but also bolsters their reputation as skilled artisans.

One of the most tangible outcomes of their training is their economic empowerment. As they've started earning a sustainable income from their craftwork, their role within their households and communities has undergone a significant shift. Financial independence has not only given them more control and influence over household decisions but has also elevated their status within the community. Their newfound financial stability has augmented their decision-making power, allowing them to participate more actively in community matters, thereby contributing to their community's development.

The impact of these training initiatives extends to their business practices as well. With the knowledge and skills acquired, these craftspeople have expanded their horizons. They now have access to new and diverse markets, a vital component in today's interconnected world. What resonates most with them is the ability to access previously uncharted markets, including international ones. This exposure has broadened their perspectives, enabling them to explore new avenues for growth. They've adopted modern business strategies, which have transformed their local operations into globally competitive enterprises.

The crafts people's newfound access to international markets is a testament to the enhanced quality of their products. Their ability to confidently compete at the international level indicates a remarkable improvement in the craftsmanship and aesthetics of their creations. This not only opens doors to global recognition but also amplifies their earning potential, thereby further securing their financial independence.

### Social Impact

Furthermore, their association with PAIMAN has not only nurtured their professional growth but also catalyzed their emergence as community leaders. Empowered by the confidence instilled through economic empowerment, these craftspeople have assumed leadership roles within PAIMAN's existing community network. They have become voices of change, actively addressing critical social issues. Sheeba, one of the craftswomen, is a shining example of this leadership. She took it upon herself to raise awareness about 'Swara,' a deeply entrenched social issue. Her courage in speaking out demonstrates their evolving role as advocates for change and social progress, transcending their roles as mere craftspeople.

*'Swara,' a deeply troubling social practice, involves giving a girl to a grieving family as compensation for a murder. In this distressing custom, girls who become 'Swara' are subjected to severe mistreatment within their new households, particularly at the hands of their husbands and mothers-in-law. They are denied the respect and status that should come with the role of a daughter-in-law.*

*These girls endure constant emotional and physical abuse, often reminded that they are seen as the enemy's daughter, implying that their own parents deemed them expendable in exchange for*

*resolving a conflict. Their lives are marked by cruelty - beatings, starvation, grueling labor, and relentless humiliation. Despite the horrors they face, some may give birth to children in these dire circumstances, but their lack of skills and education often leaves them trapped in this cycle of suffering.*

*For these girls, daily life involves enduring physical violence, emotional torment, and the crushing weight of societal expectations. Their plight highlights the urgent need to address and eradicate such harmful customs and promote gender justice and equality.*

In essence, the impact of PAIMAN's initiatives has been transformative on multiple fronts. It has boosted their self-confidence, enhanced their economic independence, expanded their market

reach, and catalyzed their emergence as community leaders and advocates for social change. These craftspersons have not only improved their livelihoods but have also contributed positively to the betterment of their communities and the preservation of their cultural heritage. Hence as women these crafts persons are also making efforts for social change and advocating against heinous practices such as 'SWARA', child marriage etc.

The four craftspersons, who underwent training have not only benefited individually but have also catalyzed positive change within their communities. They've actively engaged with fellow crafters in their regions, forming and nurturing networks that have bolstered the entire community of artisans.

Six members of PAIMAN's Women TOLANA received training from Sheeba and PAIMAN's resource persons are now sharing marketing and networking skills with other craftswomen and guiding them on what could be improved linking them with markets in Charsadda and Dera Ismael Khan.

### **Cascading Knowledge and Skills**

By sharing the knowledge and skills they acquired during their training, these craftspeople have become conduits of empowerment. They've extended their expertise to others, providing training and guidance on innovative designs and captivating color schemes. This generous sharing of knowledge has created a cascading effect, empowering a broader spectrum of artisans within their networks. The 4 crafts persons on their return from Sri Lanka extended their expertise to 6

more crafts persons each. Their training focused on color palettes, design, patterns and schemes that appealed to western buyers and would have better acceptance in global online market places. The following case studies serve as concrete examples of our commitment and impact.

