



**TOWARDS AN
UNDERSTANDING OF
WOMEN'S ARTS
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IN THE TERAI REGION
OF NEPAL**

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Acronyms

HE	Higher Education
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JWDC	Janakpur Women's Development Center
KU	Kathmandu University
LMIC	Low-to-Middle Income Country
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPR	Nepalese Rupee
OBU	Oxford Brookes University
SME	Small-to-Medium Enterprise

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Key Findings	2
Aim of Study	2
Rationale for Study	3
Current Understanding	3
Entrepreneurship and the Arts	3
The Nepali Context	3
The Terai	3
Women	4
Methodology	4
Semi-structured Interview	4
Observation	4
Focus Groups	4
Findings	5
Themes	5
Gender Inequality	5
Caste and Ethnicity	6
Social Enterprise Governance	7
Business Skills Deficit	7
The Arts	8
Social Network	9
Targeted Training	10
Engagement with Men	10
Arts for Social Change	11
Limitations and Recommendations	12
Action	13
Women's Entrepreneurship	13
Artistic Innovation	13
Modes of Expression and Peace-building	13
Impact	13
Concluding Remarks	14
The Study in Numbers	15
Appendix	16
Sources	18

Executive Summary

This early stage, exploratory research is intended to inform emerging debates on entrepreneurship in Nepal, with particular reference to the gender, culture and caste dimensions of these discussions. Based on a growing awareness of the role of arts and culture in women's livelihoods, the British Council commissioned this research to identify barriers and opportunities for arts, crafts and culture to drive women's social and economic wellbeing, and to explore the role of the arts in Nepali social cohesion more generally. In recognition of the disparity of opportunity between the people of the Hill and Terai regions, the researchers purposefully designed a programme of study to capture data from entrepreneurs and stakeholders in the Terai, as well as those active in Kathmandu. The researchers aim to highlight current gaps in academic, industry and third sector understanding of entrepreneurship in the Nepali context, and suggest further avenues of research required to address these gaps.

Conducted by the Centre for International Tourism and Events Management Research at Oxford Brookes University, in collaboration with the British Council Nepal, the study included observation and interviews with individual female and male entrepreneurs based in and around Janakpur, Nepal. This was supplemented by three focus groups attended by multiple stakeholders, hosted at the British Council Nepal offices in Kathmandu. As well as suggesting a future research agenda, the end result is a potential new, collaborative partnership between UK and Nepali Higher Education, industry and third sector partners. This study is also intended to inform the British Council's future policy development in the areas of gender equality, entrepreneurship and cross-cultural dialogue in South Asia.

Key Findings

1. Most Terai women engage in entrepreneurship through a social enterprise; men are more likely to start their own SME;
2. Arts, crafts and cultural exchange provide a vital source of income for Terai women;
3. Arts, crafts and cultural exchange offer improvements to Terai women's social wellbeing;
4. Gender inequality, lack of business skills and poor social enterprise governance are barriers to Terai women's engagement with entrepreneurship;
5. Building links with other artisans, targeted training and outreach intervention with male community members are enablers of Terai women's engagement with entrepreneurship;
6. The arts can foster peaceful social exchange across religious, caste and geographical groups in Nepal.

Aim of Study

This study was conducted under the following aims and objectives:

- » To understand the landscape of women's entrepreneurship in the Terai region;
- » To understand the landscape of arts and culture in the Terai region;
- » To understand the potential for arts and culture to provide a medium for peace-building between Hill and Terai peoples;
- » To identify opportunities for the development of Terai women's entrepreneurship;
- » To inform the co-design of a potential new, large-scale research project with social enterprise and community stakeholders, with the potential to improve Terai women's socio-economic wellbeing.

Whilst there are acknowledged limitations to our work, the authors believe these findings to comprise preliminary evidence for a clear need for research and investment in Terai women's entrepreneurship; moreover, they suggest that the arts hold great potential for delivering improvements in socio-economic wellbeing and conflict resolution in Nepal.

Rationale for Study

The arts, crafts and creative engagement have long been recognised as a plausible segue into enterprise activity for women in developing country contexts (USAID, 2009). This observation is supported by recent research highlighting the prevalence of handicraft enterprise in Kathmandu; however, studies acknowledge that little data exists on handicraft entrepreneurship in the Terai region (Gautam, 2016). Accordingly, the researchers selected two study locations (Figure 1):

- a) Kathmandu, an international tourist destination with a history of supporting both the arts and women's microenterprise;
- b) Janakpur, an emerging destination in the South East of Nepal with a rich cultural heritage.

