



Impact and Challenges of Covid-19 in the Pottery Value Chain

Expert Consultation



2nd May, 2020

This document is the result of a Consultation Sessions held between the SELCO Foundation staff and prominent experts and practitioners in the Pottery Value Chain. The discussion took place covering the challenges across three key aspects- pottery related activities, market channels and linkages, and financial support. The consultation was held with the following people:

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Pottery Activities

INPUTS & SUPPLY CHAIN

- The period from March to May is very critical for potters for two reasons-
 - The procurement and collection of mud for the complete year is done during this period
 - Main period to prepare for the production in the summer season- which is the peak season for most of the potters, followed by festival season Ganesh Chaturthi and Diwali, September onwards)
- Due to the lockdown, many of the potters who had the cashflow, were also not able to procure the raw materials for their peak work season. This was primarily because they could not access tractors or other transportation modes. This will affect their access to clay for the remaining year.
- Before the lockdown ends, monsoons will arrive and the clay will not be usable for pottery purposes. Some potters in remote villages might be able to procure clay from neighbouring fields. However, the prices may undergo inflation which they might not be able to afford considering the nil cashflows and loss of livelihoods.

- Many potters do not have proper storage facilities- with no sales, this risks the current inventory getting damaged.
- For potters who currently have raw materials, and are continuing to work to prepare for the festival season, they are not able to find space for storage. The existing products have not been liquidated yet resulting in shortage of space for new artefacts that can be produced during this time.
- Provision of shared facilities such as godowns in local areas can be a solution to enable them to store their inventory.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Market Channels and Linkages

- Lower skilled potters mainly rely on water storage containers and bottles where markets are seasonal
- Very high skilled potters which have developed a specific art form are fewer in number but can usually make good incomes from sale of giftable items.
- Summer season is a peak season for sales of earthen pots for water storage as well as designer artefacts which are mostly sold in exhibitions and other fairs. All fairs have been cancelled for the season due to lock down and social distancing protocols. For many potters, summer is the main or only season for sales.
- Certain linkages such as vendors for curd pots are continue to abide by their order, but restrictions in transportation of goods has provided a setback.
- The main item made by Potters in Odisha and some temple towns is a *kubo* which is a kind of pot used in temples by devotees. This key market linkage for the potters will be severely affected and little or no sales would be expected in the coming year.
- It is predicted that demand for pottery products will take a minimum of 1 year to start recuperating. Within this period, a lot of potters are expected to give up the craft in search of other livelihood opportunities.

| Product | Market Linkage |
|--|---|
| Bottles and Pots (Water Containers) | Summer - Peak Season. Sales Hampered, but can pick up post lockdown |
| Cups and Pots for setting and sale of curd, or sweet items | Since overall demand in the market has reduced, the market might be affected. But delivering on some orders might be possible, if transportation and delivery is made possible |
| Artisanal Products (Jewellery, Statues, Lamps and Diyas, Decorative Bowls and Cups) | These fetch a premium price, but sales will be severely affected for a year at least. Usually sold only to a niche market, or sold in fairs, exhibitions and festivals- which will not be an option |
| Large pots for Temples and other smaller artefacts fro use by pilgrims | Primarily in temple towns. Since the closing down of temples, and tourism activities being affected for a year at least- this linkage will be severely affected |

Financial Support

CASH FLOWS

- Unsold inventory has locked up precious capital. Since pottery is not recognised as an essential service, delivery on existing orders has not been possible.

- Since March to April is the procurement season, some potters have taken loans. While there has been a moratorium period of 3 months, post that period, the potters will be in distress and default on the loans since the market linkages will take a minimum of a year to revive.

- In the short and mid term, pottery and other artisanal communities would need relief support for the next 1 year for basic survival.

RELIEF PACKAGES

- Khadi India and District Industries Centre has provided some basic support in the past to the potters during disasters. They also provide support in training and in the past, have also announced programs to support asset building in the community- providing electric pottery wheels and blungers. For example, during the cyclone Fani, the registered potters were given a sum of INR 820 as relief support by DIC.

- The main relief packages that are available to the potters right now are the generic ration relief packages offered by state government for vulnerable groups. In some cases, these require a ration card, which some potters, specifically informal potters may not have.

- Handicrafts being a subset of the Ministry of Textile does not receive the kind of focus as it requires considering the number of individuals and families who depend on it as a source of Livelihood. Greater national level measures need to be taken to recognize skilled and unskilled artisanal communities in India and create special packages and schemes for them- not just for ration but also to secure their livelihoods.

Way Forward:

- Map and unlock relief schemes available for the crafts sector or potters in general.
- Support potters with immediate relief that help them tide over this pandemic but also supports their livelihood in the long run-
 - Working capital for raw material to prepare for the festival periods in 3 months
 - Coordinate for transportation license to ensure sales and delivery of confirmed orders
 - Design solutions on efficient storage of finished products so there is no damage
- Explore mapping of essential activities in the region to create market linkages; or to map out alternate uses of the machines like blunger (ie rent out to farmers for feed or fertiliser production)
- Since several potters will look for alternate livelihoods- important that appropriate up-skilling to re-skilling programs are made accessible

Thank You!

Do get in touch for further information and assistance.

Write to us at:

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SELCO Foundation COVID-19 Response Website:

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