



Shakti is NEED's (Network of Economic and Entrepreneurial Development) product label and means 'inner strength'. It is the name given to a unique collection of products, handcrafted by small groups of women artisans and tailors in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Northern India. The specialism in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, is beautiful Chikan craft embroidery and they embroider scarves, tops and dresses

According to recent World Bank estimates, one tenth of the world's poor live in Uttar Pradesh. And despite a narrowing of the gender gap in India's so-called 'metro-cities', there is still great inequality. Around 80% of women are illiterate and have no access to skills training, especially in rural areas. Bihar is India's poorest state, with 85% of the population living in villages, where poverty is severe.

Through NEED programmes, women from the poorest villages can learn new skills, develop their entrepreneurial skills and work collectively to earn money for themselves and their families. NEED helps women to set up their own small businesses and helps them form savings groups so that they can become independent. Over 600 small producer groups have been formed. NEED is working to make sure that they receive a fair price for their work. Fair trade with international markets plays a vital role in helping these groups survive and flourish.

The village of Pathan Khera shows the resourcefulness and power of women. Led by Kesana who travels to Lucknow to pick up orders and distribute them around her village, this group has cut out the traditional middle man who used to take an extremely large cut for bringing the orders and then picking them up. They specialise in traditional Chikan craft embroidery, which this area of India is famous for. Most of the village women want to be part of this expanding business.

