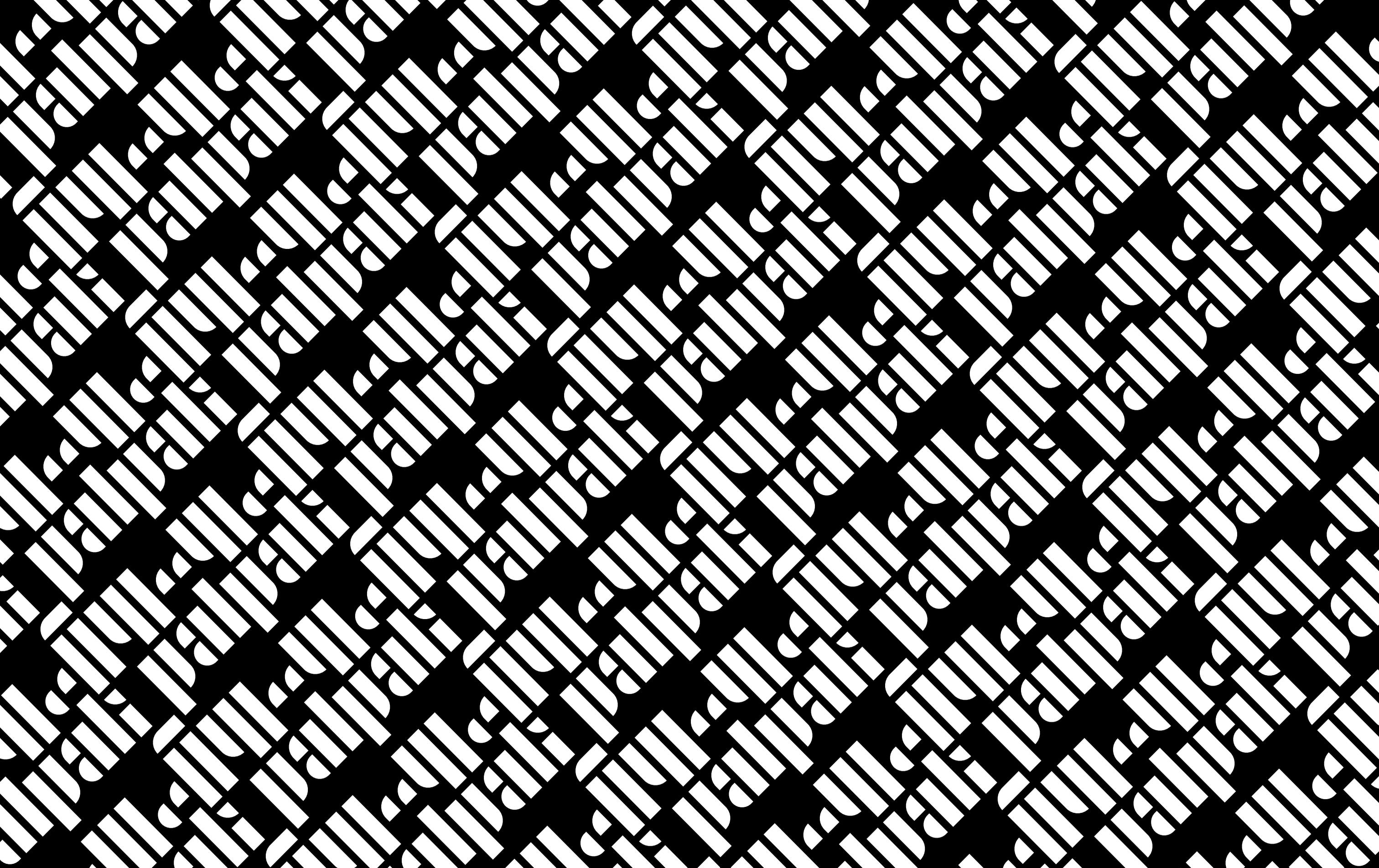


पुस्तकालय
पाठपाठ



پالپال
palpal

Weaving tradition into the future

This book is dedicated to all the believers and champions—enterprises, skilled artisans and designers, alike, and their staunch partners in the Government of Nepal and development community—working purposefully to protect and position local heritage products like Palpali Dhaka for the future.

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Proud partner: Palpali Dhaka Association & Brand Palpali catalysed & co-created with the UKaid Skills for Employment (सीप) program.

Research, editing, concept and design: IMAGEARK

Photos: Bijaybar Pradhan
Katha Haru
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www.palpali.com

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Palpali Dhaka is synonymous to not just Palpa, but Nepal as a whole. It is a part of every significant cultural ceremony in the lives of the Nepalis. We have to preserve the generational skills and essence of this craft and take it forward in a way that is fitting for the times. It is great to see the youth take interest in Palpali Dhaka and decide what is needed to take this movement to a broader audience, in Nepal and all over the world.

While the industry was not in a good state post-war, the local government strongly believed that we should not give up on a craft that symbolized Palpali and the overall Nepali identity itself. Thus, we encouraged the local producers to get together and form an association, which would be wholly supported by the local government where needed. The efforts of Palpali Dhaka Association are commendable. They have empowered the community and boosted the industry's confidence in the commercialisation of the craft.

Self-sustenance in small-scale industries often leads to prosperity in small towns, which ultimately serves to benefit the economy of an entire nation. A thriving Palpali Dhaka industry would mean the artisans can earn a livelihood in their homeland with their ancestral skills. They will also feel a certain pride in their craft, as they are engaging in dignified labour of immense cultural significance.

The private sector has a lot to contribute to the economy. We, as a local government, need to empower them by supporting them where needed, be it with resources and reach or with policymaking. Our goal is to reach a point where the industry is completely self-sustaining, and the Tansen government is wholly committed to helping them reach that milestone.

The partnership forged among the Lumbini Province Government, Tansen Municipality, Palpali Dhaka Association and UKaid सौप Programme has brought together the private sector, government, and development agencies at a common ground—harnessing the multi-sectoral capabilities to tackle the bottlenecks facing the industry. Indicative of the building momentum, and growing interest in Palpali Dhaka, advocacy is ongoing for Tansen to be declared the 'Dhaka Capital of Nepal'.

It's not just a fabric – it is our culture, our art. It is deeply attached to our sentiments and our identity. With this project, and with the Palpali brand, we look forward to proving that Palpali Dhaka too can have a place in the contemporary lifestyle.



Ashok Kumar Shahi
Tansen Municipality Mayor

MESSAGE FROM PDA'S FOUNDER

Palpali Dhaka fabric originated from Palpa District in Nepal and holds a special significance among us Nepalis. Our industry—once vibrant and thriving—started facing a critical shortage of artisans due to outmigration of workers. Those who remained were largely engaged on a part-time basis. As labourers were attracted to higher wages elsewhere, there was an urgent need to revive the industry by building a skilled artisan base, and by making the industry and its fabric attractive to both weavers and emerging national and global consumers. Nepali weavers do not usually receive formal training because they are expected to learn from peers while on the job. This, however, limits knowledge and abilities on quality standards, work ethics, and productivity levels. Over the years, as the market shrunk, the industry and the entrepreneurs saw a rise in unhealthy competition coupled with decline in production, profits, and workers' wages. Over the last decade, the industry was plagued by seemingly insurmountable challenges. From having local and national markets inundated with cheap dhaka-like imitation fabrics to difficulty in finding and retaining labour, these were unprecedented times for our industry.

However, over the last two years, all the dhaka producing workshops came together to jointly form Palpali Dhaka Association (PDA), through support from Lumbini Province Government, Tansen Municipality, and the UKaid सौप Programme, to rethink, retool and reboot the industry. Our efforts, despite the pandemic, are unlocking key bottlenecks. Comprising nine firms, PDA is a coordinated platform to improve and institutionalize stronger training practices through standardized three-month apprenticeship-based curriculum on weaving, business literacy, soft skills, enhanced trainer skills and other productivity-enabling interventions.

Thanks to these ongoing endeavours, productivity and production at the factories have gone up. We are thrilled to see a stronger skilled and motivated artisan base, which has led to the industry entrepreneurs' rapid productivity increase. The dhaka factories which were shut-down have now reopened, ones which were functioning in limited capacity are now expanding, and new ones are emerging.

With PALPALI, we now have a powerful brand face to launch a fresh range of fabric collections and innovative new products that we hope will take Palpali Dhaka into the homes and lives of today's generation. We are all geared with strong national and international experts, convened and connected through our partnership with UKaid सौप, helping us get our product diversified, recognized and scaled. We are excited about what lies ahead of us.



Sagar Man Maharjan
Founder

MESSAGE FROM UKaid सीप

It's been exactly two years since we kick-started our partnership with the Palpali Dhaka Association (PDA). It was in February 2019 that we brought together an inclusive range of key institutions and individuals—from the leadership of the Lumbini Province; Mayor of Tansen; to financial institutions; local and international designers; marketing experts; fair trade certifiers; skills experts; tech specialists; various private sector actors, and our partners from the British Embassy in Kathmandu— to join us for the public launch for our collaboration with PDA at Tansen, also as a symbolic demonstration of shared solidarity.

This collaborative action approach, along with our ability to spark and enable systems thinking, innovations, and transformative results, has been central to the progress and recognition we've generated for Palpali Dhaka.

Two years on, resurgence and inclusive growth of the Palpali Dhaka industry is well underway. UKaid सीप has been able to create and demonstrate a replicable model on how donor-funded programs can catalyze growth of a rural economy; mainstream women's economic empowerment; facilitate Public Private Partnership in a way that takes advantage of and is supportive of the federalism that's in motion in Nepal; promote broad participation in the market system, and bolster industry capabilities.

We're proud of what the PDA has done, and is doing, to uplift the entire sector. To truly improve and safeguard livelihoods for the entrepreneurs and workers associated with this sector.

The results are telling: over the last two years, jobs have tripled; investments by firms have increased by 40% on average; productivity has gone up by almost 30%; growth of new enterprises has increased by 40%. Outside of Palpa too, in other priority growth sectors and regions, we've seen integration and replication of similar models—around multi-sectoral partnership-building and enterprise-growth based skilling for job creation—that we've co-created, tested, and proven through our work.

