



Research article

The Role of Handicrafts in Sustainable Economic Development (Case Study, Part II District, Kapisa Province)

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Abstract

Handicrafts in the second district of Kapisa, as an important source of income and employment, play a key role in the sustainable economic development of this region. With its rich cultural and artistic heritage, this district benefits from diverse productions such as weaving, pottery, metalwork, leather embroidery, tinsmithing, and woodworking industries, which represent traditional skills and local capabilities. Considering the market demand for quality and independent products, handicrafts can become a good source of income for the residents of this district. Selling these products in local and even international markets will improve the economic situation and help families. Handicrafts can help attract tourism. The display and sale of these products in local markets and exhibitions can increase tourism attractions and positively impact the local region. Handicrafts in Part II of Kapisa district (henceforth, Hesa-e-Dowom District) are rich in the history and culture of this region. The purpose of the research is to analyze the impact of handicrafts on employment, to evaluate importation, to study challenges and obstacles, to analyze the market and export opportunities, and to preserve cultural identity and sustainable development. The method of research in this article is investigative, analytical, and descriptive. Also, the data analyzed was collected through distributing questionnaires. This study concludes that handicrafts are not only a means to ensure the livelihood of the residents, but also an important factor in sustainable economic development in this region. Supporting these industries can help achieve sustainable growth and improve the quality of life of the people in this region.

Keywords: Capital, development, employment, industries, resources

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1. Introduction

Handicrafts, as one of the most important manifestations of a nation's culture and art, have always played a prominent role in the historical and economic development of societies. They not only represent the cultural identity and history of a community but also serve as a significant source of income and employment. In Afghanistan, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas, handicrafts, due to their cultural richness and diversity, can serve as an effective mechanism for both economic and social development (Azimi, 2011).

Hesa-e-Dowom District of Kapisa Province, endowed with abundant cultural and artistic resources, possesses strong potential for the expansion of handicraft industries. With a young and talented population, the district has the capacity to foster employment and improve social and economic conditions through the promotion of traditional crafts (Ahmadi, 2015). Handicrafts in Afghanistan are regarded as one of the fundamental pillars of the country's cultural and economic identity, playing an essential role in people's lives in safeguarding cultural heritage and in supporting economic growth. These crafts, passed down through generations, symbolize the nation's collective memory, cultural continuity, and daily life.

Sustainable development refers to a process of resource management, investment, technological advancement, and institutional transformation that aligns present needs with the aspirations of future generations. The concept, emphasized since the early 1990s, is closely linked with human development, environmental protection, and intergenerational equity (Aman, 2018). In the Afghan context, the key components of sustainable development include natural resource stability, social sustainability, political stability, and economic sustainability (Hajir, 2017).

Given the socio-economic conditions of this region, examining the role of handicrafts in promoting economic growth, identifying existing challenges, and exploring potential opportunities is both timely and essential (Ghubar, 2009). Handicrafts, as a reflection of cultural authenticity, require strategic planning to preserve their traditional values while adapting to modern market dynamics (Elham, 2007).

In this study, the researcher aims to examine the role of handicrafts in generating employment, increasing household income, and preserving cultural identity in the Hesa-e-Dowom District of Kapisa Province. Furthermore, the study investigates the barriers and limitations facing this sector and provides practical recommendations to policymakers and NGOs for supporting handicraft development and improving local livelihoods.

Research Question: Can handicrafts in Hesa-e-Dowom District contribute to the creation of job opportunities for local residents?

Hypothesis: It is hypothesized that handicrafts in this district, as a primary source of income, generate both direct and indirect employment opportunities for local residents, particularly for women and youth.

This research thus aims to serve as a valuable academic resource for policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners interested in promoting sustainable economic development in Kapisa Province through the revitalization of traditional crafts.

2. Literature Review

The literature review provides an overview of previous studies and scholarly works related to the role of handicrafts in economic development and sustainable livelihoods. Although no comprehensive study has specifically focused on the handicraft industry in Hesa-e-Dowom District of Kapisa Province, several national and international studies have discussed the broader significance of handicrafts in Afghanistan's economy and cultural preservation.

Ahmadi (2015) discussed the importance of handicrafts as one of the country's fundamental industries that contribute to sustainable economic growth. He emphasized that traditional crafts serve both domestic needs and export potential, highlighting their dual role in Afghanistan's internal and external trade.

Azimi (2011) explored various types of industries in the country and noted that handicrafts remain among the most vital economic sectors for rural development. His analysis suggested that the sector not only provides income opportunities but also preserves cultural identity and promotes self-sufficiency.

