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COMMERCIAL HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION BY THE TEMBÉ PEOPLE OF BRAZIL

Halley Mitchell

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COMMERCIAL HANDICRAFT PRODUCTION BY THE TEMBÉ PEOPLE OF BRAZIL[1]

Halley Mitchell[2]

Abstract:

Commercial handicraft production is significant to Brazil's Tembé Indians both for the ethnic pride it engenders as well as the revenue it provides. In producing handicrafts Tembé express pride in their heritage and strengthen their ethnic identity. Selling crafts also generates needed revenue to purchase those manufactured goods to which the Tembé have grown accustomed. Although the prices paid for handicrafts often do not highly compensate the artisans, handicraft sales are still an integral part of the Tembé economy. Handicraft production complements the Tembé's routine activities of farming, collecting forest products, hunting and fishing. As they can produce handicrafts in between other activities—at times when people would otherwise remain idle—the flexibility of this commercial activity is well-suited to their lifestyle. In addition, the low capital investment and simple tools allow many individuals to participate in this economic activity. If adequate marketing channels can be established for these ethnic crafts, then handicraft commercialization may prove a increasingly significant activity for indigenous groups.

Keywords: Commercial handicraft. Tembé.

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[2] NAEA-UFPA's Associated Resercher during 1998.

Introduction

Commercial handicraft production is significant to Brazil's Tembé Indians both for the ethnic pride it engenders as well as the revenue it provides. In producing handicrafts Tembé express pride in their heritage and strengthen their ethnic identity. Selling crafts also generates needed revenue to purchase those manufactured goods to which the Tembé have grown accustomed. Although the prices paid for handicrafts often do not highly compensate the artisans, handicraft sales are still an integral part of the Tembé economy. Handicraft production complements the Tembé's routine activities of farming, collecting forest products, hunting and fishing. As they can produce handicrafts in between other activities—at times when people would otherwise remain idle—the flexibility of this commercial activity is well-suited to their lifestyle. In addition, the low capital investment and simple tools allow many individuals to participate in this economic activity. If adequate marketing channels can be established for these ethnic crafts, then handicraft commercialization may prove a increasingly significant activity for indigenous groups.

The Tembé People of Brazil's Eastern Amazon Region

The Tembé Indians of Brazil occupy several indigenous reserves in the northern states of Pará and Maranhão. They live in riverside villages which are jointly-occupied by peoples from the Urubu/Ka'apor, Timbira, Guajajara, and Munduruku, groups. In the *Alto Rio Guamá Indigenous Area*, located in the state of Pará near its border with Maranhão, the Tembé Indians there have been attempting to increase their economic self-sufficiency.

The Tembé Indians are of Tupi descent and, in the past, referred to themselves as the Tenetehara, meaning, "we are the true people" (Gomes 1977:1). Locally, those Tenetehara living in the state of Pará are known as Tembé, a Tupi word meaning, "lower lip." The people of the same descent living in the state of Maranhão are known as Guajajara--also a Tupi word meaning "owner of the feathered head ornament" (Gomes 1977:1).

The Tembé subsist both by farming, hunting, and fishing. They clear forest patches annually from July-November to make way for their crops including maize, manioc, cará (*Dioscorea* sp.), squash, beans, and bananas, and rice (Wagley and Galvão 1948:138). More recent additions include papaya, pineapple, and cashew fruit. Game eaten includes tapir, deer, peccary, monkeys, agouti, paca, caiman, wild boar, and some forest birds.

Historically, marriage among Tembé was initially matrilocal; sons-in-law were to live in the home of their bride until the birth of the couple's first child. At that point the couple could erect their

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own household. (Wagley and Galvão 1948:140). Today these rules are much more flexible, and the newlyweds usually decide for themselves where they choose to live.

In a 1872 census, the Tembé totaled 9,000 people, 6,000 of whom were living in the Gurupi region. The Tembé population declined an estimated 98% during the twentieth century (Balée 1994:45). This decline was not primarily due to emigration, but it was the unfortunate result of introduced disease (Balée 1994:45). Many surviving Tembé were said to have intermarried with black Maranhenses (Hurley 1928: 14-27, cited in Arnaud 1981/82:224).

The Tembé population is quickly growing in both the Gurupi and Guamá river regions. According to FUNAI's census in 1985, the Tembé population numbered approximately two hundred and seventy five individuals in the Guamá River region and one hundred and fifty seven in the Gurupi River region (CEDI 1985:180-181). In FUNAI's most recent census in 1998, there numbered 371 Tembé living along the Guamá River, and 428 living along the Gurupi River.

