

## Reviving the Loom: KRDP's Role in Strengthening Khadi in Chhattisgarh

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### Abstract

The Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP), initiated with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India, represents a transformative intervention for the Khadi and Village Industries (KVI) sector in India. The programme aims to modernize production systems, enhance livelihood opportunities, and revitalize traditional craftsmanship. This article examines the socio-economic impact of KRDP on weavers in Chhattisgarh, drawing on insights from the study conducted across various districts. The programme has strengthened livelihood security through improved wages, infrastructure development, skill enhancement, market linkages, and entrepreneurial support. By integrating policy reforms, marketing interventions, institutional restructuring, and technological upgrades, KRDP has significantly contributed to raising the income levels, working conditions, and economic resilience of weavers in the state.

### Introduction

Village and Small Industries (VSI) have always held a strategic position in India's economic framework, providing the second-largest source of employment after agriculture. Traditional sectors such as handloom, handicrafts, coir, sericulture, and khadi continue to shape rural livelihoods and preserve India's craft heritage. Khadi and Village Industries (KVI) represent a crucial segment of this unorganized, non-factory sector, generating employment at minimal capital cost and utilizing local skills and raw materials.

Historically, khadi emerged as both an economic and symbolic force under Mahatma Gandhi during India's struggle for independence. Before 1947, it functioned as a non-governmental movement rooted in self-reliance and rural empowerment. Post-independence, the government institutionalized khadi development through the establishment of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in 1956, which became the nodal agency for promoting and supporting khadi production through state-level boards (KVIBs).

To address modern challenges ranging from outdated production systems to limited market competitiveness, the Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP) was launched. In 2008, ADB approved a USD 150 million loan to support comprehensive reforms, including policy restructuring, institutional strengthening, marketing upgrades, and modernization of khadi production systems. The programme sought to position khadi in alignment with contemporary market needs while enhancing wages, employment generation, and artisan empowerment.

In Chhattisgarh, home to a rich weaving tradition, KRDP has played a catalytic role. The programme's interventions, like skill development, infrastructure upgrades, marketing support, financial assistance, and cluster development, have collectively contributed to improving the livelihoods of weavers. Enhanced income stability, increased market visibility, adoption of innovative designs, and improved working conditions have supported both socio-economic progress and cultural preservation. These efforts have empowered weavers not only as skilled artisans but also as emerging entrepreneurs capable of participating in national and global textile markets.

### **Strengthening Traditional Craft through Modern Interventions**

Chhattisgarh's weaving heritage reflects centuries of indigenous knowledge, artistry, and cultural identity. However, many artisans historically faced challenges such as outdated tools, low market penetration, and limited opportunities for skill enhancement. KRDP has helped bridge this gap by integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary techniques. The programme's training modules focus on advanced weaving skills, improved yarn handling, natural dyeing methods, design innovation, and quality enhancement. By enabling artisans to adopt modern techniques without losing cultural authenticity, KRDP ensures that traditional craft continues to flourish in a globalized market. These initiatives have not only improved product consistency and durability but have also allowed weavers to create textiles that appeal to diverse consumer segments—from domestic buyers to international design houses. The infusion of modern design sensibilities has opened new avenues for khadi, positioning it as both a heritage fabric and a sustainable, eco-friendly fashion choice.

### **Infrastructure Development and Market Expansion**

One of the longstanding barriers for weavers in Chhattisgarh was the absence of adequate infrastructure. KRDP has addressed this challenge by establishing Common Facility Centres (CFCs) equipped with improved looms, dyeing units, quality testing facilities, and finishing tools. These centers serve as shared spaces that reduce the cost burden on individual artisans while increasing efficiency and output quality.

Additionally, modern weaving sheds with better ventilation, lighting, and ergonomically

designed equipment have markedly improved the working environment. These improvements have resulted in enhanced productivity, reduced physical strain, and greater consistency in production.

On the marketing front, KRDP has made significant strides by strengthening linkages with urban markets, retail chains, exhibitions, and digital platforms. With the introduction of the Khadi Mark, consumers now have an assurance of quality and authenticity, which has further boosted product credibility. Social media promotion, participation in national trade fairs, and collaborations with fashion designers have increased the visibility and desirability of Chhattisgarh's khadi products, thereby ensuring stable demand throughout the year.