Moqim Nejad et al. (2022) described handicrafts as activities primarily dependent on manual labor and creativity. They argued that, although handicrafts might not always be classified as fine arts, they represented a blend of functionality, innovation, and cultural expression—factors essential to defining them as applied arts in modern society.

Taniwal (2015) defined handicrafts as products made using small-scale manual tools and workshops distributed across different provinces. He emphasized the significant role of these industries in Afghanistan's economy by meeting local needs and contributing to the country's foreign trade balance.

Panjshiri (2008) discussed the main export goods of Afghanistan and identified handicrafts as one of the most valuable and historical export items. He highlighted that Kapisa Province, due to its rich culture and scenic beauty, holds a unique position in Afghanistan's handicraft tradition, where carpet weaving, embroidery, and woodcrafts represent major economic activities.

Arez (2009) also emphasized that the handicrafts of Kapisa, particularly in Hesa-e-Dowom District, are not merely economic assets but symbols of cultural pride and artistic excellence. Carpet weaving, which has existed in Afghanistan

for centuries, is cited as one of the leading traditional industries with substantial export value after Karakul skin products (Panjshiri, 2008).

Ahmadi (2015) further documented the historical background of leatherwork in Afghanistan, noting that the country's first modern leather factory was established during the reign of Amir Habibullah Khan in the early 20th century. The factory produced shoes, belts, and processed animal skins for domestic consumption and export, indicating early industrial development in traditional sectors.

Ansari (2015) described home-based crafts such as embroidery, needlework, and decorative sewing as among the most prevalent forms of women's economic participation in Afghanistan. These activities contributed not only to household income but also to maintaining traditional art forms within local communities.

Noristani (1971) provided a detailed account of metalworking industries, including blacksmithing, coppersmithing, and goldsmithing. According to his research, craftsmen across Afghanistan produce essential tools for rural life, such as axes, knives, and agricultural instruments, which demonstrates the adaptability and practical importance of these traditional industries.

In addition, several contemporary Iranian studies have offered relevant insights into modern challenges and opportunities in the handicraft sector. For example, Norouzi (2024) discussed the impact of higher education, design innovation, and co-creation in the development of handicrafts, emphasizing the need for integrating modern design with traditional craftsmanship to achieve sustainability. Sharifi et al. (2024) identified key barriers to adopting social production models in handicraft manufacturing, while Bazargani et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of branding and rural entrepreneurship as catalysts for sustainable economic growth in Iran's handicraft sector.

Based on this review, it is evident that while Afghanistan's handicraft industry has deep historical and cultural roots, there remains a critical need for empirical, region-specific studies. The current research aims to fill this gap by providing a localized analysis of how handicrafts in Hesa-e-Dowom District of Kapisa Province contribute to employment, income generation, and sustainable economic development.

3. Materials and methods

This study employed a quantitative research design using an analytical-descriptive approach to investigate the role of handicrafts in sustainable economic development within Hesa-e-Dowom District, Kohistan, Kapisa Province. The research was conducted in 2024 (1403 Hijri Solar) and relied on both primary and secondary data sources.

Data Collection Methods: Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed among local artisans and small business owners involved in various handicraft sectors. The questionnaires were designed to assess participants' general attitudes toward handicrafts, their economic and social impacts, and the major challenges they face in production and marketing. The questions were divided into two major sections: General perceptions regarding the importance of handicraft, and views on the challenges, market access, and development opportunities in the handicraft sector.

Secondary data were obtained from the relevant books, academic articles, and official reports related to handicrafts, rural industry, and sustainable development. These sources provided the necessary theoretical and contextual background for the study.

Population and Sampling: The statistical population of this research consisted of handicraft producers and local craftsmen residing in Hesa-e-Dowom District. A total of 54 respondents participated in the study. A random sampling technique was conducted to ensure representativeness and minimize selection bias.

Data Analysis: The collected data were analyzed using statistical software tools that allowed for automatic data processing and quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were applied to interpret the responses. Graphs and tables were also used to illustrate the findings and visualize trends across key research variables. To ensure reliability, the questionnaire was pre-tested among a small group of artisans before data collection. Minor modifications were made based on feedback to improve clarity and accuracy. The validity of the instrument was established through expert review by academic specialists in geography and socio-economic studies. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. The data collected were kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

This methodological framework provides a solid empirical basis for analyzing how handicrafts contribute to employment generation, income improvement, and sustainable economic development in Hesa-e-Dowom District.

4. Results

In this section, the questionnaires have been analyzed. It includes tables and charts, where each table presents the number of respondents and the percentage for each option. Similarly, the charts illustrate the percentage of each response, as mentioned in the tables.

The population of this study consisted of artisans. The research was completed using data from 54 artisans involved in various sectors.

