



CASE STUDY

RANGSUTRA

Handmade crafts by highly skilled rural artisans in India



RangSutra Crafts India Ltd (RCIL)

www.rangsutra.com

RangSutra Crafts is a handmade crafts company owned by over 2,000 artisans - most of whom are women - who live and work in villages and small towns across India. These artisans are producers and active decision-makers in the supply chain, delivering ethically sourced and environmentally friendly handcrafted products to their customers.



PROBLEM - SOLUTION

The informal sector in India employs over 86% of India's total workforce. For rural India, 96% are considered informal workers - majority of whom are women in agriculture or the handloom and handicrafts sector¹. The same women earn roughly 31% less² than their men counterparts, despite taking on reproductive and household work on top of their informal labours. This results in financially insecure communities of rural women who are disproportionately affected by social issues like hunger, poverty, and climate change.

RangSutra is a community-owned handmade crafts company, empowering rural artisans in India by assigning them decision-making roles when designing, producing, and marketing the ethically sourced, environmentally friendly textile products. The organisation serves as a bridge between local ancestral skill and modern markets, environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

1 - <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/factsheets/glance-informal-sector-india>

2 - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7539753/>

BUSINESS MODEL

India's textiles - including handlooms and handicrafts - are exported to more than 100 countries, and account for 11.4% of the country's total exports³. The handlooms and handicrafts sector is second only to agriculture in terms of economic activity, employing 43.31 lakh weavers directly and indirectly throughout India, 77% of whom are women. Looking ahead, the sector market is expected to reach USD 6.2 billion by 2028.

Rangсутra promotes Indian traditional craftsmanship by utilising different crafting methods like applique, Chikankari, and Ralli in their products and textiles. The artisans design and produce hundreds of unique crafted products ranging from women and men's fashion, accessories, and home goods and textiles. Aside from direct selling to consumers (B2C), the brand has a wholesale (and benevolent) relationship with FabIndia, a chain store retailing clothing, furnishings, fabrics and products handcrafted by Indian community-based artisans. Rangсутra also sells handcrafted articles and home decor to furniture powerhouse IKEA.

³ - <https://www.investindia.gov.in/sector/textiles-apparel/handlooms-handicrafts>

CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN ACTION

Handloom weaving and handicrafts typically use less energy, work with natural materials, and produce less waste in comparison with mass production and manufacturing of the same types of products. Rangсутra subscribes to "slow fashion" - ensuring that their production processes consider the welfare of people and the planet by being intentional about the quality and quantity of products they design. The brand actively works toward optimizing materials use and limiting production waste. For home furnishings in particular, Rangсутra is able to eliminate unnecessary waste by weaving the exact widths required. Moreover, slivers of fabrics and other leftover materials are used to weave durries and create smaller bags and trinkets respectively.

Rangсутra uses Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) grade cotton for over 80% of its raw materials and has set up 107 kW of solar renewable energy capacity across 3 artisan states - Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana.

WOMEN IN SUSTAINABILITY

Over 80% of the 2000+ artisans that Rangсутra works with are women.

Aside from owning shares in the company, these women undergo upskilling in craft techniques, management and quality training, and product development workshops through their involvement with Rangсутra.

MEASURING IMPACT

Rangсутra is a 'people-first' organisation, focusing on improving the lives of its rural artisans through ownership, increased incomes, upskilling, and gender impact. The artisans are not only shareholders in the company, they are also able to take up supervisory and managerial roles in the production centers. The artisans receive regular income - 130% more than the market wage for artisans, giving them increased confidence and the ability to participate in decision making for the family. Artisans constantly receive skills training and support to develop their know-how in the handicraft sector. And given that Rangсутra works with majority women artisans, the gender impact of their work is palpable. Rangсутra estimates total impact created for all stakeholders at INR 16.83 Crore in 2022.

“Most artisans are [also] shareholders in the company. This is a matter of great pride for them.”

