

# Interview with Women Skill Development, Kathmandu

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**With me here today we have Mrs Kiran Rawal, president of the womens skill development multi co-operative organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal. We also have Kisu Rawal who will act as translator.**

**So firstly, where are you from?**

Kathmandu, Nepal

**Can you tell me a bit about your organization please?**

This organization was established in 2007, established by family, friends and neighbours initially. Each one of them placed 25,000 RP and came up with the idea of using block prints, easiest skill to do, and produce products like napkins, bedsheets, cushion covers,t-shirts, wall hangings, shoes, dresses using very basic skills and producing products, even bags.

**This was set up in which year?**

2007

**So quite a recent organization**

Yes, it is.

**So what is your position within the organization? Can you tell me a little about your role?**

She is the president of the organization, as president of the organization, she is in charge of everything, she supervises product development, anything official she needs to deal with. She is in charge of official work, supervising but not in charge of product supervision. Meetings,what problems the organization is facing, what sort of training they require to build their skill, she is in charge of that?

**How many people currently work in your organization**

There are 25 founders, all involved in the organization, but out of 25 only 15 people taking salary and the rest are volunteering.

**Can you tell me something about the volunteers you have working in the organization?**

She is also a volunteer even though she is the president, she is not taking any money. Volunteers, main job in the organization is marketing, product supervision, what sort of material, product designing, to be used. Setting up stalls for exhibition, selling their products. That's what the volunteers are doing. She also took volunteer training from TEWA, thats another organization (NGO) in Nepal and during her training she did a small exhibition about the products from Women Skill Development and they were very impressed with her work and she got an award for being an exceptional volunteer.

**This was quite recently?**

This was very recent, it was a month and a half ago. Most of the women working there are all housewives, they never had a formal education, they can not even write their

name in Nepali. They cannot even sign their names.

**On average they are completely illiterate?**

Yes, some can sign their name, basically the highest level of education would be the equivalent of grade 2, a 7 year olds education. These women come from very very poor financial background, not just that, their husbands are either drug addicts, alcoholics or jobless and are abusive.

**So how does the organization help these women? They provide a skill I presume?**

The thing with this organization is that they are using whatever skill these women have and use that skill to produce different products. For example, say someone is very good at sewing so then that women who does the sewing. There is one women who is very good at mixing natural ingredients and coming up with different colors and she does the mixing of colors for the block print. There are women who have a steady hand and they are really good with block prints so they do the block print. What this organization does is whatever skill you have, they are utilizing that and giving them work and making them self sufficient. Also as these women are very poor and sometimes cannot even afford to send their kids to school so the organization encourages them to bring their children to the workplace where there are volunteers like Kiran Rawal and others, who play with the kids, much like a daycare centre where they can be close to their kids, work and make some money.

**So we will just take a bit about your selling method. How do you currently sell your product?**

There are 2 organization who are regular customers of theirs. They buy their products and are called Sana Hasta Kala and Lokta Paper. They buy their products and sell them. These organizations have been here for quite some time and they have big market, not just in Nepal but abroad. They are the ones who are buying their product and selling them.

Introducing them to foreign countries. Some of the products are bought by Oxfam, Fair Trade. And also, neighbours, founders and volunteers, relations, encourage this organization. Instead of buying vase or show piece for a birthday or wedding they are buying Women Skills products and encouraging their sales. It's like a tradition now that anyone who is related to people working in Women Skills buy their products for someones wedding. Neighbours and friends come to their office to buy their stuff. Even within these 25 founders, if they are buying presents, they buy their own product and gift their own product. All the gifts I bought was from the womens skill development and never bought anything outside of that.

**Right now, how busy is your organization? You seem to have a lot of staff, so how many transactions do you make?**

She cannot really say how much the transaction is per month, it depends on the season. If there is a wedding season there is a huge demand on bedsheets, etc. For Dosai, which is a major festival in Nepal they have huge demand of different products. It depends on

the month, you can't really say every month there is an average of this. Because she is trying to encourage her own organization all 25 founders in their house, their curtains, bedsheets pillows napkins, everything is their own product. Not just because it is their own organization but because the quality is very good.