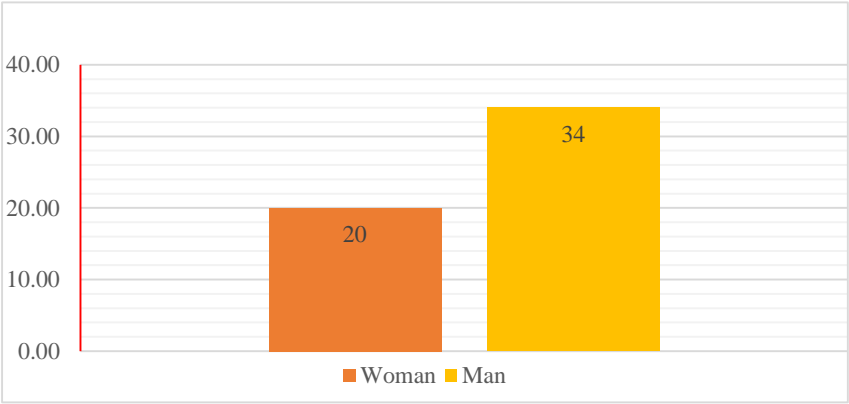


Figure 1. Details in This study, a total of 34 male respondents and 20 female respondents participated

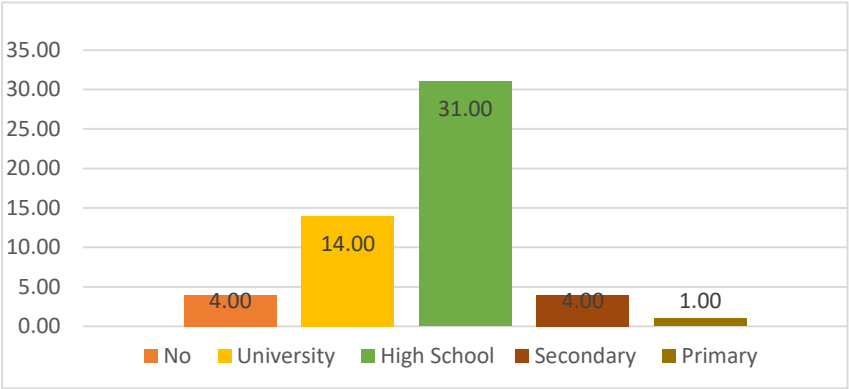


Figure 2. Details According to the data, 1 respondent completed primary education, 4 completed secondary education 31 completed high school, 14 held a bachelor's degree, and 4 respondents had no formal education.

Question 1: *Are handicrafts in Hesa-e-Dowom District important to me?*

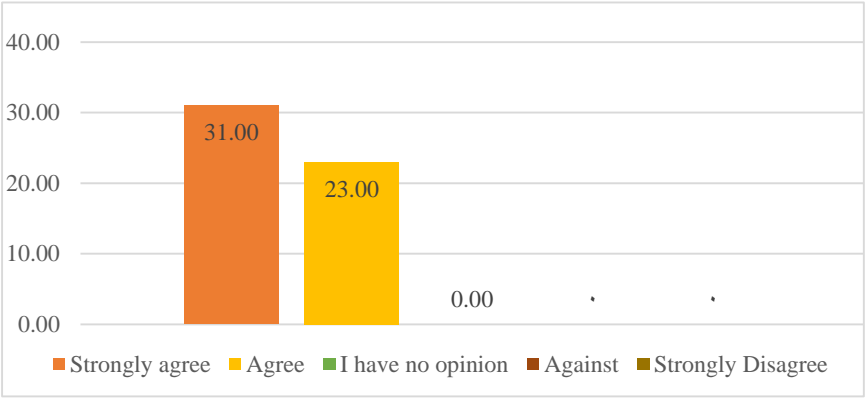


Figure 3. Details Analysis shows that 31 respondents (57%) strongly agreed and 23 respondents (43%) agreed with this statement. None expressed disagreement, indicating a universally positive perception of the importance of handicrafts among local artisans

Question 2: *Does the production of handicrafts help preserve local culture and identity?*