Through this look-book, we're thrilled to be capturing some of the milestones, stories, and progress ushered in through our journey with PDA. We're excited about what the next phase will entail for PDA – to truly expand and elevate this industry for a resilient, competitive, and inclusive future, for local entrepreneurs and workers both.



Baljit Vohra
Team Leader
UKaid सीप



Stuti Basnyet
Deputy Team Leader
UKaid सीप





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Palpali Dhaka Association

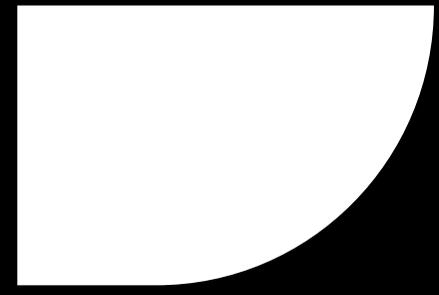
PDA founding members

UKaid सीप

Tansen Municipality

Label STEP

Other collaborators



Introduction



Subdued primary colours, small geometric patterns that are handwoven with much patience and care, traditional Palpali Dhaka is the humble handwoven fabric that has come to be synonymous to the region itself.

Geographically, Palpa is blessed. Its western location enjoys proximity to India, but its pine forests and hilly terrain lends a welcome reprieve from the tropical temperatures typical of the Lumbini province. Rivers and waterfalls dot the landscape, with its villages and towns either sitting on the lap of endless green rolling hills or perched above a lake of clouds. On a clear day, one can witness the snow-capped Himalayas crowning the resplendent scenery in all its glory.

Tansen, the administrative center of the region, has a history as colourful as its most famous fabric. Before the rise of the Shah dynasty, it was the capital of the Magar Kingdom, one of the most powerful regional dynasties that reigned before modern Nepal, and even came close to conquering Kathmandu in the 16th century.



Legend has it, Tansen was a strong contender against Kathmandu to be the capital of modern Nepal. Tansen boasted a thriving cultural scene rich in arts and crafts, a lovely climate, and its hill-top location was an ideal vantage point to defeat potential invaders. Ultimately Kathmandu's central location tipped the scales in its favour. But when education was abolished for commoners all over Nepal under the autocratic 100-year Rana regime, Tansen was one of the few places who put up a silent rebellion and continued to run their universities as usual, even enrolling defiant learners from other parts of Nepal.

The Rani Mahal palace in Palpa, built in 1893

Tansen's love for colours is made evident with its cheerfully painted houses. Vintage hand-painted signboards over generations-old shops sit on narrow stone-paved alleys that wind up and down in slopes. The various workshops around its old town squares lay testament to Tansen's long history of craftsmanship, earning the town its long-standing reputation for high quality metalcraft and weaving.



Palpa always had a history of weaving. A generational skill taught in the Magar culture, most Palpali women weaved fabrics on the handlooms in their own homes. Back in the era when imports were uncommon and expensive, most textiles in Nepal came from Palpa. Therefore, it's only fitting that Nepal's most famous weave would originate from here and go on to become a strong symbol of the national identity.

IN MANY WAYS, THIS IS AN ORIGIN STORY.
BUT FOR THE PEOPLE OF PALPA, THIS IS A LONG-AWAITED SEQUEL.

AT PALPALI, EVERY THREAD HAS A STORY TO TELL.

STORIES OF A LAND HIGH ABOVE THE CLOUDS WHERE THE
RHYTHM OF SHUTTLES AND LOOMS RANG IN EVERY HOUSEHOLD
ONCE UPON A TIME.

STORIES OF A NEAR-FORGOTTEN CRAFT, PRECARIOUSLY
PRESERVED BY THOSE WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH IT.

STORIES OF NOSTALGIA AND LONGING FOR A TIME WHEN A
THRIVING INDUSTRY UPLIFTED THE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS OF AN
ENTIRE REGION.

STORIES OF ARTISANS WHO RETURNED TO THEIR LOOMS AFTER
DECADES OF CONFLICT AND UNCERTAINTY.

AND STORIES OF A PASSIONATE COMMUNITY THAT CAME
TOGETHER TO BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO A HERITAGE CRAFT.

PALPALI CELEBRATES THE REVIVAL OF THE MOST DEFINING
INDIGENOUS WEAVE OF NEPAL.



T H E S T O R Y B E G I N S H E R E

Birth of an industry



It was in the late 1950's that Ganesh Man Maharjan, an enterprising native of Palpa, returned to his hometown from Bengal having learnt how to weave the khadi cloth. But he found khadi too simple, too bland to catch the eye. Inspiration struck him during one trip to Kathmandu, when he came across the Dambar Kumari Dhaka, block-printed 3-layered muslin shawls made popular by Dambar Kumari, a Rana princess. He had also picked up a few techniques from the Bengali Jamdani weavers, so he tried to apply the same techniques to khadi. He experimented with weaving small geometric patterns into the khadi with colourful cotton threads, giving a whole new appeal to an otherwise plain fabric. The first motifs in the new weave were inspired from those seen in the Dambar Kumari Dhaka. Making a bold new statement with its geometric motifs in red, black and green, this fabric became a trendsetter for its era and came to be known all over Nepal as Palpali Dhaka.

An instant hit with the Shah dynasty and Rana aristocracy, wearing Palpali Dhaka became a status symbol and a fashion statement which later trickled down to the wardrobes of the Nepali public. The fabric lived its glory days during the regime of King Mahendra, when dhaka *topi* was declared as the national cap of Nepal and made it an icon for the Nepali identity.



THE DIFFICULT DECADE

The year 1996 saw the start of the series of events that lead to a tumultuous decade in Nepal, fraught with conflict and uncertainty. In the decade of the Civil War (1996-2006), many dramatic political events had the country destabilized and its economy reeling, most significantly the Royal massacre of 2001 and the subsequent end of Nepal's long-standing monarchy.

For the people, this period meant living with constant fears of being looted, kidnapped, executed, or recruited into the Communist army. Tansen, being a district administrative center of the country, was also a frequent target of violence. In an incident that shook the country in 2005, the historic Tansen Durbar was attacked and reduced to a smouldering ruin, a deeply traumatic event for the Palpali people. In industries, radicalized labour unions and extortions became commonplace. No industry escaped the impact of the war, least of all Palpali Dhaka.

Many fled their towns and villages for safer prospects. Looms were abandoned, and the sound of the shuttles faded into oblivion. With no weavers in sight, the factory owners saw the slow death of hope. One by one, they closed their doors. More than thirty workshops in Palpa shut down for good, and the remaining functioned in radically downsized capacities.

The war may have ended in 2006 with a promise of peace, but its repercussions continued to haunt the industry. After all, a decade worth of damage is not easily undone. While Nepal entered its fledgling era of peace and trade picked up again, there was not much of an industry left to accommodate it. Many had migrated abroad during the conflict period in search of greener pastures, leaving industries facing acute labour shortages.

Palpali Dhaka was in demand again, but weavers were too few and far in between. This gap in the industry was met by cheap, low-grade, imported fakes which flooded the market, diluting the image and integrity of the original hand loomed fabric.

Interest in the authentic fabric dwindled. It had lost its momentum and with it, its potential appeal as a trendsetting fabric. Post-war, the new-age Nepalis who grew up on TV, dial-up internet and glossy magazines were eager to catch up on the new trends happening in the world. This generation saw Palpali Dhaka as something that belonged to the past, in the lives of their parents and grandparents. Dhaka's status was slowly reduced to a ceremonial fabric that the Nepalis adopted for cultural necessity and national pride.

SEEDS OF HOPE



Nepal has been going through many cultural shifts in the social media age. The smartphone-tapping youth of today carries a strong awareness of global trends, while also appreciating the heritage left behind by their ancestors. After the devastating earthquake of 2015, which reduced many of the nation's historical monuments to a rubble, heritage conservation became a much discussed topic of discussion. It brought the focus back to valuing and reviving the gems within our own cultural heritage and leaned the public sentiment towards taking pride in what was local, what was Nepali.

In Palpa, this epiphany happened by pure chance. Ashok Kumar Shahi, the Mayor of Tansen Municipality, had always encouraged revival of the Palpali Dhaka sector as it was the very pride of the region. But the few remaining workshops were scattered and competing against each other, preoccupied with fighting their own battles.

The light-bulb moment happened when Baljit Vohra and the team from UKaid सीप visited Tansen, taking cue from the Finance Secretary, Madhu Marasini. Sitting in the Nanglo's restaurant in old-town Tansen, the workshop owners of Palpali Dhaka and the सीप team together with Madhu Marasani, put their heads together and had a lengthy discussion on the

multitude of problems the industry was facing. The competition between the workshop owners fostered some unhealthy practices. Each of them tried lowering the prices of their handwoven dhaka to win a bigger slice of the market pie. But this meant the weavers were paid less, discouraging an already diminishing population of weavers. Eventually, it was agreed that joining hands to tackle their issues would stand to benefit them all, and the idea of forming an association to collectively orchestrate a structured revival effort was born.

The idea gained momentum with the collective enthusiasm and support of the Tansen Municipality, Lumbini Province Government and Palpa Chamber of Commerce. These parallel incidents took place in the right time and right place and played a vital role in the establishment of Palpali Dhaka Association in 2019. This time, they wanted to do it right for this heritage craft, prioritizing skills enhancement of artisans' innovating fabrics and products around a brand; and working with progressive designers and buyers to chart a new future. With their values and priorities in place, the Palpali Dhaka Association had taken their first steps in setting an example for a revival project designed and delivered right, with UKaid सीप support.

PURNA MAYA MAHARJAN



“We come into this world with nothing, and before long, we will leave with nothing. While I am here, I want to help people and serve the community the best I can.”



Sunlight streams through the blue-framed windows and onto white walls and wicker benches of the office of Swodeshi Bastrakala Palpali Dhaka Udhyog, the very place where Palpali Dhaka was first conceived by the late Ganesh Man Maharjan and his wife Purna Maya in the late 1950's. It is an unpretentious space, at ease with itself, with its aged wooden furnishings, a light clutter of memorabilia from the yesteryears and rolls of Palpali Dhaka fresh off the looms. Lovingly called 'Aji' (grandmother) by many, visiting Purna Maya in her space feels a lot like visiting your favourite grandmother - warm, welcoming and homey.