**So right now, your primary market is Nepal. Can you elaborate on your future plans, can you see any difficulties in selling just to the Nepalese people? Is there a market outside of Nepal?**

They do have plans for the future. The only thing that is stopping them from going ahead with any plan is money. Because everything you do needs money, their next step, what they wish to do is to have their own showroom. Instead of selling through different NGOs they wish to have their own shop where they can introduce their products to a wider audience. The problem with having their own showroom is to pay the rent, you need your staff to be there, pay the employees. Financially they are not up to this level and this is why they are depending on other organizations to buy their product and selling amongst their family, friends and neighbours. They do want to sell their products abroad, not just limit it to the Nepalese market, target foreign customers but the problem they are facing is because they have never done anything like this before they have no idea where they should go and get contacts, where to find contacts or who to talk to and how they should get in touch with these people to sell their products. They do want to reach out but they do not know how.

**The main problem would be the availability of knowledge to approach the market abroad. For example, a website might be ideal for what you are aiming, so there would be very few technical people in Nepal whom you could approach freely or for a reasonable price. Can you comment on that?**

Obviously no-one wants to work for free. They have talked to different people about their services and paying them for their services but the charges were simply too much for the organization. Someone has just donated their old computer to the organization. Everything in the factory has been donated by the founders, old sewing machine, old computer. They are minimum in there,

There is a computer donated by someone, but people do not know how to use the computer. They don't even know how to turn it on. Surfing the internet is out of the question.

**Do you have internet access on the computer?**

The computer is just there as a showpiece, another reason for not using it is due to not having electricity.

**On average how much power would you have every day?**

During monsoon, there is electricity. Right now it is winter and most of the time there is no electricity for 20 hours leaving electricity for only 4 hours every day.

**Would this be during business hours that there is electricity available? Does it vary every day**

Usually it is two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. From the time you get to work and finish, there is no electricity. People who have money use generators to go on with their business, but because our organization does not have much financial backup they cannot afford electricity.

**Is there a shortage of fuel in the country?**

Yes.

**Is this recent occurrence? How long has this been going on for?**

It has been going on forever.

**Is there an end in sight?**

The main problem is because Nepal is landlocked, surrounded by India and China. Everything that comes to Nepal comes mainly through India. If there is any problems in the border nothing comes through. Because Kathmandu is a valley there is only one way in and one way out, so if there is a monsoon and a landslide, the road is blocked. For weeks there is nothing coming in or out of the valley. Not just politically but also geographically. I don't see any change or difference in the situation happening.

**Going back to your current situation, what your thoughts on e-commerce in Nepal, are there many charities online?**

It is starting, compared to the rest of the world, e-commerce is not that popular yet in Nepal. There are organizations who are doing online business, deliveries, buying stuff online, but it does not look like they are making much profit.

**Can you tell me how you think they are spending the profits/money?**

The main problem is that online shopping in Nepal is used by family members who live abroad. The actual market of Nepal / Kathmandu cannot access these services as there is no electricity but also because the postal system is simply not reliable.

**You talk about the postal service being an issue; In Kathmandu is the post office close to you?**

Not that far, not easy access, many 10 minutes away.

**Do they have shipping options, Fedex, UPS?**

Yes, DHL, UPS, Fedex. Everything is there but it is quite expensive for locals to access these services. It costs around 50 dollars to send less than 500g parcel. 50 dollars is a monthly salary in Kathmandu.

**You were talking about the barriers to e-commerce in the country, one was electricity, the other being the irregularity of the postal system. Can you talk about the banking situation. Do you have a credit card and have you made any online payments in Nepal personally?**

I do have a credit card, but have never used it to pay online. I have accessed the ATM, but there are irregularities in the balance and that scared me off. Because I am doing

everything electronically and I'm supposed to have 100 dollars in my account but the machine only shows 30 dollars so there are discrepancies in the account.

**Does your non-profit have a bank account?**

Yes, we do.

**Do you have access to merchant facilities? Processing credit cards**

No. We use cheques,

**Do they accept online payments?**

No

**How many non-profits are there in Nepal that are in the same situation that you are facing?**

I cannot say an exact number to how many organizations who are in a similar situation. Most of the organizations are in the same situation, only big NGOs supported by international NGOs, they have online access, internet access, online shops. Most of the organizations in nepal don't have websites, don't have Internet banking, don't have credit cards.

**And they don't have training?**

No, they don't have training.

**Wrapping this up, I'd like to thank very much for for your time. I hope that your situation improves over the next year.**

Thank you. I'm very happy that a small organization like ours is getting some sort of notice and someone is interested in helping an organization like hers. I'm very happy about that, but the main problem is language and I cannot really express myself.

**You've done a great job of that today, thank you very much.**

You're welcome, thank you.