Traditional Crafts Production and Gender: Evolving Gender Roles in Traditional Crafts Production in Two Rural Communities and an Urban Crafts School in Bhutan

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This paper assesses evolving gender roles in traditional crafts making in Bhutan, the possible underlying reasons for these changes, and their implications. It is structured in three parts. A historical overview of the roles of men and women in crafts making is followed by a review of the changes that have occurred over time in these gender roles, drawing on case studies in two rural communities in Bhutan – Tsebar in Pemagathsel in eastern Bhutan and Bjokha in Zhemgang in south-central Bhutan – and in the National Institute of Zorig Chusum, a crafts production training institute in the capital Thimphu. The possible reasons for the developments are discussed and rural and urban differences compared where relevant. The paper then assesses the influence that the increasing participation of women in income-generating activities in crafts production has on their engagement in the agricultural sector, where traditionally women were largely engaged. Finally, it discusses some of the impacts of these changes on gender roles and livelihoods of men and women, and the opportunities and challenges the changes offer for sustainable development.