Wearing a simple white cotton sari with a blue border, an ensemble that matches the décor without even trying, Purna Maya intuitively moves through her office with the grace of someone in perfect harmony with her surroundings. After all, it is a space that she designed herself, when she and her late husband first laid the foundations for their weaving workshop, inspiring and setting in motion many other such local workshops.

Aji's gentle smile and humble disposition belies a spine of steel, and a rich legacy earned with an unflinching commitment to her personal values of hard work, perseverance, and service to the society.

While Ganesh Man Maharjan is credited with the invention of Palpali Dhaka, Purna Maya has been no less of a force in building the legacy their family has come to be known for. In an era where it was virtually unheard-of for women to work to earn a living, Purna Maya's decision to learn weaving and actively run the workshop alongside her husband was met with much disdain and criticism from the Nepali society, including her close family. The "civilized" society scorned families who relied on their daughter-in-law for an income. A social hierarchy of caste-based professions was strongly prevalent, and most people looked down at manual labour like weaving, not considering it a "respectable" way to earn a living. At a time when gender roles and casteism were deeply embedded in the society, those who didn't abide by its codes were actively shunned and ostracized.



But Ganesh Man and Purna Maya were the outliers. They paid little heed to the naysayers as they saw no shame in earning an honest living, regardless of a person's caste, gender or status. The slurs they were called were harmless sticks and stones as they channelled all their efforts into building their Dhaka empire.

Alongside her husband, Purna Maya was actively involved in all aspects of the business. The couple would travel to Kolkata in India to hand-pick the highest quality raw materials and procured German dyes to colour the yarns. With an innate eye for aesthetics that she still carries today, she would come up with new motifs that Ganesh Man would then plot on a graph. The Royal family was a big fan of her designs and sought her expert eye on colour combinations when commissioning their favourite patterns.

Starting with a small workshop of 3 pit looms, Purna Maya eventually went on to train hundreds of women from 14 districts of Nepal in weaving Dhaka. When Palpali Dhaka was at the peak of its popularity, their workshop alone employed around 500 weavers.

Her recruitment style was rather unconventional. She would come across socio-economically vulnerable women, with husbands who had either left them or fallen into bad habits. Purna Maya would reach out to them, offering them a skill to learn and a livelihood to earn. When possible, she would also offer them a place to stay and send their children to schools and colleges. Long before "women's empowerment" was a buzzword, she encouraged women to think for themselves, without relying on a husband to meet their needs. In her typical no-nonsense manner, she told single women to stop seeing themselves as victims, roll up their sleeves and get to work.

Having lent a hand to support many people in her lifetime, Purna Maya is one of the most respected figures in Palpa. When many factories and landmarks around Palpa became a base camp for the rebels, Purna Maya sternly told them to keep the fighting out of her factory and let her people work. Some members in the rebel army had grown up playing in her workshop as children and couldn't bring themselves to disrespect her wishes, but that wasn't enough to save their business from the consequences of war. Though Swodeshi Bastrakala was one of the very few factories that survived this period, the once-thriving factory of 500 weavers was reduced to less than 20.



For someone who helped build this industry from scratch and took it to its peak, it was especially heartbreaking to see its sorry state post-war. Even more crushing was seeing low grade, machine-made dhaka being sold as the original, destroying the essence of the very brand they had worked so hard to create.

But it has lifted her spirits immensely to see Palpali Dhaka entrepreneurs, many of whom she trained herself, unite with the common goal of reviving the industry and ensuring that the weaving technique she and her husband had spent their entire lives perfecting will continue to live on with a new generation of weavers. Today, with the catalytic skilling-based enterprise growth support from सीप, her workshop and others associated with PDA, have tripled their workforce and dramatically increased productivity. She is proud to see her youngest son Sagar Man Maharjan helming the Palpali Dhaka Association to carry on their legacy of the craft into the lives of the new generation.

Refusing to retire despite being well into her 80's, what drives her to show up to work every morning is not the desire to create a business empire, but to help people by handing them the skills to earn a dignified livelihood.



“We successfully trained 350 weavers and technicians in the past two years despite the pandemic, who are able to be employed with our own firms or work as independent home-based weavers with the support of PDA and सीप.”

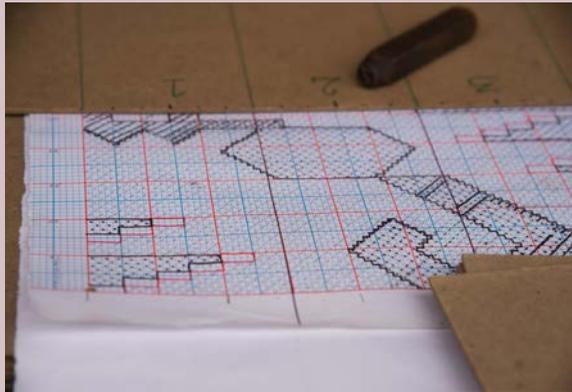
-Hari Rayamajhi
Founder
Saraswati Dhaka Cloth Industry

“What is invisible to the end-consumer is the skill, craftsmanship and effort that an artisan applies into weaving Palpali Dhaka. It is a form of art and should be appreciated as such. It is our plea for anyone interested to only look for Palpali Dhaka with a certificate of authenticity.”

-Manoj Raj Sharma Paudyal
Owner
Paudyal Dhaka Udhog



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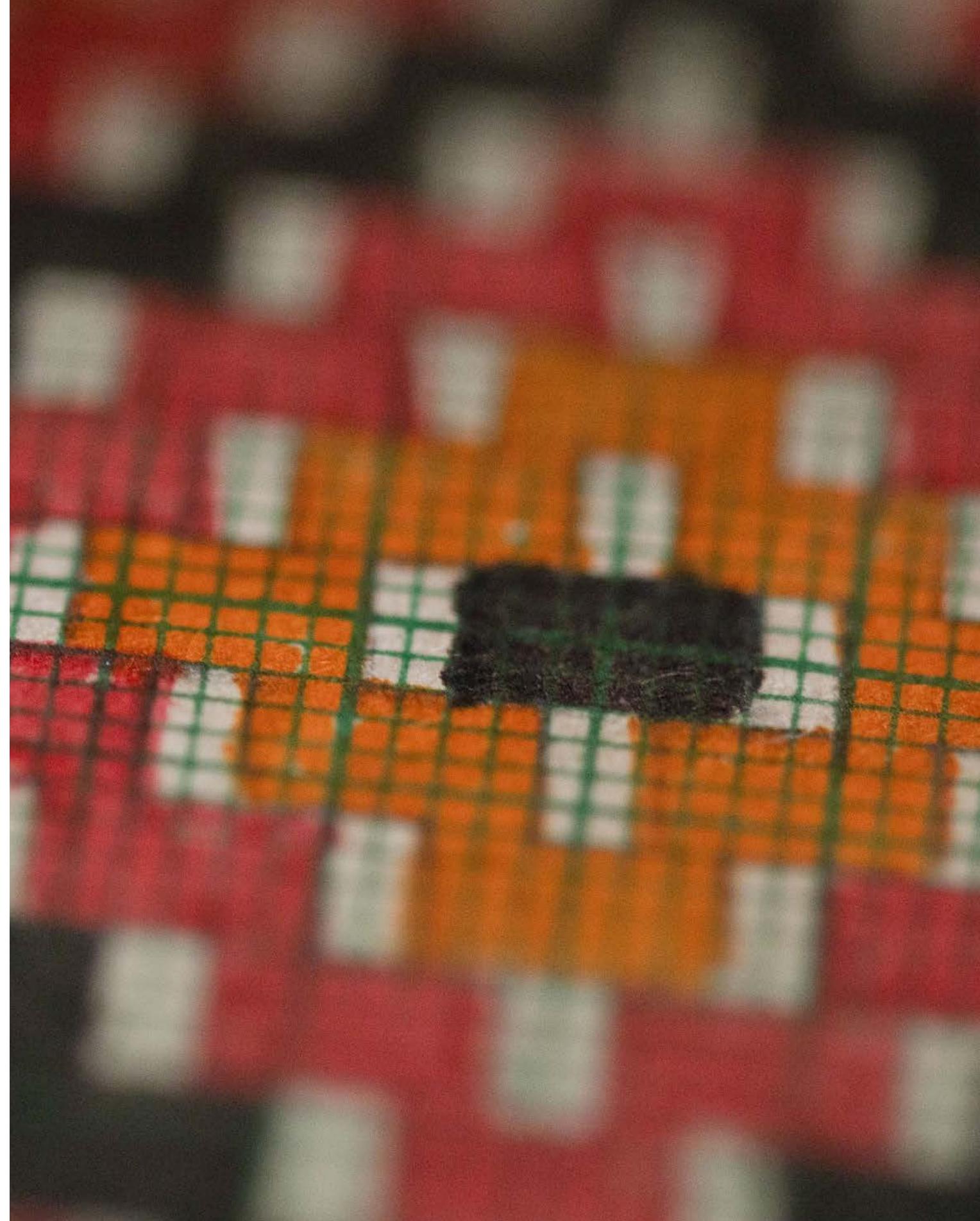
BORN

Identifying Original Handwoven Palpali Dhaka



Authentic Palpali Dhaka fabric can be recognized by looking at the back of the fabric. Original handwoven Palpali Dhaka has floating yarns that go from one pattern to another. This is an indication of handwoven Palpali dhaka fabric as machines cannot replicate this effect.

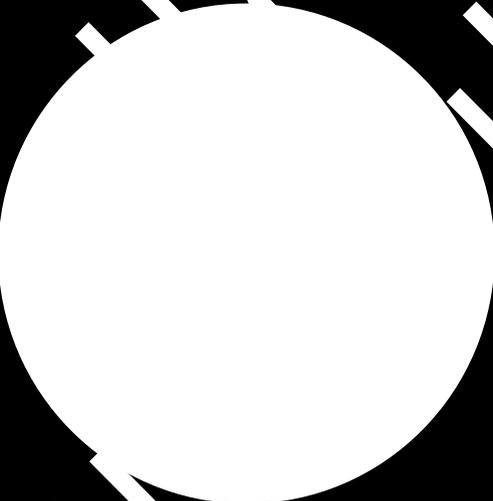
Floating yarns that entirely cover the back, or absolutely no floating yarns, both indicate machine-made fabric.