In contrast to Nepali-speaking Kathmandu, almost 75% of Janakpur's population lives below the poverty line; the majority of citizens speak Maithili and only 13% of women are considered literate (Government of Nepal, 2001). The town of Janakpur itself is a historic Hindu pilgrimage site, and has drawn international acclaim for its unique arts and handicraft culture in which women play a pivotal role (Mishra, 1996). Moreover, following the 1995 founding of the pioneering arts social enterprise, the Janakpur Women's Development Center ("JWDC"), the women of the surrounding villages are increasingly engaging in entrepreneurial activity (Crawford & Leitmann, 2002). The JWDC agreed to facilitate access to a range of participants based in and around Janakpur, whilst participants in Kathmandu were recruited through the British Council's network of arts NGOs.

The ultimate goal of the research team was to elicit an understanding of the primary barriers and enablers of women's participation in arts entrepreneurship, so as to develop recommendations for further study – as well as possible practical measures to better support Terai women wishing to engage in enterprise.

Current Understanding

Entrepreneurship and the Arts

Whilst this was by no means pre-supposed, the authors found that the predominant mode of

entrepreneurship currently operating in the Terai to be social enterprise. Definitions of social enterprise abound, but for the purposes of this study, the authors consider that any enterprise integrating cultural values from the charity and business sectors comprises a valid example (Dees, 2012). This can range from a for-profit company with a CSR policy to a charitable organisation which also generates revenue (Monroe-White, et al., 2015).

In resource-constrained environments, social entrepreneurs are known to operate intuitively and creatively to combine disparate expertise and solutions on a community-wide basis: a phenomenon known as social bricolage (Gundry, et al., 2011). In subsistence marketplaces such as those found in Nepal, social entrepreneurs can be seen as facilitators of wider inclusive growth, as well as acting as agents of socio-economic change for individuals (Azmat, et al., 2015). Arts-based entrepreneurship, in particular, has been cited as a unique means for fostering economic and community development in rural regions, given its roots in culture and tradition and wide opportunities for participation (Balfour, et al., 2016). Heritage arts and crafts entrepreneurship is unique, in that it offers the dual benefits of providing a livelihood whilst also preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage. However, there are a number of acknowledged challenges and weaknesses in the social enterprise sector in South Asia – particularly barriers to women's participation – which are likely to be particularly acute in Nepal's Terai, where gender inequality is so pronounced (United Nations, 2005).

The Nepali Context

Whilst the international development community has begun to form an understanding of the arts entrepreneurship landscape in South Asia, Nepal is typically absent from published studies (Darko, 2016). Whereas case studies on the role of arts in development in countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and India (Clammer, 2014) are regularly disseminated to the international community, the voices of Nepal's arts-based social entrepreneurs have yet to be heard.

The Terai

Nepal has a long history of unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity between the Mountain, Hill and Terai regions, with the Hill-dwelling majority ethnic

populations enjoying the greatest benefits. In recent times, the Terai has become the focus of increased national attention, as the region experienced political turmoil connected to the Government's attempt to pass a Federalisation bill designed to significantly weaken ethnic Madhesi parties' political power in the country. The 2015/16 roadblock instigated by the Madhesi, resultant fuel shortages, power outages and violent demonstrations served only to drive a greater wedge between the Hill and Terai peoples (Allison-Reumann & Baogang, 2016).

Indeed, the inequality between Hill and Terai castes persists despite a general upward trend in educational mobility: young people of the Terai are significantly less likely to attain qualification and employment equal or superior to their parents' than their Hill counterparts (Tiwari, et al., 2016).

Women

In particular, research has shown that gender is a determinant of microenterprise performance in Nepal, with male entrepreneurs outstripping the achievements of their female equivalents – largely, researchers suspect, as a result of educational inequality (Thapa, 2015). However, in spite of prevailing cultural attitudes towards women, there are reports of Terai women entrepreneurs carving a niche for themselves: the arts, in particular, have been highlighted as a unique accessible route into entrepreneurship. Indeed, in certain districts of Nepal, it is matched only by agriculture as the sector most accessed by women (USAID, 2009).

Methodology

This research seeks to provide a preliminary understanding of women's participation in arts-based entrepreneurship in the Terai region of Nepal. Given the paucity of literature focusing on women's entrepreneurship outside of Kathmandu, the team devised a mixed methods methodology, designed to support an inductive approach to research. Whilst there are limitations to so-called "low-n" and case study research exercises (Yin, 2009), the aim was to generate new theoretical and practical insights based on the data collected, rather than testing a pre-defined hypothesis. This approach is particularly appropriate for small-scale, under-researched phenomenon.

The researchers employed a mix of social science and ethnographic research, on the understanding that immersion in women's entrepreneurial and cultural activity could provide insights unlikely to emerge through more structured research instruments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Semi-structured Interview

Over the course of 10 days, the researchers interviewed eight female and two male artisan entrepreneurs, all based in the villages surrounding Janakpur. These data were used to identify and formulate common themes and factors influencing Terai women's engagement with entrepreneurship.