All Tembé wear western-style clothing and speak Portuguese. In 1983 the Tembé living along the Guamá River were described as no longer speaking their native tongue (Ruffaldi, Sales e Esteves, 1983 in CEDI 1985). At this same time, 90% of the Tembé living along the Gurupi river were said to speak Tembé as well as Ka'apor (ibid.). Today, the number of Tembé speakers has fallen among those of the Gurupi region, and the situation has not improved in the Guamá region. But as in 1980, these Tembé are served by FUNAI's (the National Indian Foundation's) post at Canindé. Neighboring groups live on the Maranhão side of the Gurupi in another area, *Reserva Indígena Alto Turiaçu*, which includes Guajá and Ka'apor peoples. Combined, they numbered around 210 individuals in 1980 and were distributed among seven villages (Arnaud 1981/82:230-231). Today the count is 391 residents—mostly Ka'apor, with a few Tembé inhabitants intermixed.

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Area MAP

Source: CEDI 1991

The Cultural Significance of Crafts

Both in the past and in the present, handicrafts represent an important part of Tembé culture. In recent interviews[3] two elder village chiefs explained the cultural significance of their handicrafts:

> (I make handicrafts) to bring them to the forefront, to not forget from of our ancestors, the culture of our ancestors...what the ancestors did. So it is to not forget. That is the reason. (Chico Tembé, personal interview September 1998).

> Our ancestors made these (handicrafts) here. Rings...they made everything. Our grandparents, ancestors, they worked only on these (crafts) here. (Veronica Tembé, personal interview September, 1998*)*

These comments indicate that handicrafts serve to tie the Tembé to their history and bring their customs into the present. Handicrafts represent a link to the past and allow them to remember the ways of their ancestors and their indigenous heritage.

But these crafts are not only cultural artifacts, they are also utilized in the daily lives of the Tembé today. Carved gourd bowls still serve as bowls and cups from which food is consumed, and

[3] Quotations were transcribed and translated from oral interviews conducted in Portuguese by the author.

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baskets are used to carry goods from place to place. Hand-made sieves are used to separate granules of manioc flour before toasting them over a huge stove, whose fire is maintained using a woven fan. Many men still hunt with both bows, arrows and spears. And carved palm-nut jewelry is still worn by men and women alike. Other decorative items including head dresses, beaded skirts, and gourd rattles are used in today's festivals to celebrate young children and commemorate the rites of passage rituals for adolescents.

Handicrafts also promote the Tembé's cultural identity and increase their ethnic pride. Making beautiful crafts earns both women and men respect in their community. Moreover, the Tembé believe their ability to make traditional crafts illustrates their heritage and sets them apart from outsiders. Lordinha Tembé, a woman well-respected in among the Tembé for her facility with making beautiful items, asserts the importance of handicrafts:

> One sits over there and makes (handicrafts) to not lose (our skill), if not we forget and then no-one makes them anymore. Then all is lost. We lose our culture. . . (But) if we make (handicrafts) all of our life—no, (we will not forget). . . . If not, we lose everything. . . . Then we don't know how to do anything anymore. Then we become white--only wanting to sell varnish and that sort of thing. . . . Only travelling by plane, very far away. (Personal interview, September 1998).

One way the Tembé distinguish themselves from "whites" is their ability to make handicrafts. Tembé believe that "whites" are not skilled with their hands and thus must buy and sell industrialized goods—rather then make them themselves. Similarly, "whites" travel by machine instead of using the hand-made canoe, the Tembé's most common form of travel. Continuing the tradition of making handicrafts hence enforces Tembé ethnicity.

The Economic Significance of Crafts

In addition to its cultural significance, handicrafts also play a large role in the Tembé economy. Yet handicrafts were not among the first products commercialized by the Tembé. Instead, Eduardo Galvão and Charles Wagley note that the Tembé were trading copaíba tree resin and natural latex rubber with travelling merchants as early as 1845 (1961:26 in CEDI 1985:182). Araújo Brusque, a high government official of the state of Pará, noted that the Tembé were extracting oils, Brazil nuts, parsley and other natural products in 1862 (Moreira Neto 1971:12-13 in CEDI 1985 :182).

In their fieldwork with the Tembé of Maranhão in 1941-42 and 1945, Wagley and Galvão describe that manioc flour (locally called "*farinha*"), *babassú* nuts, copaíba oil, and animal pelts were commercially sold. In exchange, the Tembé purchased manufactured goods including iron tools, clothes, salt, gunpowder and ammunition, fishhooks and lines, and kerosene (62, 168).

In the 1970's the National Indian Agency, FUNAI, opened a series of shops named "ArteIndia" that were devoted to marketing Indian handicrafts. The specific date of the Tembé's first

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commercial handicraft sale is unknown**.** But by 1985, CEDI notes that the most significant handicraft activities included men making baskets and combs, while women concentrated on spinning cotton to make hammocks and headdresses. CEDI describes several other important commercial activities at this time, including the extraction of titica vines and breu tree resin; the hunting of land tortoises, jaguars and caiman; and the selling of pigs, chickens, farinha and canoes. (1985:190).