A UNIFYING FORCE FOR NEPALIS

It would be rare to come across a Nepali who hasn't worn dhaka at least once in his or her life, for it has been a part of every rite of passage that a Nepali goes through – from birth to coming-of-age ceremonies to weddings. For many elderly men, a dhaka *topi* is an everyday staple. There was a time when a Dhaka *chaubandi cholo* was winter necessity, with its thick tapestry weave and layered cotton providing a warm protection from chilly mornings. Even with all the ups and downs of the industry, Palpali Dhaka retains its significance and remains to be the only fabric that Nepalis all over the world identify as their own, no matter what part of Nepal they are from. In that respect, Palpali Dhaka has a unifying effect that Nepalis rally behind, much like the flag of Nepal.





COLLECTIONS
2022

1 heritage COLLECTION

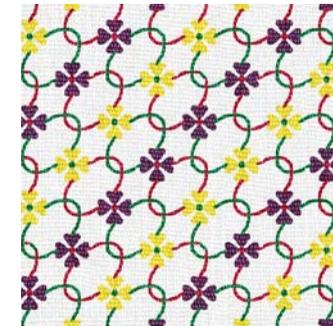
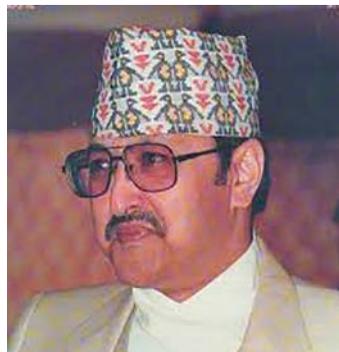
Hand-picked from the historical archives of the first dhaka workshops, Palpali's Heritage collection features a revival of the classic patterns that have been loved and cherished by generations of Nepalis.





Penguin
HE2201

Designed by Ganesh Man Maharjan himself in the mid-80's, the Penguin pattern came to be a personal favourite of the late King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah. The King was spotted wearing a dhaka *topi* featuring this iconic pattern in several historic photographs, including one that was featured in a postage stamp in the year 2002.



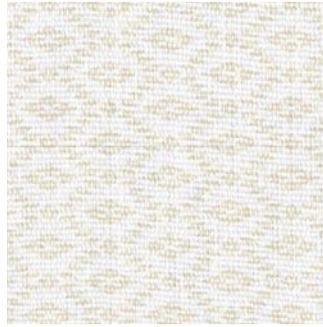
Aishwarya
HE2202

This light floral pattern is named after Queen Aishwarya, wife of King Birendra, who first drew the concept sketch for the design in the late 80's. She was a style icon back in the day, famous for her dramatic hairstyles and saris. A loyal patron of Palpali Dhaka, she had commissioned this pattern to be used exclusively for her sari blouses.

The pattern and original colour combinations were later modified by designer Pitambar Shrestha to be used outside the royal palace.

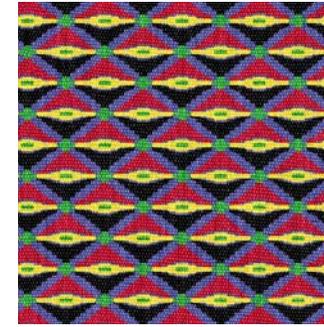


Bichhi
HE2203



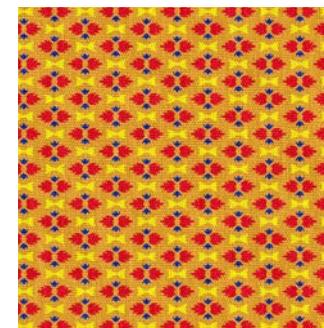
Bichhi
HE2204

The *Bichhi* pattern is inspired by, and literally translates to “the scorpion”. Megh Bahadur Thapa, a famed designer in the history of Palpali Dhaka industry, conceived this pattern in the 80’s. It was instantly a smash hit, preferred by many Nepali men for their dhaka topis.



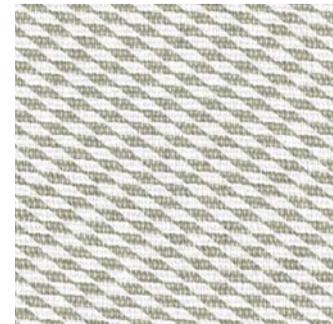
Aakha
HE2205

An avant-garde design for its era, the *Aakha* pattern is a geometric representation of the human eye. Designed by Ganesh Man Maharjan, this design was remembered for its unusual colour scheme and large motifs. Also conceived in the 80’s, the *Aakha* pattern was considered contemporary for its era and different from the traditional dhaka patterns.



Mukut
HE2206

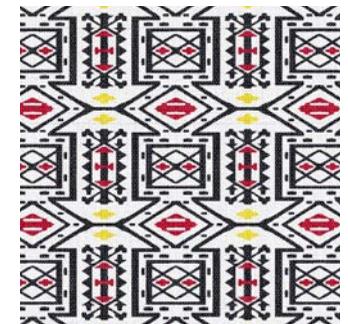




Kakre Biya
HE2209

They say a designer's inspiration strikes in the most unexpected ways. One fine day, Megh Bahadur was enjoying the warm winter sun eating cucumbers with his folks, the seeds scattered on a ground in an appealing disarray. He stared at the sight, a visual forming in his mind, which he quickly drafted into a pattern. This pattern, named *Kakre Biya* (literally translated to 'cucumber seeds'), went on to become one of the most versatile designs in Palpali Dhaka history.

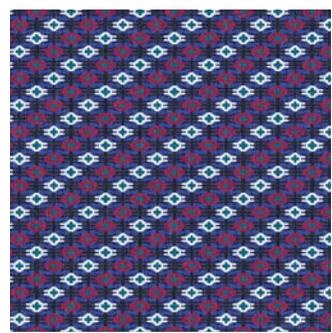
The *Mandap* pattern pays homage to religion, inspired by the Mandap of Sapta, a place Hindus create for a seven-week religious ceremony. The shapes and colours of the pattern offers a strong symbology for good luck, and has a special place in the hearts of Hindus.



Mandap
HE2210

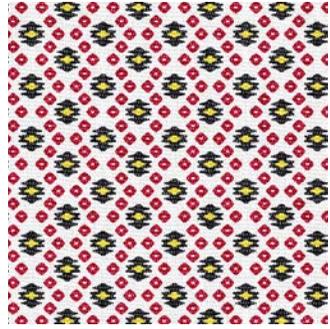


Plus
HE2207



Trishul
HE2208





Resham
HE2212

Another one designed by Megh Bahadur Thapa, the *Resham* pattern was at its peak popularity around late 1980s. While most traditional Palpali Dhaka was woven in pure cotton, this pattern was originally woven in silk yarns that came from Rupse in Palpa. The use of local silk yarns in Palpali Dhaka boosted the silk production and benefitted the region's silk farmers. The design itself is inspired from the raw material, with the black and yellow parts representing the silk worms and the red diamonds resembling the kimmu berries eaten by the silk worms.



“What Palpali Dhaka has achieved with a public-private partnership model so far is a success story that we hope to replicate for other cottage industries to create more employment opportunities.”

-Madhu Marasini
Finance Secretary
Ministry of Finance
Nepal

“Given the tremendous potential of this heritage product for modern-day relevance, setting new skilling norms for the designs of tomorrow has been a painstaking process. Through UKaid सीप support, PDA member firms are improving organizational capability that ensures innovative fabrics and products emerge true in spirit to their cultural origins, generate consumer appeal and create best-in-class women weavers.”

-Baljit Vohra
Team Leader
UKaid सीप



“When you purchase an artisanal product from a Label STEP Fair Trade Partner, you help improve the lives of the people who created it. The STEP Standard provides the broadest and strictest labour, health, safety, social and environmental rules in the artisanal weaving industries.

As a Label STEP Partner, The Palpali Dhaka Association commits to fair trade and the wellbeing of its weavers and workers. Dhaka textiles made under STEP fair trade conditions offer a distinct competitive advantage — one a growing number of discerning consumers expect.”

-Reto Aschwanden
Managing Director
Label STEP

**TARA BAHADUR RANA
MASTER WEAVER &
TECHNICIAN
TANSEN, PALPA**

Sitting cross-legged in a workshop, humming to the tune of a familiar folk song on the radio, Tara Bahadur Rana meticulously punches holes into cardboard cards according to a design graph he plotted himself. It will take him a few days to make about 720 of these cardboard punch cards which will form the template for a single repeating pattern of dhaka, to be installed into a semi-jacquard loom. These punch cards enable the semi-automation of the process, serially lifting the warp threads in accordance to the pattern.

With his ability to translate any design from a sketch or a photo to an actual graph, Tara Bahadur is one of the best dhaka technicians in the region. He is an on-call technician for several workshops around Tansen and switches between designing, fixing misbehaving looms and weaving, depending on the call of the hour, along with running his own workshop.

Plotting a graph for the patterns and making punch cards to feed into the semi-jacquard looms is the primary step of the process, and one that requires mathematical precision and focus. There are a precious few who adopt this role, even with training, as one needs to be an all-rounder intimately acquainted with all aspects of dhaka weaving.

But Tara Bahadur took to this role like a duck to water. Trained through a government initiative many decades ago, he loves the technical challenge that each new design presents. But as textile industries dwindled during the civil war that lasted from 1996-2006, and villages faced the impending threat of being recruited into the Maoist army, Tara Bahadur left for Saudi Arabia, which lured him with the promise of a better livelihood. Post-war, he returned to his hometown and never looked back. He wanted to be present to raise his children well and return to his beloved craft. So, he set up a small home workshop with a few looms and trained a few weavers to work there. His eldest son learned the ropes and came to supervise the workshop himself.