Observation

Firstly, the lead researcher observed social entrepreneurs interacting with customers in a boutique artisan retail outlet in Kathmandu; secondly the researcher observed women artisans during their daily work at the JWDC – including artistic production, administrative duties, conducting tours with international visitors and team meetings. The researcher also observed two celebrations of the Chhath puja *festival*³ – one large-scale evening event in central Janakpur, and one small-scale dawn event in the small village of Kombura. Data were written up as field notes immediately following observation sessions prior to coding (Denzin, 1997); these informed the identification of themes and study conclusions.

Focus Groups

In the final phase of the study, the researchers held three focus group meetings of 120 minutes' duration: one with solely academic stakeholders; two with community/NGO/academic/industry stakeholders. The first focus group explored and developed a research framework for investigating arts entrepreneurship, the preservation of arts and culture and peace-building in the Terai. The second focus group discussed contextual factors influencing women's entrepreneurship. The third focus group suggested and evaluated possible development interventions and solutions to enhance women's entrepreneurship in the Terai and in Kathmandu; this informed the co-design of a large-scale research project submitted to a UK funder in December 2016.

³Chhath puja is a traditional festival dedicated to the Hindu sun god, observed at dawn and dusk over a 48 hour period in Northern India and Southern Nepal. It is rooted in folk culture and fosters social integration and biodiversity conservation through its female-led customs, focus on purification of water bodies and provision of tropical fruits (Kumar, 2012)

Findings

The data were processed using a six-step thematic analysis, adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006) :

- 1) Familiarisation with data
- 2) Creation of initial codes
- 3) Search for themes among codes
- 4) Review of themes and iteration
- 5) Definition of themes and
- 6) Production of final report.

Themes

As the data were continually sifted and re-processed, a number of themes emerged. Select pieces of evidence are showcased in direct quotes under the following thematic headings. These have been selected as indicative of wider shared experiences and perceptions elicited from the informants during the study.

Gender Inequality

The semi-structured interview data in particular highlight the cultural prevalence of patriarchy and the lack of equal opportunities for women in the Terai. Women participants reported experiencing extreme domestic violence against themselves, female family members and even children.

Barrier: Gender Inequality

"My father was murdered in front of me when I was 12, so we had no dowry for my marriage at 14. My husband's family beat me, because I had no money to bring...my younger brother came to live with us to bring money – now he is educated as a teacher and supports my husband's family. Now I am 25 and have four children and one is severely disabled. How can I earn money for his hospital fees?"

-Female Participant JN03, Interview

Barrier: Gender Inequality

"It is normal for the men to beat their women... Each of us bears her own scars. In one village I have seen sisters set alight for defying husbands or fathers-in-law"

-Female Participant JN06, Interview

It also emerges that male community members have great influence over the opportunities afforded to women, and that entrepreneurship cannot be made accessible for women without engagement with their male counterparts; women require permission and approval from male household leaders to engage in enterprise.

Barrier: Gender Inequality

"When they [the JWDC] came to our village, we could not speak to them or look at them. We were totally veiled at the insistence of our husbands"

-Female Participant JN09, Interview

The male entrepreneurs spoke candidly and frankly about their distaste for female family members, but held a more open attitude towards women artisans outside of their own families – these women were considered "colleagues" rather than "burdens".

Barrier: Gender Inequality

"Each day I curse my daughters for the debt they bring me...the dowry is 4 lakh NPR each and I have two...How can I afford electricity for my [ceramic] machines? I hate my daughters"

-Male Participant JN04, Interview

The focus group data collected in Kathmandu echoes the Terai women's observations. Women artisan contributors were able to recount several experiences whereby their achievements were either blocked or diminished by male relatives.

Women artisans also report experiences of prejudice from male colleagues and collaborators, adding further barriers to their achieving economic and social wellbeing through entrepreneurship.

Barrier: Gender Inequality

"Even though I am designing in Kathmandu, a modern city, men are still unwilling to trust me...suppliers, other designers, even some of my colleagues in the University"

-Female Artisan, Kathmandu, Focus Group 2

Caste and Ethnicity

Of the ten entrepreneurs interviewed, six were from high-Caste groups and four from low-Caste. One entrepreneur was from the Dalit Caste group, considered "Untouchable" (Mainali, et al., 2017). The continued prevailing influence of the caste system on Nepali social structures was evident, with artisans noting that traditional arts and craft were oftentimes the sole route into entrepreneurship available to low-Caste groups.

Barrier: Caste and Ethnicity

"Although I can paint [the goddess] Lakshmi, I cannot go into the temple and touch her, because I am Chamar...my art is my worship"

-Female Participant JN03, Interview

Data collected during the focus groups reiterate the complexity of the caste hierarchy in Nepal, and suggest a lack of understanding of the barriers represented by an entrepreneur's ethnic background.

