

Artisan Industry Market and Economic Opportunity Analysis in Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao



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List of Acronyms

BDS:	Business Development Services
CBO:	Community-Based Organization
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
GIZ:	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IGAs:	Income Generating Activities
ILO:	International Labour Organization
ISF:	International Solidarity Foundation
KII:	Key Informant Interview
MFI:	Microfinance Institution
MoCI:	Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Somaliland)
MoCT:	Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Somaliland)
MoLSA :	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Somaliland)
MSME:	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
PPE:	Personal Protective Equipment
PPP:	Public-Private Partnership
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA:	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SME:	Small and Medium Enterprise
ToR:	Terms of Reference
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
USD:	United States Dollar
WEE:	Women's Economic Empowerment

1. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive market and economic opportunity analysis of the artisan sector in Somaliland, conducted across three key cities—Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao. Commissioned by the International Solidarity Foundation (ISF), the study aims to inform ISF’s 2026–2029 development cooperation program by identifying viable artisan sub-sectors, assessing obstacles and opportunities, and providing actionable, gender-transformative recommendations to enhance women’s and youth’s livelihood resilience.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach that included a desk review, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with eight categories of stakeholders, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), field observations, ethnographic shadowing, customer journey mapping, and stakeholder network analysis. These methods captured the full breadth of artisan activity, market dynamics, and stakeholder relationships in both urban and peri-urban settings.

Key findings highlight that the artisan sector—particularly textile and tailoring, tie-dye, incense-making, and leathercraft—holds significant potential for inclusive economic development. Women dominate production in several sub-sectors but face barriers related to finance, mobility, recognition, and access to markets. Traditional crafts such as pottery, blacksmithing, beadwork, and basket weaving are at risk of disappearing due to modernization, cultural stigma, and limited intergenerational transfer. Market access is primarily informal and digitally mediated through WhatsApp, TikTok and Facebook, with growing opportunities in diaspora demand and cultural branding.

The report concludes with a series of strategic recommendations aligned with ISF’s priorities. These include strengthening high-potential sub-sectors led by women, improving access to business training and digital tools, expanding financing options for informal artisans, promoting cooperative formation, and embedding sustainability and circular economy practices. Policy and advocacy recommendations call for formal recognition of the artisan sector, simplified registration pathways, and the inclusion of artisan skills in national vocational training systems.

By supporting the transformation of Somaliland’s artisan economy from informal survival work into formal, sustainable livelihoods, ISF can play a pivotal role in fostering economic inclusion, cultural resilience, and long-term empowerment for women and youth.

2. Introduction

The artisan sector in Somaliland represents a rich and diverse tradition of handmade production, deeply rooted in cultural heritage and community identity. From tailoring and tie-dye to incense-making and blacksmithing, artisan work plays a vital role in household economies, particularly for women and youth. Despite its cultural significance and economic relevance, the sector remains largely informal, underfunded, and under-recognized in policy and development planning. Artisans face numerous challenges, including lack of access to finance, limited training, inadequate infrastructure, and poor market linkages—especially in remote and peri-urban areas. In addition, many traditional crafts are at risk of disappearing due to modernization, lack of apprenticeships, and social stigma associated with certain artisanal castes. Recognizing these dynamics, this study was commissioned to build an evidence-based understanding of the sector's current state and future potential, particularly as a vehicle for inclusive and sustainable livelihoods.

2.1 Relevance of the Study

The study aligns directly with the International Solidarity Foundation's (ISF) mission and core objectives under its 2022–2025 program, and in preparation for its 2026–2029 strategy. ISF's commitment to advancing women's economic empowerment, strengthening livelihood resilience, and promoting inclusion through sustainable and circular economy models is reflected throughout this assessment. The artisan sector offers a high-potential entry point to realize these goals. It is a domain in which women already lead production of its sectors, youth are eager for creative expression, and traditional knowledge intersects with modern sustainability practices. By identifying scalable, green, and inclusive opportunities, the study helps guide ISF's future interventions to ensure that women and young people are not only participants but leaders in the economic transformation of their communities.

2.2 Importance of the Study

This study holds significant importance in guiding development strategies for inclusive economic growth in Somaliland. The artisan sector—deeply intertwined with local culture, identity, and livelihoods—has long been overlooked in formal economic planning, despite its potential to generate employment, especially for women and youth. By examining the sector's current status, market systems, value chains, and circular practices, the study fills a critical knowledge gap and brings visibility to an informal economy that sustains thousands of households.

Importantly, the study provides ISF and its partners with evidence-based insights to design targeted interventions that are not only economically viable but also socially transformative. It helps identify where support can have the highest impact and how to ensure women and youth are empowered not just as laborers, but as entrepreneurs and leaders. Additionally, by integrating sustainability and circular economy dimensions, the study contributes to environmentally responsible development approaches, making it highly relevant to both local realities and global development goals.

2.3 Geographic Scope

The study focused on three key urban centers in Somaliland—Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao—each offering a unique lens on artisan practices. Hargeisa, as the capital and largest commercial hub, hosts the most organized and connected artisan enterprises, with better access to inputs and digital platforms. Borama presents limited but a community-oriented artisan landscape, where community training models are emerging. Burao, while less developed than Hargeisa, shows promise through youth-led initiatives, especially in vocational training centers and informal tailoring. By covering these diverse urban contexts, the study captures regional variations, resource disparities, and emerging trends across Somaliland’s artisan economy.

2.4 Intended Use of the Study Results

The findings and recommendations of this study are intended to directly inform ISF’s 2026–2029 development cooperation program design in Somaliland. The report serves as a foundational resource for identifying target sectors, partners, and investment priorities. It provides a detailed roadmap for programming that supports artisan enterprise development, cooperative formation, gender equality, financial inclusion, and the adoption of circular economy principles. Beyond internal planning, the study is also a tool for external advocacy—supporting ISF and its partners in engaging with local authorities, donors, and civil society actors to promote policy alignment, resource mobilization, and systemic change in support of inclusive artisan livelihoods.

2.5 Objectives of the Study

The artisan sector in Somaliland, particularly across the cities of Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao, holds significant yet underutilized potential to contribute to inclusive economic development, sustainable job creation, and cultural preservation. Artisanal crafts such as tailoring, tie-dye, incense-making, henna, and beadwork represent a vital yet largely

informal segment of the local economy—one that is deeply gendered, often community-rooted, and rich in tradition. Recognizing this latent opportunity, the International Solidarity Foundation (ISF) commissioned this study to conduct a comprehensive market and economic opportunity analysis of the artisan industry.

The study serves as a critical input for ISF’s 2026–2029 programming strategy, with a deliberate focus on enhancing women’s economic inclusion, youth participation, and the adoption of sustainable and circular economy principles. By capturing the current state and future potential of the artisan sector, the study aims to inform program design, advocacy efforts, and investment strategies that support inclusive and transformative development pathways.

The primary objective of this study is to assess the structure, dynamics, and viability of the artisan industry in the target cities, with a particular focus on value chain analysis and economic potential. The study aims to identify how women and youth can be more meaningfully included and empowered in artisan livelihoods, while also examining the barriers that currently constrain growth—ranging from market access and financing to training and infrastructure.

By generating detailed insights into both opportunities and constraints, the study seeks to provide ISF and its partners with a robust evidence base to inform future interventions. Ultimately, the goal is to identify actionable entry points for revitalizing or scaling artisan-based livelihoods in a way that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable.

3. Overview of the Artisan Sector in Somaliland

The artisan sector in Somaliland represents a significant yet under-researched component of the local economy, one that blends cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and informal entrepreneurship. Existing literature highlights that artisanal production has historically provided a means of livelihood for rural and urban communities, particularly for women who engage in home-based or cooperative craft activities. Despite limited formal documentation, several studies and development reports have acknowledged the role of artisan work in sustaining household incomes, fostering identity, and promoting skills transmission across generations (UNDP, 2021; ILO, 2020). However, the sector has remained largely informal and fragmented, lacking policy integration and institutional support.

This chapter synthesizes existing knowledge on Somaliland’s artisan industry, drawing on published studies, NGO reports, policy documents, and regional comparisons. It explores the historical evolution of artisan crafts, from blacksmithing and weaving to contemporary tailoring and incense production, while highlighting key shifts brought on by modernization, globalization, and demographic change. Special attention is given to literature examining gender roles, youth participation, sustainability practices, and value chain linkages within the artisan economy. The chapter also reviews how cultural perceptions and economic constraints have shaped the trajectory of certain crafts, some of which are now at risk of disappearing without deliberate revitalization efforts. This literature review serves as a foundation for the empirical findings presented in later chapters, helping to contextualize both opportunities and challenges facing the sector today.

3.1 Summary of Desk Review Findings

The desk review revealed that Somaliland’s artisan sector is modest in size and scope, with limited formal support or integration into national development strategies. Most artisan activities are informal, small-scale, and centered around textile production, which remains the only active and economically viable sub-sector. Other traditional crafts—such as pottery, leatherwork, metalwork, and woodcarving—have experienced significant decline, with many considered dying trades due to lack of market demand, skill transmission, and institutional backing (Abdi, 2020; Yusuf & Ismail, 2021).

3.2 Historical and Cultural Context of Artisan Production

Artisan crafts have deep roots in Somali culture, historically tied to pastoral livelihoods and self-sufficiency. Items such as handwoven fabrics, clay pots, carved wooden tools, and traditional garments once played integral roles in daily life and social identity. However, due to decades of conflict, displacement, and the rise of imported goods, traditional skills have eroded. Today, cultural memory of these crafts survives, but active production is limited to urban centers like Hargeisa and Borama where female-led textile groups are still functioning (Ahmed, 2019).

3.2.1 Historical Artisan Areas in Somaliland

Historically, Somaliland's artisan sector encompassed a wide array of crafts that were deeply embedded in the socio-economic and cultural life of communities. Traditional crafts were transmitted across generations, often tied to familial lines or clan-based apprenticeships.

Once a prestigious skill, blacksmithing in Somaliland played a critical role in producing agricultural tools, weaponry, and household implements. These artisans were highly respected for their skill in manipulating iron and other metals using rudimentary kilns and manual bellows (Ali, 2019).

Somaliland's pastoral economy produced an abundance of hides and skins, making leathercraft a widespread traditional practice. Leatherworkers specialized in crafting sandals, belts, sheaths, and water containers, often embellished with intricate motifs (Hussein, 2020).

Wood artisans traditionally crafted beds, stools, storage chests, and utensils using local hardwoods. These pieces were functional and artistically expressive, adorned with carvings symbolizing heritage and clan identity. Predominantly practiced by women, weaving with palm fronds and grasses yielded mats, baskets, and domestic items. These products also had significant ritual and ceremonial value (Farah, 2018). This included the preparation of herbal medicines and amulets, often coupled with artisanal crafting of containers, beadwork, and calligraphic talismans rooted in Islamic and pre-Islamic traditions (Yusuf, 2017).

3.3 Crafts That Are Almost Extinct in Somaliland

Despite their rich historical value, numerous traditional artisan crafts in Somaliland are on the verge of extinction or have already disappeared. These crafts, once essential to daily life and cultural identity, have been gradually displaced by globalization, urbanization, and shifting socio-economic conditions.

a) Blacksmithing

Historically a major craft, blacksmithing played a vital role in Somali society, producing knives, tools, and weapons crucial to nomadic life (Lewis, 1994). However, in modern Somaliland, blacksmithing has drastically declined. The influx of cheap imported metal goods from countries like China and India has rendered local metalwork economically unviable (Osman, 2015). Additionally, the marginalization of artisan groups has discouraged younger generations from continuing the craft.

b) Traditional Weaving and Basketry

Basket weaving, traditionally practiced by pastoral and agro-pastoral women, was once a staple of household production. Items such as mats (*Caw*), baskets (*Salled*), and ropes (*Xadhko*) were essential for everyday nomadic life. However, the widespread availability of plastic household goods has severely reduced demand for handmade woven products (Samatar, 2020). While some older women still practice the craft, it is increasingly viewed as a relic of the past, particularly among youth.

c) Spiritual Crafting and Traditional Healing

Specific groups of the community, were traditionally known for spiritual healing, crafting protective amulets, and conducting rituals. However, with the rise of formal medical services and stricter religious interpretations aligned with Salafi Islam, these practices have drastically diminished (Ahmed, 2013). In modern Somaliland, traditional healing is often stigmatized or dismissed as superstition, leading to a generational decline in its transmission.

d) Artisanal Pottery

Pottery was once prevalent in rural and parish settlements, where women produced clay pots for cooking and water storage. However, the decline in market demand, combined with the lack of skilled transmission, has made pottery a virtually extinct craft in Somaliland (Jama, 2017). Modern cooking vessels and plastic containers are now preferred, and few potters remain to pass on the knowledge.

The decline of these artisan crafts reflects broader socio-cultural shifts in Somaliland. As the society modernizes and integrates into global economic networks, traditional crafts—especially those associated with marginalized groups or outdated technologies—struggle to survive. Preserving these crafts would require targeted interventions, including vocational training, cultural education, and support for artisan cooperatives.

3.4 Contemporary Artisan Sectors in Somaliland

In recent decades, the artisan landscape in Somaliland has undergone significant transformation. While many traditional crafts face extinction, others have adapted to modern economic and cultural conditions, particularly in urban centers like Hargeisa, Burao, and Borama. These contemporary artisan sectors blend traditional skills with new tools, market aesthetics, and entrepreneurial models, particularly among youth and women.

i. Tailoring and Textiles

Among all artisan sectors, tailoring and textile production is the most vibrant and dynamic today. Tailoring shops are widespread across Somaliland's urban landscape, with youth and women forming the backbone of this sub-sector (Mohamoud, 2021). This growth is fueled by a combination of local fashion trends, diaspora cultural exchange, and social events such as weddings, where custom-made garments are in high demand. Tailors often blend traditional Somali styles like the *dirac* and *macawis* with contemporary cuts and imported fabrics. Training programs and small business grants offered by NGOs have further enhanced accessibility to tailoring as a profession.

ii. Goldsmithing and Jewelry Design

Goldsmiths remain active in urban commercial centers, particularly in Hargeisa, where they cater to cultural practices such as marriage ceremonies and dowry traditions. Jewelry shops produce custom items like bangles, necklaces, and *Xirsi* (amulets), using imported gold primarily from the Middle East and Asia (Yusuf, 2019). Despite the limited local gold mining, the symbolic and social importance of gold jewelry ensures its ongoing relevance.

iii. Furniture Making and Carpentry

The furniture and carpentry sector has expanded alongside urban growth and the booming construction industry in Somaliland. Workshops in Hargeisa, Burao, and Borama supply homes, offices, and hotels with furniture and fittings. Increasingly, artisans use electric tools, modern machinery, and even CAD-based designs, reflecting a shift toward more commercial and standardized production (Farah, 2020). The demand for contemporary furnishings has created a space where traditional woodworking skills are blended with modern craftsmanship.

iv. Leather and Handicraft Cooperatives

Small-scale leather cooperatives have emerged, especially those supported by NGOs and vocational training centers. These cooperatives, often women-led, produce items such as sandals, handbags, wallets, and ornamental pieces, using locally sourced hides and traditional techniques adapted to modern tastes (Ahmed & Hassan, 2022). Some of

these products are marketed to tourists, diaspora visitors, and local NGOs, reflecting a niche but growing market.

v. Pottery and Ceramics

Though traditional pottery is nearly extinct in Somaliland, a handful of urban ceramic makers continue the practice. These are often affiliated with school art programs, youth art collectives, or NGO-supported heritage projects (Jama, 2017). While not yet commercially sustainable, these initiatives are essential in documenting, reviving, and re-teaching pottery skills that were once common in rural areas.

3.5 NGOs and Projects

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Somaliland have played a crucial role in supporting vocational training programs aimed at enhancing economic empowerment among vulnerable populations. These initiatives not only foster self-reliance but also contribute to reducing unemployment and poverty through skills development and entrepreneurship.

Tailoring programs have been particularly effective in empowering vulnerable women by equipping them with marketable skills. Organizations such as Candlelight for Health, Education and Environment (Candlelight) and the General Assistance and Volunteer Organization (GAVO) have implemented community-based tailoring projects. These initiatives focus on training women in sewing and fashion design while providing access to basic tools and markets to enable income generation (Candlelight, 2022; GAVO, 2021). The projects often target internally displaced persons (IDPs), widows, and economically marginalized women, offering a pathway to financial independence.

In urban centers like Borama and Hargeisa, vocational training centers have integrated carpentry into their curriculum as a means of engaging male youth in productive economic activities. These programs, often supported by international donors and implemented by local NGOs, aim to address youth unemployment by offering hands-on technical skills in woodwork and furniture making (Shaqodoon, 2021). Many graduates of these programs either find employment in local workshops or start their own businesses.

Leathercraft is another vocational area promoted by NGOs such as Shaqodoon and Save the Children. These organizations have facilitated the creation of leatherwork cooperatives, where young people, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, are trained in crafting leather goods such as bags, belts, and sandals. In addition to skills training, these programs also focus on entrepreneurship by offering business

development support and market linkages, thereby enhancing the participants' capacity for self-employment (Save the Children, 2020; Shaqodoon, 2021).

Jewelry making has emerged as a viable income-generating activity for women, thanks to the efforts of NGOs like the IIDA Women's Development Organization. These initiatives typically offer comprehensive training in the design and production of jewelry, along with startup kits that include tools and raw materials. By combining technical instruction with business mentorship, these programs help participants establish micro-enterprises and access local and regional markets (IIDA, 2022).

Overall, these NGO-led vocational training projects contribute significantly to building resilient livelihoods and fostering economic inclusion in Somaliland's urban and peri-urban communities.

3.6 Cultural Revival

In recent years, there has been a modest but meaningful resurgence of interest in Somali cultural heritage, driven by a combination of grassroots initiatives, institutional efforts, and international partnerships. Museums, heritage centers, and cultural NGOs are increasingly playing an essential role in preserving and promoting traditional crafts, oral histories, and indigenous knowledge systems. This cultural revival is seen as a response to decades of conflict and globalization, which have eroded many aspects of traditional Somali identity.

Key institutions, such as institutions with academic, science and arts mandates and regional museums in Hargeisa and Berbera, have begun documenting and exhibiting artifacts, including traditional crafts like weaving, pottery, leatherwork, and wood carving. These exhibitions not only preserve cultural memory but also provide educational opportunities for younger generations to engage with their heritage (Ali, 2021).

Moreover, NGOs such as Redsea Cultural Foundation have been at the forefront of promoting cultural literacy and heritage appreciation. The annual Hargeisa International Book Fair (HIBF), organized by Redsea Cultural Foundation, has evolved into one of the most significant cultural events in Somaliland. In addition to literature and intellectual exchange, the event has introduced artisan stalls and live craft demonstrations, exposing urban youth and international visitors to traditional Somali arts and crafts (Redsea Cultural Foundation, 2023). These platforms serve as critical bridges between generations, fostering intergenerational learning and cultural continuity.

While the revival of traditional crafts and cultural practices remains in its early stages, the momentum suggests an increasing societal recognition of the value of cultural

identity. These initiatives are not only about nostalgia; they represent active efforts to strengthen social cohesion, foster community pride, and offer new economic opportunities through cultural tourism and artisan entrepreneurship (Farah, 2020).

Overall, the cultural revival movement highlights the intersection of heritage preservation, education, and economic development, indicating a broader trend towards reclaiming and revitalizing Somali identity in a modern context.

3.7 Institutional and Policy Framework

The artisan sector in Somaliland operates in a largely informal and unregulated environment, with no comprehensive institutional framework or coordinated national strategy to support its development. Unlike sectors such as livestock or agriculture, artisanal production lacks a dedicated ministry or agency responsible for oversight, promotion, or innovation. Although the Ministry of Trade and Tourism and the Ministry of Education and Science occasionally support artisan-related initiatives—mainly through vocational training programs—these efforts tend to be sporadic, donor-driven, and not integrated into a long-term policy agenda (World Bank, 2022).

This lack of institutional coherence is further compounded by the absence of legal frameworks to protect and promote local crafts. There are no national standards for artisan products, no systems for certification or intellectual property protection, and no government-led initiatives to brand or market Somaliland's crafts domestically or internationally. As a result, local artisans struggle with issues of product quality, market access, and competition from imported goods, particularly low-cost industrial products from Asia (Abdi, 2021).

