

Round Table on Handloom Policy of Telangana Government was held at Sundarayya Vignana Kendram on 2 August 2016

It was attended by 41 representatives from weavers cooperatives, Additional Director of Commissioner for Handlooms, Joint Director of Commissioner for Handlooms, members of All India Handloom Board, Osmania University, Rashtra Cheneta Karmika Samakhya, weavers from Pochampally, Siddipet, Sircilla, Warangal, Gadwal weavers clusters, DASTKAR, and CARPED

Ch Ramesh from Pochampally welcomed the gathering. Mohan Rao presided the Round Table.

Additional Director Commissioner for Handlooms of Telangana informed that today's Round Table is important in helping the state government's policy on Handlooms. He also informed that recently Mr KT Rama Rao, Cabinet Minister for the state government (Information Technology, Panchayat Raj and Municipal Administration and Urban Development) has assured the representatives of the weavers of forming separate ministry and department for handlooms to end neglect of handlooms. So far the policy and budget of Textiles ignored handlooms with its preoccupation of the powerlooms. The state government provided ex gratia of Rs 15 million for families of 600 weavers suicides. He explained there were several welfare measures but the implementation is poor because of low awareness among the weavers. He welcomed the Round Table to make concrete suggestions that can be proposed for review and inclusion in the forthcoming handloom policy.

Handlooms and the weavers engaged in the sector are on decline over the years despite due to neglect by the government and growing poverty among the weavers. Wage Incentive to ensure decent standard of livelihood was missing and the proposed policy by the state government should give top priority to this issue.

Round Table urged the government to declare time bound plan to form the Department of Handlooms and separate ministry of Handlooms so that comprehensive action plans and welfare measures can become reality before the next financial year (i.e March 2017).

Protective measures under the Handlooms Reservation Act were observed to be weak and there are no measures for arresting violations of the GI. Ikat and tie and dye of Pochampally received GI and patent but its violations by the mills from Gujarat, are not checked despite police complaints by the Pochampally weavers. Handlooms Reservation Act has listed 11 items and made Commissioner of Handlooms responsible for Enforcement. Inaction of the Commissioner on pursuing the police complaints, they said it is because the Reservation Act has not specified any agency responsible for enforcement with regard to GI and patent given to a community. However, the Round Table urged the Commissioner of Handlooms to investigate by deputing special team to Gujarat and speed up the case, since the Reservation Act doesn't exclude them from doing anything to support the interest of handlooms. Commissioner assured that they will examine the possibility of asking the enforcement machinery to examine the case. A monogram and measures to popularise the GI for ikat was also suggested.

Handlooms can be strengthened significantly if government departments procure cloth from handloom cooperatives. The Commissioner of Handlooms has placed work order, after consultations with the weavers cooperatives in January 2016, for purchase of 1200,000 meters cloth from Karimnagar Cooperative Society and so far only 300,000 meters has been supplied so the government is buying mill cloth. Representatives from cooperatives explained that time frame given for supply as well as rates were not realistic for the handlooms societies to supply the material. Six months time was required to implement the work order. Work Orders for procurement from handlooms should consider practical time frame for supply, the speakers informed.

Many weavers are not having Weavers Credit Cards.

State Level Bankers Committee of Telangana has no member from Handlooms. The Round Table urged the authorities to nominate members from the Handlooms sector at the earliest so that the lead banks in the state do have representation and means to listen to needs of the weavers.

Government has to update its database and conduct the census of handlooms in the state because the data with weavers forums suggest there are about 70,000 handlooms in Telangana while the government refers 2009-10 handloom census of 35,000 looms. Members informed that looms exist in cooperative societies as well as out of the cooperatives and the government has a conservative estimate of only looms in cooperative societies. Low estimate of the looms and thereby the weavers makes the policies and plans to exclude a large segment of the weavers from accessing any welfare measures.

Cluster Development Programme with the assistance of Government of India provides Rs 20 million to weavers cooperative societies and other agencies for taking up handlooms development. The cluster development programme is not making any progress since there is no role for the Commissioner for Handlooms, the officials mentioned.

Central government assistance is unused or under utilized since the state government has not provided its share of contribution to the welfare measures. Bhumkar Yojana Insurance scheme was in abeyance since September 2014 after replacement ICICI Lombard insurance scheme with *Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana* (a government-run health insurance scheme) as the nodal agency.

Women representatives from Pochampally and Gadwal mentioned that most of the weaving and pre-loom processes are done by women. But, the women weavers are recognized as weavers for issue of credit cards and other schemes. Divorcees, widows and single women among the weavers are most neglected, they explained.

Round Table urged the Commissioner of Handlooms to organize consultations with the weavers cooperatives and forums to formulate policies to avail the GOI support and send proposals to National Handloom Development Corporation.

Housing Schemes by the state and central government should be redesigned to include functional needs of the weavers who need house with looms. Indira Awas Yojana and state government housing

schemes must include house-cum-work shed design to enable the weavers access housing assistance schemes.

NABARD assistance to handlooms and weavers cooperatives and MNREGS should be reviewed to ensure the weavers avail benefit of these programmes. While unskilled labour earn Rs 150 per day under MNREGS works undertaken by the government the weaver is not able to earn Rs 40 a day. MNREGS should also include weaving and related activities under its scope to ensure minimum guarantee of employment and decent wage.

Ms Uzamma and Mr Bharath Bhushan discussed the need for making the new textile policy open for public debate. There are indications that the new policy is likely to include many power driven, pneumatic looms and other 'hybrid' technology based weaving processors under handlooms. That would replace the handloom weaver with all mill operators in future.

Prof Srinivasulu discussed the likelihood of government of India declaring a new National Textile Policy. The policy is not made public but there are signs of its being excessively favorable to mills and power looms and exports of finished textiles through large scale apparel units. Units having less than 100 workers are not recognized by the labor department and policy plans to generate 10 million jobs in three years of whom 70 % are women. There is demand to make the policy open for public debate.