Since my visits to the Tembé began in 1995, I have observed that Tembé income has primarily come from five sources: social security payments to community elders; sales of handicrafts to a local government store; sales of titica vines (Heteropsis spp.) used for wicker furniture; sales of "breu" tree resin (Protium spp.) used for boat caulking; and sales of "farinha"—the manioc flour which is the region's primary dietary staple.

The following chart summarizes the results of a survey conducted among fifteen of the thirty households in the Tembé village of Tekohaw. The participating households were randomly selected and were interviewed on a voluntary basis. The chart details the monetary amount in Brazilian reis that each household earned from approximately May 1997 through May 1998 from various income sources. It thus provides insight to each major facet of the Tembé economy. However, the primary source of income recorded in the "Odd Job" category is earned as daily wages provided by a visiting ecologist to his research assistants. This source of income is thus only temporary, however, and should not be considered as a regular part of the economy. The data was gathered from informal interviews with family members and relies upon individuals' memories of sales. This information can therefore be treated as only an approximation of actual values.

House	Odd Jobs	Pension	Farinha	Breu	Titica vine	Crafts	Other	Total R$/ household	% R$ from craft
1	R$150	R$0	R$45	R$30	R$190	R$320	R$0	R$735	43.54%
2	R$138	R$0	R$150	R$0	R$312	R$0	R$0	R$600	0.00%
3	R$374	R$0	R$0	R$125	R$72	R$0	R$0	R$571	0.00%
4	R$120	R$1,520	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$240	R$0	R$1,880	12.77%
5	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$7	R$50	R$29	R$0	R$86	33.72%
6	R$6	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$300	R$0	R$306	98.04%
7	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$15	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$15	0.00%
8	R$90	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$41	R$70	R$201	20.40%
9	R$12	R$1,520	R$0	R$0	R$30	R$30	R$0	R$1,592	1.88%
10	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$7	R$0	R$72	R$0	R$79	91.14%
11	R$0	R$0	R$20	R$0	R$50	R$0	R$5	R$75	0.00%
12	R$102	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$115	R$145	R$0	R$362	40.06%
13	R$617	R$0	R$40	R$20	R$158	R$111	R$0	R$946	11.74%
14	R$378	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$0	R$358	R$0	R$736	48.64%
15	R$0	R$2,924	R$0	R$0	R$145	R$0	R$0	R$3,069	0.00%
TOTAL	R$1,987	R$5,964	R$255	R$204	R$1,122	R$1,646	R$75	R$11,253	14.63%
AVERAGE	R$132.47	R$397.60	R$17.00	R$13.60	R$74.77	R$109.73	R$5.00	R$750.17	14.63%

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The chart illustrates that approximately 14.63% of the income that entered Tembé homes during 1988 was generated from handicraft sales. Though this figure seems relatively small, handicrafts actually represent the third largest source of income. Discounting the income earned from the outside researcher, the average annual income would fall to R$617.70, and handicrafts would be the second-largest source, accounting for 17.76% of Tembé income.

These calculations illustrate that the social security payments are an integral part of the Tembé economy. Yet because Indians generally do not pay any money into the social security system, some Brazilians are contesting the Indian's right to these funds. Social security payments should therefore not be relied upon too heavily. Moreover, social security is only available to individuals over 65 years of age; younger Tembé must look to other sources.

Interest in selling titica vine fluctuates with its price. Though the Tembé continue to extract these vines, called "cipó" and used to make wicker furniture, they often only earn approximately R$1.00 to R$1.50 per kilo of dehusked dried vine. If the Tembé are able to sell a more finished product, furniture for example, then their labor may be more highly compensated. Breu tree resin, used as a sealant for boat caulking, yields an even lower price—between R$.50 to R$1 per kilo. The Tembé are currently experimenting with production of breu incense sticks that could also improve their profits. As farinha remains the primary staple of the Tembé diet, its production is certainly necessary. But the price garnered per sack of farinha—between R$10 to R$20 per 30 kilos—renders commercial production unattractive. After examining the other available options, commercial handicraft production seems quite appealing.

Not only do handicrafts bring significant income to the Tembé, but they also represent an economic activity that is very well-suited to Tembé lifestyle. As the Tembé spend their days hunting, fishing, tending their fields, and watching their children, among other activities, there exist few economic options whose pursuit would not greatly alter the Tembé's daily routine. Fortunately, making handicrafts can be undertaken whenever convenient. "Chico Rico," a retired Tembé chief, explains how handicrafts fit in with other routine activities.

