

Exploring Opportunities and Challenges of Craft Making: The Case of Knitting and Crochet Crafts in Addis Ababa

Simret Gebretsadik Araya

Ethiopian Civil Service University, College of Leadership and Governance, Institute of Leadership and Good Governance P.O.Box: 20935/1000, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study is to explore the opportunities and challenges of knitting and crochet crafts in Addis Ababa. To that end, an exploratory research design with qualitative approach is employed. Data are collected via in-depth interview, focus group discussion, observation and document review. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis and narration. Findings revealed that the national labour policy, the investment law, the industrial development package and the micro and small enterprises strategy as well as establishment of responsible government institutions have created promising environment for the crafts' sector to flourish. However, absence of integration among stakeholders has resulted in various constraints such as inadequate access to working premises, lack of market linkage, inconvenient loaning schemes and absence of training on organizing and upgrading the knitting and crocheting skills of the crafters. Besides, crafters feel desperate due to their belief that the public consider knitted and crocheted craft products as old fashioned. The study concluded that, the responsible government bodies should integrate and work on creating demand for the knitting and crochet craft products by teaching elementary school students, providing further training to crafters, enable crafters' to operate their business in organized forms and subsidize the input supplies. Otherwise, these crafts might disappear with all the potential benefits human beings could extract from them.*

KEY WORDS: - challenges; crafters, crochet; knitting; opportunities

INTRODUCTION

Knitting and crochet are types of needle work, mainly feminist crafts, used to produce diverse types of decorative and functional items (Leslie, 2007). Knitting is the act of making fabric by using two needles or thin sticks and yarn. Loops in the yarn are manipulated with the sticks to make an elastic knitted fabric. The word knitting is said to be driven from an Anglo-Saxon word “Cynntan” which means to knot or tie (Hubert, 2010). Similarly, Crochet represents a craft in which yarn is looped in to a patterned fabric with a hooked needle like instrument which is traditionally known as the crochet hook. The term crochet is said to have emanated from the old French word “Croches” or “Croc” which means hook (Reed, 2004). Crochet creates an interloped fabric structure worked with a single continuous yarn.

These crafts are used to make wide variety of objects, from narrow decorative bands to bedspreads, collars, pillow cases, table cloths, cardigans, hats, sweaters and skirts (Hubert, 2010, Calderin, 2009). The knitting and crochet products are durable by nature and can be designed with attractive colour combination and expression (Čuden, 2017). Making knitting and crochet crafts demand quite simple inputs such as moderately skilled labour, yarn, crochet hooks, needles, knitting sticks, measurement tape, stitch markers, sewing machine, scissors and glue (Rehfeldt, 2013, Hubert, 2010).

History tells us that knitting and crochet have been used as ways out of hard times in England and Ireland. During the Second World War, England faced acute shortage of wool and the government urged people to recycle wool and produce knitted and crocheted garments for the army. Similarly, Ireland was hit by great famine which lasted from 1845-1850. The Irish lift themselves out of that disaster by massively knitting and crocheting in cooperative forms and schools began teaching the skill all over the country (Hubert, 2010, Marks, 2009).

However, gradually, the demand for knitted and crocheted items has been influenced by technological changes, fashion trends and public perception (Grum, 2011, Sims, 2002). It was negatively affected by the burgeoning textile industries of Europe in the beginning of the 19th century. This was for two basic reasons. The first one is that the modern industries have employed many women who were previously engaged in doing these crafts as a means of their livelihoods. Secondly, even though there were some women who still kept knitting and crocheting at home, they were discouraged due to consumers' preference for the manufactured textile products which were perceived to be more fashionable, consistent and comfortable than the handmade fabrics (Meer, 2017).

As a result, an art and crafts movement was started in England in 1888 and the USA in 1897. The movement created a small group of teachers, architects, crafts people and collectors who finally organized the first crafts exhibition in the US. The craft demonstration advanced excellence in design, technical mastery, and functionality of the craft products in everyday life (Meer, 2017, Mahgoub & Alsound, 2015).

Finally, the craft revived at the early 21st century due to the internet technology which unites knitting and crochet enthusiasts and diffuses the practical skills of how to make these crafts (Mayne, 2016, Hubert, 2010). These days, knitting and crochet have developed in to profitable market activity in the West. Besides, phrases such as yarn bombing, graffiti knitting and yarn storming are used to describe urban social practices of producing knitted and crocheted tactile products and displaying them in public places (Čuden, 2017).