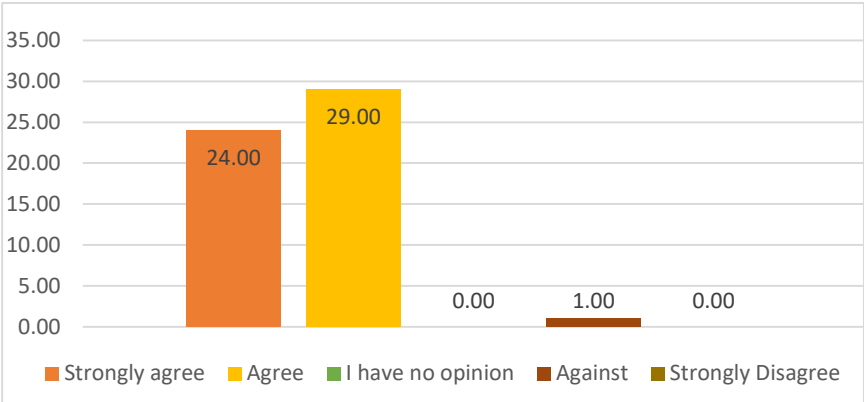


Figure 4. Details Findings reveal that 24 respondents (44%) strongly agreed and 29 respondents (54%) agreed, while only one respondent (2%) disagreed. This demonstrates that handicrafts are widely perceived as a vital component of cultural preservation

Question 3: *Can handicrafts improve the local economic situation?*

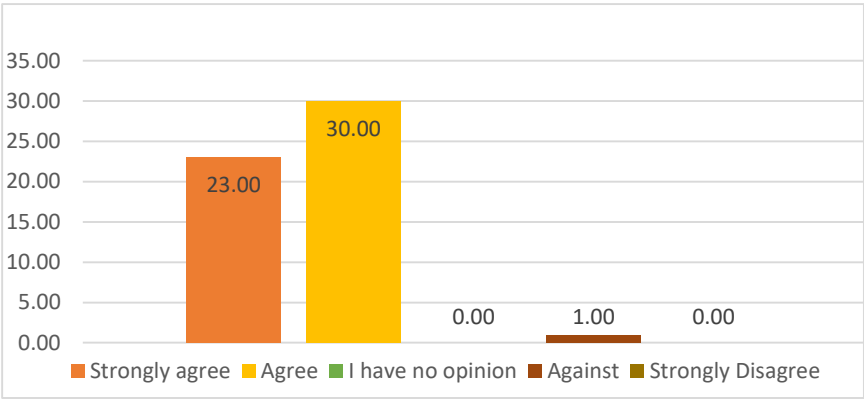


Figure 5. A total of 23 respondents (43%) strongly agreed and 30 respondents (55%) agreed, with one respondent (2%) disagreeing. The results confirm that artisans recognize the significant economic potential of their work

Question 4: *Is there currently a suitable market for handicraft sales in the district?*

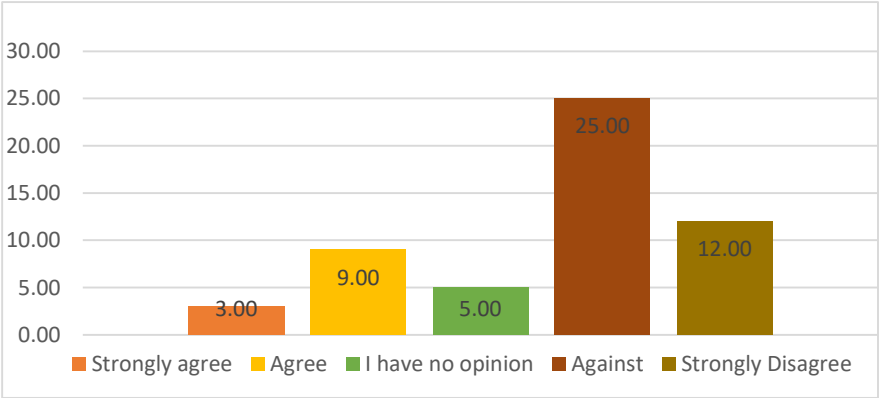


Figure 6. Responses show that 25 respondents (46%) disagreed, 12 (22%) strongly disagreed, 9 (17%) agreed, 5 (9%) were neutral, and 3 (6%) strongly agreed. This indicates that most artisans face market access limitations and lack sufficient local sales opportunities

Question 5: *Should the government provide greater support for handicraft producers?*

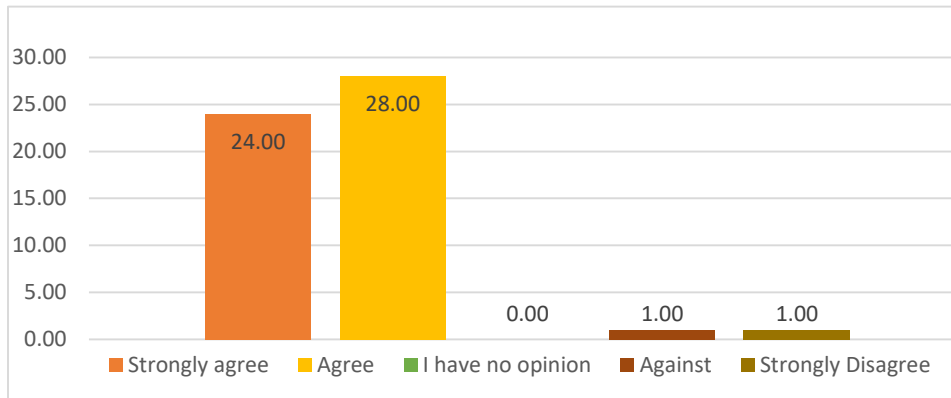


Figure 7. Results indicate that 24 respondents (44%) strongly agreed and 28 (52%) agreed, with only two respondents (4%) expressing disagreement. The findings underline a strong demand for state-led support initiatives

