Chapter 2
Designing Future Livelihoods:
The Sustainable Value of Tripura Bamboo Mission

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ABSTRACT

As one of the oldest cottage industries of India, the bamboo crafts are an important source of livelihood for the tribal societies in Northeast India. With the advent of globalization, new spheres of networking and market opened up making it hard for the traditional artisans to compete with the global sellers. With no value addition, the products sold by the artisans were undervalued in the global market. Gradually, artisans adopted newer means of producing these traditional goods, which involved both process and product innovation. In order to protect indigenous knowledge base and tradition, Tripura Bamboo Mission was introduced as a successful sustainable livelihood model. It is based on a cluster approach that innovatively transforms a subsistence crop into an essential source of livelihood. This chapter reflects on the sustainable value of the TBM design and the impact of collaboration on the community and productivity of tribal artisans. It also highlights the socio-cultural value addition to the community and the sustainability value of the cluster design.

INTRODUCTION

Moving a step out of the realm of the design world and bringing under its ambit social issues of relevance, defines a social design. Designing for social good entails a change in the attitude of the people involved and taking actions to address local needs. Such a socially responsible design emphasizes the needs and experiences of people while recognizing the constraints of time, money, resources, and engagement while facilitating better socio-spatial relationships. Collective collaboration here plays a major role in making the socially sustainable design a success. A sustainable community design reduces the negative impact on resources, environment, and communities and distributes responsibility amongst its members.

Sustainability is a relationship between dynamic human economic systems and larger, dynamic, but normally slower changing ecological systems, such that human life can continue indefinitely, human individuals can flourish, and human cultures can develop - but also a relationship in which the effects of human activities remain within bounds so as not to destroy the health and integrity of self-organizing systems that provide the environmental context for these activities. (Norton, 1992, p. 45)

Tripura Bamboo Mission (TBM) resonates with the sustainable development aims: "to provide for today's generations without compromising the resources and security of future generations" (Brundtland, 1987). Global sustainable development intends to encourage the building of partnerships and roles amongst various social actors in the community, including indigenous people. Chapter 26 of Agenda 21 stipulates the need for increasing the role and capacity of indigenous people in sustainable development and to bring in equality factors into account. Cobb et al. (1995), considers "sustainable development as a concept encompassing the integration of economic development, social concern and environment protection (or the triple bottom line sustainability) in a mutually reinforcing manner" (p. 36).

Tripura Bamboo Mission is a socially sustainable product-service design where the quality of products is enhanced through collective planning and organizing. The TBM design process improves human well-being and provides for a sustainable livelihood. Solow (1991) claims that the system is sustainable as long as the total capital (human-made plus natural capital) of the system is equal or greater in every next generation. It designs for successful participation within a cluster with productive outcomes for the community. The interaction and connectedness of the three elements: People, Process, and Platforms is what defines the social design. Social Design, and more so a sustainable social design, may be defined as an interaction of the interconnected elements, where a group of motivated individuals, through a process or a set of actions, support, accelerate or extend the desired outcome using relevant platforms.

TBM, in its ambit, creates a social space for the individuals to gather and interact to generate the desired outcomes. "Designers are making a human argument that community-driven design thinking can establish social change" (Gibboney, 2013). The TBM design is a very human-centered design that:

…includes products and aspects of the physical environment that meet the needs and abilities of the user, not those that demand adaptation to the design by the user. Human-centered design is not a design style, but is a process for designing and developing buildings, products, and communities that is grounded in information about the people who will be using them - utilizing research findings and data on cognitive abilities, physical abilities and limitations, social needs, and task requirements in order to provide living-environment solutions that enable all users to function at their highest capacity - regardless of age or ability. (Greenhouse, 2012)

TBM also qualifies for a green design where "planning and investing in a technology infrastructure serves the needs of today as well as conserving resources and saving money" (Pollack, 2008, p. 63). The cluster approach followed under the Mission makes these clusters social innovation hubs where process and product innovation take place. "The collective process of enhancing the immediate environment by endogenous private, public, and collective organizations clearly is a kingpin in the creation of an innovative milieu" (Marc-Urbain Proulx, 1992). In a fast-changing world, where technology is partaking human excellence, it is even more important to preserve the local knowledge and traditions. The most common aspiration of all forms of social design is changing the world and addressing the social issues but not

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