According to Silverman (1999), craft making has been practiced in different parts of Ethiopia beginning from time immemorial. Pottery, basketry, beadwork, embroidery, metal works, sculpture and weaving are the main types of craft works practiced in Ethiopia (Center of excellence international consult (CEIC), 2019). Nonetheless, the knitting and crochet crafts were lately introduced to Ethiopia during the Italian invasion of the country (1936-1941).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview of the crafts' sector

The Crafts sector absorbs a significant number of the work force of developing countries and contributes a lot to their national economy (Kebede, 2018, Abebe, 2017, Delbiso, 2013, ILO, 2002). Craft making is a business activity practiced both in rural and urban areas (Mahgoub & Alsound, 2015). Craft refers to customary methods of creating functional and decorative items either for personal use or for the market. Craft makers

usually work in a group of small size; it is in most cases done by family members (Qadri, 2018). Besides, their working conditions are poor and insecure; they use simple equipment and small work premises. UNESCO (1997), cited in (Yang, Shafi, Song & Yang, 2018, p.3), defined crafts in terms of artisanal products as follows:

“Artisanal products are those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant.”

Crafting has been practiced starting from the ancient times (Khurana, 2011). Conceivably, it could be as old as the human civilization itself. Archaeologists over the years have conducted excavations in different parts of the world and discovered various crafted items made in different eras via which the human civilization has gone through (Kabanda, 2015, Silverman, 1999). Hence, craft has been and continues to be one of the most important features of the human life in the world.

As a result, different parts of the world are known for their unique craft works such as lacquer work and ceramic in Japan and China, tapestry in Florence, carpets in Persia, batik in Java and textile craft works in Africa (UNIDO, 2009). Craft covers, materials ranging from glass, textiles, ceramics and jewelry to curios industrial appliances and every day utility. The main cause for its diversification is the continuous change of means of production (Grum, 2011, Smith, 1981).

Significance of craft making

The significance of craft making for the humanrace could be broadly categorized in to two as economic and socio-cultural.

Economic significance

Well organized craft making has potential to make considerable economic contribution which could stimulate the national economy by generating new jobs to job seekers, attracting tourists and enable consumers to get qualified products for affordable prices (Qadri, 2018, Pathan, 2016, Nyawo, & Mubangizi, 2015, UNIDO, 2009). It is also significant industrious sector and export commodity for many developing countries (Mahgoub & Alsound, 2015). Beyond supporting the livelihoods of the people, it also promotes creativity of individuals engaged in making the craft (Mayne, 2016, Schwarz & Yair, 2010).

The crafts' share in the worldwide market is estimated about 30 billion USD. Colombia, Tunisia, Morocco and Thailand are some of the countries that amass a good amount of revenue from their craft industries (UNESCO, 2009b, cited in Kabanda, 2015). Besides, the annual contribution of the craft industry amounts to \$13.8 billion in the United States of America. In India, craft making is a sector which employs about 15 million people and it stands second next to agriculture in its contribution to the country's economic development. Haiti gains 2 million dollars a year from its papier mache and metal craft products (Derks, Barber, Kula, & Dalziel, 2006, Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), 1998).

According to UNESCO (2009b, p.167, cited in Kabanda, 2015, p. 9), the craft sector makes positive

contribution to countries' economy by playing the following roles.

- a. Stimulate entrepreneurial spirit to build on the innovative potential of opportunity-driven citizens to serve as engines for development.
- b. Mobilize and utilize local resources towards development which otherwise could be wasted.
- c. Decentralize business activities and provide linkage between rural and urban communities and various branches of socio-economic establishments to meet people's needs at grass roots level.

Socio-cultural significance

Likewise, the social and cultural advantages of craft making are numerous and have long lasting impact on the socio-cultural context of a nation (Pathan, 2016, Silverman, 1999). First and for most, forming crafting groups create social inclusion under which people from different Socio-cultural and economic backgrounds came together due to the passion they have towards the craft and the economic value added to their livelihoods (Qadri, 2018, Kabanda, 2015).

When the craft makers are gathered, they get chance to discuss on their socio-cultural and economic issues which by itself creates sense of community value, achievement, awareness and strength in a locality (Sowden, 2015, Pollanen, 2012). Further, this unity of craft makers helps them weave social connections, heal emotional disorders and transfer the craft making skills and legacy to current and future generations (Mayne, 2016). All in all, the crafts' socio-cultural benefits to crafters could be summarized as follows (Schwarz & Yair, 2010, p. 67-68).

- a. Focus and concentration
- b. Freedom and autonomy
- c. Confidence, self-esteem and sense of value
- d. Achievement and ownership
- e. Experience of enjoyment and development of imagination skills
- f. Inclusion and social interaction

Further, giving crafted products as gifts to loved ones could create strong emotional attachment and ensure longevity of the memories of friendship (Čuden, 2017, Pollanen, 2013).