Question 6: *Does lack of specialized training limit the development of handicrafts?*

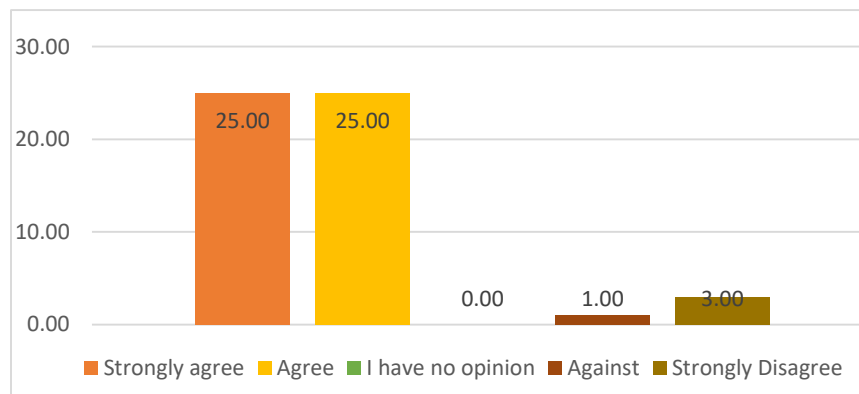


Figure 8. Analysis shows that 25 respondents (46%) agreed, 25 (46%) strongly agreed, one (2%) disagreed, and three (6%) strongly disagreed. The majority highlighted the urgent need for skill-based education and technical training programs

Question 7: *Are insufficient financial resources one of the main problems in handicraft production?*

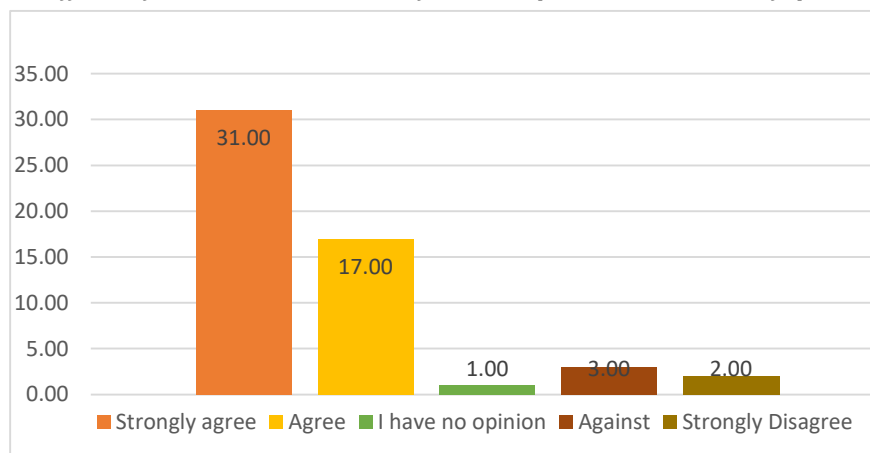


Figure 9. Findings reveal that 31 respondents (57%) strongly agreed, 17 (31%) agreed, three (6%) disagreed, two (4%) strongly disagreed, and one (2%) remained neutral. This demonstrates that limited financial capital is a critical constraint in expanding handicraft businesses

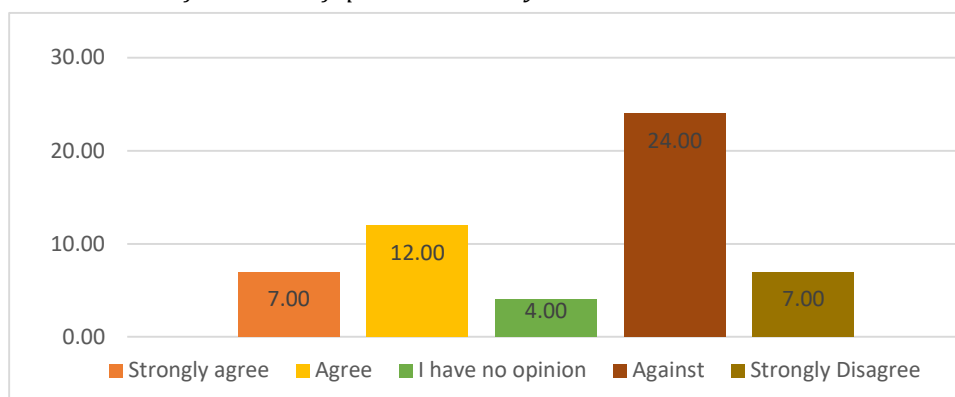
Question 8: Are raw materials for handicraft production easily accessible?