> For example, today is Sunday, people are making (handicrafts). Whatever day that people arrive early, they make a little. (When) they arrive early from their service, or from fishing as well. . . . (If) one arrives, and it is already dusk, then it is not possible to do it, but tomorrow, very early, one can make a bunch and then. . . . When there is not something else one needs to do, then only make (handicrafts). (Personal interview, September 1998).

The flexibility of handicraft production allows the Tembé to continue their daily tasks as well as generate income. In moments when Tembé workers would otherwise be unoccupied, they can use the opportunity to make handicrafts. Berta Ribeiro agrees that handicrafts are an ideal vocation. She says:

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> Trade-oriented handicraft production provides the Indians with the opportunity to work at an activity that they are used to and which is part of their cultural patrimony. It helps prevent their leaving the community to hire themselves out as manual labor, extracting spices, hunting and fishing. It provides for the fellowship of men and women during the time of collective handicraft work. It guarantees them an income which I am certain is superior to that they would receive as bottom-level workers at surrounding ranches and extractive industries (p. 32).

Because the Tembé are able to purchase many of the industrial products that they need with the money from their handicrafts' sales, the Tembé infrequently leave the reserve to search for a paid labor position. As the Tembé continue making their traditional crafts, they both maintain their culture and earn money.

In addition to its advantages for indigenous peoples, José Silveira D'Avila emphasizes craftsmanship's role as a socio-economic solution for developing countries. He asserts that craftsmanship puts idle labor to work, utilizing people's inherent abilities with low-cost training. It creates discipline and development of individual abilities against the trend of production uniformity and standardization. That said, however, some measure of standardization is required to create a solid product line and to move beyond current ad hoc sales. Overseas buyers, for example, generally prefer to receive items closely resembling the samples they have received, rather than new designs.

Handicrafts can also be an occupational activity for the casually unemployed or for those between harvest times. It also allows personal autonomy, simple instruments, and small financial resources. Finally, D'Avila suggests that artisans can be very useful to modern industry. He says,

> In view of fast obsolence, the instability of industry and the current habits of living, we need a corresponding capacity of adaptation of human faculties. The heavy structure and the proportion of factory layouts sometimes can't match speed. Thus, it is necessary a planning (sic) to make the best of the versatility of craftsmanship, integrating it into the industrial system.... Also, in certain highly technological operations, the craftsmanship skills are more efficient than industrial production and even irreplaceable (198-199, 201).

Thus craftsmanship serves many different needs: from providing relief to the socio-economic issues of some developing notions, to aiding industry with flexible and efficient resolutions to their production. As craftsmanship seems to be a "win-win" solution for most all parties involved, it should be promoted as an important sector of the economy.

Domestic Handicraft Sales

The Tembé are skilled in making beautiful palm-nut jewelry, painted gourds, basketry, and traditional weaponry. In the past the Tembé have primarily sold their crafts to the FUNAI store, ArteÍndia, located in downtown Belém. But the Tembé claim that prices offered by ArteÍndia do not adequately compensate them for the time invested in creating the crafts. For example, one Tembé man

selling hand-made coronets to ArteÍndia in August of 1998 received only R$5 each (approximately US$4.22) (Mitchell personal archive). These horns are made by hollowing out a small tree to make the instrument's body and then weaving intricate basketry around the outside. It requires several days to make each horn, and the R$5 is thus a low return for the artisan's effort. However, ArteÍndia is a small, hidden store with low traffic. They therefore do not always have space for the quantity of items produced, since the store is limited by demand from tourists passing by. It is therefore difficult for this one outlet to absorb as many handicrafts as the Indians could produce.

Finding customers outside the local ArteÍndia store could increase the volume of Tembé crafts purchased and would reduce their reliance on this one buyer. ArteÍndia does try to purchase most of the handicrafts that the Indians bring them, but to survive, they must pay low prices for these crafts. Other private buyers may pay more for items, but they generally buy many fewer items and require a much higher quality.

The Tembé are apparently not alone in their discontent with low payment. Berta Ribeiro notes that many academicians condemn commercial handicraft production specifically because the artisans receive such meager payment for their work (1983:31). Sometimes, artisans receive no compensation whatsoever. In her thesis about the Guarita and Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau Reservations, Ligia Simonian asserts:

> "Many FUNAI (both non-Indian and Indian) and other officials have simply taken Indian surpluses and glass beads to sell in regional markets and to partially or totally expropriate the money" (1993:379).

One thus learns that indigenous groups throughout Brazil have a long history of unfair compensation for their art.

A few enterprising Tembé have successfully been selling their handicrafts to other private buyers in Belém, but these businesses also cannot purchase the quantity of items the Tembé could produce given better access to broader markets. Private buyers generally also require a much higher quality of crafts, which requires more skill and thus merits higher payment.