Statement of the problem

These days, various homework easing electronic machines and appliances are introduced in to the urban centers of Ethiopia and many residents are using these technologies. Since most of the domestic work is carried out by women, availability of these machines could enable them get relief from the home work burden that used to take a woman's whole day and some part of her night time as well. This scenario creates room for the woman where she could engage in creative and productive activities such as knitting and crocheting (Barroso, 2019).

Besides, the knitting and crochet crafts use simple inputs and are suitable to be made at home side by side with child care and other household responsibilities of women (Čuden, 2017). It is also convenient to knit or crochet while one is watching TV, getting hair dressing service and moving long distances via different modern modes of transportation.

Nonetheless, despite all these favorable scenarios, the researcher observed that many women residents of the

city do not knit or crochet. There are only few women who individually practice the crafts to make simple functional and decorative items for their own, as a gift for others and rarely for sell. On top of that, except the few craft making centers established by non-for-profit organizations, it is hard to find organizations engaged in knitting and crocheting in Addis Ababa.

There is dearth of literature on craft making in Ethiopia in general and on the knitting and crochet crafts in particular. The few studies conducted so far on craft works (CEIC, 2019, Pathan, 2016, Grum, 2011, Wayessa, 2009), indicated that even though there are about 16 million people engaged in craft making, the crafts' sector is still at its infant stage. The reasons for such backwardness are the sector's lack of adequate link with tourism, crafters' inability to transform their crafted items in a way responsive to modern life styles, the operators' lack of training and business development services, absence of product diversification and export arrangements (Hailai, Vermaack, Kibrom, Luback, Mahlet, Negasi, & Yemane, 2019).

However, none of these studies have addressed the issues of knitting and crochet craft making. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to make contribution that enables to fill this knowledge gap. To that end, the researcher has designed the following specific objectives.

- i. To explore the Crafters' outlook regarding public perception on the knitted and crocheted items.
- ii. To identify the opportunities available for the knitting and crochet craft making.
- iii. To discover the challenges related with the knitting and crochet craft making.

METHODS OF THE STUDY

The exploratory research design was adopted for this study. Exploratory research design deals with exploring into a phenomenon. It did not focus on finding out conclusive results; rather, it comes up with initial findings that could serve as a base for further quantitative studies to be conducted on the specific issue under discussion (Reiter, 2017). Besides, the exploratory research design is flexible enough to provide opportunity to use diverse qualitative data collection tools (Creswell, 2009, Reichertz, 2014, Gray, 2004).

Both primary and secondary data are used for the purpose of this research. The snowball and the judgmental non-probability sampling techniques were employed to find out respondents who are well experienced in making these crafts for market as well as those who are rich in information on the input provision, production and consumption aspects of the knitting and crochet craft products.

Primary data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with craft makers, yarn dealers, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Micro and Small Enterprises Development (MSED) Agency, the Addis Ababa City Administration's Education Bureau, Bureau of Trade and Industry, Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Agency, Micro Finance Institution, the Kotebe Metropolitan University's College of Teachers' education and two private textile and garment companies.

The interviewed crafters were composed of ten female individual crafters and leaders of two institutions engaged in knitting and crochet craft making. All of the ten individual crafters selected for interview live in different parts of the city and have long been occupied in knitting and crocheting as a means of their livelihood. One of the craft making institutions selected for this study was established around the 1970s by foreigners who came from Germany and the Netherlands. In 1993, the foreigners transferred ownership of the institution to a local NGO. The second Craft making institution has 33 years of experience in craft making. The founding members of the organization were trained by the Catholic God Shepherd sisters. It is currently engaged in dying, weaving, printing, doll making, patching, knitting and crocheting activities.

In addition to the interviews, focus group discussion was conducted with eight traditional craft product dealers working in Addis Ababa, around the post office, and personal observation was made to get insights of craft making and marketing that could not be obtained via the other data collection tools. On the other hand, secondary data took account of review of relevant documents namely, the Addis Ababa Education Bureau's education curriculum, the National labour policy (2009), the investment law (2012) the micro and small enterprises (MSEs) strategy (2012) and the industrial development package (2008).

The data collected through in-depth interview, focus group discussion and observation were transcribed on the field. Consequently, the comprehensive transcript was read carefully and repeatedly in order to label the most important phrases that are going to be coded. Then, the codes were categorized according to their importance and relevance to meet objectives of the study. Similarly, secondary data extracted from documents were categorized based on thematic issues of the study. Finally, the coded and thematically categorized data were analyzed using thematic analysis and narration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Crafters' outlook on public perception regarding the knitted and crocheted products

All the interviewed crafters as well as participants of the focus group discussion said that there is negative public perception towards crocheted and knitted items. The crafted products are considered as old fashioned and crafters are seen as illiterate and without other options of income generation. This finding is similar with the findings of Mahgoub and Alsound, (2015) and Grum (2011) which asserted that the public is more interested to buy machine made textile items even though the crafted products are more durable, cheap and visually attractive.