Some women have known these embroideries and crafts since childhood, while others have learned the skills just recently. But this doesn't matter: the most important thing is the feeling of community and support these women find in joint embroidery sessions. *While her husband jokingly calls these meetings "a sect," Khursheeda appreciates the support she gains from them. Neelam mentioned that a significant number of women began attending these sessions as a means of dealing with personal grief. Many of them expressed that they have successfully managed to divert their attention from stress and sorrow.*

This project has empowered women to improve their craft, increase their household income, and become socially active in addressing issues that affect them and promoting peace in their communities.

These women have become Change-makers who are seeking to create an impact that will affect the lives of generations to come. Women living in crisis like settings are particularly vulnerable, with fraying social fabrics and institutions surrounding them. Given the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills in craft production, craftswomen have not only achieved economic stability but also gained recognition as influential community leaders.

### **Eco-friendly Tote Bags**

Empowered by their newfound expertise in breaking away from conventional fabric norms, color palettes, and patterns, PAIMAN artisans embarked on a creative journey. Guiding new trainees, they delved into the realm of embroidery on jute, an unconventional choice that would prove to be transformative. With intricate floral embroidery in vibrant, eye-catching colors adorning the otherwise plain jute fabric, they crafted exquisite tote bags.

These eco-friendly masterpieces made their debut at the Lahore expo, where they quickly captured the attention and hearts of attendees. The bags, a fusion of traditional craft and contemporary design, resonated with environmentally conscious consumers seeking sustainable and fashionable alternatives. The embroidered jute tote bags became an instant sensation, selling rapidly and garnering praise for their artistic blend of heritage and innovation. This successful



venture not only showcased the artisans' adaptability but also demonstrated the market potential for eco-friendly and culturally rich creations.

*These women have become Change-makers who are seeking to create an impact that will affect the lives of generations to come.* Women living in crisis settings are particularly vulnerable, with fraying social fabrics and institutions surrounding them. Armed conflict, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies can significantly weaken a society's ability to protect women and girls from GBV, fueling a rise in intimate-partner violence, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking, and sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. Many armed groups use sexual violence as a tactic of war to advance military or political aims

### **AsmaShamshad**

*AsmaShamshad, a skilled craftswoman from Peshawar, has a unique and challenging story. Her life took a dramatic turn when she was struck by a stray bullet during a wedding celebration where young boys engaged in the traditional Pashtun practice of air firing. While air firing is a cultural expression of joy and victory, it has proven to be a dangerous tradition, causing injury and death to many. Asma's spinal cord was hit by a single bullet, resulting in a life-altering spinal injury that left her unable to walk. She now relies on a wheelchair for mobility.*

*Despite facing a life of dependency and dealing with the loss of her parents, Asma's determination to contribute to her family's finances remained unwavering. Drawing on the embroidery skills she learned from her mother as a young girl, Asma sought to use her craft to generate income. Her physical limitations prevented her from engaging directly with market vendors, but she began taking orders from women in her neighborhood and other acquaintances. Initially, her orders were limited, and her income was meager.*

*However, Asma's life took a positive turn when Madame Zara, one of PAIMAN's craftswoman in Conflict and Culture project recognized her potential and welcomed her into her trainees' team. Zara trained her in color scheming, designing as per market requirements, linkages development and marketing skills. Asma began to receive more orders, keeping her consistently busy with her craft. Notably, her embroidery work gained finesse and sophistication.*

*Today, Asma no longer considers herself a burden on her family. Instead, she takes pride in being a contributing member, both financially and creatively. Her journey is a testament to the transformative power of skill development, mentorship, and determination in the face of*

*adversity.*

Shehnaz's life took a difficult turn after her husband's passing, leaving her with three children to support. To make ends meet, she undertook various odd jobs such as running a small candy and snack shop from her home and working as a maid in households. Despite her relentless efforts, her earnings were insufficient to provide her children with a decent life.

