The Fabric Social

Perth, Australia
Lakwa, India
Fiona McAlpine

Organization type: for profit
Project Stage: Start-Up
Budget: $10,000 - $50,000
Website: http://www.thefabricsocial.com
Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/thefabricsocial
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/thefabricsocial

- Business
- Fair trade
- Income generation
- Social enterprise
- Trade
- Community development
- Poverty alleviation
- Cultural preservation
- Gender equity
- Minority rights
- Women's issues

Project Summary

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The Fabric Social is a conscious clothing label with one important difference. We work exclusively with women affected by armed conflict, putting an end to their economic isolation. By zeroing in on war torn areas, we are targeting one of the primary causes of armed conflict: poverty.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"

What if we change the way the world thinks about how it consumes its clothing? What if we could wage peace with every purchase?

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Poverty is one of the greatest causes of conflict, and conflict is one of the greatest causes of poverty. This cycle of armed insurgency has played out this narrative in India’s Northeast region for over half a century. Falling between the cultural tropes of South Asia and South East Asia, the Northeast struggles to maintain its multitudinous tribal identities while simultaneously struggling to reap any benefits from mainstream Indian culture.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

The Fabric Social creates sustainable silk and cotton shirts and dresses for the Australian women’s market. The Fabric Social is a conscious label, combining Australian design talent with the grassroots handloom weaving skills described above. We work with communities to create ethical fashion for the e-commerce marketplace. We promote a participatory market solution to poverty alleviation.
Awards
PayPal People Rule Competition, UN Women Project Inspire (shortlisted finalists)

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Take Baidu’s story for example. Baidu is an ex officer in the liberation front of Assam. Having witnessed horrific violence as a young woman, she was emboldened by the political message of the resistance. Baidu spent her life in the jungle, taking up arms and ranking as a commander. When her village was left in tatters after an attack, Baidu surrendered, entering into peaceful negotiations. Baidu and a group of other women commandeered a disused building and built a silk farm. Today, Baidu is our quality control mainstay, buoyed by the renewed demand The Fabric Social has created for indigenous silk. Baidu has created some of the finest eri silk on the market and was able to purchase a scooter. From armed renegade to entrepreneur.

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

Operating on the smell of an oily rag and a lot of volunteer love, we have (more than) doubled the daily wage of the weavers with which we work, bringing the dormant looms back to life. We cannot overemphasise the importance of financial sustainability for these women and their communities. Not only does it put food on the table, a small sustainable wage frees these women up to be full and active participants in their communities. These women are dynamos, but it is hard to be an agent of change when all you can think about is how you will afford to send your kids to school, or pay for rice. After two years of intensive ground work, fundraising and two initial sales rounds, The Fabric Social will reach its production stabilisation phase by March 2016. This will make our long term financial and sales projections more accurate.

Spread Strategies: Moving forward, what are the main strategies for scaling impact?

With a stable sales based income, we will focus on building inventory for external retail stockists, exploring wholesale opportunities for fabric production – but most importantly – introduce new products from new communities to diversify our range. We have two examples of these new projects ready to go. One is also in Northeast India, making hand-woven bags with women who used to be prisoners of war. The other is a group of women jewellery makers on the Thai-Burma border who have been displaced by the conflict there. We have built connections with both of these groups.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution’s plan to ensure financial sustainability?

Our goal for Assam over the next 12 months is to prove out the stability of our business model and sell approximately 800 garments / 61,880 in revenue. To do this we need to engage sales representatives to fulfill and generate demand for our product in Australia and abroad (USA, UK, Europe) where conscious consumerism is established and growing rapidly. We plan to be 100% reliant on sales income by 2017.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

Our production supply chain is much clearer than most of our ethical fashion competitors, who might have a one-for-one system or a charitable aspect, but are silent on their supply chain. Usually, our competitors provide no information about their artisans, leading to the assumption that they are not fair trade and that their garment construction is done in a factory. We are extremely transparent in being cruelty free, organic and fair trade, and share the stories of our weavers. Their story is as important as the product.