Moreover, the lack of incentives for innovation, entrepreneurship, and export promotion inhibits the sector's capacity to attract youth and women or to scale production. Without financial tools such as micro-credit, grants, or subsidies for startups, many artisans remain trapped in subsistence-level production, unable to commercialize their skills or contribute meaningfully to the economy.

3.8 Comparison of Artisan Sector in the Region

In stark contrast, countries in the Horn of Africa region have taken proactive steps to institutionalize and develop their artisan economies. Ethiopia, for example, has embedded artisan and small-scale manufacturing support within its national development agenda through the Federal Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (FeSMEDA). This agency has established craft hubs, training centers, and export-oriented clusters to support artisans with capacity building, marketing, and

access to finance (UNESCO, 2020). These efforts are complemented by Ethiopia's growing participation in regional and international trade fairs, which further promote the visibility of Ethiopian crafts.

Similarly, Kenya has successfully linked its artisan sector with tourism, heritage, and diaspora engagement strategies. Government initiatives such as the Kenya Vision 2030 have recognized crafts as a key element of cultural industries, fostering the development of artisan cooperatives, cultural villages, and export facilitation programs. Kenya's National Museums and Tourism Board also promote craftwork as part of the country's cultural tourism offering, creating economic opportunities for thousands of artisans (African Development Bank, 2019).

By comparison, Somaliland has yet to adopt such integrated strategies. Although rich in cultural traditions and artisanal knowledge, it lacks the infrastructure, policy environment, and institutional coordination needed to convert this cultural capital into sustainable economic gains. Without meaningful public investment or a formal policy vision, Somaliland risks falling further behind regional peers in harnessing the artisan sector for development.

3.9 Emerging Trends and Opportunities

Despite these structural challenges, the artisan sector in Somaliland holds considerable potential for revitalization, particularly in light of global trends favoring ethical consumption, sustainability, and cultural authenticity. Increasing international demand for handmade and eco-friendly goods presents a window of opportunity for Somaliland to reposition its traditional crafts as competitive, niche products in both local and international markets (UNCTAD, 2021).

Notably, urban-based women's cooperatives have begun aligning traditional artisan skills with principles of the circular economy. For example, groups engaged in textile recycling, tailoring, and handmade accessories are not only generating income but also addressing environmental concerns through the reuse of materials (IIDA, 2022). These initiatives underscore the potential of the artisan sector to contribute to both economic empowerment and environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, digital platforms and social media provide new channels for market access, branding, and storytelling. With appropriate support in the form of training, infrastructure, and seed funding, young entrepreneurs could leverage e-commerce to access diaspora and international markets, promoting Somaliland's unique cultural identity while earning a livelihood.

To fully harness these opportunities, Somaliland needs a strategic policy framework that includes investment in training, infrastructure, market linkages, and legal protection for artisan producers. Multilateral support and public-private partnerships could also play a crucial role in scaling up successful pilot initiatives and integrating the artisan sector into broader national development goals.

3.10 Existing Artisan Activities in the Three Cities

This section explores the current state of artisan activities in three major urban centers of Somaliland including Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao. These cities have traditionally been hubs of craftwork and local enterprise. However, in the contemporary context, most artisan sub-sectors face serious challenges related to economic viability, lack of institutional support, and cultural disconnection.

3.10.1 Typologies of Artisan Activities

Historically, the artisan economies of Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao featured a diverse array of craft-based activities. These included textile weaving and tailoring, leatherwork, wood carving, pottery, and metalworking. In recent years, however, this diversity has dwindled significantly. Among the three cities, only textile-related activities—primarily tailoring and basic embroidery—remain economically active and culturally visible (Abdi, 2021).

In Hargeisa, the capital and largest city, tailoring shops line the markets and neighborhoods, with many women and youth engaged in sewing clothing for local consumption. Borama, known for its education institutions and relatively stable urban economy, also sustains small-scale tailoring, particularly among women’s cooperatives. Burao, while economically constrained, still shows pockets of tailoring activity, mostly driven by informal household-based work (IIDA, 2022).

3.10.2 Focus on Textile Production

Textile production, including tailoring, hemming, and modest embroidery, is currently the only consistently active artisan sector in all three cities. This sector has endured due to several factors including the continuous demand for clothing, low startup costs, and the adaptability of tailoring skills to market needs. Many women, particularly from marginalized groups, have been able to access tailoring through NGO-led training programs and microenterprise support (Shaqodoon, 2021).

These tailoring businesses often operate as micro-enterprises, with a handful of sewing machines and limited access to broader markets. While some tailor shops cater to local fashion trends or Islamic dress codes, others provide school uniforms or basic alterations, reflecting a functional rather than decorative orientation in textile production.

3.10.3 Status of Other Sub-Sectors - Inactive, Dying, or Lacking Potential

Other traditional sub-sectors such as leatherwork, woodcraft, and pottery are either inactive, dying, or severely underdeveloped. In the past, leatherwork was common, especially in Burao and Borama, with artisans producing sandals, belts, and bags. Today, industrial imports and limited consumer interest have driven this practice to the margins (Farah, 2020).

Similarly, wood carving and furniture making once thrived using locally sourced materials, but modern manufacturing and imported products have displaced traditional woodworking. Pottery, once integral for household use, has all but disappeared, as plastic and aluminum wares dominate markets. These dying sub-sectors suffer from a lack of training institutions, raw materials, market access, and cultural valorization (World Bank, 2022).

3.11 Skills, Techniques, and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

One of the most pressing concerns across all artisan sub-sectors is the breakdown in intergenerational knowledge transfer. Historically, artisan skills were passed down through apprenticeship models within families or clan-based networks. Today, few young people show interest in these traditions, viewing them as economically unviable or socially outdated (Ali, 2021). In many cases, elderly artisans are the last custodians of specialized techniques, such as hide tanning or hand-loom weaving.

Modern vocational training programs, while valuable, rarely integrate traditional knowledge systems. Instead, they focus on basic employability skills and standardized curricula that may not align with the richness of local craft heritage. Without targeted efforts to document, teach, and revitalize these skills, many traditional crafts risk permanent extinction.

3.12 Economic Contribution of the Artisan Sector

The artisan sector in Somaliland, though underdeveloped and informal, holds substantial potential for contributing to employment, local economic activity, and cultural preservation. While accurate data is limited due to the lack of formal sector tracking, existing evidence and regional comparisons suggest that with strategic investment and policy attention, the artisan sector can play a key role in inclusive economic development.

3.12.1 Employment Generation and Livelihoods

Artisan activities, particularly in tailoring, textile recycling, and small-scale handicrafts, provide vital income opportunities for women, youth, and marginalized groups. In urban centers like Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao, tailoring micro-enterprises and informal production units represent an important safety net in the absence of formal employment (World Bank, 2022). For many households, artisan-related work—although small in scale—supplements incomes and offers flexible working arrangements, especially for women balancing domestic responsibilities.

NGO-supported training programs have enabled some participants to move from subsistence to commercial levels of production. For example, initiatives by IIDA and Shaqodoon have facilitated the establishment of women’s cooperatives that generate livelihoods through tailoring, embroidery, and accessory making (IIDA, 2022; Shaqodoon, 2021). These cooperatives often support not only their members but also secondary livelihoods through the sourcing of materials, rental of workspace, and informal apprenticeships.

Despite this, the sector remains largely informal and lacks social protection mechanisms, access to credit, and sustainable market linkages. As a result, the full employment potential of the sector remains untapped.

3.12.2 Linkages with Tourism, Culture, and Heritage Industries

The artisan sector has the potential to form a critical component of Somaliland’s nascent cultural and heritage economy. Traditional crafts embody intangible cultural heritage and could be leveraged as assets for tourism and diaspora engagement. Events like the Hargeisa International Book Fair, which incorporate artisan stalls and cultural exhibitions, illustrate how crafts can complement broader heritage-based experiences (Redsea Cultural Foundation, 2023).

Additionally, craft production can be integrated into proposed eco-tourism or heritage tourism initiatives, where handmade goods serve as souvenirs and storytelling tools. Such integration would not only diversify local economic activities but also help promote national identity and pride. However, these linkages remain underdeveloped due to weak policy support, poor marketing infrastructure, and the absence of artisan branding and certification systems.

In countries like Kenya and Ethiopia, policy frameworks explicitly connect artisans to the tourism and cultural sectors, thereby maximizing their value chain potential (African Development Bank, 2019). For Somaliland, adopting a similar integrated approach could enhance the visibility and viability of its artisan traditions.

3.13 Research Gaps and Future Directions

Although there is growing recognition of the artisan sector's role in cultural preservation and livelihood generation in Somaliland, the body of research on the topic remains limited, fragmented, and outdated. To fully understand and leverage the sector's potential, more structured and context-specific research is required.

Most current literature on Somaliland's economy focuses on macro-level sectors such as livestock, remittances, and humanitarian aid. Artisan-related studies are either anecdotal, embedded in broader gender or livelihood reports, or limited to NGO project evaluations with restricted public access (World Bank, 2022; IIDA, 2022). As a result, comprehensive, data-driven analyses of the artisan sector are lacking. The specific gaps include the following.

- Absence of baseline data on the number of artisans, types of crafts, income levels, and gender distribution.
- Limited ethnographic or historical studies tracing the evolution of craft traditions and their social meanings.
- Insufficient market research, including consumer preferences, export potential, and pricing mechanisms.
- Neglect of informal value chains, including how artisans interact with suppliers, intermediaries, and customers.

Moreover, there is a lack of comparative research with other regional contexts, which could provide valuable lessons on institutional models, financing tools, and cultural integration strategies (UNESCO, 2020).

3.14 Emerging Trends Worth Investigating

Several trends are beginning to shape the artisan landscape in Somaliland, offering promising avenues for further research.

- **Digitalization and e-commerce** - How urban artisans—especially youth—are using social media and digital platforms to market and sell their products remains an underexplored area. Initial observations suggest digital engagement is growing, but its scale, effectiveness, and barriers need detailed assessment (Farah, 2020).
- **Circular economy and sustainability practices** - The rise of textile recycling and eco-conscious production among women's cooperatives offers a valuable intersection between sustainability and traditional skills. Research could investigate how these practices align with global sustainable development goals (UNCTAD, 2021).

- **Youth engagement and innovation** - As traditional knowledge holders age, the role of youth in revitalizing the sector through design, innovation, and entrepreneurship deserves closer study. Understanding the aspirations and constraints of young artisan entrepreneurs could inform future vocational and economic policies.
- **Diaspora and cultural export opportunities** - Somaliland's global diaspora represents a largely untapped market for artisanal goods. Studies exploring diaspora consumer behavior, product design preferences, and potential trade linkages would be highly valuable.

3.15 Implications for Policy and Practice

The current research limitations constrain evidence-based policymaking. To design effective interventions, policymakers need updated, disaggregated, and sector-specific data on artisans and their economic environment. Key implications include the following.

- Development of a national artisan sector strategy, informed by empirical data and stakeholder consultations.
- Integration of artisan crafts into national education and vocational curricula, preserving traditional skills while fostering innovation.
- Design of inclusive financial instruments (e.g., artisan-focused microcredit, grants) based on a better understanding of the sector's risks and needs.
- Implementation of cultural mapping initiatives to document endangered crafts and artisan communities across Somaliland.

Research partnerships between academic institutions, government, and civil society could help fill knowledge gaps and foster a culture of policy-relevant inquiry.

Longitudinal and participatory studies involving artisans themselves would further ground future strategies in lived realities.

4. Methodology

4.1 Overview of the Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to ensure a comprehensive, nuanced, and context-sensitive understanding of the artisan industry in Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao. The methodology was guided by the principles of inclusivity, participatory engagement, and gender sensitivity. Data was collected using a combination of desk reviews, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), ethnographic shadowing, customer journey mapping, stakeholder network analysis, and field observations. These tools were chosen to triangulate findings, enrich insights, and allow for a multidimensional analysis of artisan production systems, market dynamics, and inclusion opportunities for women and youth.

Data collection was carried out by a multidisciplinary team with experience in qualitative study, market analysis, gender mainstreaming, and local cultural contexts. The tools were pre-tested and adapted to reflect local realities, and data collection was conducted in Somali to ensure full participation and comprehension by all respondents.

4.2 Desk Review

Prior to fieldwork, an extensive desk review was conducted to build foundational knowledge and inform the development of the primary data collection tools. The review included academic literature, market assessments, NGO reports, government policy documents, artisan sector strategies, and social media content. Key areas of focus included artisan value chains, circular economy practices, market trends, gender roles in artisan production, and policy and regulatory frameworks. The insights gathered from the desk review helped identify knowledge gaps, validate assumptions, and inform the formulation of context-specific research questions.

4.3 Data Collection Process

The data collection process was designed to comprehensively capture the current state, challenges, opportunities, and ecosystem dynamics of the artisan industry across the three target cities—Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao. The study combined qualitative depth with contextual relevance to ensure a nuanced understanding of both supply-side and demand-side perspectives within the artisan value chain.

Fieldwork was conducted over a period of 15 days in June, during which primary data was collected from a diverse range of stakeholders. These included artisan producers, raw material suppliers, market actors, government institutions, NGOs, consumers, and cultural representatives. The data collection team consisted of experienced data collectors, facilitators and gender-sensitive team members to ensure inclusive participation, particularly among women and youth.

Prior to field deployment, a comprehensive set of data collection tools was developed, tested, and refined to suit the local context. These included semi-structured interview guides, focus group protocols, observation checklists, shadowing templates, customer journey mapping frameworks, and stakeholder mapping tools. The tools were carefully aligned with the study objectives and designed to elicit both factual and experiential information.

Engagements were conducted in local languages to enhance clarity and comfort, and wherever necessary, community leaders and focal persons were involved to facilitate access and trust. The triangulation of multiple tools and perspectives allowed for data validation and enriched the analysis, contributing to robust and grounded findings that reflect the realities of the artisan sector in Somaliland.

i. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Key Informant Interviews were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders representing eight distinct categories.

- i. Artisan producers
- ii. Input suppliers
- iii. Design and development experts
- iv. Market access actors
- v. Promotion and advocacy groups
- vi. Financial institutions
- vii. Institutional support actors
- viii. Cultural stakeholders.

A total of 48 KIIs were held across the three cities. These interviews allowed for the collection of expert-level insights, sector-wide perspectives, and operational details of the artisan value chain. The guides were semi-structured, enabling flexible probing into issues such as production challenges, business models, market access, support systems, innovation potential, and inclusion barriers.

ii. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Four FGDs were conducted—two in Hargeisa and two in Buroa and Borama—with artisan producers, youth groups, women groups, businesses and community members.

Each discussion brought together 8–12 participants to explore shared experiences, perceptions of artisan work, and community-level challenges and aspirations. Participatory mapping and open-ended questions were used to stimulate in-depth dialogue. These sessions were particularly useful in capturing gendered perspectives, localized constraints, collective priorities, and informal dynamics that affect participation in artisan activities.

iii. Ethnographic Shadowing

Ethnographic shadowing was employed to gain immersive, first-hand insights into the daily routines, work environments, and decision-making processes of selected artisans. A total of two artisans were shadowed for a full working day in Hargeisa and Buroa. There were no artisans that had full day engagement in Borama. Data collectors documented time use, resource allocation, social interactions, household responsibilities, and coping mechanisms. This approach provided nuanced understanding of gender roles, informal labor, production intensity, and how artisans balanced work with personal obligations—especially for women with caregiving responsibilities.

iv. Customer Journey Mapping

To understand demand-side dynamics, customer journey mapping sessions were held with buyers of artisan products in local markets and among the diaspora. These sessions explored how customers discovered products, what influenced their decisions, which platforms they used, and what factors shaped satisfaction or dissatisfaction. A total of 7 participants across different segments were engaged. The insights helped uncover purchasing motivations, price sensitivities, feedback loops, and gaps in outreach and customer service—critical for informing market expansion strategies.

v. Stakeholder Network Analysis

A stakeholder network analysis was conducted to map the relationships, collaboration patterns, and influence dynamics among actors in the artisan ecosystem. Data was collected through a combination of KII follow-ups and a participatory mini-workshop conducted in Hargeisa with selected stakeholders. Participants identified their key collaborators, levels of trust, frequency of interaction, and perceived value of these relationships. This information was used to generate visual network maps showing hubs, linkages, disconnects, and potential strategic partnerships.

vi. Field Observations

Field visits were made to artisan hubs, markets, and production workshops in each city. Observations focused on working conditions, tools and materials used, infrastructure

quality, workspace organization, and customer engagement. Notes were taken to document environmental indicators that could not be fully captured in interviews. These observations played a critical role in validating narratives from FGDs and KIs and revealing non-verbal cues about artisans' operational realities.

4.4 Sampling Approach

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure diversity, inclusion, and relevance across stakeholder categories. Participants were selected based on their engagement in or knowledge of artisan activities, their willingness to participate, and their ability to offer insights into the study's thematic areas. Gender and geographic balance were ensured to the extent possible, and special effort was made to include underrepresented voices such as young women, informal producers, and elders with indigenous knowledge.

In total, the study engaged 48 Key Informants across 8 stakeholder categories, 4 Focus Group Discussions with over 40 participants, 2 Artisans for ethnographic shadowing, 7 Customers for journey mapping sessions, 1 Stakeholder Workshop with 11 participants and Multiple observation visits to production sites and market hubs. Of the total participants 58% were female and 42% male.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards to protect the rights, dignity, and safety of all participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to all interviews, focus groups, and observational activities. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, how the data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Verbal or written consent was documented depending on literacy levels and cultural appropriateness.

Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. All responses were anonymized during transcription and analysis, and any identifying information was excluded from reports or shared data sets. Digital data was securely stored in password-protected formats accessible only to the core study team.

The team also prioritized cultural sensitivity, ensuring that all interactions respected local norms, traditions, and gender dynamics. Female facilitators were deployed where necessary to engage women participants more comfortably. Questions and discussions were framed in ways that were contextually respectful, non-intrusive, and inclusive of diverse perspectives. Prior engagement with community leaders and local collaborators helped to reinforce cultural appropriateness and trust-building.

The majority of study participants chose not to disclose their personal or business details, including names. Information was recorded only for those who felt comfortable sharing their details.

4.6 Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

While the study was comprehensive in scope and employed a robust approach, several limitations were encountered during its implementation. These limitations, however, were either mitigated during the data collection phase or acknowledged in the analysis to ensure the findings remain reliable and reflective of the realities on the ground.

- **Limited Formal Data on the Artisan Sector**

One of the main challenges was the scarcity of existing formal data or documentation on the artisan sector in Somaliland. Much of the activity occurs informally, with little to no government or institutional records, making desk research less fruitful than anticipated.

The study team compensated for this gap by conducting extensive fieldwork, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnographic observation. Additionally, the study relied heavily on firsthand accounts from artisans, local groups, and informal community leaders to build a reliable primary evidence base.

- **Time and Resource Constraints**

The breadth of the study—covering three cities and eight stakeholder categories—placed significant demands on time and logistics. Some activities, like follow-up interviews, had to be adjusted to fit within the available timeframe.

The team prioritized depth over breadth, ensuring that data collection in each city was thorough and contextually rich. Tools such as ethnographic shadowing and customer journey mapping provided additional insights that compensated for time-limited engagements with broader groups.

- **Accessibility and Mobility Barriers**

In some locations, accessing artisans—especially women working from home or informal spaces—posed a challenge due to cultural norms or logistical difficulties. Youth artisans and elders practicing rare crafts were also not always easy to locate.

The team worked with local facilitators, community elders, and women's groups to reach harder-to-access respondents. Gender-sensitive protocols ensured that female respondents were interviewed in safe and comfortable environments.

- **Language and Terminology Gaps**

Some respondents were not familiar with formal development terms like “circular economy” or “value chain.” This risked misinterpretation or incomplete responses in interviews and FGDs.

Data collectors used localized examples and translated concepts into Somali equivalents during interviews. Visual aids and storytelling techniques were also used to help respondents articulate their experiences more effectively.

- **Potential Social Desirability Bias**

In group settings such as FGDs, some participants—particularly women and youth—might have felt constrained in participating and contributing actively.

The consultant ensured equal participation by giving them opportunities to contribute and participate, data collectors were also trained to create an open, respectful environment. Anonymity was assured, and informal conversations outside of group settings were also documented to capture more candid feedback.