Rangсутra also commits to lower emissions by using handlooms instead of mill-made fabrics, uses effluent treatment in the dyeing process, and utilises solar energy to power operations. Through these initiatives,

Rangсутra products are approximately 31.71% less emissions-intensive versus mechanized cotton textiles.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- Recognised with the TIAW (The International Alliance for Women) World of Difference 100 Award in 2012
- Received the Nari Shakti Puraskar Award, the highest civilian honour for women in India, from the President of India in 2015
- Honored by the IIC (Impact Investors Council) for their Innovative Social Entrepreneurship in 2016
- Recognised by TIE Global as Social Enterprise of the Year in 2021
- Received the Women Transforming India Award from NITI Aayog, Government of India in 2021
- Recognised as Social Entrepreneur of the Year 2022 at the India Impact Awards 2022

GROWTH PLANS

Rangсутra is planning to grow and provide employment opportunities to more artisans from remote communities across India by mapping market demand and understanding what customers want from the enterprise, ultimately growing the market for responsible production and consumption. Alongside this, Rangсутra aims to create more awareness about India's diverse craft heritage, featuring unique looms and weaves per state.

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WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Sumita Ghose, Founder and Managing Director



While completing her Master's Degree in Conflict Resolution through a Fulbright fellowship in the US in 2002, Sumita Ghose came up with the idea of RangSutra as a platform to bring together different actors in the crafts space, highlighting the importance of rural artisans in the spectrum. Sumita was inspired to take action after working and living in rural Rajasthan where she met amazing women who had these traditional crafting skills and organic agriculture know-how but did not have the opportunities in livelihood, education, and health to improve their social positions.

“The idea of rangSutra came to me [as] a possible solution to rural unemployment and underemployment in India, due to the lack of industries in remote parts of India, away from State and even district capitals.”

Sumita believed in the innate leadership qualities of these rural women and artisans, and encouraged them to become shareholders in RangSutra. As shareholders, everyone has a stake in the business, and will do everything in their power to make sure the venture succeeds. Some artisans go on to become grassroots craft managers, taking responsibility for their groups and ensuring timely delivery of products to sales channels. On top of this, everyone ensures that they and their teammates are well taken care of and receive equal pay.

Women also play an important role in promoting a circular economy. Sumita took charge and formed women's groups to bring conversations of finance, technical expertise, and sustainability to the forefront, increasing confidence among women artisans to take action. Sumita used social entrepreneurship to uplift the lives of rural artisans across India in an industry that supports environmentally-friendly practices from design to production to delivery.

Sumita dreams of “crafting an inclusive world” with the stakeholders of RangSutra - by creating self-dependent and financially-able artisan communities and implementing sustainable policies across the traditional handicrafts supply chain, she's well within achieving this vision.



ABOUT CIRCULEAD

CircuLead is designed to empower women entrepreneurs building innovative solutions in the Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy. The programme aims to support women leaders to strengthen their business models, deepen their leadership skills and learn from peers through a hybrid, immersive learning experience. The EU-Resource Efficiency Initiative (EU-REI) is implementing this capacity building programme with support from [Nüshu Network](#), powered by [Unlock Impact](#).

ABOUT EU-RESOURCE EFFICIENCY INITIATIVE

European Union's Resource Efficiency Initiative (EU-REI) (2017-2023) for India and aims to support India in the implementation of the United Nations global Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) agenda by way of adapting international standards and best practices in business on resource efficiency and circular economy and fostering the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources. The EU-REI aims to facilitate partnerships between Indian and European businesses and stakeholders on Resource Efficiency (RE) and Circular Economy economy in sectors of interest.

EU-REI acts as an important vehicle for the India-EU Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy Partnership.

It is implemented on behalf of the European Union by a consortium led by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), Confederation of the Indian Industry (CII) and adelphi.

ABOUT UNLOCK IMPACT AND NÜSHU NETWORK

[Unlock Impact](#) is a gender-smart women-led firm dedicated to help purpose-driven enterprises succeed across South and Southeast Asia. Powered by Unlock Impact, the [Nüshu Network](#) offers community, coaching and capital for women entrepreneurs in Asia who are looking to build and grow sustainable enterprises. Since its inception, the network has delivered 2000+ hours of learning, 1000+ hours of mentoring at 50+ community events to over 500+ women entrepreneurs.

ABOUT adelphi

[adelphi](#) is Europe's leading independent think-and-do tank for climate, environment and development. We are some 350 strategists, thought leaders and practitioners working at the local and global levels to find solutions to the most urgent political, economic and social challenges of our time. As a policy consultancy, we support a just transition towards carbon neutrality and sustainable, liveable societies. Our work is grounded in transdisciplinary research, evidence-based consulting and stakeholder dialogues. With these tools we shape policy agendas, facilitate political communication, inform policy processes and support decision-makers.