### **Institutional Strengthening and Policy Interventions**

KRDP is not just a skill development initiative; it is a holistic reform programme aimed at revitalizing the entire khadi ecosystem. The restructuring of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has played a critical role in strengthening governance, planning, and service delivery. The programme emphasizes:

- Transparent financial management
- Streamlined raw material supply chains
- Credit facilitation through banks and government schemes
- Upgradation of institutional record-keeping and monitoring systems

These policy interventions ensure that assistance reaches the grassroots and that institutions remain accountable, efficient, and responsive to artisan needs. The strengthening of cooperative societies has also empowered weavers to bargain collectively, participate in decision-making processes, and access benefits equitably.

### **Enhancing Livelihoods and Promoting Entrepreneurial Culture**

One of the most transformative outcomes of KRDP is the shift from wage-based labour to entrepreneurial engagement. Many weavers who previously depended solely on daily wage earnings are now running small enterprises, managing production groups, and marketing their own products. Training on financial literacy, branding, packaging, and digital marketing has given artisans the confidence and capacity to manage their enterprises efficiently.

Women weavers, in particular, have significantly benefited. KRDP has enabled them to gain financial independence, assume leadership roles in cooperatives, and achieve greater social recognition. This empowerment has not only enhanced household income but also contributed to improved education, health, and well-being of their families.

## **Sustainable Development and Future Scope**

KRDP's alignment with sustainable, eco-friendly production practices positions it strongly within the global demand for ethical textiles. The use of natural fibers, biodegradable dyes, and hand-based processes reduces carbon footprint and makes khadi a sustainable choice. This opens opportunities for exports, design collaborations, and niche luxury markets.

Looking ahead, integrating khadi with e-commerce, developing youth-centric training programmes, and establishing design innovation hubs in Chhattisgarh can further strengthen the sector. Strengthening partnerships among government agencies, private designers, NGOs, and academic institutions will create a more resilient ecosystem for artisanal growth. With continued support, Chhattisgarh has the potential to become a national model for rural textile-based entrepreneurship and sustainable craft revival.

Chhattisgarh's weaving sector, enriched by generations of traditional hand-spinning and weaving artistry, has received a significant boost through the interventions of the Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP). By integrating heritage skills with modern techniques, KRDP has strengthened artisans' capabilities through skill enhancement, design innovation, and training in contemporary weaving methods, enabling the production of superior-quality and market-responsive fabrics. The establishment of Common Facility Centres, upgraded weaving sheds, and improved dyeing, printing, and finishing units has addressed long-standing infrastructural challenges while expanding market access through exhibitions, trade fairs, and digital platforms that have substantially increased the visibility of Chhattisgarh's khadi. These systemic improvements have translated into better livelihood security, with weavers reporting higher and more stable incomes due to streamlined raw material procurement, financial support, and cooperative mechanisms that ensure fair wages and transparency. Beyond income enhancement, KRDP has nurtured a culture of entrepreneurship, empowering artisans to evolve from wage workers into micro-entrepreneurs skilled in branding, quality control, and marketing. Notably, the programme has had a transformative social impact by elevating the status of women weavers, providing them with financial independence, leadership opportunities in cooperative structures, and enhanced roles within their households and communities, thereby contributing to both socio-economic resilience and the revitalization of Chhattisgarh's weaving heritage.

## **Conclusion**

The Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP) has demonstrated a substantial positive impact on the socio-economic well-being of weavers in Chhattisgarh. Through

comprehensive reform measures including training, improved infrastructure, financial support, marketing initiatives, cluster-based development, and institutional restructuring, the programme has significantly enhanced productivity, income, and livelihood resilience among weaving communities. Weavers now benefit from better access to raw materials, modernized production facilities, expanded market reach, and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

Moreover, KRDP has played an essential role in preserving traditional weaving techniques while integrating innovation to meet contemporary consumer preferences. The enhanced visibility of Chhattisgarh's khadi products at national and global platforms has further strengthened market confidence and artisan recognition. Despite certain limitations in data collection and geographical coverage noted in the original study, the overall outcomes highlight KRDP as a transformative initiative capable of fostering sustainable rural development. Continued policy support, investment in design innovation, and stronger digital marketing linkages will be critical in ensuring the long-term growth and competitiveness of the khadi sector in Chhattisgarh.