- **Ethical Considerations in Participant Data**

A key aspect of this study was the ethical handling of participant information, particularly in relation to consent and confidentiality. While a number of participants chose not to disclose their personal or business details due to privacy concerns or trust-related preferences, their decisions were fully respected in accordance with ethical research practices, and only those who gave explicit consent had their information recorded and the others have participated the study but their details not recorded. This approach prioritized participants’ comfort and confidentiality, reflecting the study’s commitment to ethical integrity.

As a result, only participants who explicitly consented to the collection of their personal information were recorded. Although this meant that personal data was collected from a smaller portion of the overall participant pool, it reflects a deliberate and responsible approach to participant autonomy. The core research objectives were met using the full range of data collected, and the insights generated remain valid and meaningful. The study’s methodological rigor and analytical depth were maintained, ensuring that its outcomes are both reliable and applicable.

5. Findings

5.1 Existing Artisan Practices

To understand the depth, diversity, and socio-economic dimensions of artisan activity across the three target cities—Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao—we conducted a multi-method mapping and profiling exercise. This process aimed to document the range of crafts practiced, identify key actors and structures involved, assess levels of organization, and explore linkages to sustainability and economic development.

The mapping was not limited to a superficial listing of crafts; rather, it sought to capture the full ecosystem in which these practices exist, evolve, or decline. We examined both formal and informal practices, generational continuity, gender participation, and market structures. The study also considered the enabling or inhibiting factors that shape artisan livelihoods—such as access to raw materials, tools, finance, skills training, and exposure to innovation or market trends.

Together, these approaches produced a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of artisan activity, revealing the socio-cultural importance of crafts, their economic contributions, their state of vulnerability, and their potential for revitalization. This overview informs evidence-based planning and targeted support for the sector in Somaliland.

5.1.1 Textile and Tailoring

Practices and Products

The textile and tailoring sub-sector in Somaliland is characterized by remarkable diversity, adaptability, and cultural relevance. Its outputs reflect a fusion of traditional identity and modern utility, serving both ceremonial and everyday needs of local communities as well as diaspora markets.

Textile and tailoring clearly emerged as the most vibrant and economically viable artisan subsector. This includes both traditional and modern clothing, with a notable demand from diaspora and domestic markets. As one of the participants also noted, “*Textile production is the only craft we see growing—everyone wants a custom design for weddings or celebrations*”.

Artisans in this sub-sector produce a rich portfolio of garments and household items. This includes culturally significant garments such as dirac (flowing formal wear), shiid (light cotton wear), shawls, toob, guntiino (traditional women's wrap), sube'iyad, and headscarves. These items are in high demand during national celebrations, weddings, and other formal events. Additionally, some workshops produce school-oriented

traditional wear that caters to institutions seeking culturally rooted attire during cultural celebrations or events.

In response to urbanization and fashion influences from Gulf countries and social media, artisans have expanded their offerings to include abaya, trousers, gawn, hijab, and various styles of prayer garments. These are often characterized by modest cuts, contemporary designs, and a blend of traditional fabric with modern tailoring techniques.

Tailors also cater to the home décor market, producing embroidered curtains, cushion covers, bed linens, and decorative fabric hangings. These items are popular as wedding gifts and household essentials, often blending traditional motifs with modern aesthetics. This diversity in product lines allows artisans to cater to seasonal, ceremonial, and everyday demands, thereby providing resilience in income generation.

Tailoring practices in Somaliland differ significantly depending on geographic location, scale of operation, and access to infrastructure. In cities like Hargeisa, artisans tend to operate more structured workshops. These often employ semi-industrial sewing machines, have a steady supply chain for inputs, and benefit from higher client retention and bulk orders. Urban tailors are more likely to have access to training, external support from NGOs or TVET programs, and opportunities for visibility through digital platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok. The presence of diaspora clientele also drives demand for high-quality, customizable garments.

In areas like Borama and Burao, tailoring is typically less formalized. Artisans often work from small shops, their homes or community centers, using manual or foot-operated machines. Material sourcing is largely local and from Hargeisa. Business continuity in these areas is sustained more by social networks, word-of-mouth referrals, and barter systems than by structured marketing. Despite these constraints, such environments foster strong community relationships and cultural continuity.

Women dominate tailoring (female and household products) in both urban and rural contexts, particularly in home-based operations focused on tie-dye, embroidery, and garment assembly. Men are more visible in commercial tailoring spaces, often operating tailoring shops that service male customers or produce bulk uniforms. In both cases, the tailoring process typically involves a mix of custom orders and batch production based on anticipated demand.

Most tailoring skills are passed down informally through apprenticeships, with family members or senior artisans mentoring newcomers. In the absence of a formal curriculum, these methods are essential for maintaining craft quality and local design knowledge—but they also limit innovation and consistency across the sector.

The contrast between structured and informal tailoring ecosystems reveals both inequalities and opportunities. While urban tailors are better positioned to scale and

access new markets, rural artisans play a crucial role in preserving traditional techniques and reaching underserved communities.

Textile crafts, particularly tailoring and tie-dye, represent the most scalable segment of the artisan sector in Somaliland due to their adaptability, modular production processes, and alignment with cultural and contemporary fashion trends. Artisans can easily adjust designs, colors, and patterns to match shifting consumer preferences, often creating new styles within a few weeks to meet demand surges tied to weddings, cultural events, or online fashion trends. This flexibility allows for rapid response to market signals and personalization—attributes highly valued by both local and diaspora consumers.

Evidence from diaspora markets strongly supports this scalability. Somali communities abroad, particularly in Europe, North America, and neighboring East African countries, consistently demand traditional garments and tie-dye fabrics that reflect cultural identity while meeting modern aesthetics. Artisans have begun leveraging social media platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok to showcase and sell products internationally, with many buyers placing custom orders remotely. This growing cross-border demand not only validates the export potential of Somaliland's textile crafts but also highlights the sector's capacity for expansion if equipped with better tools, digital marketing skills, and logistics support.

Tie-Dye as a Distinct Artisan Niche

Tie-dye has evolved into a vibrant, culturally significant, and economically promising sub-sector within the broader textile and tailoring industry across Somaliland. It stands out not only for its aesthetic appeal and creative freedom but also as a symbol of women's economic participation and entrepreneurship.

This resist-dye technique involves a sequence of folding, twisting, crumpling, and binding the fabric with threads, bands, or clips, followed by the application of colorful chemical dyes. When unbound, the fabric reveals striking and often symbolic patterns that are unique to each artisan's technique and vision. Beyond aesthetics, tie-dye garments have become highly valued in weddings, national holidays, and diaspora gatherings, reinforcing their cultural and social significance.

The study has identified two major categories of tie-dye artisans which are end to end producers and dyeing service providers. The first one are the artisans that manage the entire value chain—selecting fabrics, applying dye techniques, and designing garments such as dirac, scarves, abayas, and headwraps. They often sell finished products through social media, in informal markets, or at cultural events.

The other one, dyeing service providers are practitioners specialize in offering dyeing services for other tailors, retailers, or customers who bring their own fabrics. These service providers are often seen as technical specialists, trusted for their control over

color blending, pattern consistency, and drying techniques. This separation of roles allows for task specialization and business diversification within the sub-sector, creating employment opportunities for women with varying skills and resources.

Tie-dye is exclusively practiced by women, making it a crucial avenue for female livelihood generation, particularly for those working from home or within women-led businesses. It provides low-barrier access to income for women with limited formal education or financial capital. Moreover, it has fostered a sense of artistic identity and independence, enabling women to express creativity while earning an income.

Despite its promise, tie-dye faces several persistent barriers including raw material constraints. Artisans frequently struggle to access safe, high-grade dyes. Most materials are imported via middlemen from Dubai, China, or Mogadishu, increasing costs and reducing consistency. The widespread use of unregulated chemical dyes—often mixed without gloves or masks—exposes women to skin irritations, respiratory problems, and other long-term health risks. There is a general lack of awareness and access to personal protective equipment (PPE). Tie-dye is a space-intensive process, especially during the drying phase. Inadequate access to open, clean, and secure drying areas often leads to contamination, delays, or quality degradation. Many women resort to drying fabrics in shared courtyards or roadside areas, which limits production capacity. Most tie-dye artisans are self-taught or informally trained. This affects quality control and limits the sector's ability to scale or access larger markets where consistency and compliance with safety or quality standards are key.

Despite these constraints, tie-dye holds significant untapped potential. Locally, tie-dye is popular among women of all ages for its vibrant expression and cultural pride. Internationally, especially among the Somali diaspora, tie-dye is often seen as a link to heritage, increasing its value in boutique cultural and ceremonial markets. The fashion-forward nature of the industry keeps demand high and recurring. Since designs change rapidly, artisans who keep pace with trends and innovate consistently can sustain steady sales.

Platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook have become crucial for showcasing designs and connecting with buyers, particularly from the diaspora in Europe, North America, and Gulf countries. These platforms also allow direct-to-consumer sales without requiring physical retail infrastructure. Tie-dye naturally lends itself to circular design practices, such as repurposing offcuts into accessories, or using low-impact natural dyes. With proper support, this niche could lead in adopting sustainable artisan practices. For this sub-sector growth, the study is recommending the following strategic recommendations.

- Establish women-led tie-dye cooperatives to centralize access to raw materials, provide shared workspaces, and reduce costs through economies of scale.

- Introduce Safety Training and Provide PPE Kits to all active artisans to reduce occupational risks.
- Support product development and branding to target diaspora markets more effectively with uniquely Somali tie-dye identities.
- Create tie-dye innovation hubs within TVET centers or women's development centers to offer structured training, digital marketing support, and design mentorship.

Market Dynamics and Raw Material Sourcing

The textile and tailoring sub-sector in Somaliland operates within a diverse and dynamic market environment, catering to both domestic demand and regional trade opportunities. Its evolution reflects a blend of cultural traditions, consumer fashion preferences, and economic linkages that cross national borders.

The largest share of customers is within Somaliland, where traditional garments remain a staple of daily life and special occasions. Although at varying levels, consumers from Hargeisa, Borama, Burao, and surrounding towns rely on local tailors for both traditional and modern attire, including everyday wear such as dirac, shawls, hijabs, trousers, and prayer clothes. Special occasion garments, often customized for weddings, religious festivals, and graduation ceremonies. Embroidered household textiles like curtains and bed linens, especially in preparation for marriage or housewarming events.

Local demand is seasonal and trend-sensitive, with spikes during Eid festivals, school re-openings, wedding seasons, and national holidays. WhatsApp status updates, TikTok videos, and Facebook pages significantly influence fashion choices and help artisans showcase their work to potential customers.

While less formalized, regional exports form a growing segment of the artisan market. Djibouti is a key destination, with strong cultural ties and a sizable Somali-speaking population that favors Somaliland-made attire for its authenticity and affordability. The Somali Region of Ethiopia (especially Jigjiga and surrounding areas) presents similar preferences, with buyers sourcing bulk orders during festivals or to resell in local markets.

These exports are typically moved through informal trade routes or courier-based delivery systems, facilitated by social networks and diaspora connections. Sellers often coordinate through social media platforms and mobile money payments, enabling cross-border commerce with minimal overhead.

Artisans and tailoring shops rely on a multi-channel approach to market and sell their products. Digital platforms are widely used, WhatsApp is the dominant tool for showcasing and advertising products; TikTok and Facebook are also used for promotional videos and direct customer engagement.

Word of mouth and referrals remain critical, especially among older clients or in tightly knit communities where reputation and trust determine business success. Small tailoring shops, household-based workshops, and sometimes grouped women (although very small) in urban markets serve walk-in customers. Orders from abroad are facilitated via family members or friends; some tailors take custom orders through WhatsApp or Messenger, with products shipped via courier services.

The quality and source of raw materials significantly impact the artisans' ability to produce competitive, appealing products. Common fabrics (cotton blends, polyester, lace) are available through local textile wholesalers mostly in Hargeisa but also in smaller scales in Borama and Burao. Threads, needles, zippers, and embellishments are likewise locally accessible, often through general markets or specialized tailoring supply stores. These materials serve most of the day-to-day tailoring needs and are relatively affordable.

For clients seeking premium quality or exclusive patterns, tailors procure fabrics from Dubai, China, and Mogadishu. These are typically ordered in small batches or sourced by relatives traveling abroad. Special dyes, including those used for tie-dye work, are also imported, with a preference for more vivid and durable products compared to local alternatives.

Despite these challenges exist in raw materials including price volatility of imported inputs due to exchange rates and transport costs, lack of standardization in fabric quality, leading to inconsistencies in finished products, supply chain disruptions, especially during political unrest, port delays, or regional tensions. Some artisans noted that reliance on middlemen raises costs and limits choice, especially in smaller towns like Borama and Burao.

The ability to source high-quality, consistent, and affordable raw materials is directly tied to artisans' competitiveness—both in the local and regional markets. Facilitating bulk procurement systems, direct linkages with suppliers, or group purchasing could reduce costs and improve access to better materials.

In parallel, targeted investments in product design, branding, and digital marketing could help artisans leverage market demand and diaspora connections to scale their operations sustainably.

Marketing Strategies and Customer Engagement

Marketing within the textile and tailoring sector has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from traditional shopfronts and local reputation to a vibrant mix of digital tools, informal networks, and personalized customer service. Artisans, especially younger and urban-based tailors, are increasingly leveraging online platforms to market their products, take custom orders, and engage with customers. WhatsApp is

the most widely used tool, particularly for direct marketing. Tailors and designers regularly update their status with new styles, promotions, and client testimonials, using it as a daily virtual storefront. Customers often browse these updates and place orders via private messages. TikTok is gaining popularity for showcasing fashion trends, especially short videos demonstrating tailoring techniques, transformations, or "before and after" client fittings. This platform is particularly effective in drawing the attention of younger, fashion-forward clients. Facebook pages and groups serve as a broader outreach tool, especially for those aiming to target diaspora markets or potential bulk buyers. Some artisans run informal online boutiques, using Facebook to display collections, receive feedback, and negotiate prices.

These platforms offer low-cost, high-reach alternatives to traditional advertising, allowing artisans to bypass middlemen and build direct relationships with their customers. Digital engagement also supports real-time feedback, which artisans use to refine their offerings, test new designs, and track customer preferences.

Despite the digital shift, referrals and word-of-mouth remain powerful—especially in close-knit communities like Borama or neighborhoods in Burao and Hargeisa. These networks rely on reputation built over years of service where satisfied customers introduce artisans to relatives, neighbors, and event organizers. Community-based endorsements, often through groups, women's circles, or youth networks. In many cases, a single well-executed order for a wedding, graduation, or Eid can lead to multiple follow-up referrals. Some tailors receive entire batch orders from extended families or social groups based solely on previous good performance.

A growing number of artisans now adopt a hybrid marketing strategy. Using WhatsApp and Facebook to attract attention and collect orders as well as on relying on personal rapport and localized delivery (often through boda-boda couriers or customer pickup) to complete the sale. Some tailor shops have even integrated mobile banking like ZAAD and E-Dahab for seamless payment. This blended model reflects the reality of Somaliland's market—where digital tools are widespread, but trust, community familiarity, and personal relationships still drive purchase decisions, especially for high-value or ceremonial clothing.

The digital migration opens several pathways for scale and sustainability. Social media training and digital branding workshops could help tailors maximize their visibility and customer appeal, establishing artisan digital marketplaces or e-commerce hubs could aggregate small-scale producers and enhance their online reach, government or NGO support to subsidize internet access and digital tools could level the playing field for rural or semi-urban artisans.

Design Trends and Innovation Dynamics

Design trends are central to the vitality and competitiveness of the textile and tailoring sub-sector, acting as both a creative and economic engine. In a market increasingly shaped by digital exposure and rapidly changing consumer preferences, the ability to offer fresh, appealing designs is directly linked to an artisan's success and sustainability.

The sector operates under a multi-faceted design model. Many workshops, especially those with access to resources, hire professional designers—to conceptualize and sketch out innovative styles that reflect both cultural identity and modern aesthetics. These professionals often draw inspiration from global fashion trends, Islamic attire styles, Somali cultural motifs, and customer feedback to stay ahead of the market curve.

At the same time, workshop owners themselves frequently take on the role of designer, particularly in smaller or home-based enterprises where budgets may not allow for full-time creative professionals. These owner-designers often rely on personal experience, creativity, and customer interaction to produce designs that resonate with local tastes.

In addition to professional or owner-led designs, customer-driven design requests are highly prevalent. Clients often come with specific visions or inspirations, sometimes showing photos from online platforms. Tailors are expected to replicate or modify these based on available materials and local styles. This co-creative relationship fosters trust and personalization but also demands flexibility and skill from artisans.

The sector is defined by a fast-moving design cycle. New designs typically enjoy peak popularity for only two to four weeks, after which interest wanes as consumers shift attention to newer styles trending online or in social networks. As a result, artisans must constantly innovate, experiment with patterns, colors, and cuts, and update their portfolios. This pace of change keeps the market dynamic but also places pressure on artisans to keep up with trends—especially without structured support or formal training in design principles.

Because of the resource constraints most artisans face—such as limited workspace, material costs, and time—design creation is often demand-driven rather than speculative. In other words, new styles are typically developed only after an order is placed. This just-in-time model helps minimize waste and reduces the financial risk of producing unsold stock. However, it also limits the artisans' ability to showcase ready-made samples or capitalize on impulse buyers.

Social media plays a critical role in amplifying design trends. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp are not only used for promotion but also as real-time feedback loops—what garners attention or "likes" often informs the next trend. This has increased the influence of younger consumers and fashion influencers, shaping demand and encouraging more experimental, bold, and individualized designs.

In short, design is not just an aesthetic choice in this sector; it is a business imperative. The agility to adapt, the capacity to anticipate consumer preferences, and the creativity to stand out are what define success in Somaliland's fast-evolving tailoring landscape. Without continuous design innovation, even the most technically skilled artisans risk falling behind in a marketplace where fashion cycles are measured in weeks, not seasons.

5.2 Circular Economy and Waste Minimization

Although the artisan sector in Somaliland is largely informal and resource-constrained, elements of a nascent circular economy are beginning to take root—driven by necessity, creativity, and an emerging awareness of sustainability.

Across the textile and tailoring sub-sector, fabric waste is a common byproduct of design and production. However, rather than being discarded, fabric scraps and offcuts are often given a second life through pragmatic reuse which include the fact that small offcuts are frequently sold or donated to businesses such as restaurants, garages, and car washes, where they are used as rags and polishing cloths. This not only reduces waste but also creates micro-value chains across sectors.

Artisans—particularly women working from home—repurpose leftover fabric into small items like hairbands, coin purses, or mobile pouches. These are often sold as add-on items or bundled with larger garments. In some cases, scrap materials are stitched together to create unique patchwork patterns for clothing or home décor, adding value through artistry.

Some artisans utilize scrap yarns and threads for embellishments such as decorative trims, stitched borders, or appliqué designs. This is particularly common in embroidery and tie-dye sub-sectors, where visual appeal and uniqueness matter.

Skilled tailors and designers in cities like Hargeisa and Buroa are increasingly adopting smart cutting techniques to minimize waste from the outset. These include, batch cutting similar styles to maximize fabric use, measuring and modeling tools to layout patterns with minimal leftover material, on-demand design where garments are only produced after an order is placed, thus avoiding overproduction and excess scrap.

Despite these promising developments, several constraints limit the scaling of circular practices. First, lack of awareness and training where many artisans are unaware of circular economy principles or techniques that could help reduce waste and increase efficiency. There are no organized collection, sorting, or recycling systems for textile waste. As a result, opportunities to consolidate scraps for larger-scale reuse (e.g., insulation, padding, recycled textiles) remain untapped, Lastly, There are few programs

or partnerships aimed at introducing eco-friendly production models or connecting artisans with green design specialists.

However, The evolving interest in sustainability—both globally and locally—offers an exciting opportunity to embed circularity into artisan business models. Some potential avenues include training programs on eco-design, pattern efficiency, and creative reuse, micro-grants or competitions encouraging innovation in upcycling or zero-waste fashion, market incentives, such as labeling or certification for eco-friendly products, which could appeal to diaspora buyers and ethical consumers abroad and collaborative spaces or cooperatives where scraps from multiple artisans are pooled and repurposed collectively.

5.3 City-Level Distinctions in Tailoring Practices

As the largest urban and economic center in Somaliland, Hargeisa boasts the most mature and expansive tailoring networks in the region. Tailors in the city benefit from proximity to key supply chains, with easier access to high-quality fabrics, threads, sewing equipment, and embellishments—often imported through nearby trade routes from Dubai, Mogadishu, and China. The city also has a more digitally savvy artisan community, actively using platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook to promote their products, take custom orders, and engage with clients both locally and across borders. Additionally, the presence of urban markets and fashion-conscious clientele drives a steady demand for both traditional and modern garments, reinforcing Hargeisa's role as a trendsetting hub in the tailoring sub-sector.