In spite of these current limitations, handicrafts are products with which the Tembé are very familiar and have much experience. Though the profits earned have often been rather low, time has shown that there is a solid market for these crafts. Because the handicrafts are finished goods, the Tembé only need one intermediary (or two for international sales) between themselves and the final consumers. The Tembé can capture an even greater share of the proceeds from their labor, especially in international sales, if they assume more responsibility in connecting with more diverse markets and eliminate some intermediaries. Finally, one key to generating better prices is to implement more stringent quality control. This issue will described in more detail below, as it is a necessary step to developing a sustainable enterprise.

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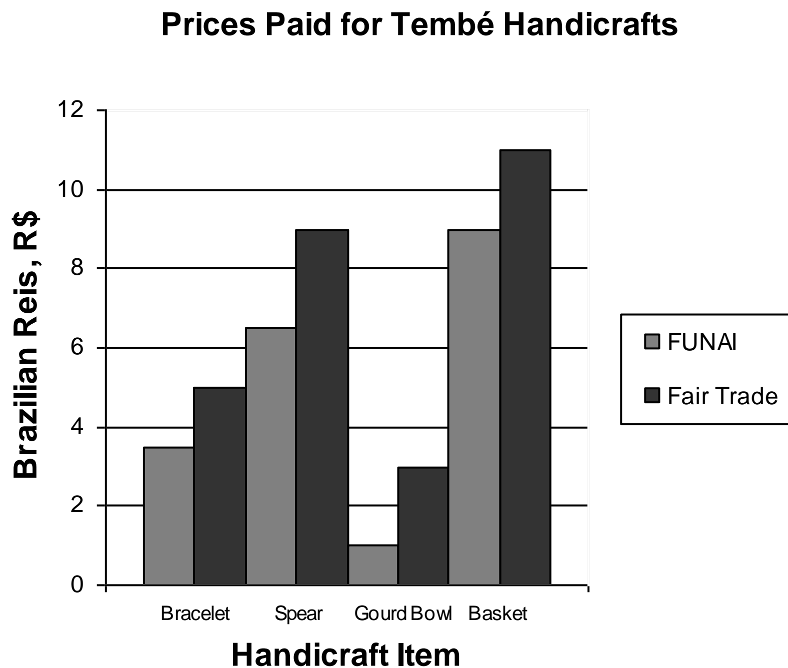
Overseas Handicraft Sales

Consumers in the United States and Europe have demonstrated interest in helping to maintain the integrity of the world's rain forests. There exists a niche of the public that is interested in purchasing sustainably harvested forest products. Using this trend to their advantage, an American researcher working with the Tembé has helped them to find a distributor for their handicrafts in the United States. Located in San Francisco, Fair Trade Zone Imports has already made several purchases of Tembé crafts and has been sending suggestions for new products that might be created for the US market. Fair Trade Zone has been a great help to the Tembé because this company is willing to pay much higher prices than the Tembé receive locally. Dedicated to the concept of "Fair Trade"—which entails paying fair wages to artisans in developing nations—this importer has sometimes paid twice the local price. The following graph indicates the difference in prices paid:



While this graph clearly illustrates that some overseas buyers are willing to pay a premium for indigenous goods from the Amazon, this graph hides the fact that they usually buy only the highest quality goods. On the other hand, ArteÍndia accepts a wide range of qualities and pays more for better work. The average price, noted in the graph, accentuates the price difference. But one must keep in mind that Fair Trade prices also *should* be higher due to the higher quality of the crafts.

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Challenges with Overseas Sales

Though overseas buyers are often willing to pay more, getting goods to them is also a complicated undertaking that requires a high level of organization. First, overseas buyers must have a reliable way to transmit their orders. Because the Tembé live in the middle of the forest with no electricity—let alone a fax or an email system—it is currently impossible for them to receive orders directly. In the past, outside supporters have personally carried handicraft orders to the Indians; but such support should not be depended upon in the long-run. FUNAI has agreed to transmit orders, but this agency is often disorganized and slow. Until they create a reliable way to maintain contact with the outside world, financial transactions and a permanent export business will be difficult.

The Tembé themselves are in the process of establishing an association with a medium-term goal of maintaining a modest contact office in Belém that could possibly facilitate such communications. The prospective title for this organization is “Zane Wy Ka’a”—the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Gurupi River, Pará/Maranhão. This association will represent the Tembé, Ka’apor, Timbira, and other minorities living along certain sections of the Gurupi river. However, the peoples living in the Alto Rio Guamá and Alto Turiaçu Indian reserves lack understanding about the meaning and implications of such an association. In addition, internal disputes and lack of technical expertise has delayed the association’s foundation for several years. Yet a formal organization is a requisite step towards maintaining a permanent Indian-managed export business. Without such an organization, the Tembé would be unable to open a bank account and would need to depend on intermediaries to handle financial transactions. The Tembé currently receive money through the bank accounts of friends or supporters who must physically carry money out to the indigenous areas to pay artisans. These sorts of transactions are not viable in the long-run. An effective method to distribute money to artisans needs to be explored in the near future.