Figure 10. Responses indicate that 24 respondents (44%) disagreed, 7 (13%) strongly disagreed, 12 (22%) agreed, 7 (13%) strongly agreed, and 4 (8%) remained neutral. The data suggest that access to raw materials is inconsistent and often insufficient for local production needs

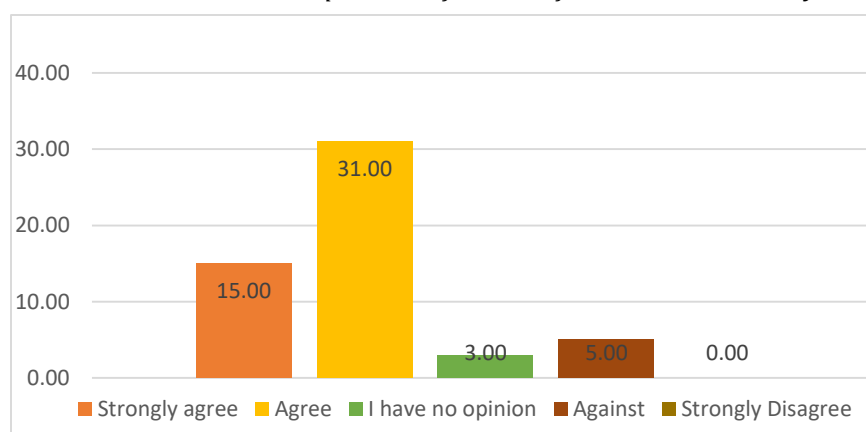
Question 9: Is public awareness about the importance of handicrafts in the local economy low?


Figure 11. Findings show that 31 respondents (57%) agreed, 15 (28%) strongly agreed, five (9%) disagreed, and three (6%) were neutral. The overall result indicates a considerable lack of awareness regarding the economic value of handicrafts among the general population

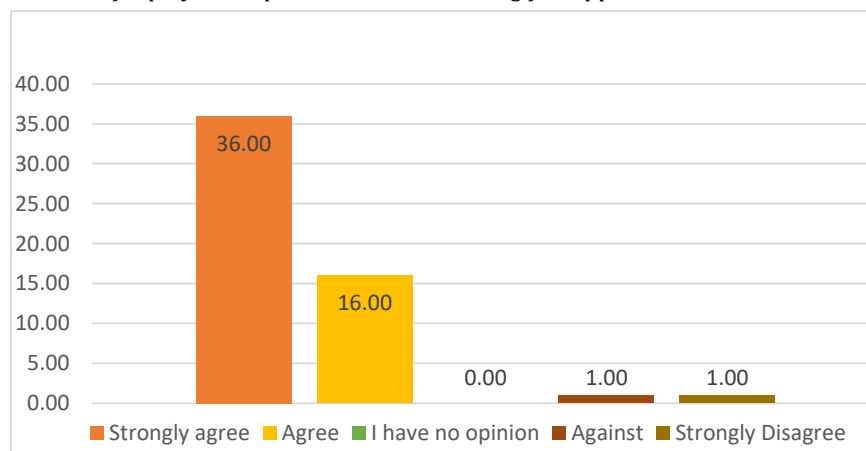
Question 10: Do handicrafts play an important role in creating job opportunities?


Figure 12. Out of all respondents, 36 (67%) strongly agreed and 16 (30%) agreed, while only two (3%) expressed disagreement. This finding confirms the direct employment impact of the handicraft industry in the district