Compared to Hargeisa and Buroa, Borama is the least active city in terms of artisan sector development. In textile sector, while small-scale tailoring shops and businesses do exist, much of Borama's textile trade relies on goods imported from Hargeisa and Djibouti. According to the district administration, there are currently no formal training centers providing artisan or vocational skills in the city. Despite this, local resilience and initiative are evident. We met a young woman who voluntarily trains other women in embroidery skills, offering a grassroots solution to the lack of formal support. Borama's tailoring sector is less commercialized than Hargeisa's, yet it thrives within close-knit community settings, especially through women's groups and local centers that informally support basic skill-building.

While Burao's tailoring sector is also less developed compared to Hargeisa, it is nonetheless experiencing green shoots of growth, particularly among young people. This momentum is largely fueled by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centers, which have become focal points for capacity building and creative experimentation. Youth-led tailoring initiatives are emerging with aspirations to turn skills

into livelihood opportunities, despite limited access to materials and marketing platforms. The nascent stage of the sector here suggests untapped potential that, with proper support—such as seed funding, mentorship, and improved access to digital tools—could evolve into a dynamic contributor to the regional artisan economy.

5.4 Key Challenges in the Textile and Tailoring Sector

Despite its vibrancy and economic potential, the textile and tailoring sector in Somaliland faces several structural and operational barriers that hinder its full development.

- **Lack of Formal Curriculum and Structured Training Programs**

There is a significant gap in standardized vocational education and training for tailoring and fashion design. Most artisans, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, acquire their skills through basic trainings, informal apprenticeships or self-learning. While the TVET office of the Ministry of education has two certificate levels of tailoring program, it is not widely adopted. The absence of formal curricula and certification frameworks limits the ability of artisans to advance their skills in areas such as design, pattern-making, business management, and garment finishing. This also reduces the sector's attractiveness to young entrants and weakens quality assurance.

- **Absence of Policy Frameworks and Sector Support**

The tailoring and broader artisan sector lacks government policies, legal recognition, or strategic development plans. There are no formal incentives, protection mechanisms, or support structures—such as tax breaks, subsidies, trade fairs, or export promotion schemes—that could help artisanal businesses scale and compete. This policy vacuum means the sector continues to operate informally and remains largely invisible in national economic planning.

- **Skills Gaps and Human Resource Constraints**

Artisans often struggle with limited technical and creative capacity, especially in advanced areas like design conceptualization, digital illustration, pattern-making, and branding. As a result, most artisans rely heavily on trial-and-error methods. One female business owner reported having to personally oversee all aspects of production—from design to sewing and finishing—due to a lack of skilled and trustworthy staff. This not only strains individual capacity but also restricts growth, collaboration, and innovation.

- **Market Competition from Low-Cost Imports**

The market is saturated with cheap, mass-produced imported clothing, often of inferior quality but competitively priced. These imports, mostly from Asian and Middle Eastern markets, undercut local products and reduce customer willingness to pay fair prices for locally made, handcrafted garments. This dynamic discourages investment in quality improvement and perpetuates a race-to-the-bottom pricing model that hurts artisan livelihoods.

- **Limited Access to Finance and Investment**

Most tailors and textile artisans operate as micro or small informal businesses with minimal capital. They lack access to tailored financial services, including loans, grants, or micro-insurance, and are often unaware of how to prepare business proposals or approach financiers. The absence of targeted financing mechanisms prevents investment in modern equipment, shop expansion, skills upgrading, and bulk raw material procurement, which collectively stifles productivity and limits scale.

5.5 Opportunities in the Textile and Tailoring Sector

Despite the challenges facing the tailoring and textile industry, the sub-sector holds significant untapped potential for growth, innovation, and sustainable livelihoods. A range of emerging trends and enabling factors provide clear entry points for strengthening the sector.

- **Growing Demand for Customized and Culturally Significant Garments**

There is a resurgence of interest in traditional Somali attire, especially for ceremonial, religious, and social functions. Consumers are increasingly seeking garments that reflect cultural identity and personal taste—creating demand for custom-made designs such as dirac, guntiino, and embroidered headscarves. This offers artisans a competitive edge, particularly when compared to mass-produced imports that lack cultural resonance.

- **Rise of Fashion Consciousness Driven by Social Media**

The widespread use of platforms like TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook has fostered a new wave of fashion awareness. Tailors and designers now have direct access to potential customers through low-cost digital marketing, enabling them to showcase their work, gather feedback, and follow fashion trends in real time. This digital shift has also shortened design cycles, encouraging constant innovation and pushing artisans to create trending, visually appealing products.

- **Availability of Mobile Banking and Digital Payment Platforms**

The increasing use of mobile money services such as Zaad and E-Dahab has simplified transactions and broadened customer reach beyond geographic constraints. These platforms reduce the need for physical storefronts and enable remote order-taking and payment, particularly useful for women artisans operating from home. They also reduce the overhead costs associated with formal banking and enhance financial inclusion for micro-enterprises.

- **Youth Engagement and Entrepreneurial Interest**

A growing number of youth, particularly women, are showing interest in tailoring and fashion design as a viable livelihood. This is often supported by vocational training programs, online tutorials, and TVET center initiatives. With proper guidance and resources, this emerging workforce has the potential to inject creativity, energy, and tech-savviness into the sector—transforming tailoring from a survival skill into a respected profession.

- **NGO Support and Cultural Shifts**

There is increasing involvement from NGOs, women’s associations, and development programs in supporting artisan activities. These initiatives include training, provision of equipment, market linkages, and cooperative development. Concurrently, societal attitudes are shifting—artisan work is now increasingly seen as dignified, creative, and economically valuable, especially as demand for “Made in Somaliland” products grows.

5.6 Production Processes and Interlinkages

The artisan sector in Somaliland is defined by a complex web of production stages, informal collaboration, localized supply chains, and interdependent practices. While each sub-sector (e.g., tailoring, woodcarving, pottery) has distinct tools and techniques, they share common patterns in how raw materials are procured, transformed, marketed, and sold. This section outlines these processes and explores how different actors and activities interconnect across the value chain.

5.1.2 Inputs and Raw Material Sourcing

The foundation of all artisan activity begins with the acquisition of raw materials, which vary significantly by craft type but are uniformly essential in shaping the quality, identity, and economic value of final products. Across the three target cities—Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao—artisans rely on a blend of locally available resources, imported supplies, and natural material collection. These procurement strategies not only reflect the resource landscape but also underscore the adaptive ingenuity of the sector.

Tailoring artisans source raw materials such as fabrics, threads, dyes, buttons, zippers, and decorative trims from local wholesalers based in central markets. However, for specialized or higher-quality materials, many artisans—especially in Hargeisa—import inputs from Dubai, Mogadishu, or China through informal trade networks. Local availability fluctuates due to import delays, which sometimes prompts reuse of older fabrics or the mixing of different quality levels in a single product. In tie-dye practices, the demand for chemical dyes and white cotton cloth creates a mini-supply chain of its own, often dependent on few importers.

Woodcarvers in Somaliland source materials from both local and imported wood. Indigenous tree species are obtained directly or through small-scale traders who also serve the construction and furniture industries, creating competition for quality wood. Imported woods—from countries like UAE, China, and many others—are used for higher-end products due to their durability and consistency. Most wood is acquired as raw logs or planks and refined by artisans themselves. While tools and machinery vary, most work remains labor-intensive. There are modest circular linkages, with wood waste being reused in other artisan activities.

Although still limited in practice and scale within Somaliland, pottery relies on specific clay deposits, often located in rural areas or near riverbeds. Access to these deposits is usually based on informal land-use arrangements. Potters collect and process the clay manually, which involves drying, soaking, filtering, and kneading. Due to the sector's small size, many potters also work in agriculture or other artisan trades to supplement their income.

Metal-based crafts rely on varied sources. Scrap metal—from old vehicles, broken tools, and discarded machinery—is a primary input for blacksmiths, while goldsmiths often work with recycled gold or raw material acquired through regional trade routes. In some cases, blacksmiths buy steel rods and iron sheets from hardware stores, especially in urban areas like Hargeisa. There is growing interdependence with local recycling chains, linking artisans with waste collectors and scrapyards.

Producers of henna and incense gather their ingredients primarily from rural agricultural areas and pastoralist communities. Henna leaves are often cultivated seasonally and dried for later use, some Henna are also imported from outside, while frankincense resin, myrrh, are harvested from wild trees in mountainous or arid zones—mainly in Sanaag and Bari regions and other aromatics imported from outside the country. These inputs are either self-sourced by producers or acquired from mobile traders who bridge the gap between rural gatherers and urban producers.

Leather artisans in Somaliland acquire their raw materials through two primary channels. imported leather and locally processed hides. Imported leather—whether finished or semi-processed—typically comes from countries like Ethiopia, or the United

Arab Emirates, and is favored for its consistent quality, texture, and ease of use. In contrast, locally processed hides are sourced from regional abattoirs and small-scale tanneries, providing a more accessible but often less reliable alternative. The quality of these local hides varies significantly, largely due to rudimentary processing techniques and a lack of standardization. Importantly, the leathercraft sector is closely tied to the broader livestock value chain; the availability of hides is highly seasonal and directly influenced by livestock slaughter patterns, which peak during religious festivals and lean during off-seasons but always abundant.

5.1.3 Primary Processing and Transformation

The primary processing and transformation stage represents the heart of the artisan production process—where raw or partially processed materials are shaped into usable, semi-finished, or final products. Each artisan sub-sector undertakes this phase using a combination of inherited techniques, culturally embedded knowledge, and often rudimentary tools that emphasize craftsmanship over mechanization.

In textile and tailoring, artisans transform fabric through a series of stages including cutting according to patterns, sewing with either hand-operated or electric machines, dyeing (particularly in the case of tie-dye), and adding intricate embroidery. These processes blend both traditional Somali aesthetics and modern fashion sensibilities, and often involve delicate, time-consuming handwork that adds unique value to each item.

Blacksmiths and goldsmiths rely on smelting, hammering, molding, and engraving to convert metals into tools, decorative items, and jewelry. Their workshops are typically equipped with basic furnaces, anvils, and chisels, requiring significant manual dexterity and heat-resistance skills. Goldsmithing, in particular, demands precision and artistry, as products are often custom-made for weddings or cultural ceremonies.

Potters work with natural clay, shaping it by hand or using manually operated wheels. Once formed, the items—ranging from cooking pots to decorative containers—are dried and fired in makeshift kilns. Despite the rudimentary tools, the craftsmanship involved in shaping and decorating these items is profound, rooted in longstanding local traditions.

In the realm of traditional healing and incense production, the transformation phase involves blending organic ingredients such as herbs, resins, and oils. These are processed through drying, crushing, mixing, cooking, and curing. The resulting products—incense substances, healing pastes, or aromatic powders—are not only used locally but hold cultural significance.

Leathercraft artisans engage in curing raw hides, dyeing, softening, and cutting them to size. The leather is then stitched, embossed, or pressed into functional goods such as sandals, bags, belts, etc. This process is labor-intensive and often done by hand, though some workshops use basic presses for shaping.

Importantly, this stage of production remains heavily labor-reliant and artisanal in nature. In sub-sectors like tie-dye and pottery, the workload during peak production times leads artisans to form informal collectives. These groups pool labor and share knowledge, encouraging collaboration and community-based resilience in the absence of formal industrial support. Such cooperation also serves as a critical pathway for preserving cultural knowledge and mentoring the next generation of artisans.

5.1.4 Value Addition and Product Assembly

This stage marks the transition from basic crafted forms to polished, market-ready products. It involves applying finishing techniques that not only improve the visual appeal of items but also increase their durability, functionality, and perceived value—crucial factors in determining product success in both local and regional markets.

For textile artisans and tailors, value addition often comes in the form of detailed embroidery, beadwork, or appliqué, which infuse garments with cultural motifs and intricate designs. These embellishments distinguish artisanal clothing from mass-produced alternatives and are a major factor in customer preference, especially for ceremonial or festive wear. In tie-dye production, finishing may include adding lining, stitching hems, or combining dyed panels with complementary fabrics to enhance the garment's form and function.

In the leathercraft sector, artisans apply dyes and surface treatments, emboss brand marks or motifs, and use hand-stitching to reinforce seams—especially for items like bags and sandals. These touches not only increase durability but also brand recognition and aesthetic appeal. In more advanced workshops, metal rivets and zippers are added, sourced from other artisan segments or general hardware suppliers.

Potters enhance their products with glazing and painting, applying traditional or symbolic patterns to improve both water resistance and decorative quality. Some also experiment with burnishing and polishing to achieve a more refined look, while incense burners or tea pots may receive added design elements during this phase.

Blacksmiths polish finished tools or jewelry, sharpen or refine edges, and often combine metals with other materials—such as attaching wooden handles or decorative beads. The incorporation of functional or cultural details is a major draw for traditional farming tools, cutlery, and adornments.

Woodcarvers add value by smoothing surfaces, applying varnish, and engraving patterns or symbols through etching. Depending on the final use—furniture, decor, or utensils—they may also join different pieces of wood or affix other materials to enhance both strength and style.

This phase is also where inter-subsector collaboration becomes most apparent. Tailors might acquire custom-made buttons or fasteners; leather artisans may line their bags with colorful, tie-dyed fabrics; and potters might use wooden or metal stands crafted by other artisans. Such integrations create a rich, interconnected artisan ecosystem where collaboration strengthens product quality and innovation. These synergies not only promote diversification but also build community-level value chains, reinforcing resilience and adaptability in a changing market.

5.1.5 Packaging, Marketing, and Distribution

In the final stage of the artisan production process, the focus shifts to how finished products are packaged, promoted, and moved through market channels. While this phase may seem secondary to the production itself, it plays a vital role in determining the commercial success of artisan goods—especially in contexts where brand recognition, perceived quality, and customer convenience shape consumer behavior.

Packaging practices across the artisan sub-sectors remain largely basic and informal. In the textile and tailoring domain, finished garments are usually folded neatly and wrapped in transparent plastic or soft fabric bags, especially for local deliveries. However, packaging is rarely branded, which limits the ability of artisans to build identity, ensure traceability, or present their goods in premium markets. In some modern tailoring outlets or boutiques, garments may be hung on racks or boxed for display, but such practices are still limited to a few better-resourced entrepreneurs.

In the case of incense and henna, packaging has seen modest innovation. Some producers are now using small reusable metal tins, glass jars, or plastic containers to store and present their products. These are often repurposed containers rather than custom-designed packaging, but they improve storage and give products a more professional appearance. Labeling, if present, is often handwritten or printed with basic equipment, and rarely includes detailed product or safety information. This represents a barrier for reaching formal retail outlets or export markets that require standardization and labeling.

Pottery and jewelry items are typically sold without packaging, displayed on open stalls, tabletops, or shelves in local markets. For these items, visual presentation is crucial—arrangement, lighting, and how items are grouped all affect customer perception. However, the lack of protective packaging poses a challenge for both transport and export, where fragility, weather exposure, or theft can result in losses.

Marketing strategies are increasingly shaped by digital media, with WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook emerging as dominant platforms. Artisans post product images, customer testimonials, and short videos demonstrating their work processes to build trust and attract buyers. TikTok, in particular, is leveraged for storytelling and showcasing fashion

trends. These platforms allow for direct sales and negotiations, reducing transaction costs and enabling customer feedback loops. However, many artisans lack the digital skills or consistent internet access needed to maximize this channel, leaving a digital divide between more and less connected producers.

Despite the digital shift, word-of-mouth remains powerful—especially in close-knit communities where personal reputation and customer loyalty play significant roles. For many artisans, repeat customers and informal referrals generate a large portion of sales.

Distribution varies depending on product type and scale. While some artisans sell directly to customers from their workshops or homes, others rely on middlemen or local traders to move their products to broader markets. This is particularly true for those aiming to reach Djibouti, the Somali Region of Ethiopia, Puntland, or Mogadishu. These intermediaries handle logistics and sometimes marketing but often take significant margins, which can erode artisan profits. Nonetheless, their role remains critical in navigating fragmented or underdeveloped formal retail systems.

Overall, this phase reveals both innovation and constraint. While digital marketing and informal networks have created new avenues for artisan outreach, there is a pressing need for improved packaging standards, branding strategies, and structured distribution systems to unlock higher-value markets—particularly regional and diaspora-based ones.

5.1.6 Support Services and Institutional Linkages

Artisan producers in Somaliland operate within a landscape where formal support structures are still emerging. Although these services remain limited in scope and unevenly distributed, a growing ecosystem of institutional linkages is beginning to shape the development of the sector.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centers, particularly those based in Hargeisa and Burao, serve as the main formal avenues for skills development. These centers offer foundational training in tailoring, metalwork, and other crafts. However, their reach is often constrained by limited resources, outdated equipment, and lack of tailored curricula that reflect the evolving needs of local artisans. Despite these challenges, TVET centers play a critical role in introducing youth to artisanal trades and are increasingly seen as important entry points into the sector, especially for unemployed or out-of-school young people.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are another key pillar of support. Their involvement typically takes the form of short-term projects that offer grants, in-kind tools, or capacity-building sessions. In many cases, NGOs facilitate the formation of cooperatives or artisan associations to enhance group production and collective

marketing. These cooperative models, though often donor-driven, have provided valuable lessons in collaboration and scaling. However, sustainability remains a concern once external funding ends.

The broader support ecosystem—comprising business development services, financial institutions, and government bodies—is notably underdeveloped. Formal quality standards, regulatory frameworks, or tailored policy support for the artisan sector are either missing or poorly enforced. This policy vacuum makes it difficult for artisans to formalize their businesses, access credit, or integrate into value chains beyond their immediate markets.

Despite the limited institutional scaffolding, grassroots-level networks are forming organically. Particularly among women, informal systems of mutual aid, skills exchange, and pooled marketing have emerged. These networks enable members to share tools, collaborate on large orders, and provide backup labor when needed. While these systems are not formally recognized, they represent vital social infrastructure that sustains the sector in the absence of robust formal support.

Overall, while institutional linkages remain in their infancy, they are evolving. With targeted investment, policy engagement, and better integration of informal networks into formal support mechanisms, the artisan sector could benefit from stronger and more sustainable institutional backing.

5.1.7 Circular Practices, Interlinkages, and Emerging Circular Economy

While the artisan sector in Somaliland remains largely informal, signs of a budding circular economy are becoming increasingly visible across different crafts and cities. Resource reuse, inter-sectoral linkages, and waste minimization practices—although not yet systematized—demonstrate a growing awareness of sustainability among artisans. These practices reflect both traditional habits of thrift and emerging adaptations to economic and environmental pressures. The circular economy in this context is not only about environmental stewardship but also a pathway to economic efficiency, product diversification, and local value addition.

- **Waste Minimization through Reuse and Repurposing**

Many artisan sub-sectors demonstrate a strong tendency to minimize waste by repurposing byproducts and offcuts. In the tailoring and textile sector, fabric remnants—generated due to constant design turnover and custom orders—are rarely discarded. These scraps are reused to make patchwork items such as small bags, purses, cushion covers, and even children’s clothing. A significant portion of these offcuts also finds its way into the informal cleaning economy, particularly in restaurants and car washes where they are used as cleaning rags. In some cases, designers deliberately develop

patterns that optimize fabric usage to minimize leftover material—an example of upstream efficiency in the production process.

Leather artisans follow a similar path, turning leftover pieces from shoe, belt, and bag production into smaller items like keyholders, covers, or decorative motifs. These small accessories, which require minimal input and can be sold at affordable prices, help artisans maximize returns from each hide or sheet of leather. This practice not only supports waste reduction but also expands product lines and customer options.

In the woodcraft sub-sector, artisans use offcuts and shavings from carvings or furniture-making for secondary purposes. While large and high-quality pieces are prioritized for products like wall décor or utensils, smaller or irregular pieces are repurposed by incense makers, either as burning platforms or as carriers for aromatic oils and resins. In some cases, these wood remnants are sold as firewood or even used in kilns for pottery firing, closing the loop between crafts.