Transportation and Shipping

Transportation continues to be a problem in delivering products to overseas customers. Because the Tembé live in such a remote area, there is no reliable method of transport. Though there are three motor boats and four slower diesel boats servicing these indigenous areas, the motors are often broken and transportation is unpredictable. To continue purchasing from the Tembé under current conditions, buyers will need to take these transportation issues into account and be ready to allow several months for product delivery. It may be difficult for most potential buyers to plan their purchases given such a high level of uncertainty.

Transportation is also *expensive.* A typical trip to the indigenous areas from the port town of Gurupi requires approximately 100 liters of gas round-trip, which is currently priced at R$.77 per liter (Approximately US$.67 per liter) plus approximately R$10.50 worth of oil (approximately US$9.15).

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This figure does not include transportation from Gurupi to the city of Belém, which costs R$11 for a bus ticket. For larger items that cannot easily be carried by bus, FUNAI would likely help transport them.

Once the products arrive in Belém, they need to be labeled and packaged for shipping. For import into the United States, each item must be labeled with a tag indicating the country of origin. In addition, the shipment must be accompanied by a packing list, a description of all items, and a formal receipt for the items purchased.

The Tembé must develop the managerial skills to perform all of these functions, but developing these skills may take many years. None of the Tembé has more than four years of formal education, and their accounting and reading skills are not yet adequate to deal with such matters. Perhaps one or two Tembé could be trained to perform these functions; otherwise, they need to hire an intermediary who will undertake these tasks on their behalf. FUNAI has preliminarily agreed to fulfill this role, but no specific person has been indicated to date.

Finally, shipping goods overseas from the Amazon is very costly. Often the transport costs from Asia are two to three times cheaper than from Belém, thus making it difficult for Amazonian crafts to compete in the global market. Given this cost structure, the Tembé need to focus on creating very unique items that will not directly compete with those from Asia. By creating items that are distinctively Amazonian and that are not produced elsewhere, the Tembé have a better chance at selling their wares despite high transport costs.

The Tembé must find ways overcome the daunting language barriers that separate them from overseas clients. English-speaking friends and supporters can certainly help the Tembé with language issues, but the Tembé must be sure they can count on such support in the long-term.

All of these challenges make clear why the Tembé sell their crafts to intermediaries who have the skills necessary to distribute them. While the Tembé can surely learn to deal with some of these challenges, they will need to create realistic goals for their craft sales.

Quality Control

The Tembé must design and maintain quality standards for their crafts so that customers will have faith in Tembé products. Currently, artisans do not consistently produce high-quality work. They wait for an order to arrive and then must dedicate much time to making crafts to try to fill the order in a timely fashion. This method can disrupt other routine activities that are equally time-sensitive (harvesting, for example) and can lead to sloppy workmanship. Buyers in the United States have already complained that the pieces in the higher-volume orders were not as well made as the pieces in smaller orders. This inconsistency is an obstacle to securing more long-term contracts with private

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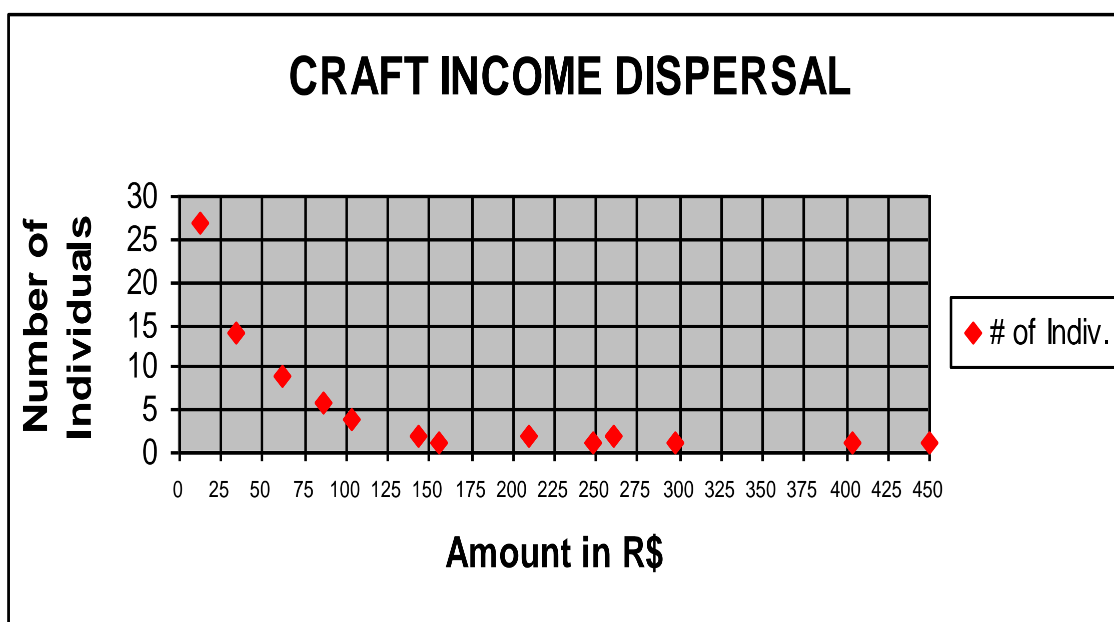
buyers. Low quality products tend to soil the reputation of the group as a whole. Unless the Tembé can maintain the high quality of their crafts, they may begin to lose buyers.

