

Launching a Partnership with Resilient Women in Mali

I first learned about obstetric fistula when Delta Survie applied to work with SERRV. The more I learned, the more I felt we must find a way to help. I visited the women, who were stringing beads outside the hospital in the town of Mopti. They were smiling while they worked. When I arrived, there was a large mudcloth banner with the symbols for the words World, Changing, and Light. They told me SERRV is a light changing the world for the women.

—Cheryl Musch

Director of International Development



Captivating, vibrant colors are typical of beadwork from all over Africa. In the case of SERRV's newest partner, a group of women in the West African country of Mali, beaded jewelry is traditionally valued. The "Cat's Eye" necklace is a popular and meaningful choice among these local jewelry wearers in this town of Mopti, for reasons more than its brilliant blue beads.

A condition not widely known in the United States called obstetric fistula affects over two million women every day around the world, including women in Mali. Often women who are married and pregnant at early ages give birth before their bodies are physically able, and experience extensive tearing. Women living with the condition are often shunned by their family, friends, and community. The average cost of comprehensive surgical treatment is 300 U.S. dollars in Mali, a price most cannot easily afford.

In Mali, women from all over the country travel to receive surgery at a hospital in Mopti. Here, most of the cost of the fistula surgery is subsidized by the French NGO Medecins Du Monde (MDM, Doctors of the World), but patients are responsible for a portion of the cost. Some of the women undergo multiple surgeries and evaluation periods that can last from several months to a year. During these long periods, the patients have little to occupy their down-time. Now, an incredible program is underway to change this situation.

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In 2001, Ibrahima Sankare, Secretary General of Delta Survie, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the social and economic standing of women afflicted with fistula and others, created a handcraft center. Women who are staying at the hospital can go to this space to be together and create jewelry and other items to sell. The center provides a sense of community for the women who are coping with their condition, so they have an environment of support and acceptance during their treatments. In addition, the profits from the crafts the women create provide an income that is used towards the women's share of the cost of treatment, as well as food and transportation home from the hospital.



In 2006, Cheryl Musch, SERRV Director of International Development, visited the group to see if there could be a partnership between Delta Survie and SERRV. She agreed that since there is a strong emphasis on social progress within the organization, SERRV's mission of directly working with and benefiting artisans would fit well. Because the women at Delta Survie have previously only sold their products locally, collaborating with SERRV will introduce them to the export market by promoting and shipping internationally for sale through A Greater Gift. They will have the opportunity to learn and broaden their experiences through increasing their production.

Right now, both organizations have agreed to a transition time period of three months to work on accruing enough raw materials for the orders and to get their systems into place. SERRV will continue its relationship with the women through frequent communication, and refine processes such as quality control, consistency and production systems.

Eventual expansion of the handcraft center through partnering with SERRV would also allow women who are no longer at the hospital, but who had acquired the beadwork skills while they were undergoing treatment, to come back and prolong employment with the organization. With this opportunity, the women will continue to have an income to support themselves and their families.

The colorful beaded jewelry made by these Malian women, including the blue beaded "Cat's Eye" necklace, will be introduced in limited quantities online and in A Greater Gift stores this coming fall!

Fair Trade Associations Expand Their Roles

A rising interest in fair trade throughout the world has meant a growing membership and role for both the North American Fair Trade Federation (FTF) and the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT).

Both groups face the challenge of providing markets for a growing number of low-income artisans and farmers who depend on fair trade importers and retailers to sell their products, while consumers increasingly seek a better understanding of business practices which differentiate fair traders from other ethical businesses.

More than 350 IFAT members from 60 countries struggled with these issues in Bruges, Belgium in May 2007. Delegates to the conference agreed that fair trade standards must remain strong, and that geographic regional bodies will play a key role in IFAT's future.

In order to ensure compliance with fair trade standards, the membership committed to the development of a fair trade certification for crafts and food within 18 months.

FTF members meeting in Washington, D.C. in June also found that a rising interest in their organization highlighted the need to develop clearer criteria for membership and more thorough monitoring procedures.

SERRV International, a founding member of these organizations, sent delegates to both meetings. SERRV follows the IFAT code of practice and has been accredited as a Fair Trade Organization by IFAT, and is monitored biennially through self assessment, peer review and random third party monitoring.



Kenya: Purchases Support a School

Our purchases from the Nyabigena Soapstone Carvers reach beyond this Kenyan organization to improve the rural community. In January 2007, the group started a primary school, using its resources to support tuition programs, school uniforms, books, and medical care. In this region, one of every six people is under 5 years of age, and the community is strained in its ability to educate the children. About 70 children attend the school, including children of members of the group and orphans whose parents have died of HIV/AIDS.