- **Inter-Sectoral Linkages and Secondary Inputs**

Beyond direct waste reuse, there is a deeper layer of circularity through inter-sectoral linkages—where the byproducts of one sub-sector become valuable inputs for another. For instance, artisans in tailoring sometimes collaborate with leatherworkers or blacksmiths to enhance their products. Buttons, buckles, embellishments, and decorative trims are sourced from fellow artisans, creating multi-craft products with unique aesthetic and functional appeal. Leather bags with textile linings or wood-embellished belts are examples of this kind of blended production.

Similarly, pottery—though limited in scale—has instances where broken or surplus items are remolded into incense burners or decorative holders. Though this remains underdeveloped due to limited infrastructure and market reach in the pottery sub-sector, it demonstrates the potential for enhanced circularity if supported through innovation and clustering.

Tie-dye artisans, who handle significant amounts of chemical dyes and water, show environmental consideration by batching dye processes to reduce chemical runoff and water usage. While the use of protective equipment and eco-friendly dyes is still minimal, there is a growing awareness among practitioners about the need for safe and sustainable practices.

- **Potential for Scaling and Systematization**

Despite being organic and often spontaneous, these emerging circular practices point to an ecosystem that is ripe for strategic scaling. If structured support—such as innovation hubs, cooperative clustering, and policy incentives—were introduced, the informal reuse and recycling currently practiced could evolve into formalized supply chains that benefit

multiple actors. Artisan groups could be supported to create waste exchange networks, where tailoring offcuts, wood remnants, leather scraps, and other byproducts are redistributed among craftspeople.

Training programs could also integrate circular production models, teaching artisans how to design for efficiency, reuse waste, and collaborate across sub-sectors. This would not only reduce environmental impact but also support business sustainability and job creation. Additionally, digital tools could help map these material flows and enable artisans to coordinate more effectively in sourcing and using secondary materials.

- **Cultural and Environmental Value**

Importantly, these circular practices resonate with traditional Somali values of frugality, creativity, and making the most out of what is available. Reinforcing these practices through contemporary sustainability frameworks could help preserve cultural identity while aligning with global environmental goals. Artisans already display remarkable ingenuity in minimizing waste and improvising with available resources; targeted support could unlock even greater potential.

5.1.8 Tools and Technologies Used

The tools and technologies employed across the artisan sector in Somaliland are largely manual, traditional, and in many cases, outdated. Most artisans rely on basic, hand-operated tools that have been passed down through generations, enabling them to maintain cultural authenticity but also limiting productivity, precision, and scalability.

In the tailoring and textile sub-sector, tools range from foot-pedaled sewing machines to hand-cutting tools, manual embroidery frames, and locally assembled ironing stations. Semi-industrial machines are present in better-resourced urban workshops, particularly in Hargeisa, allowing for higher stitching speeds and consistency. Digital tools are limited but growing, with some young designers using mobile apps for sketching patterns or promoting their products online.

Tie-dye artisans use buckets, wooden sticks, rubber bands, and plastic gloves—often improvised or of low quality—for their resist-dyeing processes. The absence of protective gear and chemical-safe equipment raises occupational safety concerns. The lack of controlled dyeing environments also affects the consistency and quality of outcomes.

Leatherworkers use punching tools, hammers, hand-stitching needles, embossing tools, and basic cutting blades. A few artisans possess foot-operated or motorized leather stitching machines, but these remain rare due to high costs. Finishing tools like edge

smoothers or logo stamps are often improvised or absent, affecting final product aesthetics.

In woodworking, basic chisels, hand saws, and sandpaper dominate. Power tools like electric saws or polishers are accessible only to a few artisans who collaborate with the construction sector or operate in semi-industrial zones. Manual carving remains the norm for decorative items.

Blacksmiths and goldsmiths use traditional forges, anvils, tongs, and rudimentary molds. While effective for simple tools and ornaments, these setups lack precision, safety, and scale. Precious metal work is often limited by the absence of refining or casting equipment.

Potters work with hand-mixed clay, manually operated wheels (or no wheel at all), and basic kilns fueled by firewood. Consistency in shaping and firing remains a challenge due to the absence of temperature control mechanisms.

Henna and incense producers use crushing stones, manual sifters, and mixing bowls. The lack of standardized measurement tools affects consistency, while packaging remains manual and rudimentary.

While artisans show ingenuity in adapting traditional tools to diverse uses, the general lack of access to modern technologies—such as automated cutters, electric sewing machines, digital pattern design software, temperature-controlled kilns, or chemical-safe dyeing tanks—constrains their ability to improve quality, scale production, and meet export standards. Nonetheless, the spread of smartphones and mobile internet offers an important entry point for technology integration, especially in marketing, design inspiration, and customer outreach.

5.1.9 Identification of Bottlenecks and Leverage Points

5.1.9.1 Bottlenecks

- **Limited Access to Quality Tools and Technology**

Most artisans work with basic, hand-operated tools, many of which are second-hand or locally improvised. The lack of capital to invest in modern, efficient, and safe equipment—such as motorized machines, digital design tools, or protective gear—slows production, reduces quality, and limits innovation.

- **Inadequate Skill Development Systems**

There is a lack of formal training institutions with updated curricula across all sub-sectors. Artisans often rely on informal apprenticeships, which pass on traditional skills but rarely incorporate modern techniques, business acumen, or design innovation.

- **Fragmented Supply Chains and Raw Material Insecurity**

Many artisans depend on irregular supplies of raw materials, both locally and through imports. Price volatility, transportation delays, and quality inconsistencies (especially for fabrics, leather, and dyes) undermine production continuity and competitiveness.

- **Weak Market Linkages and Export Barriers**

Most artisans sell in local markets or through informal diaspora channels. Poor packaging, limited knowledge of quality standards, and absence of export facilitation structures inhibit growth beyond domestic or regional markets.

- **Policy and Institutional Gaps**

The artisan sector lacks recognition in national or regional policy frameworks. This results in minimal public investment, absence of incentives, limited access to finance, and no coordinated support systems such as cooperatives or common service centers.

- **Occupational Safety and Environmental Risks**

Particularly in tie-dye, pottery, and metalwork, artisans operate in unsafe conditions with exposure to chemicals, fire hazards, or physical strain—further exacerbated by poor ventilation, lack of protective gear, and limited health awareness.

5.1.9.2 Leverage Points

- **TVET and Skills Development Expansion**

Strengthening vocational training centers with updated equipment, practical modules, and tailored programs for each craft sub-sector would significantly uplift productivity and quality. Integrating digital design, business skills, and safety protocols into training would have a multiplier effect.

- **Access to Appropriate Technology and Tools**

Providing subsidized or loan-based access to modern artisan tools—such as electric sewing machines, dyeing tanks, cutting presses, or pottery wheels—can drastically improve efficiency. Mobile-based solutions for digital sketching, inventory management, or pricing tools also hold great promise.

- **Input Supply Chain Stabilization**

Establishing cooperatives or collective procurement models could stabilize access to raw materials, reduce costs, and ensure quality inputs. Partnerships with regional suppliers or bulk importers can help minimize disruptions.

- **Market and Branding Support**

Connecting artisans to broader markets through digital platforms, branding support, and participation in trade fairs can enhance visibility and competitiveness. Training on product presentation, pricing, and customer feedback systems can further drive market growth.

- **Policy Inclusion and Institutional Recognition**

Recognizing the artisan sector in local and national development frameworks would open doors to tailored financing, land allocation, infrastructure development, and public procurement quotas. Creating formal networks or cooperatives would also enable collective bargaining and support.

- **Circular Economy and Sustainability Integration**

Supporting artisans to formalize and expand circular practices—such as fabric scrap reuse, dye batch processing, or inter-subsector material exchanges—can reduce environmental impact while enhancing product diversity and resilience.

5.7 Economic Assessment of the Artisan Sector in Somaliland

The artisan sector in Somaliland is a dynamic, culturally significant industry with the potential to drive inclusive economic development, particularly for women and youth. This conceptual economic model maps the flow of resources, cost structures, stakeholder roles, and benefit distribution across the artisan value chain. It aims to provide a framework for understanding the sector's operations and identifying leverage points for optimizing performance and livelihoods.

5.7.1 Resource Flows in the Artisan Sector

The flow of resources within the artisan sector in Somaliland illustrates a dynamic and interconnected system shaped by the availability of inputs, the role of labor, the constraints around capital access, and the energy sources powering production. Artisans draw from both local and imported resources to maintain their production activities. Raw materials such as fabrics, threads, leather, clay, wood, metals, natural dyes, and incense ingredients form the foundation of the sector. These are sourced from regional markets, local harvests, and in some cases, through imports from countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, UAE, or China. Fabric and leather, for example, may come through traders operating in Hargeisa, while pottery clay is often sourced from natural deposits around rural areas. This blend of sources introduces both opportunity

and vulnerability, as access can be disrupted by price fluctuations, import delays, or regional instability.

Labor, predominantly informal and often family-based, is another essential resource. Women play a central role in textile, tie-dye, henna, and small-scale production, typically working from home or in group settings. Youth engagement is growing, especially where TVET institutions are active, but many young people remain unengaged due to a lack of formal career paths in artisan trades. Apprenticeships remain a common method for skill transfer, though they vary widely in quality and outcomes. Labor productivity is generally low due to limited access to modern tools and consistent training.

Capital enters the artisan economy through personal savings, informal loans, microfinance institutions, and NGO interventions. However, access to finance remains inconsistent and constrained by the informality of artisan businesses, which often lack the documentation or credit history required by formal lenders. Microfinance providers and remittance-supported investments help bridge this gap, but they rarely reach the scale needed to modernize operations. In-kind capital support from NGOs—such as the provision of tools, raw materials, or startup kits—is common but project-based and temporary.

Energy flows within the sector are largely traditional. Manual labor is the primary energy source for many processes, especially in tailoring, woodcarving, and leatherwork. Firewood and charcoal are used in blacksmithing, pottery, and incense making, especially where kilns or forges are involved. Electricity, where it is used, supports a few semi-industrial operations, but costs and limited infrastructure hinder consistent usage.

These resource flows form a cycle that begins with input acquisition and culminates in the production and distribution of artisan goods. However, inefficiencies in this cycle—including underutilized labor, limited skills, material shortages, and weak energy infrastructure—create bottlenecks that inhibit growth. Optimizing these flows through improved coordination, support services, and further improving on the existing circular economy practices holds significant potential for enhancing artisan livelihoods and sector-wide resilience.

5.7.2 Cost Structure Analysis

The cost structure of the artisan sector in Somaliland is multi-layered and reflects the complexity of operating within informal markets with limited institutional support. Costs are typically categorized into fixed, variable, transaction, and opportunity costs, each contributing differently to the sustainability and profitability of artisan operations.

Fixed costs are incurred regardless of the scale of production and include the cost of renting workshops or working spaces, the purchase of essential tools and equipment

such as sewing machines, kilns, and looms, and the maintenance of basic infrastructure like furniture, display units, and storage facilities. These are initial capital expenditures that artisans may acquire through savings, donor programs, or community-based lending mechanisms.

Variable costs fluctuate based on production volume and include raw material procurement (fabrics, dyes, leather, metals), transportation, packaging supplies, energy or fuel (particularly wood or charcoal), and wages for hired labor during peak seasons or bulk orders. These costs are often the most burdensome, particularly due to import reliance and market volatility.

Transaction costs, though less visible, significantly affect artisan profitability. These include informal market access fees, time spent negotiating or searching for buyers and suppliers, and barriers stemming from a lack of standardized pricing or contract-based trading. These frictions create inefficiencies and reduce predictability for small producers.

Opportunity costs represent the value of foregone alternatives. In the artisan context, this could mean the time women spend crafting instead of undertaking paid employment or household responsibilities, or the missed educational and employment opportunities for youth who take up artisanal trades in the absence of better alternatives. These costs are harder to quantify but essential for understanding the full economic landscape of the sector.

5.7.3 Benefit Distribution

The artisan sector in Somaliland generates a wide array of tangible and intangible benefits. These benefits extend beyond income to encompass social cohesion, cultural preservation, and economic diversification.

Economically, the sector serves as a critical livelihood source for thousands of households, especially women-led ones. It enables job creation across the value chain—from producers to suppliers, marketers, and transporters. The circulation of money within local communities—through the purchase of raw materials, use of transport services, and consumption—produces a positive multiplier effect, contributing to community-level economic stability.

Socially, the sector enhances the status of women by offering a platform for income generation, self-expression, and leadership within cooperatives or community groups. It also provides a form of social protection, especially for individuals with limited formal employment options. Youth benefit through skills development and pathways to self-employment, especially when supported by TVET programs.

Culturally, the sector acts as a repository for Somali heritage. Crafts such as pottery, blacksmithing, and traditional garment-making preserve stories, symbols, and skills passed down through generations. This cultural continuity is invaluable in maintaining community identity and pride.

From a market perspective, the artisan sector is expanding into both local and export domains. Traditional clothing, home decor, and personalized items have found eager buyers among the Somali diaspora and neighboring regions. The increasing use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook enables artisans to reach a broader customer base without relying on formal retail structures.

5.7.4 Local and Export Market Dynamics

Local market dynamics in Somaliland's artisan sector are largely characterized by informal trade, with most sales taking place through direct interaction, word-of-mouth, and small-scale market stalls. Cultural events, weddings, school programs, and national holidays drive seasonal demand, particularly for traditional garments, decorations, and jewelry.

Artisans often tailor their products to fit local tastes and social functions. The lack of formal retail infrastructure has been partially offset by digital engagement, as mobile-based marketing through WhatsApp and Facebook grows. However, poor internet access, limited digital skills, and lack of structured e-commerce platforms restrict broader market participation.

Export markets—though currently underdeveloped—offer significant potential, particularly in the Somali diaspora. Buyers in Djibouti, Ethiopia's Somali Region, Puntland, and even overseas (through diaspora networks) express consistent interest in customized, culturally resonant items. Constraints such as poor packaging, inconsistent quality standards, and logistics challenges limit expansion, but with targeted interventions, this segment could become a key driver of artisan sector growth.

5.7.5 Challenges in Resource Flows

Despite its potential, the artisan sector faces persistent challenges that hinder the efficient flow of resources and slow overall growth. Price volatility and poor-quality raw materials are recurring obstacles. Artisans often have limited bargaining power, rely on inconsistent suppliers, or import materials at inflated costs due to weak collective purchasing systems. This undermines product quality, competitiveness, and profitability.

Infrastructural challenges—including lack of reliable energy, inadequate workspaces, and poor transport networks—complicate both production and market access. Informality remains a barrier to institutional engagement, access to finance, and recognition in policy frameworks.

Gender disparities further inhibit growth. Women artisans, who dominate production in many sub-sectors, often lack mobility, time, and access to decision-making spaces. Youth engagement is hampered by the perception that artisan work lacks prestige and opportunity. Finally, the absence of a regulatory framework, product quality standards, and dedicated sector policy limits efforts to formalize, scale, and protect artisan enterprises.

5.7.6 Artisan Resource Flow Diagram

Below diagram illustrates the sequential flow of resources and production stages in the artisan sector. It starts with the acquisition of raw materials and the input of capital, energy, and labor. These resources feed into the primary processing phase, where materials are shaped and treated using traditional or semi-mechanized methods. The value addition stage includes finishing touches such as embellishment, polishing, and packaging. The final products are distributed through local markets, digital platforms, and informal export channels. Ultimately, this flow generates tangible and intangible benefits including income, social recognition, and the preservation of cultural value.

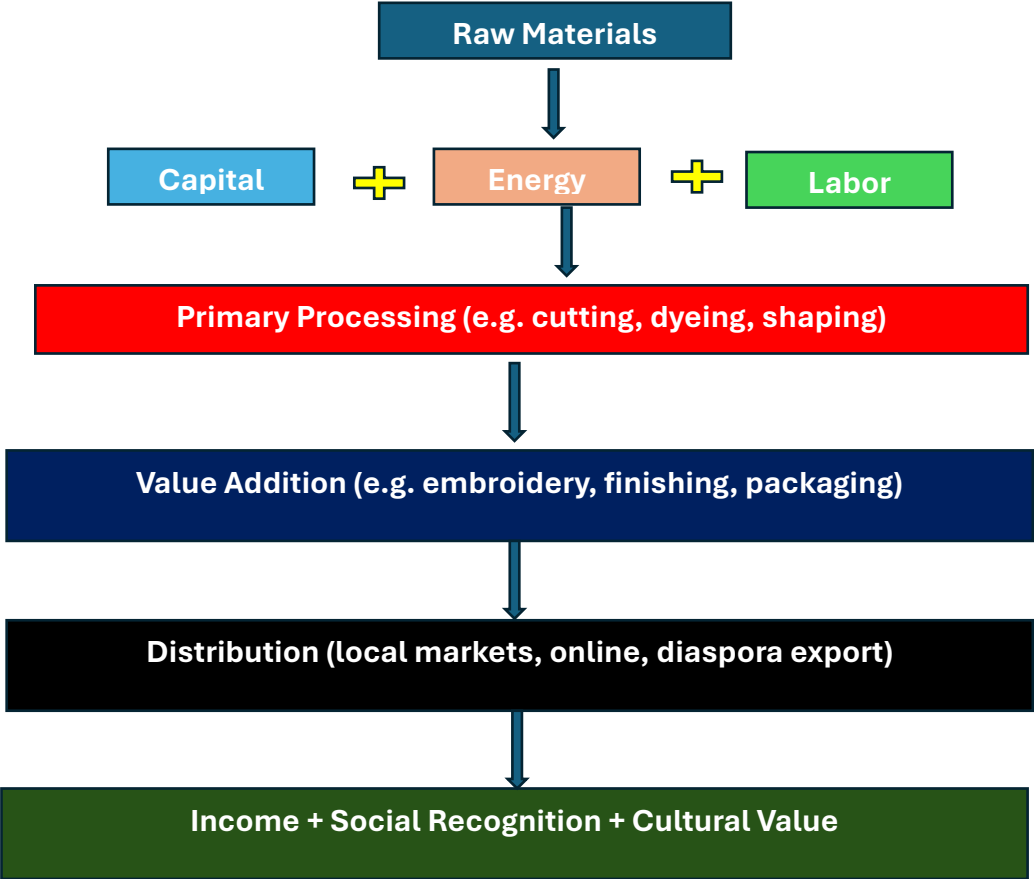


Diagram 1: Artisan Resource Flow

5.8 Market Systems and Demand Analysis

The artisan sector in Somaliland operates within a market system that is both highly localized and increasingly influenced by diaspora demand. Artisans cater primarily to local communities where products are used for everyday wear, cultural ceremonies, and social functions. However, demand from the Somali diaspora—particularly for textiles, embroidery, and customized traditional clothing—has steadily increased, often facilitated by informal courier systems or intermediaries who manage exports through regional trade routes to places like Djibouti, the Somali Region of Ethiopia, and Puntland. This dual-market orientation allows artisans to benefit from both stable local consumption and higher-margin diaspora sales, though the latter remains constrained by logistics, packaging limitations, and inconsistent quality control.

Customer behavior within these markets reflects a combination of deep-rooted cultural preferences and emerging modern influences. Using ethnographic shadowing and customer journey mapping techniques, the study revealed that most customers are highly value-conscious and maintain strong social ties with the artisans they purchase from. Preferences are influenced by occasions such as weddings, holidays, and religious events. Customers often provide direct input on design, fabric, and embellishment choices, reinforcing a co-creation model. Purchasing decisions are not purely transactional; they are embedded in trust, reputation, and family referrals.

The daily routines of artisans shed light on customer behavior patterns. Orders typically arrive throughout the day, with negotiations about design and pricing happening in person. Word-of-mouth plays a major role in customer acquisition, especially for women artisans who operate from home. Market visits for selling or showcasing products happen in the early afternoon, where social interactions merge with sales efforts. Customers expect personalized service, often discussing their preferences extensively before committing to a purchase. A strong emphasis is placed on product uniqueness and cultural relevance, and there is limited patience for delays or inconsistencies in quality.

Distribution channels are largely informal but functional. Most products reach consumers through face-to-face interactions at home-based workshops, market stalls, and small tailoring shops. Artisans frequently use middlemen or relatives to deliver goods within and across cities. For diaspora markets, products are sent via personal networks—relatives visiting abroad or travelers returning to the diaspora. There is minimal use of logistics companies, largely due to cost, lack of awareness, and packaging limitations. Retail shops remain underutilized by individual artisans, though some artisans have begun exploring display spaces.