According to results of the focus group discussion, the massive import of machine made, modern, diversified and attractive items in to the local market has diverted the public's interest on knitted and crocheted products to the machine made fabrics. They added that *"due to their lack of sophisticated skill and competence in making these crafts, Knitters and Crocheters are not in position to compete by crafting superior tangible objects with uniqueness, quality, attractive colour combinations and diversity."* There is also similar finding by Čuden's (2017) study on multiple faces of contemporary hand knitting and Wayessa's (2009) study on socio-economic status of hand craft women.

Furthermore, the researcher encountered an instance whereby similar hand crocheted sweaters, one made in the USA and the other one crocheted by a local Crocheter, here in Addis Ababa, were displayed in a boutique located at the Bole sub city and priced with a significant amount of difference. The price for the imported crocheted sweater was fixed at 850 birr whereas the local one was valued for 400 birr only. Ten days after the first encounter, the researcher went back to the boutique where she saw the sweaters and the sales person told her that the USA made sweater is already sold while there is still no demand for the locally crocheted sweater. The sales person added that *"handmade sweaters are rarely imported from abroad but, whenever they are available in the market, people are very interested to buy such items; while the demand for locally made similar stuffs is unpredictable."* In a similar study, Mahgoub and Alsound, (2015) found out that unpredictability of the demand for crafted items has discouraged crafters' creativity, productivity and their stay in the craft making business. On this regard, the interviewee from one of the selected craft making institutions reflected that:

Even though the government is highly cooperative in providing working space, our crocheted and knitted items are not getting market. Only some individuals and traders came here and buy the products. Most of the time, people said that the price for crocheted and knitted items is high. For instance, the average price

of a moderate adult person's sweater is 350 birr. This price is still lower than the price set for similar machine knitted sweaters. What makes the price of the crafted sweater seem higher is the public's perception towards handmade items. The society still believes that handmade items are simple and should be cheap. However, crafting these products is physically and mentally demanding.

Similarly, one of the interviewed crafters stated that she has been making these crafts for the past thirteen years for a subsistence amount of financial return. She emphasized that making these crafts and/or using the products are being considered as signs of backwardness and old fashioned. Therefore, she is shifting her business from knitting and crocheting different fashion wears and decorative articles to making simple decorated slippers. A study conducted by CEIC (2019, p.32), supported the crafters' view on the public's negative perception towards crafted products by stating that:

People in developed countries have awareness and positive attitude towards hand crafted items. However, the value given to crafted items and their operators in Ethiopia is discouraging. The cause for development of such negative attitude towards locally produced craft items is the generation's growing dependency on and bias towards foreign and industrial products.

This finding is also similar with that of Ogbonnaya and Ogwo (2016) which stated that the colonial mentality of assigning superiority to foreign made products and inferiority to the local ones is decreasing public demand for domestically produced textile and garment products in Nigeria.

Likewise, Pathan, (2016) and Grum (2011) on their studies of craft making in different parts of Ethiopia concluded that despite presence of some improvements from the past, there is still negative perception towards crafted products. Similarly, the French multinational market research and consulting firm named Institut de publique sondage d' opinion secteur (IPSOS), on its 2013 study of crafts' usage, perception and opportunity in Kenya and Tanzania, found out that even though the demand for crafted fashion accessories and home decorations is increasing, there are segments of the society who still perceive that crafted items lack uniqueness, are very expensive and do not have quality.

As a practical proof of the aforementioned findings, the researcher observed many women and girls wearing machine knitted sweaters with crochet and knitting patterns. This shows that there is public interest to use machine knitted and crocheted designs. Thus, the ostensible negative perception on the knitted and crocheted items could be related to factors other than being out dated or old fashioned. This could basically be related to quality, colour combination and attractive finishing.

Finally, through observation, the researcher realized that it is rarely fortunate for children and the youth to find someone, either within the family or in the neighborhoods, engaged in making these crafts from whom they could informally learn the skills and develop passion to crafted fabrics and decorative stuff. Hence, the public's negative perception towards knitted and crocheted items is result of lack of formal and informal trainings of children and adults in society and the substantial invasion of the market by machine produced fabrics.

Opportunities for the Knitting and Crochet crafts

According to interview made with an official from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry has given special attention to development of crafts. It is working in collaboration with well-known craft consultants in the area such as the Salem and Muya Ethiopia. The Ministry has also established separate cultural department accommodating the following four arts.