Team

Founding Story

We had been working on building a livelihood development project for weavers in Manipur. Getting into the guts of this project, it became clear pretty quickly that there was a complete lack of a market solution for these kinds of projects. While we have grown a lot since that first spark, the idea to use a smartphone app to bridge the gulf between isolated women weavers, and consumers desperate for more conscious clothing remains the same. Bring the digital revolution to the village, and link women weavers with consumers who value their products.

Katie Rose: Human rights law graduate from Perth, Australia. Previous work experience: women’s rights lawyer in New Delhi since 2013. Social worker for asylum seeker and refugee families with the Australian Red Cross. Study abroad in Nepal and Switzerland. Fellow of the School for Social Entrepreneurs Incubator Program 2015, and member of the Advisory Council for the Centre for Social Impact. Katie manages business development and Australian operations for The Fabric Social. Fiona McAlpine: Juris Doctor from Melbourne, Australia. Previous work experience: development projects around the world, teaching English in the Himalayas, media consulting in Nepal and West Africa. Interning for the UN Security Council legal team. Lobbied for gender equality at federal and global governance levels, and recipient of the Prime Minister's Australia Asia Award 2013 for her work on extrajudicial executions in India. Fi is based in San Francisco, USA and manages communications, digital strategy and The Fabric Social app development. Sharna DeLacy: Social welfare and development worker from Ballarat, Australia. Almost a decade’s experience working in the women’s peace movement - advocating for women’s rights and the inclusion of gender concerns in all aspects of conflict. Worked on various initiatives at the grass-roots level, with national governments and with the UN. Since 2013, Sharna has been working with women in conflict-affected Northeast India. Based currently in Assam, India and manages fabric production and project management.

Value Chain: Where does your work fit into the apparel value chain? [check all that apply]

Raw Materials, Manufacturing.
Your Role: What is your relationship to the apparel industry? [check all that apply]

Brand Representative.

Target Population: What stakeholder groups do you engage or empower in your work? [check all that apply]

Consumers, Farmer or Farmer Associations, Women.

Intervention Focus: What are you trying to achieve / influence? [check all that apply]

Access to Essential Services (i.e. Healthcare and Education), Conscious Consumerism, Labor Rights (i.e. Collective Bargaining, etc.), Gender Equality, Disaster and Humanitarian Relief, Transparency.

Lever for Change: Select up to 3 ways your work is helping to transform the industry.

Capacity Building, Media, Technology.

Is your project targeted at solving any of the following key barriers?

Hidden from View: Conditions in Forests, Farms, and Factories are Only Visible to a Select Few, A Job is Not Enough: Low-Income Workers Cannot Secure Long-Term Well-Being, Sustainability is Not Yet in the DNA: Fast Fashion’s Current Model Disincentivizes Value-Driven Economies.

Does your project utilize any of the innovative design principles below?

Activate Local Know-how for Driving Solutions: Build Opportunities for Workers to Become Leaders, Disrupt Business as Usual: Target Key Players Who Can Influence the Bottom Line.

Innovation Inspiration: When you first conceived of your project, did you think of it as applicable to the apparel industry?

yes

If you answered “no” to the previous question, which industry was your project originally aimed at transforming?

Replicating in the Apparel Industry: If your project didn’t initially target the apparel industry, how are you specifically tailoring it to do so now?

Are you nurturing or inspiring others to be changemakers? If so, how?

We are coaching our weavers to become independent small business entrepreneurs.

Tell us about the partnerships that enhance your approach. How have you collaborated with others in the industry to increase your impact?

Yes - but the space here is too small to explain! CodeCloud, Phonecycle, Illumination Solar and Ally Deam Design

Source URL: https://www.changemakers.com/fabricofchange/entries/fabric-social