Question 11: *Have handicrafts helped reduce poverty and improve livelihoods?*

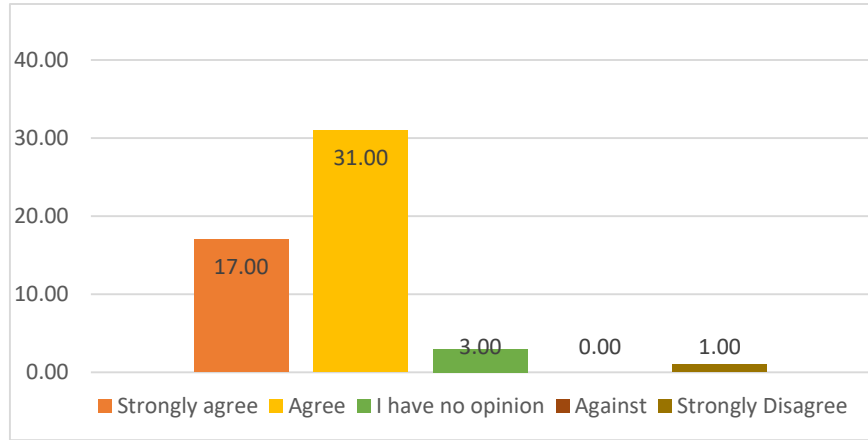


Figure 13. According to responses, 31 respondents (57%) agreed and 17 (31%) strongly agreed, while three (6%) were neutral and one (2%) strongly disagreed. These results support the notion that handicrafts contribute to poverty alleviation in rural communities

Question 12: *Can support for handicrafts promote sustainable economic development?*

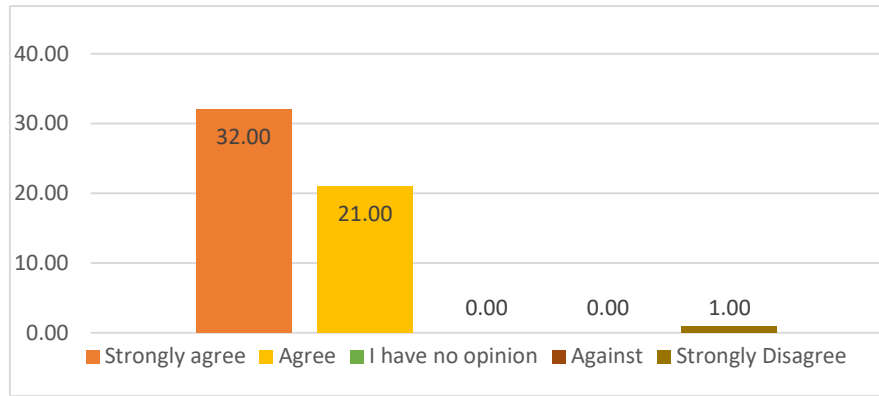


Figure 14. Findings demonstrate that 32 respondents (59%) strongly agreed and 21 (39%) agreed, with one (2%) strongly disagreeing. The consensus highlights the recognized link between handicraft promotion and long-term economic sustainability

Question 13: *Can developing proper infrastructure for selling handicrafts enhance this industry?*

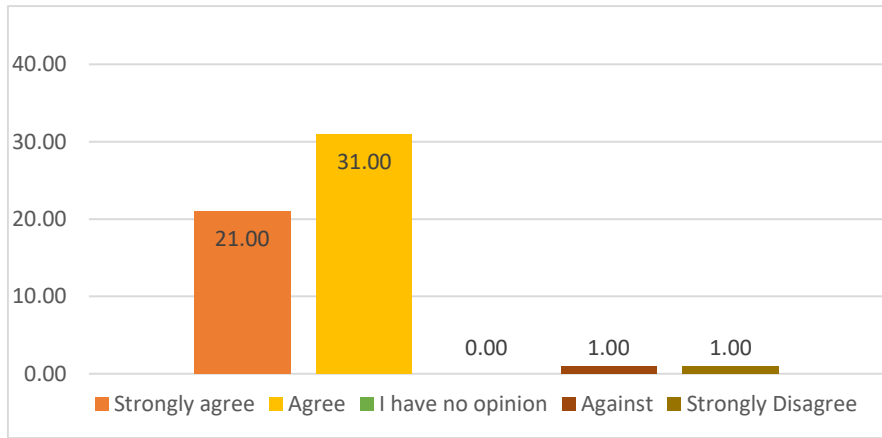


Figure 15. Responses indicate that 31 (57%) agreed and 21 (39%) strongly agreed, while only two (4%) disagreed. The data confirm the importance of marketing and infrastructure development for the sector's growth

Question 14: *Can training and skill enhancement improve the quality of handicraft products?*