To sell to the high-end of the consumer market and maximize their earnings, the Tembé will need to monitor their output and try to improve the quality of their work. Taking a step in this direction, the Tembé might consider continuing to make crafts even when they do not have a current order. This way, the Tembé can take their time making each piece and can ensure excellent workmanship on their products. Using this strategy the Tembé do risk creating goods that are never ordered; however, crafts not sold overseas can usually be sold locally in Belém.

However, all artisans are not created equal, and some Tembé are much more skilled than are others. Those who make finer crafts are therefore able to sell more of their goods to overseas buyers. The following chart illustrates the amount of income in reis earned by artisans in the last two orders from Fair Trade Zone.



A total of 71 artisans were involved in producing the crafts comprising Fair Trade Zone's first four orders in 1998, contributing a total of R$5,100 to Tembé living in the Gurupi region. As the chart details, three individuals were able to earn more than R$150 for their contributions to these orders. The two highest earning individuals, both female, are extremely skilled and all of their production is thus purchased. The third highest earner, with the help of his family, was able to quickly produce large quantities of crafts and could provide more goods to meet the demand. Thus a

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combination of skill and speed earn the highest rewards. Others were also able to contribute, those earning the least usually possessing only mediocre skills.

No matter how much time is allotted, some community members will never make export-quality items. But overseas buyers who are paying high prices want the best quality possible. Therefore, it is not wise for the Tembé to accept orders at a volume that exceeds current capacity for high-quality production. To accept such orders is a prescription for failure—the buyers will become frustrated and stop placing orders, and the Tembé will become discouraged. There is a need to realistically judge what is possible now and not accept orders above that capacity. Perhaps an outside agent can help the Tembé to realistically assess their production capacity. The goal is to improve Indian self-sufficiency, not transform them into a Developing-World handicraft factory. Improving production volume of higher-quality goods will require patience and time. Simply paying higher prices for goods will not create more highly skilled artisans overnight.

Domestic Sales Potential

Due to the complexity of overseas sales, the Tembé should consider diversifying and expanding their sales in Belém and in other Brazilian cities. Though communication and transportation would still remain a problem, Brazilian buyers do not face language barriers, hefty shipping costs or export/import regulations. There seems to be potential for increased handicraft sales within Brazil that should be explored with greater vigor.

Potential impacts of Increased Handicraft Commercialization

Continued handicraft sales will surely have cultural implications for the Tembé. Most obviously, greater commercialization integrates the Tembé's integration with the market economy. While greater integration will bring the Tembé more money disposable to purchase needed supplies, these funds can also be used to purchase alcohol, cigarettes, and batteries—which are currently buried in the ground after use and may cause ecological contamination in the future. But many of the Tembé leaders do not see increased commercialization as problematic. Muxi Tembé, a young leader chosen to represent his people, says:

> We need to buy and sell. We can no longer remain as five hundred years ago, where we stayed in the forest without entering into contact with the whites. The Indian needs to buy clothes and buy a few such things. And so we will trade. Better (to sell handicrafts) than to sell something else. Handicrafts, for example, are made from *tukum, tukumã,* from *inajá,* and from other species, and these do not run-out. We only make (handicrafts) from the fruit, but the tree remains there and is never exhausted. (Personal interview, September 1998)

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From this statement, we see the Tembé logic behind selling crafts. As they need money to purchase certain needed items, handicrafts made from renewable resources are a good option. Otherwise, more predatory practices, like logging, might be pursued to earn needed funds.

Yet even renewable resources such as palm nuts are not unlimited, which begs the question of environmental impacts resulting from increased commercialization. The high prices paid by overseas customers may drive the Tembé to collect ever-increasing amounts of palm nuts. In fact, when attempting to fill their last order, several Tembé artisans complained that there were no more palm-fruits nearby and that artisans were travelling to more distant villages to collect the nuts to make jewelry. This may have had to do with the fact that the tucumã palm only fruits in the rainy season, which was coming to the end when the last order was placed.