Barrier: Caste and Ethnicity

"There is a great need for the artists and public of Kathmandu to understand the struggle of the Madhesi people...I have seen photography start these conversations"

-Arts Festival Founder, Kathmandu, Focus Group 3

Field observation, too, shows the limited awareness of Terai women's struggles for economic independence among the tourists representing an important segment of the handicraft market. However, unexpectedly, field observation in the Terai reveals a more progressive attitude towards caste. On this occasion, it appears that the social enterprise has fostered an inclusive culture and space for dialogue across the caste divides so sharply observed in quotidian life.

Barrier: Caste and Ethnicity

Offering some background on the origin of the Janakpur paintings in her hands, the sales assistant gestures to the map of Nepal on the shop wall:

"These artists are all from Terai, where circumstances are different from Kathmandu." The tourist customer seems genuinely puzzled: "The Terai? Isn't that just India?"

-Extract from field notes, Kathmandu, Nov 2016

Barrier: Caste and Ethnicity

One of the artisans curls a wad of Rupees into her fist, before passing it to a fellow entrepreneur – a serious woman in glasses – and making a note in her record book. This, it transpires, is the monthly payment of wages. Seated beside me, a Hindu Brahmin artisan nudges my arm: "Sister, she is our accountant, and she is also Chamar! It does not matter to us here."

-Extract from field notes, Janakpur, Nov 2016

Social Enterprise Governance

The entrepreneurs participating in the interviews and focus groups were largely operating through social enterprise organisations – based either in Janakpur or Kathmandu. There emerges considerable variation in business models across the enterprises encountered in this study, and thus a clear need for further investigation. The impact of inconsistent or confused governance models on the women artisans these organisations seek to serve is marked. A lack of transparent pricing policy was a particular concern for the Terai artisans.

Barrier: Social Enterprise Governance

"I do not know how much my painting is being sold for in Kathmandu...I only know that I receive maybe 100 or 200 NPR [£0.70-80] for each painting"

-Female Participant JN01, Interview

Further to this, variation in wages was seen as unfair, leading to jealousy among social enterprise members.

Barrier: Social Enterprise Governance

"Because I am new [to the social enterprise], I receive only 600 NPR per month. Others earn 1,000 or even 3,000 NPR per month. I must spend all this money on my son's hospital fees and have nothing left for the other children"

-Female Participant JN03, Interview

The focus groups in Kathmandu robustly debated the range of policies employed by social enterprises to ensure fair wages for the artisans they work with. Social enterprise owners showed an encouraging awareness of the potentially damaging effects of patriarchal cultures within their businesses; the groups were mostly in agreement that further research is needed to establish the most socially responsible modes of governance for Nepali enterprises.

Barrier: Social Enterprise Governance

"If we [social enterprises] simply design our own products and outsource the manufacture to the Terai, we are not recognising the women as artists... Especially because we are men, this could be very damaging"

-Social Enterprise Founder, Kathmandu, Focus Group 2.

Business Skills Deficit

Seven out of the ten entrepreneurs interviewed for this study revealed that they had participated in some form of training delivered by an NGO. In the Terai, this had included artistic practice development, computer skills and literacy training. Uniquely, the participants had primarily received training in arts and crafts skills – for which they largely showed enthusiasm, but described as less urgent than assistance with business skill development.

Barrier: Business Skills Deficit

"[laughs] training, training, training! What is the point of all this craftsmanship training if I cannot sell my products? I am already an artist; I need help with my business"

-Male Participant JN05, Interview

The women artisans, 60% of whom were illiterate, were particularly concerned about new business development; they acknowledged their weaknesses in this area.

Barrier: Business Skills Deficit

"We must get more orders, but I do not know how"

-Female Participant JN09, Interview

Barrier: Business Skills Deficit

"The [social enterprise] has taught me to write, but I cannot use the computer. I must take orders only over the phone, and still many sisters cannot read or write"

-Female Participant JN01, Interview

Interestingly, the male entrepreneurs offered insight into the women's limited transferable business skills: particularly the lack of market research and innovation in their practice.

The focus group participants were also extremely vocal about the need for innovation in Terai women artisans' product portfolios.