Marketing practices in the artisan sector are evolving. Traditional marketing is based on visibility at markets, community events, and through referrals. However, digital

engagement is increasingly important, particularly among younger artisans. WhatsApp is the most widely used platform for showcasing products, taking orders, and maintaining client relationships. Facebook and TikTok are gaining traction for wider product exposure and brand-building efforts. Despite this progress, most artisans lack structured digital marketing strategies, professional product photography, or e-commerce tools. The lack of digital literacy and reliable internet access in some areas further limits the full potential of online marketing.

There is a clear opportunity to enhance market systems by investing in marketing training, improving digital access, and strengthening informal-to-formal distribution transitions. Building trust-based supply chains, promoting artisan branding, and supporting logistics infrastructure can help artisans tap into new markets while better serving their local base.

5.9 Regulatory and Institutional Environment

The regulatory and institutional landscape governing the artisan sector in Somaliland remains fragmented and underdeveloped. Artisans often operate in a legal grey zone where formal business registration is rare, and awareness of existing regulatory frameworks is low. While general business laws and trade licenses exist under national commerce and trade policies, they are not specifically tailored to the needs or realities of artisan producers, many of whom operate from home or in informal spaces. As such, compliance with legal procedures like registration, taxation, and regulatory approvals is minimal, and enforcement is often inconsistent.

Access to formalization mechanisms such as tax registration or legal recognition is hindered by bureaucracy, lack of awareness, and perceived irrelevance among artisan producers. The absence of simplified, low-cost registration options discourages micro and home-based artisans from engaging with formal systems. Additionally, artisans who wish to grow their operations often face challenges acquiring permits or licenses, especially in the absence of a defined artisan category within existing business classification systems.

The role of institutions such as government ministries, NGOs, donors, and training centers is critical but remains uncoordinated. Government ministries—particularly those of Commerce, Education, Women and Youth, and Culture—have the potential to regulate and support the sector, but current engagement is minimal and often reactive. Policy oversight specific to artisan development is lacking, and inter-ministerial collaboration is weak. Where involvement exists, it often focuses on isolated vocational training or participation in national events rather than sector-wide development strategies.

NGOs and international development organizations are among the most active stakeholders in providing support to artisans. They offer grants, tools, startup capital, and short-term training, and they occasionally facilitate the formation of cooperatives or marketing platforms. However, these interventions are frequently project-based, time-bound, and not systematically integrated with broader development or economic planning frameworks.

TVET institutions in urban centers such as Hargeisa and Burao offer some level of artisan-related training—primarily in tailoring, carpentry, and metalwork. Yet, these programs are often limited in scope and are not specific to artisan in terms of curriculum, teaching tools, and market relevance. Stronger linkages are needed between these institutions and artisan communities to tailor programs to local economic opportunities and ensure graduates are job-ready.

The sector suffers from notable policy gaps. There is no national policy or strategy focused specifically on artisan development, despite the sector's socio-economic importance. Support mechanisms such as grants, subsidies, infrastructure development, and innovation incentives are largely absent or sporadic. The lack of recognized standards and certification also hinders quality assurance and limits the export potential of artisan goods.

Strengthening the regulatory and institutional environment requires coordinated action to formalize the sector, provide clear policy direction, simplify registration processes, and create targeted support programs. A national artisan development strategy—jointly implemented by government, NGOs, and development partners—would help position the sector as a viable contributor to Somaliland's economy, preserving heritage while enabling sustainable livelihoods.

5.10 Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis

The artisan sector in Somaliland demonstrates both significant potential and notable disparities when it comes to gender and social inclusion. Women form the backbone of many artisan activities—particularly in textile production, tie-dye, henna, beadwork, and small-scale household crafts—yet they continue to face systemic barriers that limit their economic empowerment and growth. As confirmed by both FGDs and ethnographic shadowing, women's work is often home-based, and frequently intertwined with domestic duties. One participant in Hargeisa remarked, "I have to design and sew myself because hiring help is expensive and unreliable—plus I still need to cook for the family." This reflects the gendered multitasking that defines much of women's labor in the sector.

In Somaliland, the division of labor within traditional artisan sectors is highly gendered, with women playing a central role in crafts such as textile weaving, henna application, beadwork, and basketry. While their skills are essential to the preservation of cultural heritage and household income generation, women artisans often face significant barriers. Limited access to markets, restricted mobility, and difficulty obtaining finance or materials hinder their ability to scale their work or reach broader audiences. Many women produce their goods from home, balancing economic activity with domestic labor, caregiving, and community obligations. This dual burden limits their time, energy, and opportunities to expand their craft into a sustainable livelihood. One of the FGD participants said “We make our crafts between cooking, cleaning, and caring for our families—there’s never enough time to focus fully on growing our work.”

The challenges women face are not just economic—they are also shaped by social and structural constraints. Traditional gender roles often restrict their ability to participate fully in public or commercial life. To support inclusive growth in the artisan sector, interventions must consider these intersecting limitations and prioritize not only skills development but also social empowerment, access to capital, and safe avenues for women to engage directly with markets.

Women’s participation is extensive but informal, with limited access to credit, training, or market mobility. While women that own formal workshops are limited but they actively manage their businesses, make independent decisions, and engage directly with customers and suppliers. They demonstrate a high degree of autonomy in pricing, procurement, and marketing. However, they often face significant challenges in securing loans or accessing formal financial services needed for business expansion.

Youth involvement in artisan work is increasingly driven by unemployment and lack of alternatives. While some are attracted to tailoring, woodworking, or other crafts, many view the sector as low-status and lacking upward mobility. Skills transfer occurs through apprenticeships, but these are often informal and lack standardization. TVET programs exist but don’t always align with market trends or youth aspirations. A young participant from Burao stated, “We need tools, training, and motivation. Right now, artisan work is just something to pass time—not a real career.” This highlights a need for structured pathways that validate artisan trades as viable economic choices.

Social norms also significantly shape the perception and distribution of artisan labor. Artisan work—especially handcrafts and traditional products—is often seen as ‘women’s work,’ undervalued compared to formal employment or entrepreneurial ventures. Men dominate sub-sectors like blacksmithing and carpentry, while women cluster in lower-income, higher-labor roles such as tailoring or incense making. These gendered divisions are reinforced by mobility restrictions, safety concerns, and societal expectations regarding women’s public roles.

Decision-making within artisan enterprises is similarly gendered. Men are more likely to lead tailoring men clothes and many own capital-intensive tools and machinery. Women lead the production of women clothes. When men and women co-own for instance tailoring business (although this was limited) it is likely that men make most of the decisions and women some of the basic decisions—like fabric selection or stitching—but they are mostly excluded from strategic areas like pricing, investment, and business growth. In FGDs, several women indicated they would “prefer group work or cooperatives” if it provided collective safety, negotiation power, and financial literacy.

The inclusion of marginalized groups—such as persons with disabilities, minority clans, or rural artisans—is minimal. These groups often lack access to artisan networks, training opportunities, or market platforms. Very few artisan support initiatives explicitly address their needs. This exclusion limits the broader equity potential of the sector.

Addressing these gaps requires gender-intentional programming, inclusive policies, and targeted investment. Key strategies include mobile or home-based training for women, incentives for youth-led startups, formal recognition of women’s economic contributions, and tailored outreach for marginalized communities. Embedding social inclusion into artisan sector development will ensure a more equitable and resilient future.

5.11 Financial and Business Development Services

Access to finance remains one of the most critical barriers facing artisan entrepreneurs in Somaliland, especially for women. Despite their active participation in production and management, most women in the artisan sector lack access to formal financial systems. As indicated by the participant from Dahab Microfinance, majority of women artisans are unregistered, have no formal business addresses, and often do not operate under an official business name. This lack of formal identity restricts their ability to access loans, attract investment, or open business bank accounts. As a result, financial services remain out of reach for many, limiting opportunities for expansion, mechanization, or market scaling.

Microfinance institutions play a central role in attempting to bridge this gap. Providers like Dahab Microfinance and other cooperative-based lenders offer small loans or group-based credit to informal business owners, typically with simplified requirements. However, uptake remains low due to fear of debt, lack of awareness, and the complexity of repayment structures. Banks and larger financial institutions are mostly inaccessible to artisans due to high collateral demands, limited client support, and a lack of tailored financial products.

Cooperatives, when well-organized, can serve as important intermediaries. They provide platforms for pooled savings, collective bargaining for credit, and group loan

guarantees. However, the cooperative movement in the artisan sector is still emerging and lacks the regulatory recognition and institutional support required for long-term sustainability.

Business development services, including entrepreneurship support and skills training, are provided intermittently by NGOs and donor-funded programs. These often focus on production skills, such as tailoring or dyeing, but less frequently on entrepreneurship, financial literacy, or strategic planning. Consequently, artisans may excel in craftsmanship but lack core business competencies like bookkeeping, profit tracking, or market positioning.

Financial literacy is a notable constraint. Many artisans operate on cash-based systems, with limited use of mobile banking, recordkeeping, or formal budgeting. Credit constraints are amplified by this knowledge gap. Artisans are often unaware of their creditworthiness, unable to calculate and schedule repayments, or unclear about repayment obligations. Some fear taking loans altogether due to community stories of debt burdens or asset loss.

Improving financial and business development services requires a multifaceted approach such as expanding mobile banking access, formalizing artisan businesses, promoting group-based savings and lending models, and embedding entrepreneurship and financial literacy training into artisan support programs. When combined, these efforts can enable artisans to not only sustain but grow their businesses and enhance their contribution to Somaliland's economy.

5.12 Circular Economy and Sustainability Practices

The artisan sector in Somaliland demonstrates a variety of emerging circular economy practices, though most remain informal and underdeveloped. Existing practices include the reuse of fabric scraps from tailoring into cleaning cloths, patchwork accessories, or small household items. Leather remnants are transformed into keyholders, trimmings, or decorative patches, while wood offcuts are often repurposed for incense burners or used as firewood. In tie-dye production, some artisans batch their dyeing to minimize water and chemical waste. Designers also apply more efficient cutting patterns to reduce material loss.

Despite these efforts, sustainability is not yet a formalized or strategic objective for most artisans. Practices are driven more by necessity and cost-saving than by environmental awareness or structured green innovation. There is strong potential for upcycling, especially if artisans are trained to turn waste materials into marketable products, such as fashion accessories, eco-friendly packaging, or home décor items. Additionally,

interest in sustainable and locally made goods is growing among the Somali diaspora and environmentally conscious consumers, suggesting new market opportunities.

Community perceptions around sustainability are generally positive, though not always aligned with circular economy principles. Many artisans and customers appreciate reuse for its cost-effectiveness, but lack awareness of broader environmental impacts. There is also limited engagement from government or NGOs in promoting environmental responsibility within the sector. Most sustainability practices are neither rewarded nor incentivized, and tools such as waste sorting bins, natural dyes, or eco-friendly materials are rarely available.

To bridge these gaps, targeted interventions are needed to raise awareness about sustainability, develop green skills, and supply the tools required for low-waste production. Training programs should highlight the economic and environmental value of circular practices, while policy makers can support innovation through incentives, certifications, and market linkages. By embedding sustainability into artisan value chains, Somaliland's artisan sector can not only reduce its environmental footprint but also position itself as a progressive, globally relevant industry.

5.13 Infrastructure and Enabling Environment

The artisan sector in Somaliland operates within an infrastructure landscape that is largely informal and fragmented, limiting the efficiency and scalability of production. Most artisans work from home-based settings or small, rented market stalls. These physical workspaces often lack adequate lighting, ventilation, and security, which hinders productivity and increases health risks.

Access to essential utilities such as electricity and water is inconsistent, particularly outside major cities. Unreliable electricity and the high cost disrupt the use of machinery like sewing machines and metalwork tools. Transport infrastructure also poses a challenge—many artisans rely on public minibuses or personal arrangements for the delivery of materials and finished goods. Limited transport access restricts both input procurement and product distribution, especially in remote or peri-urban areas.

Artisans face notable constraints in accessing equipment and maintenance services. Basic tools are often handmade, secondhand, or imported, with little support for repair or replacement. Many artisans, especially women and youth, lack the capital or technical knowledge to invest in modern machinery. Equipment-sharing arrangements exist informally but are not standardized or institutionalized.

Digital and mobile infrastructure is more promising but still underutilized. While smartphone ownership is increasing, especially among youth, reliable internet access

and digital literacy remain uneven. Platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook are used for marketing, but more sophisticated tools for learning, inventory tracking, or online sales are largely absent. Few artisans have formal e-commerce setups, and most rely on direct messaging or informal referrals for customer interaction.

Enhancing the enabling environment will require coordinated investments in physical infrastructure, basic utilities, tool supply chains, and digital access. Development of artisan hubs with reliable energy, water, and shared equipment could dramatically improve productivity. Strengthening transport and logistics networks would expand market reach. Finally, promoting digital inclusion through training and subsidized access could position artisans to better participate in the growing online economy.

5.14 Stakeholder Network Analysis

The artisan sector in Somaliland operates through a dispersed yet interdependent network of stakeholders. These include producers, suppliers, designers, market intermediaries, support organizations, and institutions. Mapping these actors and their relationships reveals both strong interlinkages and significant gaps in coordination.

At the core of the network are the artisans themselves—individual producers, cooperatives, and informal groups—who are primarily responsible for manufacturing textile, leather, incense, tie-dye, and metal-based products. Surrounding them are input suppliers (e.g., fabric, dye, leather traders), tool providers, and informal financiers. These actors maintain transactional relationships with artisans based largely on trust and repeat business. However, these connections are largely informal, undocumented, and vulnerable to disruptions.

Supportive stakeholders include NGOs, microfinance institutions, TVET centers, and trade fair organizers. While some of these actors engage artisans directly, many operate in parallel, leading to a duplication of efforts or disconnected service provision. For example, while multiple NGOs offer training programs, they rarely coordinate curricula or link artisans to long-term market pathways. This fragmented support landscape limits sector-wide learning and stifles innovation.

Collaboration patterns vary by location. In urban centers like Hargeisa, artisan clusters benefit from semi-formal networks and sporadic donor-driven programs that facilitate peer learning and joint marketing. In contrast, cities like Borama and Burao experience more isolated operations, with fewer opportunities for collective action or coordinated investment. Trust levels between actors remain high at the community level, especially in long-standing relationships. However, trust declines when scaling to broader networks—such as accessing financial institutions or engaging with government programs—due to perceived bureaucratic inefficiencies or lack of transparency.

The value chain map illustrates a flow beginning with input procurement (from local and imported sources), moving through production (in tailoring shops, workshops, or homes), and ending in sales through local markets, social media platforms, or diaspora intermediaries. Gaps emerge in quality assurance, packaging, branding, and export logistics, where no clear stakeholders take ownership. These gaps present opportunities for targeted investment and capacity-building.

Institutional champions within the ecosystem include NGOs who have piloted successful artisan support initiatives mostly in tailoring. TVET institutions have the potential to serve as anchor points for training, innovation, and sector formalization. Microfinance providers such as Dahab Microfinance play a growing role in expanding financial access, although their reach remains limited. Government bodies—particularly local economic development departments—could emerge as ecosystem stewards if equipped with the right mandates, incentives, and resources.

To strengthen the stakeholder network, it is essential to formalize coordination mechanisms—such as artisan federations, public-private working groups, or digital directories of service providers. By fostering collective action, shared standards, and institutional collaboration, Somaliland’s artisan sector can become a more integrated and resilient economic ecosystem.

5.14.1 Roles of Key Actors in the Artisan Industry in Somaliland

The artisan industry in Somaliland operates through a multi-actor ecosystem that influences production, value chain development, market access, and sustainability. Each actor group plays a unique and complementary role, contributing to or influencing the sector’s growth and challenges.

1. Producers (Artisans, Master Craftspeople, Apprentices, Cooperatives)

- Create handmade goods using traditional skills and local knowledge.
- Serve as cultural custodians and innovators within the value chain.
- Train new artisans through informal apprenticeship models.
- Organize into cooperatives to pool resources and access collective markets.
- Drive product innovation, though often limited by access to training and materials.
- Act as small-scale entrepreneurs managing pricing, client relations, and inventory.
- Preserve and transmit cultural heritage through intergenerational skills transfer.

2. Input Suppliers (Raw Material, Dye, and Tool Providers)

- Supply key production inputs such as fabrics, leather, wood, metal, dyes, and hand tools.
- Influence production quality, timelines, and costs.
- Act as intermediaries between import sources and local artisans.
- Address challenges related to the consistency, affordability, and localization of inputs.
- Have the potential to enable scale through better distribution and coordination.
- Collaborate with artisans on product development by introducing new materials and techniques.
- Promote sustainable and eco-friendly materials to support circular economy practices.

3. Design and Development Experts (Designers, Product Developers, Quality Control Specialists)

- Enhance product appeal through modern and market-responsive designs.
- Offer guidance on branding, color schemes, ergonomics, and user experience.
- Train artisans on quality standards and finishing techniques.
- Bridge traditional craft knowledge with modern consumer preferences.
- Serve as market interpreters, adapting global design trends into locally viable products.
- Build artisan capacity through training, mentorship, and design incubation programs.

4. Market Access Actors (Retailers, Wholesalers, Exporters, Online Sellers)

- Facilitate local and regional sale of artisan products.
- Connect producers with broader markets including diaspora and tourists.
- Help artisans understand pricing, packaging, and consumer behavior.
- Organize and participate in trade fairs, exhibitions, and online marketplaces.
- Play a growing role through social media marketing and digital platforms.
- Facilitate logistics and supply chain processes, including packaging, storage, and delivery.
- Provide customer feedback and market insights to inform product improvements.

5. Promotion and Advocacy Groups (NGOs, Content Creators, Marketing Consultants)

- Promote the social, economic, and cultural value of artisan work.
- Run awareness campaigns that help artisans reach broader audiences.
- Support product packaging, storytelling, and brand development.
- Advocate for policies and investments that benefit the artisan sector.

- Raise donor interest in artisan development and youth engagement.
- Advocate for artisan-friendly policies and trade protections at national and local levels.
- Document and promote artisan histories and practices through media and storytelling.

6. Financial Institutions (Microfinance Providers, Banks, Crowdfunding Platforms)

- Provide microloans, savings products, and financial literacy training.
- Offer investment capital (though limited) to small-scale artisan enterprises.
- Act as key enablers of business start-up and expansion.
- Often apply strict lending criteria that exclude informal artisan businesses.
- Could play a stronger role through artisanal financial product innovation.
- Provide digital financial services tailored to informal artisans, such as mobile banking and micro-loans.
- Offer micro-insurance products to protect artisan livelihoods and assets.

7. Institutional Support Stakeholders (Government Agencies, Educational Institutions, Development Partners)

- Formulate policies and regulations affecting small industries.
- Provide vocational and technical training in artisan-relevant trades.
- Facilitate infrastructure development and market access initiatives.
- Coordinate donor funding, pilot projects, and entrepreneurship programs.
- Set quality, environmental, and labor standards for artisan production.
- Establish quality standards and certification schemes for artisan products (e.g., fair trade or origin labeling).
- Create linkages between the artisan sector and other industries like tourism, education, and agriculture.

8. Cultural Stakeholders (Community Elders, Heritage Organizations, Religious Leaders)

- Preserve traditional knowledge and ethical production norms.
- Influence societal attitudes toward artisan work, especially among youth and women.
- Participate in cultural festivals that showcase local crafts.
- Help ensure crafts retain authenticity and intergenerational relevance.
- Support revival of disappearing crafts through community-led initiatives.
- Organize cultural exhibitions and showcases that promote artisan visibility and appreciation.
- Influence societal norms around artisan work, especially concerning gender roles and cultural legitimacy.