- a. Performing art (entertainment, theater, music)
- b. Visual art (molding, photography, painting)

- c. Literary art (fictions, poetry)
- d. Craft making (pottery, embroidery, weaving, crochet, knitting, basketry)

The interviewed official added that different efforts are being made to economically empower craft makers. For instance, craft galleries are opened in different parts of the city and exhibitions and bazaars are organized seasonally. This situation is enabling crafters to get market access for their products. Furthermore, review of the Ministry's strategic document on development of crafts show that it has identified nine craft categories on which the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges have to train their students. The Ministry's official explained that knitting and crochet crafts are given equal emphasis with other types of crafts by placing them under the textile crafts and designs category of the strategic document.

Moreover, the government has adopted an industrial development strategy that emphasizes the need for strengthened crafts sector as a promising way forward towards broadening the industrial base and local production structure. The industrial development strategy puts primary focus on the textile and garment industries, to which the knitting and crochet crafts are highly interlinked, for the following reasons:

- a. Textile sector is foundation of industrialization of any developed nation
- b. Abundance of cotton production in Ethiopia
- c. Its strong link with agricultural development led industrialization policy
- d. Its labour intensive nature
- e. Its capital saving nature
- f. High market demand for textile products
- g. Abundance of unskilled and moderately skilled manpower

The other opportunity here is that, due to the relative peace, stability and investor friendly policy environments of the nation, foreign investors are investing their capital, knowledge and technology in the textile and garment sector. This reality enables crafters to get yarn from textile factories operating domestically.

Similarly, the national labour policy placed a great deal of weight on promotion of industries that are labour intensive. Since crochet and knitting crafts are labour intensive by nature, they have potential to absorb a considerable number of skilled and semi-skilled labour forces (Hailai et. al, 2019, Abebe, 2017, Čuden, 2017, Pollanen, 2013). Last but not least, the national labour policy gave emphasis to development of tourism based Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs). Such MSEs are expected to be established by people skilled in pottery, basketry, embroidery, weaving, crochet and knitting crafts.

To enforce the above stated policies and strategies, the government established different agencies such as the Micro and Small Enterprises Development (MSED) Agency; the Micro Finance Institutions and the TVET Colleges. These agencies are established at the federal, regional and city administration levels. On top of that, the government enacted a law on the protection of intellectual property rights and established a mandated agency known as the intellectual property authority (IPA). This scenario could encourage crafters' creativity by making them feel confident that their personally innovated designs are protected by law.

Moreover, the internet technology is creating enabling environment for those who are passionate to make knitting and crochet crafts. Using the internet, crafters' could share their creations with other crafters located domestically or abroad. Finally, due to the government's effort in expanding the coverage of primary education to all, many people in the young generation group are literate and can make personal search to enhance their knitting and crocheting skills.

Challenges of knitting and crochet craft making

Despite presence of the aforementioned policy, institutional frameworks, strategies and enabling phenomena set to support promotion and development of craft making, Knitters and Crocheters are facing various difficulties. On this regard, findings of this study are similar with that of Makhitha (2017) which stated that craft makers in South Africa are facing challenges such as lack of access to finance, lack of access to market, supply chain challenges and the fact that they have limited access to the internet. Similarly, Challachew (2018), Pantha, (2016), Grum, (2011) and Wayessa (2009) found out that craft makers in Ethiopia are facing challenges related to input provision, competitive craft making skills, finance, working premises and marketing for their craft products.

Provision of inputs

Knitting and crochet crafts use yarns made from plant, animal and synthetic fibers (Hubert, 2010). Different types of yarns result in completely different crafted pieces of fabrics. Crafters with adequate supply of this variety of yarns can produce items that are really unique and better in quality. According to Baugh (2011), there are eight types of yarn that could be used for crochet and knitting. However, out of these different varieties of yarns that are available in the developed countries' markets; cotton, acrylic and polyester are the only available yarn types in Addis Ababa. According to interview made with yarn dealers, polyester is imported from china; acrylic, the most available type of yarn, is both imported and locally produced and cotton is produced domestically. Interviewed crafters accentuated that they are facing challenges due to lack of yarn diversity, lower quality, high price and inconsistent provision of yarn in the market.

The price of yarn is high due to the fact that individual crafters are not financially capable to buy the amount of yarn they need directly from producers or wholesalers. This is so because; these entities demand crafters to buy large quantity of a single type and colour of yarn at a time. For instance; Saygin Dima Textiles Company allows individual crafters to buy its yarn products if and only if they can buy at least 150 kilograms of yarn that is of the same type and color. Similarly, the Nifas Silk Yarn Factory's lower limits for sale are between 65 kilograms and 80 kilograms. So that, crafters are being forced to buy a huge quantity of the same type of yarn which they may not need it at a time. This scenario affects their financial capability to buy other types and colours of yarn. Therefore, the last resort they have is to buy yarn from retailers who can supply smaller sizes of up to 100 gram and with different colors. For instance, the price for a 100 gram of acrylic yarn is 35-40 birr, while the price for the same grams of cotton and polyester yarns is higher in the market.