Chile: Computer Technology Assessment

Many of our producer-partners work with limited computer technology, and Comparte and Fundacion Solidaridad are no exception. As part of our long-term work with both groups, Dan Schaller, SERRV's retired Information Systems Manager, went to Chile as a consultant to assess their computer software and hardware issues. The groups considered how to use technology more efficiently within their organizations and what they would like to be able to do in an ideal situation. SERRV will continue to work with them to develop a strategy for meeting their information technology needs.

Nepal: Furnishings for a New Building

The Kumbeshwar Technical School (KTS) trains carpet weavers, knitters, and carpenters in a facility it has far outgrown. Thanks to a grant, they were able to construct a new multi-story building which has just been completed. The building will have many uses—knitwear production, office space, overnight accommodations for rural producers, a day care center for producers' children, community social and cultural activities, and more. KTS sent SERRV a message that said, "Apart of the construction, we need infrastructure development of the organization," along with a detailed list of furniture and equipment needed for the new building. SERRV sent a grant for chairs, tables, cabinets, cupboards and equipment for the new management office, the knitwear department and classroom.

Café Forestal Sets New Standard for Fair Trade Coffee



The fair trade coffee movement aims to maximize the income of small and marginalized farmers. One way this can be done is by paying a higher price for coffee beans. However, the impact can be amplified significantly if the actual processing and packaging of the coffee takes place in the country of origin instead of in the U.S.

SERRV played a pioneering role in the fair trade coffee movement in 1991 when it provided financing for the development of Café Paz, the first fair trade coffee offered in the U.S. which was processed and packaged in the country of origin.

Carlos Murillo Solano (pictured below on left testing new roasts), former Managing Director of the CooCafé Cooperative and a consultant to SERRV, explains that coffee processed and packaged in the country of origin generates more than three times as much revenue per pound for the cooperative than the exportation of green coffee beans.

SERRV strongly believes that if we are to reduce global poverty, we must increasingly purchase products which are processed in poorer countries as opposed to importing unprocessed commodities.

As a result, SERRV has financed the development of new roasts and packaging designed specifically for the U.S. market. SERRV will introduce in this fall's



A Greater Gift catalog Café Forestal light and dark roasts, gourmet blends from CooCafé which are processed and packaged in Costa Rica, setting an example for others committed to reducing global poverty through trade.

The work you've read about in these pages is supported in four important ways...

- 1 Buy** handcrafts and foods from our catalog, website, and store partners
- 2 Donate** to support important behind-the-scenes training, grants, and design assistance for our international partners
- 3 Lend** a portion of your savings to help provide pre-production advances to artisans and farmers*
- 4 Host** A Greater Gift Sale in your community or sell our products in your store

To contribute in one or more of these ways, visit us at www.serrv.org for more details.

* Investments in our Loan Fund are only offered by prospectus and available in those states where allowed by law. Please contact us for more information.

The 6-year-old nonprofit VillageWorks was visited by SERRV Product Development Director Jean Johnson in April of this year. The goals of her visit were to track sourcing policies and visit artisans working for VillageWorks; select product for future orders; as well as provide product development assistance (see side purple bar).

These goals brought Jean to meet with artisans in two of the three small training centers run by VillageWorks in Cambodia: Baray Village Weaving Center and the Chanlahong Village Sewing Center outside the village of Baray. In each community, subsistence farming of rice has been the mainstay of life with no other employment available locally. At these training centers, small groups of 10 to 20 women are paid to learn to weave or sew via a 3-month training program, and after the training they are paid at a piece rate.

As a result of the meetings with artisans, seeing their production and product samples, and working with the leaders of the VillageWorks group, Jean identified other organizations in Cambodia and Asia that could provide additional resources to VillageWorks. She was also excited about a product line from recycled rice bags as a possible platform to expand purchases from the group. To follow up on the product, she outlined processes to continue product development and design assistance. Product samples are now on order for spring 2008 catalog selection.



What is Product Development?

SERRV's work with artisans and farmers to build skills and tools for the marketplace often focuses on the area of "product development." There are two goals for this product development: first, to develop unique, attractive products that will sell well for the artisans and farmers through SERRV or to other customers; and second, for groups to learn to develop strong products on their own.

Product team staff from SERRV work collaboratively with groups to assess their product development needs and create customized training for each group. Their activities include sharing current trend information and holding product brainstorming sessions which result in sketches and new ideas from individuals in the groups. Staff will provide feedback on new product samples that are created. They also teach new techniques to improve quality control or modify design.

Product development is one of the most challenging aspects of a small business, and SERRV is committed to cultivating these skills with artisan and farmer groups to ensure their long-term success.



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