Area of Concern and Dimensions of the Problem

For over 20 years the Government of Tamilnadu has followed a policy of protecting handloom weavers through a special scheme for the production of low cost sarees and dhotis as well as uniform clothes for free distribution under various schemes. This policy was a crucial means to shoring up the livelihoods of thousand of poor artisans. Each year the Government distributed millions of free cotton handloom garments – school uniforms, sarees and dhotis, to the state’s poorest citizens. This distribution program of the Government has for long years been the main source of “demand” for the Handloom co-operatives. It is in fact kept these co-operative societies and their weavers alive. More than 50% of the budgetary outlay of the Department of Handlooms and Textiles of Government of Tamilnadu of about Rs. 190 crores per annum was spent on this scheme.

The State Government, in view of the numbers involved, kept the cost of the individual product low under this program. The fabrics were plain and without any designs and woven on primitive and ordinary looms. This resulted in the weavers loosing out on skills for when they were famous. As the orders for production of these clothes were being received on a regular basis, the weavers also developed a sense of complacency. The scheme provided for the employment of around 19500 weavers in 350 Co-operative Societies.

The profitability of these Societies has also been badly affected. Government has conducted detailed surveys in the area and has come to the conclusion that the weavers will have to be helped to become skilled and produce commercially viable products. Keeping in mind the fact that it was the lack of motivation and need to change (they were given assured production plan for the entire year) that had kept these weavers from progressing in their knowledge and skills, a concerted and focused approach to the issue will produce results. This is more so because the average age group of weavers is 40-50 and therefore it is not difficult to impart training on technologically up graded looms.

This Group of weavers is the target group for this project. The Weavers were using obsolete technology and had never felt the need for up gradation of the same since the weavers were fully dependent on low cost varieties supported by the State Government. Hence now that there is no Government scheme, the weavers are in dire straits economically and financially. Details of the number of weavers, their economic status, assets and savings of the group from 13 districts are enclosed.

The problems facing these weavers and affecting their livelihood are mainly due to the following reasons:

- Lack of Skills
- Lack of commercially marketable products
- Lack of knowledge regarding development of New Designs & Product diversification.
- Lack of knowledge regarding areas of Export potential and value addition to products.
• High cost of Production
• Outdated looms
• Inadequate flow of Funds
• Absence of Infrastructure and Training facilities
• Lack of marketing intelligence
• Stiff competition from International Market, due to:
  o Globalization
  o Mills and power looms