When asked if the present youth of the country are likely to continue learning this skill, he is hopeful. *“These skills take a long time to perfect, and to see the payoff of all that work in the design process translated into the final piece of fabric could easily take up to a week. Thus, for a generation that wants immediate results and a quick buck, this line of work may not be very gratifying,”* he muses.



Tara is also buoyed by the rejuvenated spirits, skills, and motivations of artisans and technicians engaged in the sector. *“Tansen has new-found inspiration and fresh positive energy over the last two years, thanks the work done by सीप and PDA,”* he adds.

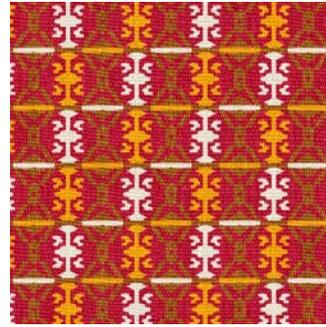
WEAVER'S
WORKSHOPS


**home
decor**
C O L L E C T I O N





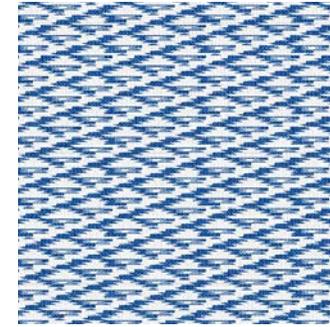
Lattai
HD2201



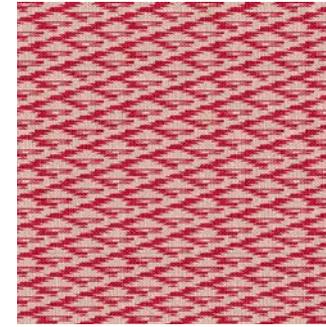
Lattai
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Saili Maili
HD2203



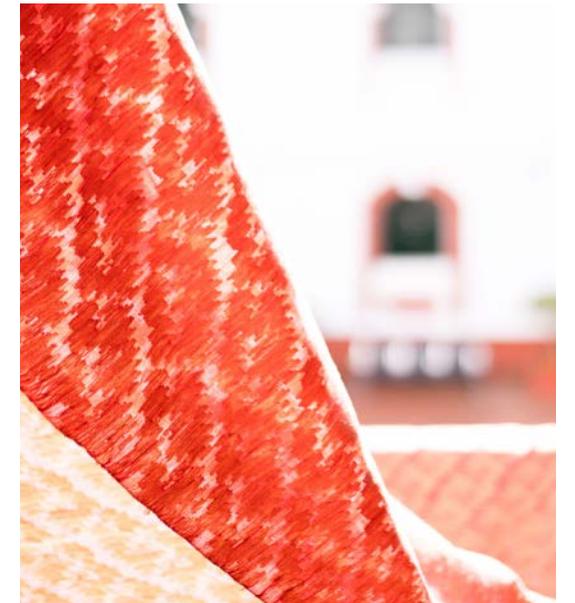
Pyramid
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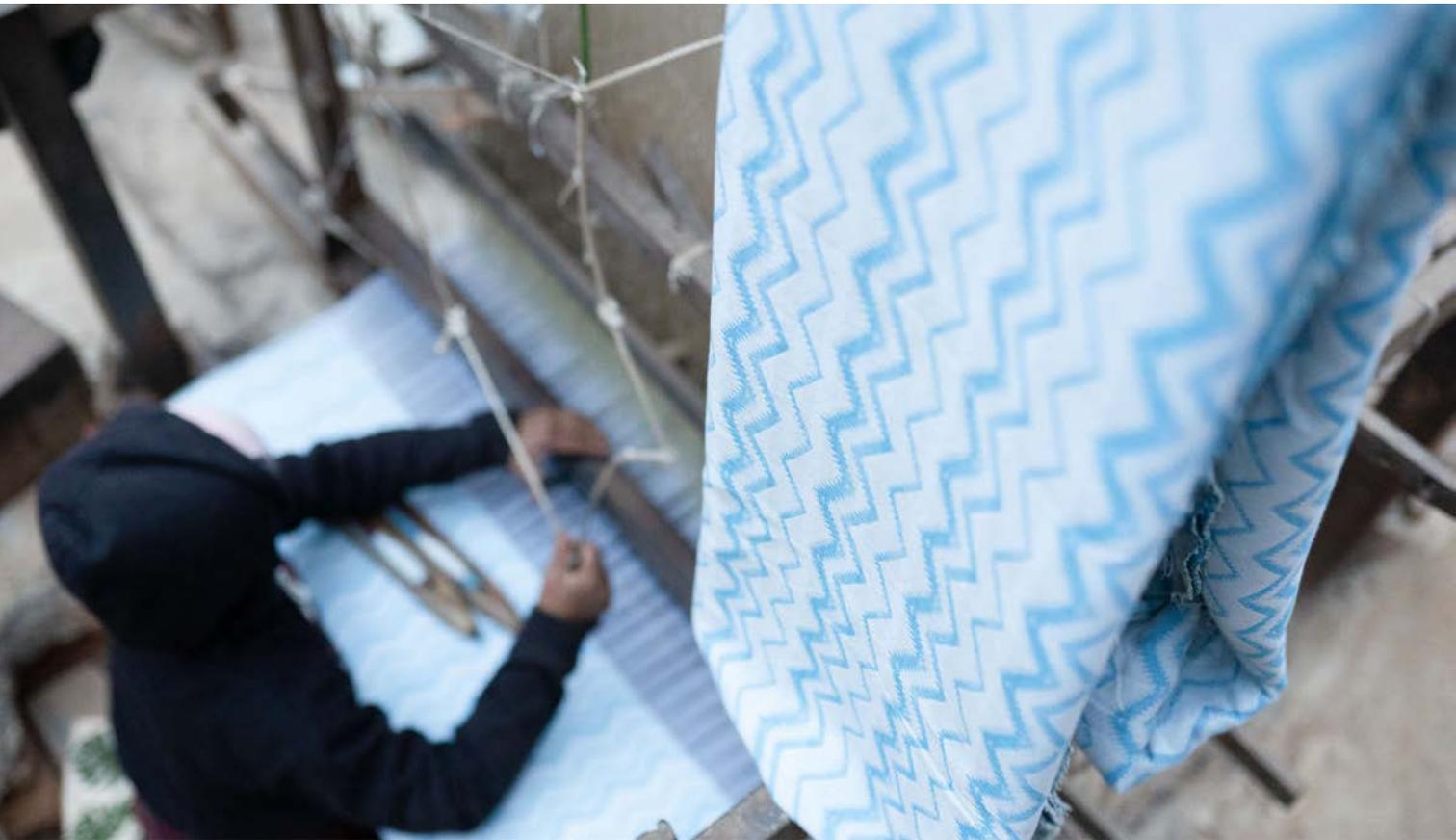


Pyramid
HD2206



Dorey
HD2207





Purja
HD2211



Pagoda
HD2212

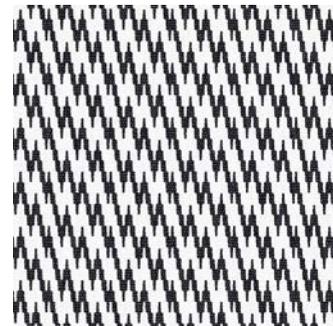


Barfi
HD2209

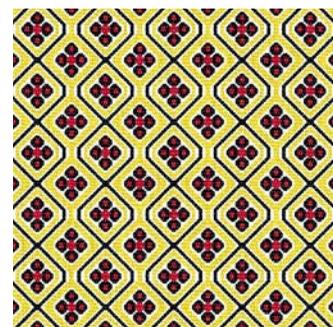


Naagbeli
HD2210

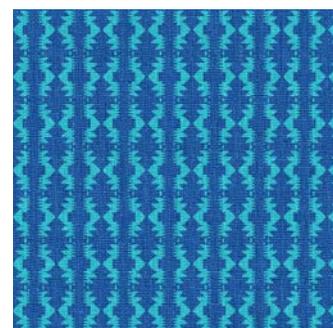




Kaligandaki
HD2213



Kimmu
HD2214



Mandir
HD2216



MIN KUMARI
WEAVER
TANSEN, PALPA



Min Kumari has been weaving since the early 2000's. Initially fumbling and clumsy with the process, it was a hard learning curve for Min Kumari. But seeing other weavers do it effortlessly strengthened her resolve to learn. Since then, her years of experience have improved her mastery of her skill, but by no means has it made dhaka an easier cloth to weave.

"Weaving a single row of motifs can easily take up to an hour, and if you miss a thread, or use a colour in the wrong row, it can't be fixed. It requires focus and attention, and a lot of hard work goes into weaving a single metre of cloth," she explains. Presently, the income is enough to make ends meet and send her son to school, therefore, the more she weaves, the more she can earn.

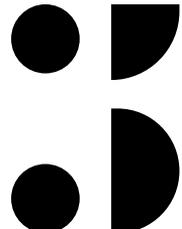
Times have taken a turn for the better since the formation of the Palpali Dhaka Association, according to Min Kumari. After their training, she had a broader understanding of the other aspects of production as well, like making punch cards and repairing the loom.

She finds it encouraging to see the traditional fabric evolve with new patterns and colour palettes. In the past, they used one set of colour combinations for everything and solely worked on white warps. Now she enjoys working on differently coloured warps and design varieties, which gives her pride and more income.

