Product Development Training: A Case Study of Kenyan Handloom Weavers

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Abstract

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) while providing employment and income opportunities operate in an extremely competitive environment and have a pressing need for additional markets to supplement their core market. This phenomenon is also observed in Kenya. Many MSEs including handloom weavers are limited in their ability to deliver products of the required quality standards in the volumes required at the agreed time. This case study documents the activities and outcomes of a project titled “New Product Training to Meet Market Needs”. The project aim was to improve the capacity of twenty individual or group members of the Hand Loom Weavers and Spinners Association (HAWESA) to meet market demands. Their businesses and the groups that they represented were located in different parts of Kenya although most were in Nairobi (the capital city) and its environs. The age of their businesses varied between 3 and 10 years. The target area of intervention was technical assistance in making consistent high quality hand loomed products. The project methodology consisted of three stages carried out between March 2007 and April 2008. The first stage was pre training activities, followed by training and finally monitoring of product design activities and evaluation of impact. The project beneficiaries identified hand woven products that were in demand by their regular customers. The handloom weavers were then trained on how to develop story boards for the new product designs and how to use patterns and templates for efficient and consistent manufacture of the identified products. The monitoring and evaluation showed that seven weavers subsequently designed two new weave patterns, three shirts and three bags. Despite good customer response to the new products, the weavers reported several challenges. They cited a lack of materials to try out samples and complained about not having enough time for new product design implementation. This study recommends that the weavers should be assisted financially and in technical skills to fully implement their training.

Key words- Kenya, Handloom Weaving, Product Development, Training