Barrier: Business Skills Deficit

"I know that I can make and sell many ceramic idols for festivals throughout the year; I understand my market very well. The women [artisans] do not do this...perhaps they are afraid to try this religious work or do not know the market"

-Male Participant JN05, Interview

Barrier: Business Skills Deficit

"I think we can consider a lack of product innovation to meet market needs to be business problem as much as an artistic one... [the Terai women] need to understand what the market wants...they are unwilling to experiment or deviate from their tradition"

-Social Enterprise Contract Designer, Kathmandu, Focus Group 3

The third focus group reached a consensus that there exists a need for a culturally sensitive approach to innovation. Whilst the delivery of transferable business skills is critical to the advancement of women's entrepreneurship, given the roots of their artistic products in their heritage culture, it is equally essential for these traditional craft skills to be safeguarded and respected. The group suggested that future research could help inform a "culture-based, market-oriented" approach to product innovation, which would allow the women artisans to reach a wider market whilst maintaining their cultural traditions.

The Arts

As well as identifying barriers to women's engagement with entrepreneurship, the study elicited some key enablers. The primary enabler emerged as participation in the arts, crafts and creative engagement. Whilst it is largely accepted that the arts have a role to play in health and social wellbeing (Clift, 2012), this study shows that the arts can also provide a viable pathway to economic wellbeing for Terai women.

Enabler: The Arts

"Before [joining the social enterprise], I just did my own art on the walls of our home. Now I do painting, screen-printing and design and earn 2,500 NPR [£18.30] per month"

-Female Participant JN02, Interview

Again, the accessibility of the arts for a population with low literacy levels was highlighted as central to the women's economic independence.

Enabler: The Arts

"After my husband died, I had no way of earning my own money because I am illiterate. I only know the traditional arts, and now I can survive with the monthly wage"

-Female Participant JN06, Interview

The potential for the arts to support social wellbeing was also confirmed by the interview participants; the women spoke of the therapeutic and spiritual value of engagement with arts and crafts.

Enabler: The Arts

"When I am painting, I feel relaxed. I can forget my troubles for an hour and connect closely with God"

-Female Participant JN03, Interview

The researchers' field observation echoed the words of the interview participants; the collaborative production of artwork seemed to enthuse and mobilise the women artisans as a collective.

Enabler: The Arts

The centre is divided into separate workshop sections, with each division dedicated to an art form. Every room is full of activity; the women chat enthusiastically about techniques and the results they have achieved. Seated in circles, they huddle together like conspirators with a brilliant secret, looking up from their work only to greet a visiting Japanese tourist with calls of "namaste", and to answer the telephone calls with orders from Kathmandu. There is an atmosphere of celebration and sisterhood.

-Extract from field notes, Janakpur, Nov 2016

Indeed, this study provides evidence for the arts as a mechanism for supporting Terai women's social and economic wellbeing – operating across caste boundaries and acting as a uniting force within communities of entrepreneurs.

Social Network

The entrepreneurship research community has long understood that an entrepreneur's social network is key to his or her success in their business ventures (Bhatt & Altinay, 2013). This study strongly supports this proposition; from the data it emerges that the strength and extent of social networks plays a role in Terai artisans' participation in entrepreneurship. The opportunity to work alongside other artisans was cited as beneficial to the women's social wellbeing.

Enabler: Social Network

"To come to the workshop each day is very important for me. Here, I can concentrate, be creative and make good quality paintings. Being around the other sisters helps me, too, because I am not alone with just my children"

-Female Participant JN06, Interview

The male entrepreneurs interviewed by the researchers spoke of their social networks in economic terms, and demonstrated experience of leveraging social contacts for their entrepreneurial benefit.

Enabler: Social Network

"If it were not for my network of friends in the village, word of my ceramic roof tiles would not have spread so far...I believe I would have fewer customers without these people supporting my reputation"

-Male Participant JN05, Interview

Further to this, the forging of national networks was highlighted in the focus groups as a potential enabler of women's engagement with entrepreneurship. It was suggested that connecting women from the Terai with the Kathmandu arts community could foster social cohesion, as well as innovation through borrowing techniques or tropes from one another's cultural traditions.

Enabler: Social Network

"I know that connecting with the Terai women has improved my practice as an artist. I think I could also help them to experiment, for example with different colour groups"

-Male Artisan, Kathmandu, Focus Group 2

Ultimately, the group concluded that initiatives to expand Terai women's social networks would likely provide an effective intervention to counteract isolation and a lack of innovation.

Targeted Training

The artisan community in the Terai spoke extensively of their experiences of training – both positive and negative. The interview data suggest that the effectiveness of a training solution depends largely on the extent to which the beneficiary community has been consulted on its development.

Enabler: Targeted Training

"The World Bank and other INGOs do not ask me what I need: they just deliver standard training...[the social enterprise] has asked us what we as artists would like, and recommended specific courses"

-Male Participant JN04, Interview

The women participants, none of whom had received formal education, were especially enthusiastic about training – and acknowledged their specific needs as a result of low literacy levels.