WEAVER'S STORY



Min Kumari loves the sisterhood she has found with her fellow weavers. Whether it is exchanging laughs, solving problems or sharing life's woes, she takes comfort in the fact that in weaving, she has also found her a community.


fashion
C O L L E C T I O N





Putali
FS2201

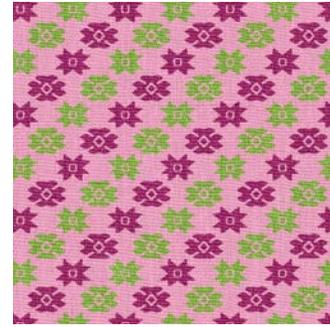


Putali
FS2202

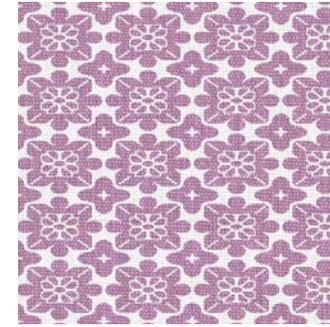


“When I first studied the fabric of Palpali Dhaka, I was really surprised to learn about the technique of hand jacquards. It is great for a designer to be working closely with the weavers to explore and find new ways to make the fabric. Palpali Dhaka has a lot to offer both in terms of technique and its complex and colourful motifs. Designers today are looking for close collaborations together with weavers and seek to get in touch with the craft more intimately. It is the spirit of such an innovative and social creative collaboration that goes into making Palpali Dhaka. In the time when the international market is overwhelmed by mass-produced items, handwoven fabrics like Palpali Dhaka show much potential in custom-made artisanal products, something the mass market cannot replicate.”

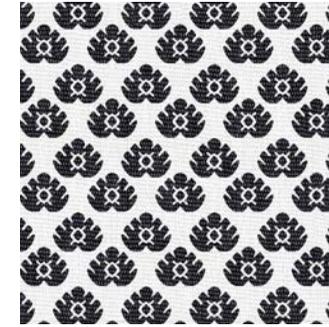
-Christoph Hefti
Textile Designer
Switzerland



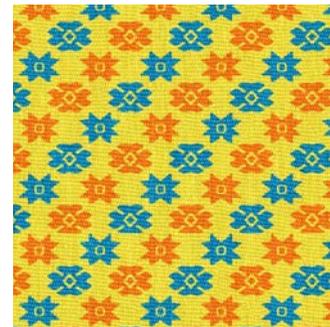
Tara
FS2203



Rangoli
FS2205



Ghongha
FS2206

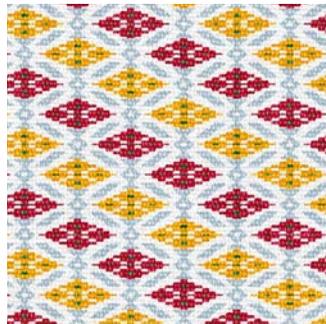


Tara
FS2204





Karauti
FS2207



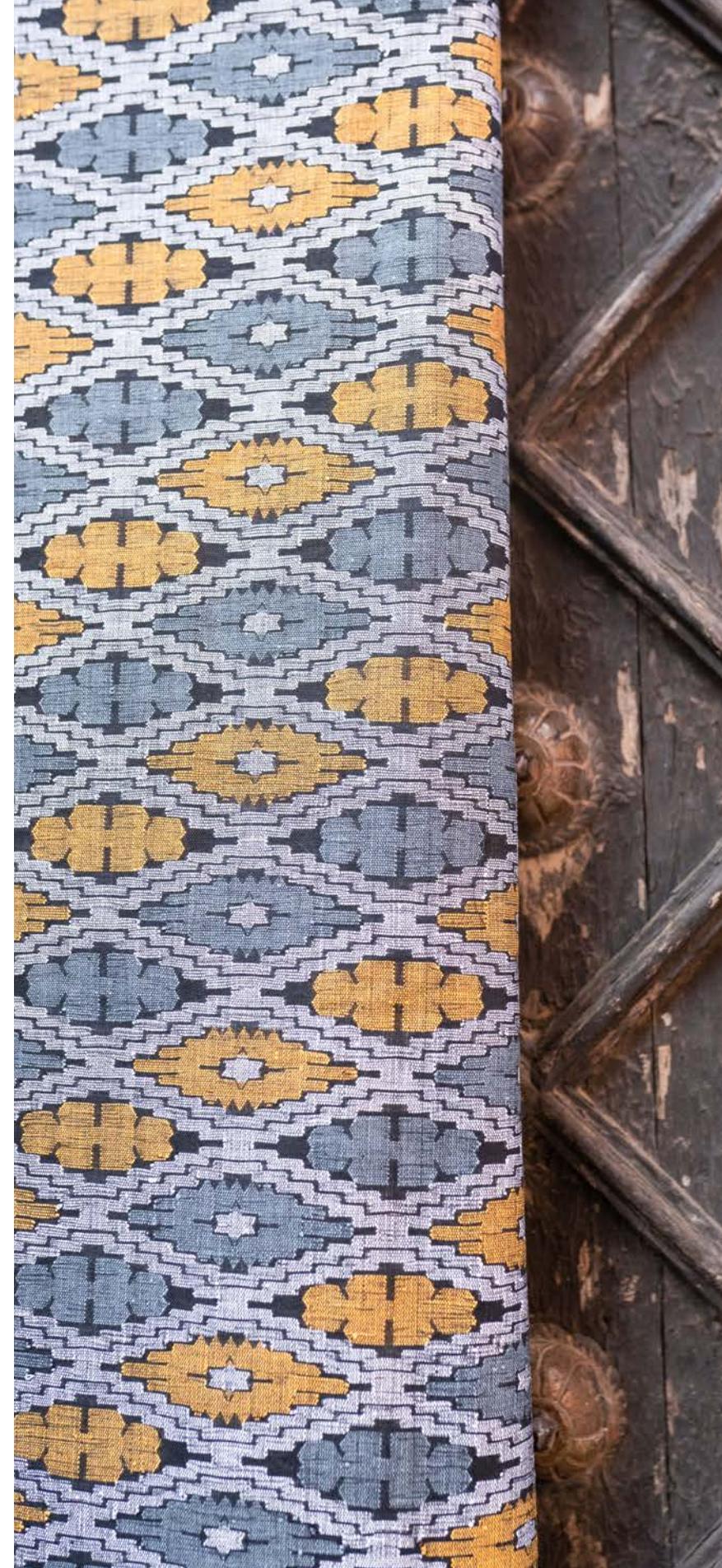
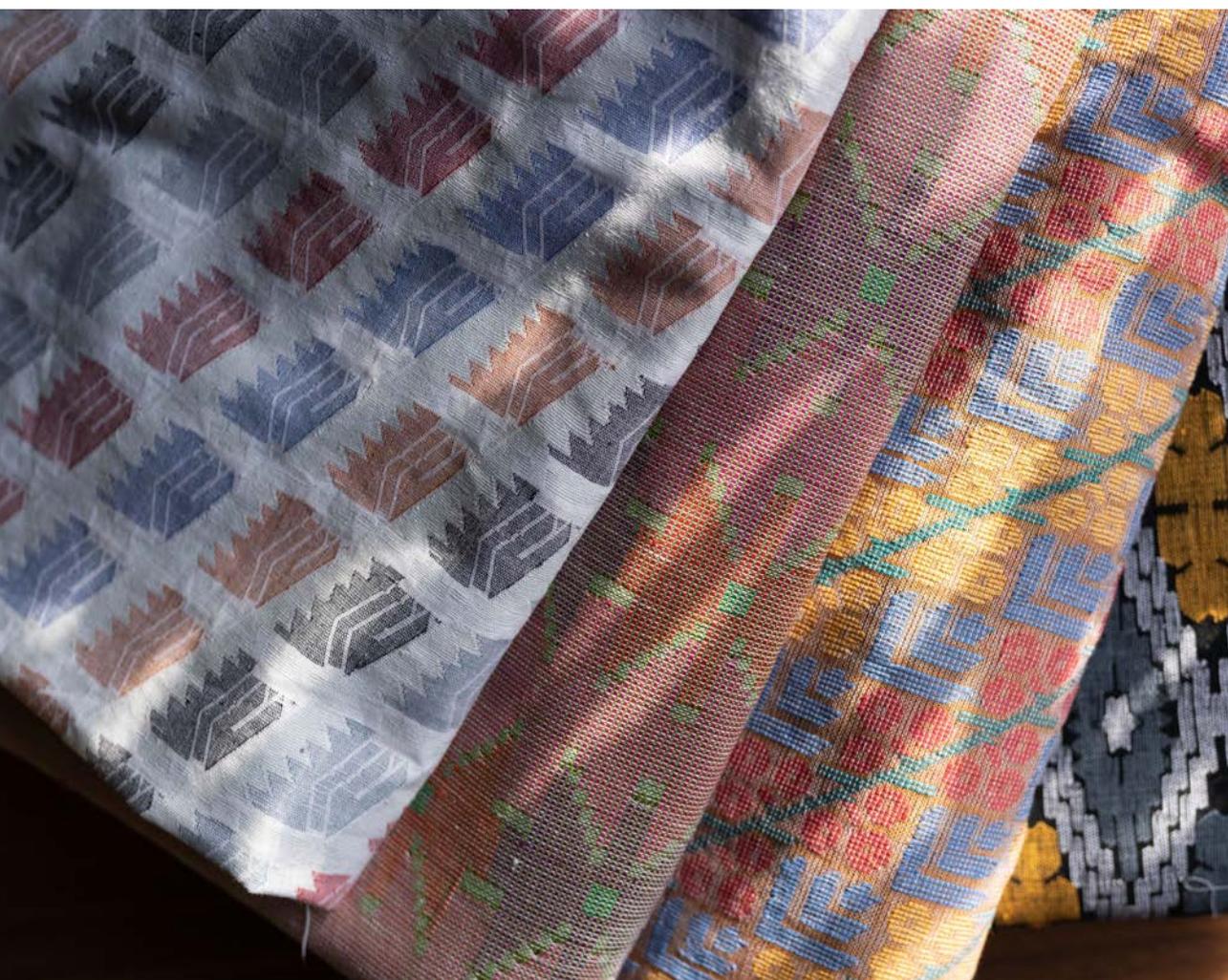
Mithai
FS2208



Changa
FS2209



Itta
FS2210



SARITA BK
WEAVER
CHHAP, PALPA

Over a decade ago, Sarita BK learned about a workshop in her village giving weaving training through a friend. One fine day returning from the farm, she stopped by the workshop, mostly driven by curiosity. As a single mother, of a daughter, the weaving training would offer her a new skill and a means to build a future for her daughter.

