

Aiding the **MOUNTAIN WOMEN**

Leh - Jammu & Kashmir

The high altitude trans-Himalayan region of Ladakh is home to one of the finest natural fibres in the world, Pashmina. It is produced by a domesticated goat, *Capra Hircus*, which is reared by the Changpa, natives of cold and harsh highlands of Leh. The semi-nomadic Changpa depend mostly on their flocks of goats and herds of yak for their livelihood. They lack basic facilities, and live in relative poverty.

Studies have proven that the total value of the



Pashmina produced in Leh, after various value addition processes, is approximately ₹200 crore per annum. Out of this, only ₹10-12 crore per annum was retained in the local economy in Leh through the sale of raw Pashmina.

There is a lucrative niche market for genuine, hand-made Pashmina products. The process of creating finished fabrics from Pashmina is labour intensive. Special skills are required to create delicate Pashmina fibre.

A comprehensive plan Project Laksal, was designed by an independent Not for Profit Consultant, to build an institution, keeping sustainability and scalability in mind. The villages of Stok and Kharnakling were chosen for the pilot phase. A training module was devised and tested in the pilot phase of the project from June-September 2016.

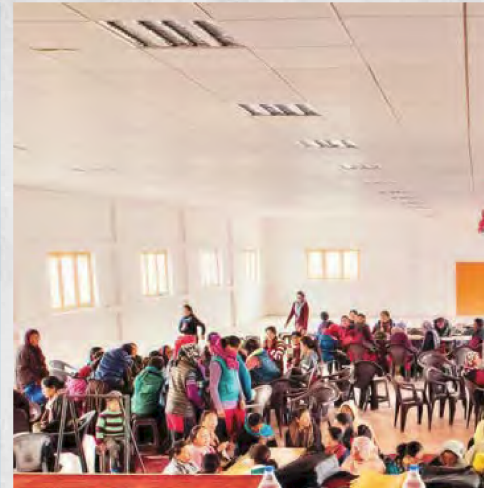
The aim of this project was to create an organised workforce of skilled rural women capable of producing and marketing their products directly and realising economies of scale.

The women were encouraged to learn the basics of designing



CHALLENGES FACED

- The extremely harsh weather conditions, coupled with lack of commensurate remuneration, dissuaded master trainers from providing training to rural communities
- Remote villages in difficult terrain posed challenges in coordination among the craftswomen
- Most of the villages involved in the project are devoid of regular power supply. The women had to work in dim lights severely straining their already weak eyesight





FINAL OUTCOMES

- The project has successfully trained 152 women who can design and create high end Pashmina, Yak and Sheep wool products
- Issued by the Ministry of Textiles, 137 women in the co-operative now have artisan identity cards; 'Looms of Ladakh' has 16 village team leaders, six office bearers and one Chief Executive Officer, all women
- The women have realised sales worth more than ₹26 lakh; the co-operative has executed supply orders for Novica, an online craft trading portal with presence in eight countries

with the help of professional designers. In order to make them independent, master trainers were developed from among the women to impart training to new groups and assume leadership roles in the cooperative. To ensure financial independence, the 'Looms of Ladakh' cooperative was provided with a revolving fund of ₹15 lakh as grant from the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, Leh.

Weeklong business management trainings were imparted by Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI), Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship Development Institute (JKEDI) and Institute of Rural Management, Anand, Gujarat (IRMA). For gaining practical exposure, the women were taken to trade fairs and institutions of excellence like the Kullu Weavers' Centre in Himachal Pradesh, Panchachuli, the Dastkaar Craft Fair, Delhi and the Textile India 2017 Fair, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

In May, 2017, the women got themselves registered as a cooperative with the name 'Looms of Ladakh'. It now has a showroom with all necessary infrastructure and a bank account.