Enabler: Targeted Training

"Through [the social enterprise] I have received many excellent trainings [sic], for example sewing and even using the telephone. I cannot read, so there must be images and demonstrations"

-Female Participant JN01, Interview

Enabler: Targeted Training

"The training for screen-printing was really very useful to me because now I can make more products. That means more orders for us. And that means more wages"

-Female Participant JN07, Interview

The study confirms that training interventions, where tailored to the needs of the community, can directly impact women's ability to earn a living from their traditional arts and crafts.

In light of these data, the researchers conclude that a standardised approach to training would not be appropriate in the context of the Terai, given the variations in educational background and the specific needs of the artisan community. Rather, it would be preferable for INGOs and action researchers to co-design programmes of training with community members; in this way, the interventions can be tailored depending on users' unique needs.

Engagement with Men

Whilst the women interview participants were clear that the cultural dominance of men represented a barrier to their economic participation, they also offered experiences of positive engagement with men. It emerges from the data that women are more likely to see improvements in their socio-economic wellbeing with the support of male community members. This is perhaps the area in which NGOs and international development actors can make the greatest contribution and effect significant change.

Enabler: Engagement with Men

"It is impossible for us to make any progress for women without involving men in the solution"

-Social Enterprise Founder, Kathmandu, Focus Group 3

Furthermore, the focus groups were united in their opinion that men should be involved in any future research aimed at improving women's entrepreneurial engagement.

In a society where women must seek permission of male family members to participate socially and economically, it is imperative that men be educated as to the benefits of women's entrepreneurship. Whilst it is unlikely that development interventions alone can overturn patriarchy, this case study research suggests that it is possible to instigate a cultural shift in gender attitudes within a community.

Arts for Social Change

Throughout the research process, the team was struck by the propensity for the arts, crafts and creative engagement to bridge cultural gulfs and foster dialogue between disparate communities: for example, Terai vs. Hill peoples, district vs. district and men vs. women. The interview participants offered numerous insights into the role of the arts in facilitating cultural exchange within their lives.

Arts for Social Change

"At first, my husband forbade me from coming to Kathmandu. When I travelled to the city for the first time, they [Kathmandu retailers] would not work with me, because I am from Terai. Then they saw my paintings. Today our Mithili art is on the walls of Kathmandu restaurants, and the sisters have earned good wages"

-Female Participant JN10, Interview

In addition to bridging gender and geographical divides, the potential for the arts to transcend Nepal's rigid caste hierarchy was especially striking.

Arts for Social Change

"When we are painting together, it does not matter that I am Chamar, and that the sister next to me is Brahmin"

-Female Participant JN03, Interview

The focus groups were again unanimous in their support for the arts as a dialogic mechanism, and noted the importance of research in this process.

Arts for Social Change

"I believe that research documenting Nepal's diverse contemporary art forms would unite people in their identities as 'artists' – not man or woman; Hill or Terai; Newar or Dalit"

-Art and Design Researcher, Kathmandu, Focus Group 1

The researchers were fortunate to hear from representatives from experienced conflict resolution social enterprises, who confirmed in the focus groups the potential for collaborative artistic engagement to facilitate peaceful dialogue.

Arts for Social Change

"[our arts centre] has been used by Terai and Kathmandu artists with great success...there is so much more collaborative work we could and should do"

-Arts Centre Founder, Kathmandu, Focus Group 3

However, it was acknowledged that the research base covering the arts as a conflict resolution tool was currently limited; researchers have typically used case study methodologies, and there is a particular lack of data relating to Nepal. The group agreed that rigorous research, using new methods, would help to build a clearer picture of the potential for the arts to foster cultural dialogue across conflicting factions.

Limitations and Recommendations

Nepal remains an under-researched country context from a social sciences and visual arts perspective. Moreover, studies focusing on the Terai are particularly scarce. Limited availability of recent official data presents a further barrier to our understanding of Nepal's social and economic landscape; the most recent Government census dates from 2011 (Government of Nepal, 2011). In this context, the study makes a modest contribution to the research and development community's knowledge of women's entrepreneurial activity in the Terai.

The evidence for arts and crafts entrepreneurship being the most accessible mode of making a living across caste groups in the Terai is particularly important. Previously, researchers had argued that agriculture and food entrepreneurship could constitute the most viable pathways to economic wellbeing for women in the Terai (USAID, 2009); our research suggests that the arts offer greater access to lower-Caste women, and that collective practice builds community cohesion among women's social enterprise members. The study also highlights the critical importance of social networks and co-designed training programmes which address the needs of users rather than speak to the agendas of international aid organisations.