"The learning phase wasn't easy at all", she recalls with a laugh. Threads would break in the middle, she would get the colours mixed up, and sometimes the pattern repetitions would be wrong. Weaving came more easily as she practised, eventually replacing farming as her core source of income.

While farming demands hard manual labour, weaving was a relatively more comfortable profession with a steady stream of work that was not impacted by weather conditions.

WEAVER'S STORY

Weaving has been even more lucrative since the Palpali Dhaka Association came into the picture, according to Sarita. Their training with graduation certification has given a formal recognition to her talent, adding to the motivation of weavers like her and emerging weavers like her daughter Srijana. It has also helped to improve and diversify their skills and raised their wages. PDA members regularly visit their workshops and listen to their problems, making this small, somewhat isolated community feel seen and heard.



Sarita is quite fond of the fabric she weaves, preferring dhaka for its multi-coloured versatility to imported fabrics. Her young daughter Srijana too was drawn to these fabrics and loved watching her mother work. Her fascination prompted Sarita to teach her how to weave, and these mother-daughter moments, weaving colourful threads onto the warp, has evolved into a beautiful daily routine. Today, Sarita looks on with pride at her resourceful teenage daughter who balances school and weaving, and is already en route to becoming a master weaver.

The mother-daughter duo are grateful for the vastly improved livelihood-linked skilling provision and other productivity measures that are now within an easy reach with support from PDA and सीप at workshops around Palpa.

SRIJANA BK
WEAVER
CHHAP, PALPA



19-year old Srijana already speaks with the maturity and wisdom of a much older woman. Daughter of Sarita BK, a seasoned weaver who first taught her the craft, Srijana starts her day like any other teenager, attending morning classes at her high school. After assignments and chores, she joins her mother in the late afternoon to weave by her side. During holidays, she spends her day at the loom, patiently weaving patterns onto the warp.

“Even a metre of Palpali Dhaka takes so much hard work. We ask everybody to buy and recognize authentic Palpali Dhaka, so that we artisans can also survive and thrive along with this industry.”

WEAVER'S STORY

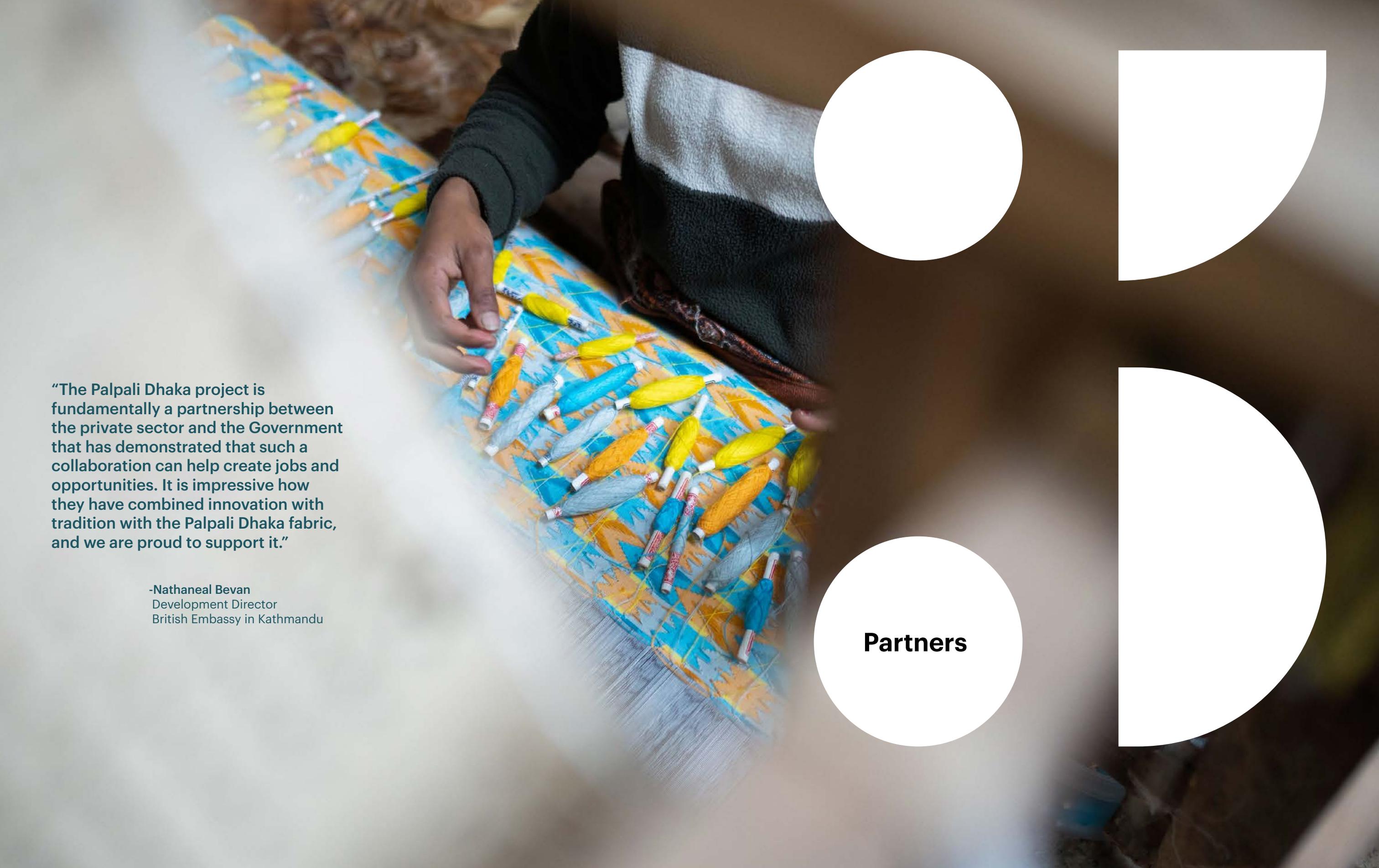
Between school and work, Srijana has learned how to balance her priorities. Her mother initially taught her the basics of weaving about 4 years ago, a skill she picked up with much enthusiasm. *“It always looked fun when mother was doing it”,* she muses, *“and the dhaka fabric is so pretty!”*. Despite her years of experience, Srijana still struggled with more complicated patterns like the Laligurans. Thanks to a 3-month skill training organized by the Palpali Dhaka Association and सीप, she had an opportunity to ask the right questions to an experienced facilitator and hone her skills further, after which complex patterns became much less intimidating.

Armed with a better know-how of her craft, the training also made her a more confident weaver. Srijana believes her weaving skill is an important asset in her life, one that has made her more confident about her future. The youngest weaver in her village, she thinks more young people should learn this craft instead of idling away their days.

“Weaving has added so much to our lives. It helps us earn our livelihood, but it also gives us a sense of community. Coming to the workshop, helping out mother, trading stories and laughs with the other weavers, all the while weaving a beautiful fabric. I can't think of a better way to pass my days.”

**THE MOST INTRICATE
PATTERNS CAN ONLY BE
WOVEN BY HAND.**





“The Palpali Dhaka project is fundamentally a partnership between the private sector and the Government that has demonstrated that such a collaboration can help create jobs and opportunities. It is impressive how they have combined innovation with tradition with the Palpali Dhaka fabric, and we are proud to support it.”

-Nathaneal Bevan
Development Director
British Embassy in Kathmandu

Partners

PALPALI DHAKA ASSOCIATION (PDA)



Palpali Dhaka Association (PDA) was established in 2020 with an aim to revive the Palpali Dhaka industry. The association plays as a catalyst to preserve the indigenous technique of producing hand woven dhaka fabric, expanding the knowledge to future generation, and improving the working conditions for weavers. Currently comprising of nine dhaka producing factories, this organization aims to standardize the quality of working conditions for the artisans through alignment with fair trade standards, introduce finest quality handmade dhaka fabrics production through certified and curriculum-based skill building trainings and collectively produce to cater to national and international markets diversifying design and product innovation. With support from UKaid सीप, Lumbini Province Government, Tansen Municipality, among other system and market actors, the association has been working towards the "Growth of Nepali Dhaka" endeavour to take the brand PALPALI to new heights.

www.palpali.com

च. सं. २०१५ साल मा स्थापना गरेकी टाका कारखाना कुनै ठेला
२०० जना काम गर्नु हुन्थियो/ बिच मा कारखाना मा १०, १२ जना मात्र
कामदार हुनु हुन्थियो। पहिले समय मा आएर पाल्पाली टाका संघ
स्थापना गरि अहिले नयाँ कामदार लाई संघ माफिब लक्षित दिई
रोजगार संगसंगै महिला दिदी बहिनी लाई आर्थिक स्थिति मा
सुधार गर्ने काम गर्न पाएकी मा खुसी हु। साथै पाल्पाली टाका कपडा
नेपाल मोलिक र गुणस्तरको कपडा उत्पादन गरि देश, बिदेश
सम्म पठाउन पाउने खुसी लाग्छ। यो हाम्रो परियोजना मा सहयोग
गर्नु हुने नेपाल सरकार, प्रदेश सरकार, स्थानिय सरकार र यू.के. एड
सिप लाई धन्यवाद दिन चाहन्छु।

पूर्ण माया
पूर्ण माया महर्जन
अध्यक्ष
पाल्पाली टाका संघ

PDA FOUNDING MEMBERS

Swodesi Bastrakala Palpali Dhaka Topi Purna Maya Maharjan

Founded in 1958 by Late Ganesh Man Maharjan, Swodeshi Bastrakala Palpali Dhaka is the first Palpali Dhaka factory in Nepal. Over the years, it has seen all the ups and downs of the dhaka market and have a deep and thorough understanding of the market. Being the pioneers of Palpali Dhaka, both Purna Maya Maharjan and Sagar Man Maharjan are helming the Palpali Dhaka Association and are actively involved in the Palpali Dhaka revitalization project.

Saraswati Dhaka Cloth Industry Hari Bahadur Rayamajhi

Saraswati Dhaka Cloth, established in 1991 by Hari Bahadur Rayamajhi Chettri with three looms, and is one of the largest Palpali Dhaka producers located in Tansen that employs more than 35 people. As Hari Rayamajhi is a talented designer himself, his dhaka came to be known for its distinct patterns and unique colour combinations, which they sell in their two outlets in Tansen.