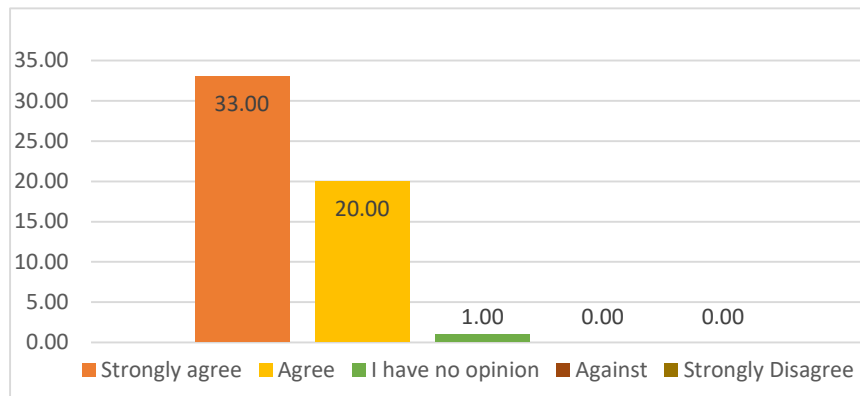


Figure 16. Results show that 33 respondents (61%) strongly agreed and 20 (37%) agreed, with only one (2%) neutral response. The majority strongly supported capacity-building initiatives

Question 15: *Can handicrafts become a sustainable source of income for local residents?*

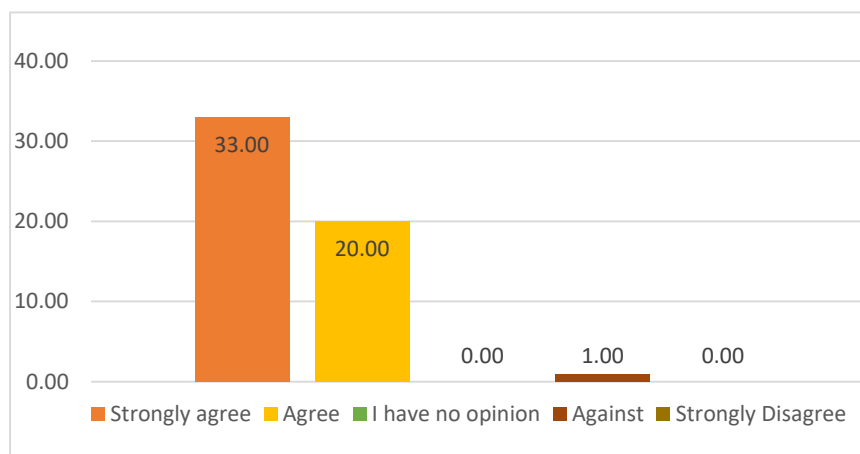


Figure 17. Findings reveal that 33 respondents (61%) strongly agreed and 20 (37%) agreed, with one (2%) disagreeing. This indicates widespread recognition of handicrafts as a viable means of ensuring long-term household income

6. Discussion

Given the growing economic importance of handicrafts as a source of income at the household level in Hesa-e-Dowom District of Kapisa Province, a comparison of the obtained results with previous studies clearly indicates that despite the increasing significance of handicrafts, their potential to raise household economic levels can play a key role.

Similar to these findings, previous research on *The Role of Handicrafts in Sustainable Economic Development* shows that handicrafts, like in past centuries, have also evolved in modern times. In today's world, crucial factors such as "higher education," "modern markets," "production methods," "handicraft design," and "co-creation" play an essential role in the sustainable development of handicrafts and in responding to various needs (Nowruzzi & Hossein, 2024).

Moreover, an Iranian researcher, in a study on the requirements and challenges of applying social production in the handicrafts sector, concluded that the use of social capacities and national capabilities in handicraft production today requires the application of modern production methods in line with technological advancements (Sharifi et al., 2024).

Another Iranian researcher has found that prioritizing rural development is one of the fundamental principles of national development in Iran, and in this regard, branding development in the handicraft sector can be one of the paths to achieving this goal (Bazargani et al., 2024).

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be stated that all respondents emphasized the economic importance of handicrafts.

7. Conclusion

Handicrafts have long been a prevalent livelihood among the people of Hesa-e-Dowom Kohistan District in Kapisa Province. The findings of this study indicate that the majority of artisans consider handicrafts important and believe that they help preserve local culture and identity. Additionally, most respondents expressed that handicrafts can provide opportunities to improve economic conditions.

According to the research, the main challenges facing handicrafts in Hesa-e-Dowom Kohistan include the lack of proper markets, insufficient training and specialized skills, inadequate financial resources for investment, scarcity of raw materials, low public awareness of the economic importance of handicrafts, poor infrastructure, insufficient government support, and burdensome customs tariffs.

Despite these limitations, the economic opportunities identified in this study suggest that the handicraft industry can create employment opportunities for local people, contribute to sustainable economic development in Hesa-e-Dowom Kapisa, and serve as a stable source of income for families in the district.

8. Suggestions

1. Government support and backing for handicrafts in Hesa-e-Dowom Kohistan District,
2. Development of appropriate infrastructure in the handicrafts sector,
3. Establishment of suitable markets for selling handicrafts, and
4. Organization of training courses and skill development programs in the handicrafts sector by the government.

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