The interviewee from one of the intuitional crafters said that, previously, domestic textile factories were capable of producing yarns with different colors, thickness and type. However, these days, it is difficult to get yarn of the required quality, type and thickness. The lower quality and less diversity in color, thickness and type of yarn prohibit crafters from making diversified crocheted and knitted products. Above and beyond, crafters stressed more on the problem of inconsistent provision of yarn in the market. As a result, it is not uncommon for crafters to accumulate unfinished craft items due to lack of the yarn with which the craft project was already started.

The other challenge faced by crafters is lack of up to date crafting tools. Knitting and crochet tools are of diversified nature, size, quality and shape which enable crafters to make stitches of different designs, shapes and sizes. However, the interviewed crafters stated that lack of diversified knitting sticks and crochet hooks is a great obstacle to ensure quality and diversity in their crafts. The only types of crochet hooks and knitting sticks available in the domestic market are those made up of aluminum and metal. These tools have a relatively rough surface and they are without handle. This feature makes them uncomfortable for crafters to diligently and consistently work with. Currently, the average price of a single knitting stick is 125 birr and for crochet hook is 75 birr. On top of that, the researcher observed that there are only few traders who sale imported

knitting sticks and crochet hooks. There is no locally made crochet hook or knitting stick in the market.

Designing and Crafting Skills

Design is one of the basic elements required to make knitted and crocheted items. Based on findings of the document review, craft making is nominally set as a component of the Addis Ababa city administration's elementary school education curriculum. However, its inclusion is made in a shallow and unsystematic way. The curriculum simply states that *"about four or five periods in a semester will be allocated for a student centered craft making which includes crochet and knitting."* However, adequacy of these slight details and the number of periods allocated to train students on these crafts is questionable. On top of that, there is no course syllabus designed for knitting and crochet craft making.

On the other hand, the Kotebe Metropolitan University, which is mandated to train teachers, is not training teachers on knitting and crochet crafts. According to interview made with the university's Academic and Research Vice president, there is mismatch between the elementary school's education curriculum and the competence of the teachers trained by the university. Besides, there are no other governmental or private institutions that train teachers on these crafts. Hence, it is crystal clear that students could not learn these skills mainly due to lack of teachers trained in the area.

As a result, most of the interviewed Knitters and Crocheters stated that they have learned the crafting skills informally through experience. Only few of them were trained in training institutions. However, the attempt the crafters made and the practical opportunities available to update their crafting skills are minimal. As a result, they remained confined to making simple items such as scarves, hats or capes and home ornaments. Previously, in addition to the formal schools, there were institutions that teach and train the knitting and crocheting skills. Typical examples could be the Catholic Cathedral School at Piazza and the Catholic Medhine Association located around the Alert Hospital. Nowadays, these institutions have shifted their training areas into machine based knitting, crocheting and weaving.

Interview conducted with an official from the Addis Ababa MSED Agency revealed that the Agency is providing training on areas identified by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism that are really marketable and profitable. The official added that *"crochet and knitting are simply cultural crafts made by housewives at home. Since, crochet and knitting products do not have market demand; the Agency is not training students on these crafts."* This official's reflection implied that the public's lack of interest on knitting and crochet crafts has penetrated into the Agency's perception. This exacerbates complication of the challenges of crafters' in advancing their crafting skills.

Some of the interviewed crafters underlined that lack of skilled manpower is one of the obstacles to their business's success. When the crafters get so many craft projects to be made for bazaars and exhibitions, there is great need to outsource the projects to other crafters. A typical example for this could be the case raised by one Crafter. She told the researcher that:

Whenever a bazaar is organized by the MSED Agency, I need to outsource different projects by providing yarn, knitting needles and crochet hooks. Even though it is known that there are some relatively skilled crafters residing in the city, it is hard to find their whereabouts. This is so because, there is no formal means by which crafters could connect and know each other.

These days, the internet is serving as a uniting space for Knitters and Crocheters of the developed world. It enabled crafters to share their innovations; learn more crafting skills from each other and promote their creativity (Mayne, 2016, Hubert, 2010). However, most of the interviewed crafters have limitations in getting

access and operating the internet. This is due to their lower level of education and financial constraints to cover the internet service fees. Some of the interviewees said that they occasionally get new designs from the internet with the help of some friends or relatives who work in private or public organizations. These employees assist crafters by downloading the designs from the internet and hand the soft copies over to the requesting crafters. Then, the crafters get them colour printed in stationery and secretarial service shops. During observation, crafters show the researcher well-documented albums of printed knitting and crochet designs taken from the internet.