5.14.2 Value Chain Map

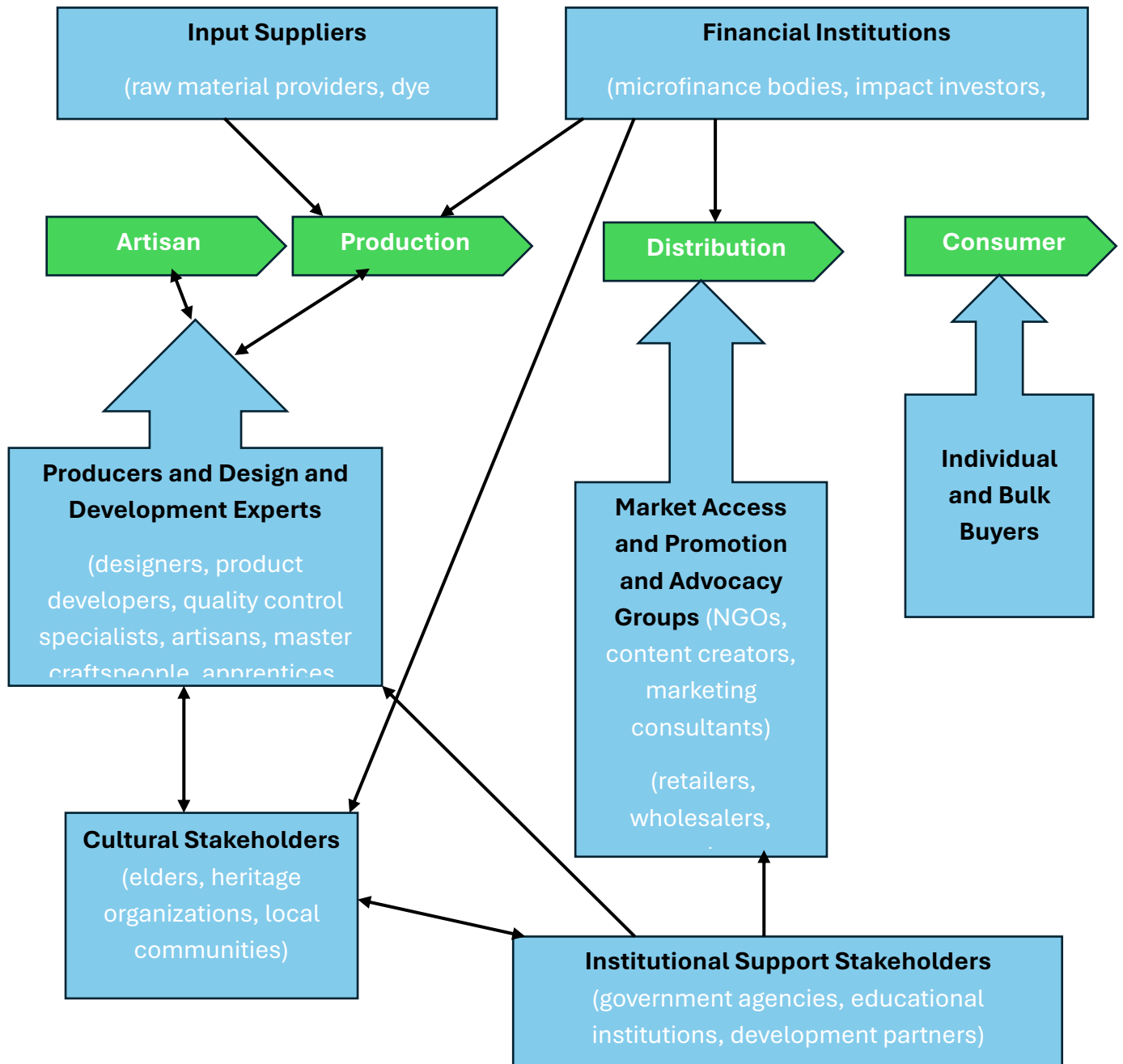


Diagram 2: Value Chain Map

5.15 Livelihoods and Aspirations

The livelihoods of artisan producers in Somaliland are shaped by the structure and scale of their engagement in the sector. Income levels vary widely depending on the time invested, resources available, and type of business model pursued. Among all artisan domains, the textile industry—especially tailoring and tie-dye—remain the most viable and active. Women in tailoring, for instance, engage at different levels of the value chain. Some operate on a part-time basis, some sell only their sewing skills to customers who bring their own fabrics. The ones that sell their skills only typically earn between USD 100–150 per month. There are also those that both sell the fabrics and have the tailoring service who roughly make around USD 500-600 monthly.

At the upper end of the spectrum are women entrepreneurs who own production workshops and operate modern retail outlets. These businesses represent the highest tier of artisan enterprise, generating substantial income while also employing multiple workers, including skilled tailors, sales staff, and administrative personnel. These owners are often seen as successful role models, and their businesses serve as hubs of innovation and mentorship within the community.

Perceptions of artisan work as a livelihood remain mixed. While the sector is recognized as a reliable income source—especially for women with limited formal employment options—it is often undervalued socially. Some view it as a fallback or secondary occupation rather than a viable long-term career. This perception is especially prevalent among youth, who associate artisan work with informal labor and limited upward mobility.

Nevertheless, many young people, particularly women, express growing interest in artisan skills due to visible success stories, increasing fashion awareness, and digital market exposure. However, this enthusiasm is tempered by persistent skill gaps. Youth often lack training in both technical skills and business management. As a result, their engagement is frequently limited to low-value tasks or apprenticeships that do not lead to independent business ventures.

Barriers to entry and scale-up include lack of access to capital, inadequate training infrastructure, and limited mentorship opportunities. For women, these challenges are compounded by social expectations, mobility restrictions, and household responsibilities. Many artisans operate in isolation, without access to cooperatives, networks, or promotional platforms that could elevate their visibility and income potential. Additionally, informal status limits their access to institutional support, credit, or contracts that would allow them to scale operations.

To transform artisan work into a more aspirational and sustainable livelihood, targeted investments are needed in vocational education, mentorship, capital access, and

cooperative formation. Promoting successful women entrepreneurs as role models, creating structured entry points for youth, and formalizing artisan businesses can help reshape public perception and support sector growth.

5.16 Strategic Opportunities and Entry Points

The artisan sector in Somaliland presents a range of high-potential areas for strategic intervention and inclusive economic growth. Among these, textile and tailoring stand out as the most dynamic and scalable, particularly for women and youth. The sector encompasses various levels of engagement—from women selling only their sewing skills to those operating full-fledged workshops and retail outlets. Strengthening access to quality inputs, business training, and modern equipment would significantly enhance productivity and income generation.

Tie-dye has emerged as a niche but rapidly growing sub-sector within textiles. Practiced exclusively by women, it responds to both local and diaspora demand for vibrant, customized designs. Supporting this craft with safer chemical practices, drying spaces, and marketing platforms could boost its commercial viability and sustainability.

Incense making is another area with high untapped potential, especially for women working from home. With the right support—such as improved packaging, quality standardization, and trainings—incense products could access new consumer markets domestically and abroad. Enhancing visibility through branding and digital platforms would further elevate this traditional craft.

Goldsmithing, while currently male-dominated, holds economic promise for women if deliberate inclusion strategies are implemented. Women are already involved in gold retail; expanding their role into design, production, or ownership of goldsmithing enterprises could open a high-value revenue stream. Targeted training and capital support would be critical for entry.

Leather crafting, though limited in current scale, is another promising domain—particularly in the production of women-focused products such as handbags, shoes, and belts. Creating specialized training programs, cooperative production units, and market access initiatives could unlock income opportunities and diversify artisan offerings.

To maximize impact, interventions should prioritize economic inclusion of women and youth. Women artisans often face structural barriers such as finance, training, and market access, while youth require role models, skill-building opportunities, and entrepreneurial support. Focused support in these areas can energize the sector with new talent and innovation.

Market expansion and value addition must also be central to future strategies. Investing in branding, advert, and diaspora marketing can broaden demand and increase consumer loyalty. Meanwhile, embracing digital tools—such as social media marketing, mobile payments, and virtual storefronts—can extend artisan reach while lowering operational costs.

Finally, embedding sustainability and circular economy practices in product design and production can differentiate Somaliland’s artisan.

5.17 Endangered Artisan Traditions in Somaliland

Across Somaliland, a wide range of traditional artisanal practices are fading into obscurity, threatening to erase centuries of cultural craftsmanship. These crafts once formed the backbone of everyday life, deeply woven into the social, spiritual, and economic fabric of Somali society. Today, however, many of these skills are practiced by only a few elderly artisans—or not at all.

Traditional Somali pottery, once essential for cooking, storage, and ritual, has all but vanished. Items like the clay oven, incense burner (this is still in demand but imported), and water vessels have been replaced by plastic or metal imports. Only a handful of rural potters remain, largely disconnected from wider markets.

Blacksmithing, involved the crafting of knives, tools, and jewelry. As imported metal goods flood local markets and stigma persists around artisan lineages, the number of active blacksmiths has steeply declined.

Weaving—particularly of traditional fabrics such as al-indi—and basketry using palm fronds or grasses were once common skills among women. These crafts served both aesthetic and practical functions, but they are now overshadowed by machine-made alternatives. The art of grass mat weaving, once integral to nomadic home-building, is especially endangered.

Women historically played vital roles as healers and spiritual artisans, crafting herbal remedies, amulets, and ceremonial items. Modern medicine, along with social marginalization, has contributed to the decline of these roles.

Camel-bone carving—used to create prayer beads, ornaments, and symbolic jewelry—is a rare skill today. In Hargeisa, fewer than a handful of known artisans remain active, with no clear generational successors.

Skilled woodworkers once made spoons, combs, doors, stools, and the traditional barkin headrests found in nomadic households. These items have largely been replaced

by factory-made goods, leading to a sharp drop in both the practice and appreciation of wood-carving.

Tanning and crafting leather bags, sandals, saddles, and traditional accessories was common among artisan groups. The rise of synthetic materials, alongside persistent social stigma, has contributed to the craft's decline. Leather crafting still exist specialy the skill but lacks economic potential.

Nomadic women were once custodians of functional beauty—crafting baskets, containers, and decorative items that adorned the Somali *aqal* (portable home). Today, the influx of plastic goods and sedentarization of nomadic communities has pushed this rich tradition to the margins.

Beadwork, particularly in personal adornment and ceremonial use, is increasingly rare. Once a communal activity led by women, it now struggles to compete with mass-produced jewelry and imported ornaments.

Traditional artisan practices in Somaliland are disappearing at an alarming rate due to a combination of economic, social, and cultural pressures. One of the primary reasons is the widespread availability of cheap imports. Mass-produced goods from abroad are often more affordable and easier to access than locally handmade items, making it difficult for artisans to compete in the market. This shift in consumer preference has significantly reduced demand for traditional crafts.

Modernization has also played a major role in the decline of these skills. As urbanization spreads and lifestyles change, fewer young people see value in learning crafts that were once essential to daily life. The lack of apprentices means that the intergenerational transmission of knowledge is being broken, and once a craftsman retires or passes away, their skills often vanish with them.

Adding to these challenges is the issue of social marginalization. Many artisanal traditions in Somaliland are associated with specific social groups or castes, such as the Tumul or Yibir. These groups have historically faced discrimination, and this stigma continues to discourage younger members from taking pride in or pursuing their ancestral trades.

Despite these obstacles, there are practical steps that can be taken to revive and sustain these traditions. Empowering artisans through targeted training programs, improved access to design tools, and support for entering regional and international markets can help restore the economic viability of craftwork. Equally important is cultural education—teaching young people to appreciate the value of traditional skills through schools, community programs, and media campaigns can foster pride and reduce stigma. Supporting cooperatives, particularly those led by women, can provide

both economic opportunities and a structured way to pass on knowledge. Together, these efforts can help ensure that Somaliland's rich artisan heritage is not lost to time.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Overview of Key Findings

This study has provided a comprehensive assessment of Somaliland’s artisan sector across Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao, revealing both its enduring cultural depth and significant economic relevance. The study, grounded in fieldwork, FGDs, KIIs, ethnographic shadowing, and customer journey mapping, examined the entire artisan ecosystem—from raw materials and production to market dynamics and institutional support.

The sector is defined by a rich tradition of creativity and craftsmanship, largely sustained by women and youth. However, it operates mostly within informal structures, with limited institutional support, sporadic training access, and constrained market entry. Despite these challenges, the sector displays remarkable adaptability, resilience, and potential for transformation, especially within the sub-sectors of textile and tailoring, tie-dye, incense-making, and—to a lesser extent—leatherwork and goldsmithing. The key findings of the study are as follows.

I. Textile and Tailoring Is the Most Vibrant and Scalable Subsector

Textile crafts—including tailoring, embroidery, and tie-dye—are the most active artisan domains across all three cities. These areas offer significant income opportunities, particularly for women, and are adaptable to changing consumer tastes and diaspora demand. Artisans operate at varying levels—from sewing-only services to full production-and-retail businesses.

II. Women Dominate Production but Face Structural Barriers

Women are central to artisan production, especially in textile, embroidery, incense, and tie-dye. However, they face gendered constraints such as limited access to finance, training, mobility, and exposure to markets. Despite these challenges, women independently run businesses, make decisions, and manage production.

III. Informal Systems Limit Growth and Market Access

Most artisan businesses are informal—lacking registration, formal training, or access to credit. This limits their ability to scale, attract investment, or participate in formal supply chains. Informal marketing, mostly via WhatsApp and word-of-mouth, dominates sales activities.

IV. Youth Participation Is Limited and Declining

Youth involvement in the artisan sector is mostly through informal apprenticeships. However, low prestige, inconsistent earnings, and lack of structured growth paths deter younger generations from joining or remaining in the trade.

V. Endangered Traditional Crafts Are Disappearing

Pottery, blacksmithing, weaving, beadwork and others are on the verge of disappearing due to modernization, lack of apprentices, and low market value. Their cultural significance is high, but economic viability is limited without reinvention and support.

VI. Raw Materials and Tools Are Costly and Hard to Access

Artisans rely on imported or low-quality inputs and outdated tools, making production costly and inconsistent. Local supply chains are fragmented and uncoordinated, and there is little access to shared equipment or modern technologies.

VII. Training and Technical Support Are Inadequate

TVET centers and NGO programs exist but lack tailored curricula, modern equipment, and sector linkages. Many artisans—especially women—learn through informal methods or peer networks, leaving skill gaps in design, branding, digital marketing, and business management.

VIII. Access to Finance Is Severely Limited

Most artisans—especially women—lack access to loans or savings products due to informality, poor documentation, and limited financial literacy. Microfinance institutions primarily support tailoring enterprises, leaving other crafts underserved.

IX. Digital and Diaspora Markets Offer Growth Potential

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok are already used informally for product display and customer communication. With training, digital tools could help artisans expand their reach, especially to the Somali diaspora who show growing demand for traditional, high-quality handmade goods.

X. Circular and Sustainable Practices Are Emerging but Unstructured

Artisans engage in informal reuse of fabric, leather, and wood waste, mainly to save costs. However, awareness of circular economy principles and access to green production methods are minimal. There is significant opportunity to scale these practices through training and innovation.

XI. Stakeholder Coordination Is Weak

Government bodies, NGOs, financial institutions, and TVETs all engage in the artisan space, but coordination is limited. There is no unified strategy or platform that brings these actors together to strengthen the sector holistically.

6.2 High-Potential Sub-Sectors for Growth

Among the various crafts assessed, textile and tailoring stand out as the most vibrant and economically scalable. The sub-sector accommodates multiple levels of engagement, ranging from individual seamstresses providing sewing services, to entrepreneurs running modern shops that combine retail, production, and skilled labor. Monthly earnings in this sub-sector vary widely, but at the highest tier, women-owned tailoring enterprises employ sales agents, designers, and administrative staff, creating livelihood multipliers.

Tie-dye, exclusively led by women, is another high-potential area with growing appeal in both domestic and diaspora markets. While artisans face raw material and safety constraints, demand for creative, vibrant fabrics—especially for cultural events and fashion-forward customers—is driving this niche forward. Incense production, deeply rooted in Somali culture, also presents economic promise, particularly when coupled with quality packaging and branding.

Leathercrafting remains underdeveloped but has strong potential for women’s empowerment if targeted with modern design, training, and market linkage. Similarly, goldsmithing, though currently male-dominated, holds unrealized potential for women should gendered access barriers be addressed through capacity building and inclusive financing.

6.3 Constraints Undermining Artisan Livelihoods

Despite the potential, several structural and systemic constraints continue to hinder artisans.

- Informality and lack of registration restrict access to finance, legal protections, and public procurement opportunities.
- Fragmented value chains and inconsistent access to quality raw materials (especially in remote areas) result in high input costs and unpredictable production cycles.
- Outdated tools and technologies limit productivity, reduce product consistency, and hinder artisans’ ability to compete with imported goods.

- Weak institutional support, marked by absent artisan-focused policies and underfunded TVETs, reduces opportunities for upskilling and scaling.
- Inadequate digital infrastructure and literacy, especially among women, restricts access to modern marketing tools, e-commerce, and digital branding strategies.
- Gender-specific barriers, such as limited mobility, restricted financial autonomy, and domestic labor burdens, continue to constrain women’s full economic participation.

6.4 Opportunities for Revitalization and Scaling

The study identifies multiple pathways for revitalizing the artisan sector and scaling its impact.

- Expand TVET access with modern equipment, updated curricula, and targeted outreach to youth and women.
- Strengthen cooperatives and artisan hubs to facilitate shared production spaces, bulk purchasing of raw materials, and collective marketing.
- Promote sustainable practices by mainstreaming circular economy principles—such as material reuse, low-waste design, and eco-friendly production—into artisan training.
- Leverage digital platforms and mobile technologies to enhance marketing, customer engagement, and direct-to-diaspora sales.
- Support the revival of endangered crafts (e.g., pottery, blacksmithing, weaving) through heritage preservation initiatives, documentation, and design adaptation.
- Create inclusive financing mechanisms, such as micro-loans tailored to informal artisans, and link artisans to ethical investors or crowdfunding platforms.

6.5 Cultural Preservation and Economic Diversification

Traditional crafts—such as basket weaving, pottery, beadwork, spiritual healing crafts, and camel-bone carving—are at high risk of extinction. Their fading presence, due to modernization, stigmatization, and market neglect, represents a cultural and economic loss. Reviving these crafts through strategic support can not only enrich Somaliland’s cultural identity but also diversify livelihood options for marginalized groups, including rural women, the elderly, and minority artisans.

6.6 A Vision for the Artisan Economy

The artisan sector in Somaliland holds the promise of becoming a dynamic engine for inclusive growth, cultural pride, and self-reliance. If given the right combination of policy support, investment, training, and market access, artisans—particularly women and youth—can emerge as drivers of a grassroots creative economy.

To realize this vision, coordinated action is needed among all stakeholders: government agencies, NGOs, microfinance institutions, training providers, private sector actors, and artisan cooperatives. Their roles must be clearly defined and synergized under a shared framework that recognizes artisans not as informal survivors, but as professionals contributing meaningfully to the economy, culture, and future of Somaliland.

7. Recommendations

This chapter outlines strategic and actionable recommendations that emerge from the study's findings and respond directly to the needs of artisans in Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao. These proposals are aligned with ISF's programming goals of promoting inclusive economic resilience, gender equality, and sustainable livelihoods for women and youth. The recommendations address institutional, economic, and social barriers while identifying high-impact opportunities for sectoral development.

7.1 Strengthening Artisan Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion

- Support women-led and youth-driven enterprises by facilitating access to markets, business training, and resources. Tailor programs to support women not only as producers but also as decision-makers, business owners, and innovators. This includes training in negotiation, pricing, and financial management.
- Focus interventions on high-potential crafts such as tailoring and textiles, tie-dye, incense making, and focused leatherwork. These sectors are culturally relevant, economically viable, and have demonstrated high demand in both local and diaspora markets. Encourage product diversification, quality enhancement, and customer-centered design.
- Encourage formalization and cooperative development by supporting artisans to form or strengthen producer groups and cooperatives. These structures can help with bulk purchasing, marketing, accessing finance, and negotiating better prices with suppliers and buyers.

7.2 Capacity Building and Skills Development

- Expand access to technical and digital skills training through collaboration with TVET centers, NGOs, and local experts. Training should cover design innovation, branding, sustainable production, packaging, and e-commerce. Incorporate modules on customer service, product pricing, and income planning.
- Integrate gender- and youth-responsive approaches in training by providing flexible formats (e.g., in-home, mobile-friendly), localized content, and support for marginalized groups. Enable intergenerational skill transfer for endangered crafts like pottery, blacksmithing, and weaving through structured apprenticeship programs.

- Build sustainable artisan hubs or learning centers in each city, equipped with tools, workspaces, and internet access to serve as sites for training, production, and peer collaboration.

7.3 Improving Access to Finance and Business Services

- Design inclusive financial products with local microfinance institutions and cooperatives that address the realities of informal artisan businesses, particularly women. These may include low-collateral loans, group savings schemes, and equipment leasing.
- Increase financial literacy and business planning support by offering coaching and mentorship in budgeting, sales tracking, investment planning, and mobile money usage. Encourage use of digital payment systems for easier customer transactions and money management.
- Support start-up funding or seed capital grants for youth and women entering the artisan sector, particularly in underdeveloped but promising areas like incense production and modern leather accessories.