Mahesh Dhaka Udhog Saraswati Bhattarai

Mahesh Dhaka Udhog was established in 1985 by Saraswati Bhattarai, an expert weaver who started with one loom and expanded to fifteen looms during Palpali Dhaka's peak years. Though a well-known producer of its times, the factory fell upon hard times and closed due to mounting challenges in the sector in 2011. After the formation of Palpali Dhaka Association, Saraswati had courage to re-open her factory with 7 handlooms. Currently, her workshop is fully operational and employs more than 10 weavers.

Paudyal Dhaka Udhog Manoj Raj Paudyal

Another Tansen based enterprise, Paudyal Dhaka Udhog was established in 1988 by Mohan Raj Sharma Paudyal. This workshop is among the larger producers of Palpali Dhaka which employs more than 35 people and have two outlets, one in Tansen and another in Kathmandu. It has a fair share of market in Palpali Dhaka sector and is known for its distinct patterns and quality. The factory is currently helmed by Manoj Raj Sharma Paudyal.

Purbeli Haate Dhaka Udhyog Narayan Gopal Pandey

Purbeli Dhaka Udhyog was founded in 2008 by Narayan Gopal Pandey. Inspired by the Palpali Dhaka designs, Narayan started his own workshop from 4 handlooms. Today, the factory is known for its own distinct patterns and colors. It employs more than 25 employees and is in process of expansion.

Bagmati Dhaka Udhyog Santa Man Shrestha

Bagmati Dhaka Udhyog was established in 2009 by Santa Man Shrestha, who boasts expert technical knowledge of the dhaka sector. Originally from Dhading, he is also a talented graphic designer and has trained many in weaving. Being one of the top producers of Palpali Dhaka, it employs over 15 people.

Deurali Dhaka Udhyog Durga Bahadur Saru

Located in the hill-top village of Chhap, Deurali Dhaka Udhyog was established in 2015 by Durga Bahadur Saru. This workshop employs many home-based weavers who received financial help to install their own loom. It is one of the top producers of fine Palpali Dhaka and currently employs more than 35 people in the village.

Karki Dhaka Udhyog Gyanu Karki

Karki Dhaka Udhyog was founded in 1984 by Mr. Hari Krishna Karki. A thriving factory in its heydays, this was one of the many factories which had to close with the many problems the industry faced post-war. Since the formation of PDA, the factory reopened to newly trained weavers and is currently managed by Gyanu Karki, daughter-in-law of Hari Karki. Today, Karki Dhaka is fully operational with more than 15 weavers, has 3 outlets, and plans to expand soon.

Rana Dhaka Udhyog Fanisara Rana

Fanisara Rana and her husband Reshi Ram Rana are among the veterans in the Palpali Dhaka industry, starting their journey with a single loom almost 3 decades ago. Their factory Rana Dhaka Udhyog was founded in 2012, and though small, produce some of the finest quality dhaka in Palpa. Today the factory's workforce is entirely women.

UKaid सीप



Funded by the British Embassy in Kathmandu, UKaid सीप brokers transformational partnerships with the private and public sector to propel growth of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in priority sectors – commercial agriculture, light manufacturing, tourism, ICT, and construction– primarily in Madhesh Province and Lumbini Province. सीप uses an innovative Challenge Fund modality to expand market-aligned skilling, affordable financial products, and ethical migration services linked to gainful livelihoods for Nepalis and transformation and growth within industries.

UKaid सीप's industry-aligned contributions have been recognized by diverse sectoral leaders, across the public and private domain, as having influenced and catalysed a paradigm shift for sectoral transformation alongside the delivery of skilling initiatives, for addressing systemic firm, sectoral and labour market constraints, as well as inclusive job creation and affordable financial access commensurate with industry growth. 'What is impressive about सीप: it is a model for how we can deliver inclusive economic growth,' remarked Nathanael Bevan, Development Director of British Embassy in Nepal, at an event held in October 2021. The way the programme has built partnerships with the private sector & Government, how it is balancing the supply & demand sides of the system; and addressing key labor and firm market constraints while integrating skill components to all efforts, is transformative.'

UKaid सीप's partnership with the PDA was designed to support resurgence and inclusive growth of the Palpali Dhaka industry for sustainable and quality jobs and enterprise growth. The programme uses demand-driven sector development approach, working with the most promising and committed local firms to drive labour, firm, and value chain level improvements as well as to promote conducive enabling environment required to boost competitiveness and resilience of Nepali industries and workers.

With support from the Lumbini Province and Tansen Municipality, UKaid सीप supported the co-creation of and co-funding for the PDA in 2019. Comprising of nine firms, सीप's multi-stakeholder partnership with PDA provided a coordinated platform to improve and institutionalize stronger skilling practices, through standardized three-month apprenticeship-based curriculum on weaving, business literacy, and soft skills and enhanced trainer skills; and other interlinked productivity-enabling interventions. The programme brought a systemic "constraint-addressing 360° solution" lens to the key challenges endured by the industry over the last two years.

Through active collaboration between local and global designers and buyers, the Lumbini Provincial Government and the Municipality of Tansen in particular, the सीप-PDA teams have worked hard to embrace culture-based innovations, recyclable materials, and story-embedded products that will continue to define the way Brand Palpali will relate to its innovative products of the future.

TANSEN MUNICIPALITY

The Lumbini Province Government, Tansen Municipality and the other municipalities of Palpa have played a huge role in formation of the Palpali Dhaka Association and have deeply invested in the revitalization project. The Mayor of Tansen Municipality, Ashok Kumar Shahi is setting an example for other government bodies to promote and use Palpali Dhaka by using it in the interiors of his own office.

The sector was facing critical challenges like a lack of innovation in product design, limited linkage to emerging markets in Nepal, lack of access to start-up and scale-up capital, and weak branding and marketing. Particularly due to weak branding and promotion of the original dhaka fabric, imported dhaka-type fabrics occupied the market, diluting the image of Palpali Dhaka. All of this directly affected the wages of the weavers and as a result, their motivation to pursue dhaka weaving as a vocation.

Reviving the Palpali Dhaka industry is a top priority for the Tansen Municipality. The partnership forged among the Lumbini Province Government, Tansen Municipality, Palpali Dhaka Association and UKaid सीप Programme has brought together the private sector, government, and development agencies at a common ground—harnessing the multi-sectoral capabilities to tackle the bottlenecks facing the industry. Indicative of the building momentum, and growing interest in Palpali Dhaka, advocacy is ongoing for Tansen to be declared the 'Dhaka Capital of Nepal'.



LABEL STEP

The Palpali Dhaka Association is working in collaboration with Swiss non-profit organization Label STEP to promote the sustainability of the handmade Dhaka industry and ensure the wellbeing of its weavers. Label STEP has developed fair trade standards specific to the handwoven textile sector in Nepal that provide strict social and environmental guidelines. The guidelines cover: the protection of workers' health and safety; the assurance of fair wages and protection of agreed wages; the prohibition of child labour; the protection against all forms of discrimination; environmental protection; the protection against forced or bonded labour; and the workers' right to freedom of association.

The Palpali Dhaka Association has made big strides to implement these guidelines and comply with the fair trade standards. Weavers salaries are set using STEP's wage calculation tool, making sure that weavers earn at least the governmental minimum wage. Production facilities have been upgraded to prioritize the safety of weaver and workers, emergency measures and protocols have been introduced, and all employees participate in regular safety and occupational health training. All workshops are equipped with sanitary and safe drinking water facilities, adequate lighting conditions, first aid kits and fire safety equipment.

Ethically sourced and eco-friendly products have become a fundamental requirement for a growing number of consumers around the world, and the market for sustainable products continues to grow rapidly. But compliance with fair trade standards is about much more than just satisfying a market demand, it is the heart of the Palpali Dhaka Association's purpose and philosophy.

www.label-step.org



OTHER COLLABORATORS

Palpali Dhaka Association's partnership with UKaid सीप is an embodiment of a real multi-sector collaboration aimed at enabling sustainable jobs and industries. In addition to the partners mentioned in the previous pages, the following have been important contributors:

- **Lumbini Province Government** prioritized the revival of Palpali Dhaka and allocated budget for skilling, employment and marketing through the local government, Tansen Municipality.
- **NMB Bank** enables affordable financial solutions for women weavers to buy handloom technology for setting up their self-employed/home-based business and for entrepreneurs to access growth capital.
- **Nepal Yarn Manufacturing Association and other yarn suppliers** in and outside Nepal, like Triveni Spinning Mill in Birgunj and Aquafil in Italy, provided raw materials to address PDA's supply chain gaps as well as introduced recyclable and environment-friendly products.
- **Image Ark** created the brand concept and identity of the Palpali brand and gave it its strategic direction as a contemporary brand. From logo to communication collaterals the Palpali brand is consistent and recognizable in its visuals and personality.
- **Kathaharu** provided visual storytelling to document and present the emotional and historical context behind the Palpali brand to strengthen marketing capacity. With the visual documentation, the Palpali brand has a marketing material that shows the effort as well as emotional weight the brand has for the consumers.
- **Christoph Hefti, Textile Designer** introduced modern-day world-class designs that appeal to a global clientele, also sensitizing PDA members about the need to and how to adapt to new-age youthful interests.
- **Aayusha Shrestha, AAMO** infused design thinking to turn Palpali Dhaka fabrics into contemporary, purposeful products that hold accountability and is relevant in today's progressive market.
- **Srishti Bajracharya, Association for Craft Producers (ACP)** helped make a selection of fabrics and develop swatches, covering all three collections. She also supported buyer identification in both national and international markets.
- **Alternative Technology (AT)** developed the Galaincha software to help Dhaka entrepreneurs design and visualize the fabrics and their colors before weaving, as a valuable efficiency-improvement tool. AT has also developed a digital catalog to boost PDA's marketing efforts and help clients/buyers visualize the fabrics.

The solutions and interventions from these stakeholders have helped optimize the value of the partnership built by PDA and UKaid सीप—by addressing critical systemic constraints and gaps at the firm, industry, and workers' levels.