Thus, the designs being used by Crafters are mostly taken from old design catalogues, from other crafters and sometimes from the internet. There are rare instances where the crafters use their innovative capacity to create new designs for their own. Due to the fact that they are not working on their own designs as well as the meager income they earn as a return, the crafters lack interest to adhesively focus on making the crafts with passion, creativity and consistency.

Access to finance and working premises

The other fundamental challenge encountered by crafters is their financial incapacity to get different inputs and commercially active working premises for their products. Obviously, the formal banking transactions are not amenable to such economically poor crafters due to their incapability to provide collaterals and get financial loan. The government has established micro credit associations aimed at providing financial access for such groups. However, the interest rate doesn't seem affordable for the crafters. Many of the interviewed crafters stated that they have never taken a loan for fear of the high interest rate which is calculated on the lump sum until the entire amount is repaid.

Ideally, knitting and crochet craft shops should be located at the economically active parts of the city. This is so because people living in such localities have better awareness and positive attitude to buy these crafted items due to the exposure they have to experiences of developed countries and to people who have been living abroad. On top of that, it is a common trend that tourists, the potential buyers of crafted items, walk around the center of the city, not at the peripheral areas.

However, the crafters earn a meager amount of income that does not enable them to rent working premises in the commercially active part of the city. That is why, many of them are selling their craft products through informal market networks and only few have rented small containers in areas far away from the city's center.

Marketing and Promotion

Promotions when done well are effective ways of selling products and services to consumers. The knitting and crochet crafts are considered as a sun-set business and the products are advertised and marketed mostly through informal market networks and words of mouth (Mahgoub & Alsound, 2015). This scenario makes it difficult for crafters to reach large size of customers. Besides, this lack of formal and consistent promotion and marketing strategy is aggravating the negative public perception towards the crafts.

The researcher conducted observation on the crafted items that are commonly sold through the informal market networks. People mostly buy crocheted or knitted items that could be used as decorative stuff for their living rooms and functional items such as crafted shower accessories and food stuff covers. Residents publicly use crocheted fabrics to cover '*enjera*' and the traditional bread '*dabo difo*', when they go to pay a visit to relatives and friends.

The interviewee from one of the craft making institutions said that they have problems in getting market for their crafted items. Previously, the institution used to organize bazaars to which some relevant government

officials are invited and lots of crafted items are sold during that event. Nevertheless, nowadays, the craft institution is not able to organize bazaars due to financial constraints. The only available marketing outlets for the institution are the Anglican Church and the American School located in Addis Ababa. At the end of every month, every Saturday, the institution is allowed to display its crafted items in the compounds of the school and the church where most of the buyers are foreigners. The interviewee added that, the institution is striving to survive with the scanty amount of income it earns from occasional sale of its craft products and donation from some foreigners who seldom came to visit it.

Similarly, one of the interviewed individual crafters emphasized that her craft products are marketed by displaying them at her small container shop. Sometimes, she makes an offer to boutiques to buy her crafted items. Nonetheless, boutiques refuse to buy these products due to absence of predictable trend of consumers' demand for these products.

Lack of organized status

Organized forms of craft making business have many advantages to crafters and the government agencies that are responsible to support them (Hailai et. al, 2019, Wayessa, 2009). If crafters get organized in the form of MSEs, they could have better access to better quality business input, finance, market share, advocacy and lobbying, market identification, pricing and negotiating buyers. It also create conducive environment for the MSED Agency to give trainings on design development, financial management, entrepreneurship, and marketing. Generally, institutionalized craft making increases quality of the products, marketing and profit of the makers.

The researcher asked individual crafters "*Why they prefer to work individually instead of getting organized in the form of MSEs.*" The crafters said that it is difficult for them to work in organized groups due to;

- a. Absence of equal level of skill and competence in making these crafts,
- b. Fear that some manipulative members might take advantage of the hardworking ones,
- c. Lack of interpersonal relationship skills,
- d. Fear of negative conflict and cheating, and
- e. Fear that their designs might be imitated by others

Thus, each of them believes that they could be more successful by hiding the design they have and craft individually. Because of this mentality, crafters do not have good interpersonal and business relationship among themselves. This phenomenon is great challenge for the crafts' knowledge, skill and information transfer within the current crafters' generation (Mayne, 2016). It also curtailed crafters from getting trainings on improving quality of their products and profitability of their business. Because of the aforementioned challenges, knitters and crocheters in the city are not able to unleash the economic, social and cultural values coated within the knitting and crochet crafts.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the Crafters' outlook on the public's perception towards the knitted and crocheted crafts as well as available opportunities and challenges that constrained success of these crafts' business in Addis Ababa. Findings revealed that the craft making skills are not being taught to students in the formal schools and there are no other institutions, either private or governmental, engaged in teaching the detail skills of the crafts. As a result, crafters are not able to supply diversified and quality craft products to the public. Coupled with this, the smashing invasion of the market with variety of modern machine knitted and crocheted items are causing the public to believe that knitting and crocheting are old fashioned crafts.

