



CASE OF ENSIRA

Introducing Ensira

Ensira is a pottery cooperative established in 2019, that were already involved in production in Addis Ababa. The groups had 240 members when they decided to come together and form Ensira Pottery Cooperative. Their compound is located in the Northern Part of Addis Ababa.

Before the Support

In 2019, the cooperative was just established, and members sold what they produced separately by themselves. Some women generated about 8,000 birr per month, most of which goes back to purchasing raw materials to produce the next batch of pottery. The working premises provided by the government was only the old house they used as showroom and sales, and not for production of pottery.

In 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the fledgling new cooperative faced a major challenge to sell products and sustain the business. The center that organized the women's pottery-producing groups needed support during the peak of the pandemic. Orders for pottery and sales shrank, employees started to leave, and the cooperative stopped the formation of the center.



Challenges/Why Ensira

As a result of the pandemic, the Ensira members, all mothers who used to be in 15 different groups, struggled with slow market conditions and a decrease in sales. The women could not afford raw materials and working capital as they produced traditional pottery, which relies on other groups for raw material supply and a redundant market. This caused a struggle to survive for most groups, and few could settle employee salaries when the facility started supporting the establishment of the center. Supporting the center meant helping many women in informal businesses to survive the pandemic and prove that traditional businesses like pottery production can be renovated and advanced into the wider market. Thus, after three years of intervention, we see:

01

How far the women members came in their business?

02

What are the challenges facing Ensira?

03

How the center helped them and what changed?

What MSE Resilience Facility provide for Ensira Pottery Center

Ensira received the biggest grant from CRRP, MSE Resilience Facility. The MSE Resilience Facility under the COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Program (CRRP) supported 26,646 enterprises (both formal and informal) that enabled 93,918 employments to be created and sustained. MSE Resilience Facility allocated part of its grant funds to supporting the 145+ informal enterprises in Ensira Pottery Center(cooperative of the informal pottery producers) out of the 2000 informal enterprises.

Ensira needed support to establish a modern center and organize the cooperative as intended. The grant was through a renovation of their working premise, the purchase of necessary equipment, and the recruitment of personnel towards improving their productivity. The budget allocated for Ensira Center was 4,322,750, and they have used all their budget by May 2023. Funds are transferred to Ensira based on the service and purchase contracts they provide. The support Ensira received included:

- Purchase of table, chairs and shelf
- Building industrial sheds, covering the cost of wall and ceiling
- Procurement of soil grinding machine
- Computer training

After the Support

According to the leaders, the Ensira center formed an association, which facilitated more convenient work conditions and enabled proper management of purchase and utilization of raw materials, point of sales, human resources, and salary payments to the essential staff including the marketing manager. Currently, 438 people are working as members or employees in the Ensira Pottery Center.

<i>Cooperative Members and Employments</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
Cooperative Members (all women)	301
Women Employees	110
Men Employees	27
Total	438

Five groups from different areas across Ethiopia supply inputs necessary for the production of pottery. Three areas are the main source of inputs:

- 01** Fiche for soft and white clay soil (Kaolinite)
- 02** Merhabete for red clay soil (Ultisol soil)
- 03** Entoto Maryam for reddish-brown (Ustalf soil)

The cooperative's leaders explained how the center provides a large amount of inventory to wholesalers and retailers with large orders. Products are also sold at their center which has its retail showroom and a shop for the consumers. Friday is the main trading day for wholesalers and retailers, which some are traders from Merkato and exporters for customers and craft shops outside of the country. The center can aggregate orders, prepare quality products and supply them for the clients as per the order on time. The product the women offer to the market goes through intense scrutiny to ensure quality standards and customer satisfaction.

Capacity Development and Women Leadership

Ensira adamantly believes in developing the skills of its members by diversifying the product lines in which an employee can engage as a potter. Every employee and cooperative member is allowed to try out and make the different products that are made in these lines.

There are two reasons for rotating potters:

1. To enhance the pottery skills of the employees within a diverse pool of product lines and make them proficient all round
2. To identify which potter is more capable to make a better product within a specific type of pottery item.

The leaders explained that different potters excel at different types of products and the rotations aid in unveiling such hidden talents from every member as a result of the job rotation.

Supervisors and managers in the Ensira center are senior women members of the cooperative. This is with reason, they struggled to find a trusted and capable manager outside of their members. Ensira faced a major problem after its establishment due to the lack of management and expertise. The center hired two managers, one after the other in the Marketing Manager position in hopes that could improve their sales and business. But on both occasions, they noticed a corrupted way of management with little to no transparency, and they replaced the position with one of the members with adequate training in bookkeeping and marketing. Currently, the management is fully women-led.

Challenges

There are three main challenges that Ensira is facing:

- Lack of electricity (because the center does not have a transformer installed to handle the power needed to operate the machinery, recently purchased mixing machine and other tools that operate using electricity are idle).
- The mechanism for burning the clay is traditional and does not comply with basic safety and safeguarding expectations.
- Inability to scale the business (primarily by expanding the line of products). Due to a lack of capital expanding their product line into new items such as vases and similar products has been impossible. They feel confident that they can produce new products if they get capital that will help them acquire the right materials such as molds in which they can have the vases made within.
- Lack of access to new markets to sell their products, and this include international markets. Most of their clients are business customers that resell their products, some exporting. The center tried to reach consumers direct but this couldn't be attained because the center doesn't have an export license. Attempts were made in reaching out to the Addis Ababa city administration to facilitate the export license, which the leaders expect approval for.



Looking Ahead

The women in Ensira want to keep changing for the better, they want to expand to produce more products. The women showed flatbread makers (Arabian bread makers) to illustrate what they are capable of. They intend to expand their line of products gradually and even produce items that are of industrial use, clays used in electric transformers for high voltage. These kinds of products could substitute the imported China clay and save foreign exchange.

The women leaders indicated that they never borrowed from any financial institutions. According to them, Ensira needs more time and a steady revenue stream to consider taking loans. But loans are something that they would clearly consider and look forward to expanding product lines and the center.

Ensira aspires to reach consumers by selling the products directly to them and currently, they are pressing in branding their product to at least have all the intermediaries as well as end users be aware of the brand Ensira.



The women in Ensira are participating in various training programs offered by different organizations to expand their skills and knowledge to improve their business.

They believe both the technical skills that they provide for young women joining the center, and business and skills training will grow their efficiency in production and effectiveness in marketing Ensira.

Ensira Pottery Center have expanded by opening new branch shops. Their new shop opened in **Adwa 00 center**, making their product and services visible to different tourist, vendor and customer.