Residing in a close-knit neighborhood of cloth weavers, Shehnaz turned to one of her neighbors for help. Small towns often embody a spirit of generosity, and her neighbor, despite their own modest means, agreed to teach her the art of weaving cloth. Over three years, Shehnaz honed her weaving skills alongside her other jobs.

After mastering the craft, she used her savings, including the proceeds from selling some personal jewelry, to purchase a handloom and weaving equipment. With determination, she established her weaving setup at home and began producing khaddar fabric. She sold her woven cloth to local vendors, ensuring that her children received quality education and lived a respectable life.

However, her income saw a significant boost when she joined Arif's network. Recognizing that fulfilling large Khamta (Khaddar) orders required the combined efforts of multiple vendors, Arif efficiently coordinated his network to meet these demands. Shehnaz's participation in this network not only increased her income manifold but also exemplified the power of collaboration and community support in uplifting disadvantaged artisans and preserving traditional crafts. She has become one of PAIMAN Women TOLANAs leading community leader who raised voice on issues affecting women and girls and advocates for women protection, resolves community feuds, mobilizes women to participate in electoral process and supports the rights of transgender.

Similar Neelam Yousafzai has also been able to set up a large network of shawl weavers and embroiderers. Many women have benefitted from this collaboration. One of her crafters Sadia is being brought up in a family of skilled embroiderers and crocheters making these crafts a part of her daily life. However, her life took a different turn when she married into a family where women didn't engage in such work. She embraced the role of a homemaker, tending to household chores and raising her children.

Yet, life can be unpredictable, and the COVID-19 pandemic brought unforeseen challenges. Like many others, Sadia's husband lost his job as the pandemic forced businesses to downsize. Faced with financial strains and a family to support, Sadia decided to take action. She tapped into her embroidery skills, crafting various items to sell. She approached local vendors and began taking orders from her community, making embroidered chaddars, shirts, bedsheets, tablecloths, cushion covers, and more.

Sadia's impeccable embroidery quickly gained recognition, attracting a growing clientele. Her contribution to the family's income became substantial, transforming her skill into a vital source of livelihood. Inspired by her success, Sadia aspires to empower other women with similar talents. She envisions setting up a small center where girls can learn embroidery and find employment.

Currently, Sadia is part of Neelam's network, ensuring a consistent flow of work. Her journey exemplifies how determination and traditional skills can not only help weather challenging times but also pave the way for empowering others in the community.

This collaborative approach has not only enhanced the quality of craftsmanship within their communities but has also fostered a sense of solidarity among artisans. It strengthens their collective capacity to compete in the market, adapt to changing trends, and preserve their cultural heritage. Moreover, it underscores the notion that empowerment and progress are not individual endeavors but communal achievements that ripple through society.

Apart from this they are ready to take risks and showcase their goods in exhibitions and other platforms.

## Healing and Peace-building Through Crafts making

In Swat the crafts women PAIMAN worked with were from diverse backgrounds such as mothers, sisters and wives of members of extremist groups, widows of police and army personnel and ordinary community women.

During their craft making, the women were encouraged to engage in storytelling but were cautioned to abstain from using derogatory remarks or hate speech towards each other. While narrating their stories the women started blaming and accusing each other which would end up in more division and hate.

Strategically women from different backgrounds were paired to make crafts together. This helped in developing a better understanding of each other's agony, pain and loss. Hence it became a place to connect with each other and overcome their fears and heal their trauma. The result was that eventually they accepted each other on more human levels and agreed to build peace among themselves and in their communities.

During their craft making, they developed songs (tappas) that reflected their pain and their way of uniting for building peace. The women shared that joint craft making and storytelling proved to be a great trauma healing process.

## Recommendations

- Government should establish design and skill enhancement centers for rural women in particular and should give them easy access to credit facilities from banks and development financial institutions without mortgage or guarantor.
- Government and Chambers of Commerce should facilitate a free mentoring platform which connects women and girls entrepreneurs and volunteer business mentors.
- Government should develop public-private partnership programs to revive, preserve, and promote traditional embroidery, weaving, and other crafts.