In-depth case studies have been recommended to generate insights on complex social phenomena, particularly in developing country contexts. However, the study is inductive in nature and subject to the limitations associated with "low-n" research studies (Yin, 2013). The researchers advise caution when considering the generalisability of the findings: it is likely that there is a diversity of social and economic challenges facing artisan entrepreneur communities across the Terai. This study offers insights into the specific difficulties experienced by the women of Janakpur and surrounding villages – an area of Nepal characterised by its rich cultural heritage, and with a growing reputation as a heritage tourism destination. This specific set of socio-cultural factors may not be replicated across the country, especially when considering Nepal's multiplicity of caste and religion. For example, more remote regions in Western districts, typically untouched by international funding

initiatives, are likely to host more impoverished communities with deeply entrenched gender inequality. It would be reasonable to expect a greater prevalence of violence against women, and thus a further unique set of barriers not observed in other locations.

Whilst the scope of this study represents a clear limitation, the data emerging from the case study are sufficiently robust to inform recommendations for future research. The authors therefore recommend the collection of data across Terai districts, using a variety of methods, accompanied by complete triangulation of the data (Patton, 2002). It is also noted that a full understanding of women's arts entrepreneurship requires insights from across research disciplines: the team recommends that future research consortia include experts from the visual arts, product design, digital engagement, economics, entrepreneurship and anthropology.

The participants in this study spoke candidly of previous research endeavours and interventions in Nepal, which had made little positive impact. These research and development activities had historically been designed and led by INGOs and finance organisations, with little knowledge of the Nepali context or engagement with research users at the grassroots level. Whilst such efforts have been well-meaning, it is likely that the international development community lacks the local connections and national research base to allow them to co-design programmes and interventions with the communities they hope to serve.

The authors argue that the co-creation of research exercises and development solutions with community stakeholders will be vital to delivering transformations to socio-economic wellbeing. The three focus groups revealed a genuine willingness among different agencies - and individual entrepreneurs - to collaborate. This is hugely encouraging for researchers seeking to develop consortia investigating arts entrepreneurship in the future: Nepal is ready to pursue alternative avenues and recognises that research can be the key to unlocking and devising solutions to development challenges.

Action

Following the collection and analysis of data, the team formulated an approach to future research, organised under three strands designed to provide a full understanding of the arts entrepreneurship landscape in the Terai. Each strand includes research-informed intervention and development activity to ensure the genuine utility of research findings. The three strands are composed as follows:

1. Women's Entrepreneurship

Developing a rich understanding of barriers and enablers of Terai women's participation in arts entrepreneurship.

2. Artistic Innovation

Exploring "culture-based, market-oriented" approaches to innovation in artistic practice, enabling women to design and produce to meet market needs, whilst maintaining an artistic identity.

3. Modes of Expression and Peace-building

Documenting and learning from the ways in which the arts, crafts and creative engagement can be used to foster social cohesion between disparate groups.

A strong academic partnership was developed between Kathmandu University in Nepal, and Oxford Brookes University and the University of the Arts London in the UK. Together these partners devised a capacity development strategy cutting across all three strands of research, designed to build research and development capability through Nepal's HE sector. To ensure effective pathways to impact, the British Council and numerous third sector partners joined the consortium in developing a high value research funding proposal informed by the findings of this study. The multi-stakeholder partnership is committed to further research and development activity in the Terai; this study acted as a catalyst to cement collaborations between UK and Nepali actors, which will hopefully provide benefit to the women artisans of the Terai in the future.

Impact

In developing country contexts, it is acknowledged that even a small-scale study has the potential to

impact on participants' lives at the community level. For instance, during semi-structured interviews and observation work, the researchers observed strong evidence of the Hawthorne effect: a phenomenon whereby participants experience or elicit a change in behaviour purely by virtue of being involved in the research exercise. Whilst the researchers are conscious that this suggests a need for longitudinal study in the future, in order to avoid bias in results, they also recognise that the people of Janakpur and surrounding villages were able to experience an improvement in social wellbeing for the duration of this study. The women in particular spoke consistently of how being involved in the research made them feel "valued" and "listened to". One participant, when asked about measures which could possibly help her to improve her working life, answered "by hearing my story, you have already helped me"⁴. In this context, the Hawthorne effect constitutes a positive impact on the lives of the men and women involved in the study (Monahan & Fisher, 2010).

This study was conducted alongside a British Council supported project allowing the women participants and their social enterprise colleagues to take part in the 2017 Women of the World Festival in Kathmandu⁵. Led by the original founder of the JWDC, the women developed a performance art piece telling the story of the social enterprise's 25-year history. The women collectively explored through arts, craft and drama, their journey from powerlessness to empowerment through creative engagement. Building on some of the themes emerging from this study, the women were able to use this project to experiment and innovate: the artisans merged the imagery of 21st Century living with ancient Mithili techniques and motifs, creating paintings and textile work depicting women in positions of power. These included female pilots flying airplanes, bicycles and even interpretations of smartphones and radios, and were incorporated into a piece of physical theatre. In addition to the performance art, the women produced a collection of paintings and other handicraft for sale at the Festival.

