

Mapping UNSW Impact Global Development

Primary SDG	8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
Broad theme	Textile production
Research	Assisting textile weavers in India to create more marketable designs
Impact region	Gujarat, India
Faculty	Art & Design
School/Institute	Art & Design
Academic	Associate Professor Liz Williamson
Project partners	National Institute for Design (Gujarat, India)
Related SDGs	9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Elevator pitch

To encourage weaving communities in Gujarat to continue their craft, Liz aims to collaborate with them to create new designs that are more marketable and environmentally sound for local and international buyers, sustaining a craft that has existed in the state for nearly 700 years.

The Challenge: Gujarat weavers are abandoning their craft

In Gujarat, artisans have been weaving textiles for nearly 700 years. But dated designs and techniques have hampered sales, reflecting an out of touch status with the latest consumer tastes around the globe. India's booming economy and its demand for labour workers means many artisans are abandoning their profession for better or more regular money working on roads or in factories. The weaving culture and tradition is slowly diminishing.

UNSW's solution: Collaborate with weavers to create more marketable designs

In 2001, Liz participated in the UNESCO 'Vital Traditions' conference in Vietnam where textile experts worked with local artisans from over 14 Asian countries to create more marketable designs. This experience changed Liz's perspective on how she could use her skills in weaving to make a difference. Since then Liz has held workshops with weavers in Tibet, Lahore (Pakistan), the Philippines and India to help local artisans revitalise their products and encourage them to use environmentally sound inputs. She takes a collaborative approach, sharing her design experience in different markets and with sizing, materials, ecologically safe dyes and weaving techniques.

Having visited India regularly since 2001, Liz has extensive experience and knowledge of the textile industry there. In the last three years, she has taken over 120 Art & Design students to Gujarat to learn and work alongside local experts and artisans. The course, which has helped shape graduate careers, is in partnership with the National Institute for Design (Gujarat). Following the course, selected student designs are hand block printed onto floor rugs in Gujarat and then exhibited at A&D's ADspace.

Liz is looking to assist weaving communities in Gujarat to improve their designs, sustain their income and continue their craft for the long term. As a first step, Liz plans to interview selected communities in the Kachchh region of Gujarat to determine how she can assist. The second step will be to work with the selected family or community to create more marketable designs and increase production levels. A planned extension of the project is to involve organisations such as Woolmart (India) who have already indicated interest in sourcing product from local artisan communities.

The Impact: Sustain income of weaving family, maintain weaving tradition

By making designs more marketable, Liz's efforts will result in a more sustainable level of income for a local weaving family allowing them to continue to ply their craft and employ local workers. One weaving family or community typically employs around 12-20 people. Liz's work will ensure the weaving family carries on with a tradition that goes back nearly 700 years in India. The new designs will also be more sustainable, increasing their appeal to Western buyers and providing a best practice example for other weaving families to live up to.

Researcher

Associate Professor Liz Williamson is an internationally respected textile designer with a long standing interest in the history, use and construction of cloth. Her work is represented in most major public collections in Australia including the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Powerhouse Museum. In 2007 Liz was selected for the prestigious Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft award. She was Head of the School of Design Studies at the College of Fine Arts (UNSW) from 2008 to 2013. Liz is inspired to pass on her love and knowledge of weaving to communities around the world to grow and sustain the art.

Ben Falkenmire 26.02.18