7.4 Enhancing Market Access and Digital Engagement

- Develop a digital platform for artisan sales to connect local producers with the Somali diaspora and international buyers. Include features for product display, ordering, payment integration, and storytelling about the artisans and their crafts.
- Train artisans in digital marketing using social media tools like WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook to promote products, engage customers, and build client networks. Ensure women and youth are targeted with mobile-based training methods that are accessible and relevant.
- Strengthen links to physical markets by supporting artisans' participation in trade fairs, exhibitions, and retail collaborations. Provide branding support to help products stand out in local and regional marketplaces.

7.5 Promoting Sustainability and Circular Economy Practices

- Mainstream sustainability in training curricula by introducing low-waste techniques, eco-friendly materials, and circular production models. Encourage the creative reuse of textile scraps, leather offcuts, and wood remnants into new products.

- Raise awareness of circular economy principles among artisans and consumers. Position sustainability not only as an environmental value but also as a competitive advantage, especially for diaspora markets seeking ethically produced goods.
- Incentivize innovation in green production through competitions, grants, or partnerships with environmentally conscious organizations.

7.6 Policy and Institutional Support

- Advocate for an inclusive national artisan development policy, ensuring recognition of the sector in trade, employment, and cultural heritage frameworks. This policy should promote artisan visibility, standardization, export support, and training system integration.
- Simplify business registration processes for artisans and cooperatives to facilitate access to finance, procurement opportunities, and legal protections. Develop low-cost, community-based registration models in partnership with local authorities.
- Facilitate stronger institutional coordination by forming a cross-sector platform of government bodies, NGOs, financial institutions, and artisan representatives. This will improve alignment, resource sharing, and collective planning for artisan development.
- Protect and promote endangered crafts through public education, funding for heritage programs, and inclusion of traditional crafts in school curricula and national documentation efforts.

7.7 Fostering a Supportive Ecosystem

- Identify and nurture ecosystem champions such as active cooperatives, successful women-led enterprises, or youth groups innovating in product design and online marketing. These actors can serve as models, mentors, and multipliers for sector transformation.
- Encourage private sector involvement in sourcing, marketing, training, and design partnerships. Engage retailers, diaspora investors, and ethical brands in supporting artisan-led supply chains.
- Link the artisan sector to tourism and culture initiatives by developing artisan trails, craft visitor centers, and partnerships with cultural institutions to showcase crafts as part of Somali heritage.

7.8 Strategic Recommendations for ISF

A. Strengthen the Textile and Tailoring Sector through Women-Led Enterprises

The tailoring and textile sector is the most vibrant and female-dominated artisan domain in Somaliland, offering scalable income opportunities. Women operate across different levels of engagement—from home-based sewing services to full workshop and shop ownership. ISF should;

- Provide business management, quality control, and modern fashion design training specifically for women.
- Facilitate the creation of cooperatives that enable joint procurement, collective marketing, and shared workspaces.
- Support market expansion through digital marketing tools and diaspora-focused branding strategies.
- Introduce startup kits for young women tailors (machines, materials, branding support).

B. Formalize and Scale Tie-Dye Production through Women’s Cooperatives

Tie-dye is an exclusively women-led craft, deeply tied to Somali culture and in high demand both locally and abroad. However, tie-dye producers face serious constraints including health risks, raw material shortages, and workspace limitations.

- Organize tie-dye artisans into cooperatives for shared production space, safety training, and input purchasing.
- Provide protective gear, proper dyeing stations, and material storage solutions.
- Support branding and storytelling for tie-dye garments targeting diaspora fashion markets.
- Offer design mentorship to enhance creativity and increase product value.

C. Expand Incense Production and Packaging Enterprises for Women

Women involved in incense-making typically operate informally, producing culturally significant products that are widely used across Somali households and celebrations. This sector holds untapped potential for income generation and export with minimal investment.

- Train women in standardized production, scent blending, and eco-friendly packaging.
- Support the development of incense product lines for weddings, tourism, and diaspora events.
- Facilitate group marketing and online sales platforms for home-based producers.
- Introduce packaging and design innovations to increase market appeal and shelf life.

D. Support Women’s Entry into Leathercraft and Accessories Production

Leatherworking is a male-dominated craft, but it holds excellent income potential for women, especially in the creation of bags, belts, sandals, and accessories tailored to female consumers.

- Introduce leather accessory production (e.g., handbags, shoes, belts) as a vocational track for women.
- Equip women’s groups with modern hand tools and sewing equipment.
- Provide training in product design, stitching techniques, and quality control.
- Connect leather artisans to local and regional markets through branding and cooperative marketing.

E. Facilitate Women’s Entry into Goldsmithing through Design and Retail Training

Although goldsmithing is currently male-dominated in Somaliland, women already participate in gold retail and consumer markets. With training, women could take on roles in design, branding, and even production of light, customizable jewelry.

- Offer jewelry design training (e.g., beading, casting, engraving) for women with interest in creative enterprise.
- Partner with existing goldsmiths to create mentorship opportunities for aspiring female artisans.
- Develop gender-inclusive business models for jewelry co-ops, blending traditional design with modern presentation.
- Explore the export potential of Somali jewelry to diaspora wedding and gift markets.

By focusing on these five artisan domains, ISF can meaningfully expand economic opportunities for women, enhance sector visibility, and foster long-term resilience in women-led creative industries. Each sector presents a unique combination of cultural

value, market relevance, and inclusion potential—making them ideal vehicles for ISF’s 2026–2029 program.

7.9 Gender-Transformative and Youth-Responsive Pathways

The artisan sector provides a critical entry point for advancing gender equality and youth economic inclusion in Somaliland. However, both women and young people face distinct structural and cultural barriers that require intentional, targeted approaches to overcome.

1. For Women

- Move beyond treating women solely as producers and empower them to own, manage, and scale businesses. Support enterprise registration, cooperative formation, and access to finance specifically for women-led ventures.
- Enable women’s access to markets, training centers, and exhibitions by supporting safe transport options, mobile-friendly training, and home-based business models.
- Develop flexible workspaces and training schedules that accommodate caregiving roles and domestic responsibilities, especially in tailoring and tie-dye.
- Train women in financial planning, price negotiation, digital payments, and self-advocacy to reduce dependency and increase control over income.

2. For Youth

- Reframe crafts as creative enterprises using innovation, social media, and youth-led branding. Develop youth-friendly marketing incubators and digital design bootcamps.
- Offer small innovation grants, apprenticeships, and mentorships to encourage youth entry into high-potential sub-sectors such as incense branding, jewelry design, or digital tailoring services.
- Advocate for artisan trades to be part of school vocational curricula and entrepreneurial training streams.

By embedding these pathways into its programs, ISF can support a more equitable and resilient artisan sector that shifts power toward women and youth as creators, decision-makers, and business leaders.

7.10 Policy and Advocacy Recommendations

A sustainable and inclusive artisan sector in Somaliland requires not only direct support to producers but also systemic change through enabling policy and institutional environments. ISF can play a catalytic role in policy advocacy by leveraging its local partnerships and strategic voice.

- Advocate for the recognition of artisan work within national development frameworks, trade strategies, and employment planning. This should include formal pathways for training, production, and market access.
- Work with local government to introduce community-level registration models that allow artisans—especially women and home-based producers—to access finance and legal recognition.
- Engage with microfinance regulators to support non-traditional collateral, flexible repayment terms, and group lending schemes for informal artisans.
- Advocate for policy measures that document and safeguard endangered crafts, promote intergenerational knowledge transfer, and recognize artisans as stewards of national heritage.
- Encourage public institutions to procure traditional textiles, décor, and furniture from local artisan cooperatives, offering guaranteed demand for quality artisan products.

These policy directions, supported by ISF's on-the-ground program work, can elevate artisan livelihoods from informal survival activities to formalized, respected sectors of the national economy.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Ethnographic Shadowing Summary Report

This ethnographic shadowing report offers an in-depth look into the daily routines of Somali women artisans, based on direct observational data collected from three female artisans working in the tailoring sector in Somaliland. These artisans were selected due to the consistent, full-day nature of their work, which allowed for comprehensive documentation. Unfortunately, efforts to include artisans from other crafts were not feasible at this stage, as those sectors typically operate on part-time or irregular schedules, making full-day observation impractical. As a result, this report focuses solely on tailoring as a representative craft within the artisan economy.

The study captures the ways in which these women navigate production tasks, social interactions, and the dual burden of household responsibilities and income generation. The artisans observed were either operating from a business place or home, which is typical for women in this sector, and reflects broader gendered patterns of labor in Somaliland. Their work environment is shaped by both opportunity and constraint—balancing creativity, customer service, and domestic obligations within a single physical and social space.

The day typically begins before dawn, around 6:00 AM. Artisans rise early to take advantage of natural daylight, as many lack adequate lighting to work after dark. The morning routine includes preparing the workspace, cleaning sewing machines and tools, and organizing fabric and materials. However, this time is also shared with domestic duties—preparing breakfast, getting children ready for school, and managing household tasks. These overlapping responsibilities immediately fragment the workday and illustrate the double workload shouldered by female artisans.

Production tasks begin in earnest by 7:00 AM, with activities such as measuring, cutting fabric, and initial stitching. These hours are often interrupted by family members, especially children needing attention, reinforcing the difficulty of sustaining focused work. The tools used—basic sewing machines, scissors, chalk, and tape measures—are often worn or shared, limiting productivity. The artisans work in confined spaces, and many work from home which serve simultaneously as living quarters, workshops, and customer reception areas.

By 8:00 AM, customer interactions begin. Neighbors or early clients may visit to discuss orders or request fittings. These encounters are both social and transactional, and they add a layer of unpredictability to the work schedule. Access to high-quality fabrics and materials is limited; artisans rely on informal networks, such as relatives or local traders,

to source supplies. Women, in particular, report challenges in negotiating prices and securing consistent deliveries, often due to limited mobility and bargaining experience.

A brief break around 9:00 AM offers some respite and an opportunity for informal knowledge exchange with neighbors or other artisans. However, these moments are often shortened by continued domestic demands. The late morning is spent on more detailed tailoring work—sewing, fitting, and decorative stitching—often while simultaneously managing customer visits or overseeing apprentices. While some women benefit from the help of young assistants, access to formal training or structured mentorship remains minimal.

The midday prayer and lunch period around 12:00 PM is shared with family. Women often prepare lunch themselves, leaving limited time to rest. Work resumes in the early afternoon with packaging finished garments, communicating with clients, and handling minor administrative tasks like tracking payments or expenses. Recordkeeping is informal, and money is typically managed through mobile money platforms such as ZAAD or E-Dahab. None of the artisans used formal bookkeeping methods, exposing them to financial insecurity and income mismanagement.

In the later part of the afternoon, around 2:00 PM, some artisans make short visits to local markets or deliver finished orders. However, mobility remains a constraint—especially for women with small children or without transport. Marketing is largely word-of-mouth, and artisans have limited access to digital platforms or promotional tools. Sales and income decisions are often made in consultation with family members, and women are less likely to manage earnings independently.

The workday gradually winds down between 4:00 and 6:00 PM with final production touches, workspace cleaning, and preparation for the next day. Even as formal work ends, domestic responsibilities resume or continue—cooking dinner, caring for children, and engaging in family activities. For these women, the line between work and home is constantly blurred, and their labor often extends beyond that of male artisans, who are more likely to work from dedicated workshops with fewer household duties.

This highlights several key structural issues including limited access to materials and tools, minimal exposure to formal training, and ongoing challenges related to mobility, negotiation skills, and financial independence. Despite these constraints, the women artisans observed demonstrate resilience, creativity, and strong community ties. Their satisfaction derives from mastering their craft, fulfilling customer needs, and contributing to household income—albeit in modest, incremental ways.

Hourly Logbook & Ethnographic Field Notes

Time	Activity & Tasks	Social Dynamics & Interruptions	Challenges & Resource Constraints	Notes on Gender & Income Practices
6:00 AM	Start of Day	Artisan wakes early, often before dawn.	Limited lighting; relies on daylight.	Women often balance household chores at this time.
	Prepare workspace, clean tools, gather materials	Family responsibilities start (preparing breakfast, child care).	Tools often rudimentary, sometimes shared or borrowed.	Men may work in workshops; women often work from home.
7:00 AM	Begin initial production tasks; shaping, cutting	Occasional interruptions by family members, children needing attention.	Workspace cramped; limited space for multiple tasks.	Women artisans multitask more frequently.
8:00 AM	Continue production; assembling parts, sewing	Early customers or neighbors may visit, asking questions or ordering.	Difficulty accessing quality raw materials; depends on informal networks.	Pricing decisions sometimes made collectively with family but greatly influenced by the market
9:00 AM	Take a short break for tea and social interaction	Social interaction with other artisans or neighbors; informal knowledge exchange.	Interruptions for errands or children's needs.	Women may take shorter breaks to attend to family.
10:00 AM	Resume work; detailed finishing, decorating	Supplier visits for materials; discussions on prices and quality. Customers arrive for negotiations etc	Suppliers sometimes unreliable; delayed deliveries impact workflow. Negotiating prices with customers can be stressful.	Women artisans may have less direct contact with suppliers. Women artisans report poor skills in negotiating.
11:00 AM	Assistants or apprentices (if	Supportive but transactional interactions;	Limited access to formal	Gender roles influence who gets apprenticeships.

	any) help with repetitive tasks	apprentices learn on the job.	training resources.	
12:00 PM	Prayer, Lunch break, often shared with family	Family time, brief respite from work.	Time constraints; lunch sometimes brief or skipped.	Women may prepare lunch while managing work.
1:00 PM	Resume production; quality checks, packaging	Handle orders, packaging and other logistics.	Shipment and logistical challenges	Women face challenges in finding shipment and route options
2:00 PM	Marketing activities: visiting market stalls, showcasing products	Engages with community, transactional and social.	Limited marketing channels; reliance on word of mouth.	Women may face mobility restrictions affecting market access.
3:00 PM	Administrative tasks: recording sales, managing money	Informal discussions on earnings; cash kept electronically.	No formal bookkeeping; risk of income loss or theft.	Women less likely to handle finances independently.
4:00 PM	Final production touches or small orders	Family members may assist or observe.	Fatigue sets in; lack of ergonomic tools causes strain.	Gendered division of labor evident in task allocation in rather formal and organised artisan businesses
5:00 PM	Clean up workspace, store tools	Reflective time, some informal chatting with neighbors.	Limited storage space; risk of tool damage or loss.	Women often clean while managing household duties.
6:00 PM	End of formal workday	Family gatherings begin; some artisans continue small tasks at home.	Balancing work and home life remains a constant challenge.	Women's workday often extends beyond men's due to domestic duties.

Annex 2: Customer Journey Mapping Insights

This report explores the customer experience of purchasing artisan products from Somaliland, focusing on both local and diaspora consumers. The goal was to understand how customers discover, evaluate, and purchase handmade items, and what influences their satisfaction and loyalty. The findings are based on representative customer insights and structured across five key journey stages namely awareness, consideration, purchase, use, and post-purchase behavior.

1. Awareness and Discovery

Customers discover artisan products through different channels depending on their location. Local buyers typically encounter them at cultural festivals, street markets, and community events. For these customers, the vivid colors, intricate designs, and face-to-face engagement with artisans create strong first impressions rooted in cultural pride and familiarity.

Diaspora customers, however, are more likely to discover artisan goods through digital channels, particularly social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Here, what attracts attention is not just the product, but the story behind it—such as the identity of the artisan or the cultural significance of the craft. Emotional connection and authenticity play a central role in catching their interest.

2. Consideration and Evaluation

Local customers usually compare products by visiting multiple vendors depending on the type of products because some products have limited vendors, assessing factors like material quality, price, and design. Their evaluation is tactile and immediate. In contrast, diaspora customers make decisions based on referral or digital cues such as product photos, seller transparency, and online reviews. Key considerations include cultural relevance, authenticity, pricing, and trust in the seller or platform. Due to their distance, diaspora buyers proceed more cautiously and often take longer to commit.

3. Purchase Experience

Purchasing artisan products in Somaliland is straightforward for local consumers. They value the direct interaction with artisans and the ability to pay in cash. The personal relationship formed during the sale enhances the customer experience and builds trust.

For diaspora customers, however, the purchase journey is more complex. Transactions typically occur via informal digital storefronts or social media, and buyers often face high shipping fees, long delivery times, and uncertainty about product quality. Most diaspora buyers do not interact directly with artisans, relying instead on intermediaries, which weakens the sense of connection and authenticity.

4. Product Use and Satisfaction

Overall, customers are satisfied with the quality and durability of artisan products. Local users often use textiles and household items in their daily routines and report long-lasting performance. Diaspora buyers view these items as symbols of cultural identity and expressions of heritage. While they value the uniqueness of the products, issues such as design, size or colors occasionally occur.

5. Feedback and Loyalty

Post-purchase, customers are generally enthusiastic advocates. Local buyers recommend products within their social circles, while diaspora customers frequently share items on social media and with other diaspora communities. There is strong willingness to repurchase, but this is often hindered by a lack of online product variety, poor user experience, or concern over logistics.

Key Insights and Opportunities

The journey analysis reveals clear opportunities to improve both local and international customer experiences including the following.

- Investing in artisan storytelling through digital platforms to deepen diaspora engagement.
- Improving packaging and logistics for international shipping to reduce delay and lost.
- Developing a centralized e-commerce platform with verified products, artisan profiles, and secure payment systems.
- Providing training for artisans in branding, customer service, and product consistency.
- Enhancing diaspora access through better market outreach and fulfillment solutions.

Annex 3: Data Collection Tools (shared separately)

The study prepared and used the following tools for the data collection.

- i. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), 8 different KII tools were prepared for the following target groups.
 1. Artisan producers
 2. Input suppliers
 3. Design and development experts
 4. Market access actors
 5. Promotion and advocacy groups
 6. Financial institutions
 7. Institutional support actors
 8. Cultural stakeholders.
- ii. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- iii. Ethnographic Shadowing
- iv. Customer Journey Mapping
- v. Stakeholder Network Analysis
- vi. Field Observations

Annex 4: List of Study Participants (only those who consented their details to be taken and shared)

S/N	Name	Organization/Business	Role	Sector
1	Kamal Isaaq	FCA	TVET coordinator	NGO
2	Abdishakur Adan	Ministry of Employment, Social and Family Affairs	Director of employment	Government
3	Abdinasir Osman	Micro-Habah	Manager of Microfinance	Financial institutions
4	Abdiweli Abdulahi	Kaafi Innovations	G. Manager	Training center
5	Mohamed Osman	Suldan VIP Tailor	Manager	Design and development(Tailor)
6	Mustafe Abdi	Tayo tailor	Manager/Designer	Producer
7	Sulub Muse	Havayoco	Head of Trainings	NGO/Training center
8	Qani Abdi Alim	Dheman Taxitile and tailoring	Owner/Designer	Producer/designer and developer
9	FardowsaMohamed	Tie and dying practitioner	Owner	Producer
10	Hibaq HiisMohamed	Ikhwa collection	Owner	Designer, developer and Digital marketing
11	Deeq Dahir	Bulsho Minority Organization	Director	NGO and Training center
12	Mohamed Ali	Ministry of education	Director of TVET	Government
13	Abwan Ahmed Owge di	Individual	Traditional knowledge Holder	Tradition
14	Hamda Said	Naima Designs	Department manager	Designer, developer and Digital marketing
15	Mohamed Ali Waji	Ministry of information, culture & national Guidance	Department Director	Government
16	Ifrah Mohamed	Intifac college	Owner and manager	Producer and training center

17	Sahra Yusuf	Suun cas Fashion	Owner and manager	Producer and training center
18	Yusuf Abdi	Abdiyare Workshop	Owner and manager	Workshop
19	Kafiya Saleban	Kaba Designs	Owner and manager	Designer, developer and Digital marketing
20	Mohamed Abdiaziz	Community College	Manager	Producer and training center
21	Hamse Abdi Bulale	Candle light	TVET coordinator	NGO and Training center
22	Mohamed Ahmed Yusuf	SYDAVO	TVET Manager	NGO and Training center
23	Ilyas Abdirahman	Borame municipality	Director of social affairs	Government
24	Huda Mohamed	Carwo Huda	Owner and manager	Designer, developer and Digital marketing
25	Habon Osman	Tayosan	Owner and manager	Handcraft producer and teacher

Annex 5: Photos (where consent was given)