The government set related policy frameworks, strategies and institutions mandated to support entrepreneurship and utilization of the available craft making business opportunities in the city. Nonetheless, Crafters are facing different challenges such as lack of commercially active working premises, lack of quality and diversified yarns and crafting tools, lack of up to date skill of the crafts, lack of organized status, absence of marketing and promotion, lack of finance as well as linkage with related industries.

Such challenges are caused mainly due to absence of adequate hands-on integration among different stakeholders, the MSED Agency's belief that knitting and crochet crafts could not serve as profitable business ventures and its resultant abstention from providing trainings on the area. Besides, absence of such formal training resulted in lack of equivalently skilled labour, which in return has affected establishment of knitting and crochet crafting MSEs.

Doing these crafts in the form of MSEs could enable crafters get relevant trainings on crafting and marketing their products, access to finance and working premises as well as on how to manage their business. If so, they can improve the quality and diversity of their products and win the public's attraction to hand knitted and crocheted fabrics of different forms. Otherwise, if relevant measures are not taken seriously and promptly, these crafts might get wiped out of the society's mind which could result in loss of economic, socio-cultural and entrepreneurial advantages to the public at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above concluding remarks, the following recommendations are forwarded to rectify the challenges being faced by crafters and enable unleashing of the economic and socio-cultural benefits of the crafts.

1. The Addis Ababa City Administration's Education Bureau has to revisit its education curriculum and amend it in a full-fledged manner that could enable to support students who are gifted and passionate to make these crafts. The extent and quality of theoretical and practical training given to elementary school students could serve as a base for those who dream to advance in the field by joining the TVET training institutions. Therefore, a comprehensive syllabus for knitting and crocheting should be designed and reasonably adequate credit hours should be allocated to it.
2. Instead of stigmatizing the crafts as of 'no economic value', the Addis Ababa City Administration's MSED Agency should reconsider the lists of crafts on which the Ministry of Culture and Tourism required it to train students in its TVET institutions. Thus, the TVET training curriculum should include crochet and knitting in its textile and garment field of training.
3. The Kotebe Metropolitan University's teachers' training department should teach and train teachers in these craft skills as well. Because, after their graduation, these are the ones who are going to teach students in the elementary and secondary schools as well as in the TVET institutions. Other private TVET institutions should also revise their curriculum so as to include training on these crafts.
4. The Addis Ababa City Administration's MSED Agency should provide training to crafters to create awareness on the importance of doing their craft business in organized forms. The Agency should work in collaboration with private and governmental actors who are involved in the crafts' value chain such as input suppliers, the land administration, textile and leather garment factories and micro finance institutions. Besides, the Agency should aware the crafters that the Intellectual Property Authority is there to provide legal protection for their authentic design creations. It should make clear what requirements should be fulfilled to get their original craft designs registered with the Authority. This could encourage crafters to freely share their design innovations and see the big picture of making

these crafts centers of innovation and creativity.

5. The loan supplied by micro finance institutions is good in terms of creating decentralized access to loan without collaterals. However, crafters are discouraged and are not taking advantage of it for fear of the high interest rate calculated on the lump sum throughout the loan period. To encourage crafters, the annual interest rate should be lowered and be calculated on each remaining amount.
6. A Knitting and Crochet Crafts Council (KCCC) must be established in Addis Ababa. This helps create network among people involved in the business, deliver capacity building services and facilitate market access for inputs as well as the final craft products. The council could serve as a liaison between crafters and other stakeholders. Besides, it could provide designs of knitting sticks and crochet hooks to domestic metal, bamboo, and wood manufacturing industries to enable them produce modern crafting tools locally. The KCCC should provide training to crafters on how to use the internet and cover the cost from membership fees. Besides, it should create a web page where knitters and crocheters could communicate and post their authentic designs registered with the intellectual property Authority.
7. Unavailability of diverse varieties and un-affordability of yarn is one of the acute challenges faced by crafters. To solve this problem, the domestic textile and garment industries should be enabled to provide the required varieties of yarn for fair prices. Until the domestic factories start producing the important varieties of yarn and crafting tools, traders involved in the import trading should be encouraged through tax and custom duties deductions to import different types of yarns and crafting tools.

Limitations

Since this study was conducted at an exploratory level, further study must be conducted to quantitatively show the public's perception towards these crafts and their products. Besides, this study was delimited to the case in Addis Ababa. Therefore, the public perception, opportunities and challenges of the knitting and crochet crafts prevailing in different parts of the country should be studied.

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