In any case, the Tembé can only work with the material they currently have in-stock. They will need to assess the relative profitability of requested items depending on the stock of raw material available. This shortage may be a serious limiting factor in the short-term—before more palm nut can be collected next rainy season. As sales climb, the Tembé must manage their resources so that they do not over-extract. Planting trees that are utilized for handicraft production could help avoid environmental problems.

Less significant but still apparent are some style shifts have occurred in Tembé jewelry in the few months since the Tembé have been selling in the United States. For example, the Tembé traditionally made palm-nut necklaces that were relatively long—approximately 60cm in length. But current fashion trends in the United States dictate shorter necklaces—approximately 44cm—or even shorter chokers. The Tembé had never before made a choker necklace, made to fit snugly around the neck. But once the Tembé had filled their first order for chokers, this new fashion suddenly started to appear in the villages. Thus by working with distant buyers, the Tembé's begin adopting some of these western styles, and may abandon some of their own traditional styles in the process.

Private buyers have also been requesting specialized items outside those originally created by the Tembé. For example, one item requested this year was a "rainstick"—never before produced by the Tembé. A Belém shop owner showed a sample rainstick to one Tembé and took it apart to show him how it works. The rainstick is now one of the items being successfully produced and sold by several Tembé individuals.

Some critics assert that such modifications of traditional crafts distort and thus destroy indigenous culture. For example, the buyers at ArteÍndia actively discourage new designs that stray from those traditionally made. They instead hope to revitalize old styles and techniques used in the past. Others, including Berta Ribeiro, do not condemn such alterations, but consider them a "re-creation" of traditional forms. She explains, "We are, no doubt, talking about a form of interference in

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tribal art, but one which respects endogenous tendencies" (pp. 40-41). To insist that indigenous peoples stay within the bounds of their traditional designs and styles limits the creativity of the modern artisan.

Encouraging only the production of traditional items "museumizes" craftsmen and craftswomen and forces them to solely continue with status quo artistry, rather than encouraging them to creatively respond to their current experience. Maria Rosilene Barbosa Alvim comments that "to see vestiges of a traditional society in the *craftsmanship* is to deny its contemporaneity and to minimize its importance as a significative (sic) means of survival" (p. 76). One can debate whether this result is part of the natural process of cultural transformation or whether it is a negative result of western influence. But Tembé culture will likely be impacted by increased interaction with the west.

One sees that the Tembé are receiving conflicting messages. ArteÍndia and the cultural preservationists want one thing and the market another. The Tembé are hence stuck between trying to live in the past and replicate old designs (like using "kirawa" plant fiber) and attending to the realities of modern life (nylon thread is much stronger).

Perhaps handicrafts can bride this gap and can symbolize the current situation of indigenous peoples of the Amazon—cultures that are steeped in tradition but living in the present day. By using traditional skills and some traditional designs, but items that are more relevant for today's buyer. For example, the Tembé traditionally wove sturdy "peneiras" used as a sieve to separate manioc flour. Most city-dwellers have no need for such an item, as they buy processed farinha. But with a few small modifications, this peneira can be transformed into a lovely picture frame that will surely find many buyers.

And if the Tembé succeed in expanding their handicrafts business? High profits coming from handicrafts will likely increase the time that Tembé spend on handicraft production. Other activities may be neglected as craft production takes on larger and larger portions of people's time. In some indigenous communities, individuals with higher earnings stopped food production in favor of buying food—which ultimately lead to disaster (Reed 1995). The Tembé will hence need to learn to balance craft production with maintaining their other necessary activities. Ultimately, the Tembé will need to determine for themselves the optimal level of handicraft production—that which actively increases their self-sufficiency and culturally-defined standard of living.

As greater quantities of money enter the village, there also could be many negative impacts. The villages are already seeing a sizable shift to a cash economy as more goods are sold and more outside products enter the village. For example, in the past three years there has been a tremendous influx of radios, tapes, and batteries. This music from outside may begin to replace traditional Tembé songs, and battery disposal is an environmental concern.

Discrepancies in income earned among individuals could potentially cause social rifts, as economic status changes among the Tembé. A man with a small family but high earnings, for example, may bring into question the traditional leadership system that is primarily determined by family size. In addition, putting more money in the hands of woman will hopefully empower women and give them a more audible voice in village life. It may lead to greater decision-making power in increased and equity with the men. However, empowering women will certainly change village dynamics and could potentially upset the Tembé men. The Tembé need to carefully consider these issues, prepare in advance for situations that may arise, and monitor the impact of these outside forces so as to avoid potentially negative situations.

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