The performance was so well-received by the audience that the JWDC was asked to headline the Festival reception. In addition to offering improvements to the women's confidence, the entrepreneurs also earned 120,000 NPR from sales made over the course of the event, over ten times

⁴Participant JN03, semi-structured interview, Janakpur.

⁵The JWDC participated in the inaugural WOW Kathmandu Festival, 18 February 2017: <http://www.britishcouncil.org.np/wow-kathmandu>

their target of 10,000 NPR. Following the event, the women have received invitations to perform in 2017 at the Kathmandu Triennale and at a reception for the US Ambassador to Nepal. This success demonstrates the critical role of events in women's arts entrepreneurship, both in terms of economic participation and supporting social wellbeing through building confidence and artistic identity.

Concluding Remarks

The study confirms that Terai artisan entrepreneurs, and particularly women, face a number of barriers to economic participation. These arise largely out of educational inequality, patriarchal social structures and a lack of governance within organisations seeking to support entrepreneurship. The women of the Terai are significantly disadvantaged by their poor literacy, chaotic family lives and the imposition of restrictions by male community members. These factors lead to entrenched poverty among women, who suffer the additional burden of male out-migration; the benefits of subsistence income appear negligible when considered alongside high incidences of death or injury to male relatives working in unsafe conditions in the Gulf States.

However, the study also generates insights into enablers of women's entrepreneurship in the Terai. For example, the research reveals preliminary evidence for the potential of arts, crafts and creative engagement to foster improved socio-economic wellbeing for women entrepreneurs. The ability for the arts to cut across caste, religious and social groups allows a broader social dialogue to take place within social enterprise contexts. Despite their governance challenges, these organisations are critical to the success of women's arts entrepreneurship in Nepal: their facilitation of social networks and ability to provide user-oriented training is vital to supporting a population with low literacy and social mobility. To achieve greater impact on women's economic and social wellbeing, future research and development interventions should be co-designed with these important community groups; the study finds that social enterprises can act as platforms for delivering targeted training and connecting disparate groups of artisan entrepreneurs.

These observations are considered alongside the findings regarding the contemporary arts and craft landscape in Nepal. Whilst the protection of heritage craft techniques is acknowledged as central to the

development of sustainable communities, relevant stakeholders also recognise that innovation in artistic practice is necessary to enable women artisans to better meet the needs of the handicraft market. Currently lacking is a programme of knowledge exchange between craft communities in different geographical locations and a safe space to experiment with new techniques and ideas. The researchers propose that Higher Education and social enterprise could work together to provide focused yet culturally sensitive initiatives to support such innovation. This kind of collaboration would build capacity within Nepali HE as well as the development sector; the researchers suggest that this will be a vital step in developing research capability within Nepal and reducing reliance on international counterparts for research and development insights.

The focus group research also revealed strong examples of Nepali civil society actors interrupting cycles of conflict and preserving shared heritage through the practice of traditional arts and crafts. As a universally accessible medium, the arts were found to offer chances for disparate social factions to engage in dialogue: be this men and women; Terai and Hill or Brahmin and Dalit. Again, the role of social enterprise organisations in facilitating cultural exchange was revealed to be central to the cultivation of peace in Nepal. Many contributing social entrepreneurs demonstrated a high level of awareness of the political tensions at play in the country, and had successfully devised strategies to engage people in utilising the arts to explore creative, peaceful responses. Politically neutral organisations, such as the British Council and private Universities, were found to be in the best position to support peaceful dialogue; in particular, the British Council's commitment to empowering women and girls to intervene in conflict situations and broker peace will play an important role in designing and delivering interventions in Nepal (British Council, 2016).

Ultimately, the study confirms that arts entrepreneurship is being successfully accessed by women in the Terai, but that further research is needed to better understand the complex interplay of inhibitors and enablers experienced by women artisans. Future research teams should consider multi-agency collaboration including social enterprises active at community-level; any research and development interventions should be co-designed with Terai artisans and ensure that representatives from each district are included in research teams.

The Study in Numbers

10	Participants interviewed
3	Focus groups held
12	Hours of field observation
\$0.64	Average daily wage for a Terai artisan
35	New partnerships formed
120,000	NPR raised for women artisans through handicraft sales at WOW Festival

Appendix



Figure 1: Map showing study locations [courtesy of maps.com]



Figure 2: Researchers from the British Council and Oxford Brookes University meet the members of the JWDC [courtesy of C. Burkert]



Figure 3: The JWDC's WOW Festival Exhibit, February 2017 [courtesy of C. Burkert]



Figure 4: The JWDC's WOW Festival Performance, February 2017 [courtesy of C. Burkert]

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