

Partnerships

NEWSLETTER OF A GREATER GIFT • SUMMER 2007

NEW ENTERPRISE FOR RWANDAN WOMEN

In rural Rwanda, a woman along the road walks with a lidded basket balanced on her head. It may contain bananas, millet, or sweet potatoes — a gift for a neighbor, a family member, or a newly married bride. Lidded baskets are rooted deeply in this country's history. Made of coiled sisal or woven banana leaf, the designs and techniques are passed from mother to daughter.

Rwanda is a small, densely populated country made up largely of small-scale farmers. Remembered for its tragic genocide in 1994, when nearly one million people were killed, Rwanda is rebuilding. When this civil war ended, 70% of the country's survivors were women. These women needed a source of income to support their families, and their basketmaking skills provided them that opportunity.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

In the rural community of Muramba, women formed a cooperative in 2002 named Jyambere Mutegarugori Muramba (Women in Development in Muramba). Muramba has more than its share of challenges. There is no paved road to this community in northwestern Rwanda. There is no electricity. There are no phone lines. There are thousands of children orphaned by the war and by AIDS living in houses by themselves. Muramba is truly a community in need.

We partnered with the 120 women in Jyambere Mutegarugori when they told us, "Due to poor local demand, we are desperately trying to expand to both regional and international markets." We



Dancille Mujawamariya, from the Rwanda Kolping Association, and Cheryl Musch, SERRV Director of International Development, discuss production with basketmakers from Jyambere Mutegarugori in Muramba.

agreed that generating income through their basketmaking would impact not only the women, but the community as a whole.

Cheryl Musch, our Director of International Development, recently visited the group to work on a long-term development strategy and to see production on our first basket order begin. She was followed shortly thereafter by Kerry Evans, our Product Specialist, who continued to monitor production and to work with the groups on products for the future. We anticipate baskets from Jyambere Mutegarugori in our 2007/2008 A Greater Gift Catalog.

One of the primary benefits for the women will be that the income they

earn can go toward their children's school fees. Many Rwandans have large families, and in some instances, have adopted orphaned children. It costs \$175 for each child to attend school for one year. In a country where annual income can total only hundreds of dollars, the expense of education can be a barrier to attending school. Income from making baskets helps ease that expense.

The basketmakers have also started a low-interest, short-term loan fund. Women take out small loans to purchase land, or to buy and sell sweet potatoes, and pay the loans back within two months. Our work with the women will encourage more projects like this one as our relationship grows.

CONNECTING SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

ARTISAN WORKSHOP SPREADS IDEAS

One of the challenges facing artisans is a lack of market knowledge and a lack of new and innovative designs. In February, SERRV International offered a design and market trends workshop to address these pressing needs.

The three-day workshop was funded by the CRS Fair Trade Fund and held in Antigua, Guatemala. Representatives from all eight of our Central American and Mexican partner groups, as well as a designer from Aid to Artisans El Salvador attended. Participants began the workshop by sharing their “dreams” and “worries” about their businesses. With fears such as “Can we maintain our clients?” and “Can we find enough work?” the participants paid keen attention to information about consumer profiles, quality control, and identifying potential designs

In the course of the training, participants also visited local craft stores and looked in magazines for product inspirations and to compare their own products to those being retailed. “One of the highlights of the training for me was hearing how the groups shared knowledge with each other,” said Jean Johnson, SERRV’s Director of Product Development. For example, our Mexican partner Casa Romero learned a new painting technique from the Salvadoran wood painters, which should improve quality and efficiency. And when



Training participants Alex Salguaro and Marisol Ramirez, both from El Salvador, look for new product inspirations they can incorporate into their handcraft designs.

the Guatemalan groups provided contacts of stores in Antigua that they have successfully sold to, at least one Salvadoran group received an order!

The workshop concluded with participants setting goals and developing specific action plans. Establishing new pricing systems and developing new product collections were two of the more popular aspirations. As the workshop attendees evaluated their training experience, one shared: “Thank you to all the people who made this possible. It is very important for our organization as we work to improve the quality of life through fair trade. God bless you!”

INVESTING IN A FAMILY FRIENDLY ECONOMY

In a world in which large corporations increasingly dominate global trade, we are committed to supporting small-scale enterprises that often allow artisans and farmers an opportunity to work with and near their families.

A purchase from A Greater Gift’s catalog supports hundreds of family workshops as well as artisan and farmer cooperatives. But your donation or investment* in the SERRV International LLC Loan Fund also provides essential capital, equipment and training.

The arid Cedarburg Mountain area of South Africa, where jobs are scarce, is the one place in the world where rooibos tea can be grown. The families of the Wupperthal and Heiveld Cooperatives recently took a huge step forward when, with the help of a \$14,000 loan from the SERRV LLC Loan Fund, they opened their own processing facility, allowing them to receive additional revenue from drying and packaging their rooibos tea.

Investments in the SERRV Loan Fund are an essential part of our comprehensive income generation program, which allows hard working families around the globe to gain financial independence.

*This shall not constitute an offer to sell or the solicitation of an offer to buy, nor shall there be any sale of these securities in any state in which such offer, solicitation or sale is not authorized. The offering is made solely by the OFFERING CIRCULAR (prospectus). To learn more about our loan fund and whether it is available in your state, visit www.serrv.org. To Donate or Lend, contact us at loanfund@serrv.org or 1-888-243-4423.



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OPPORTUNITIES FOR BASKET WEAVERS IN GHANA



A basket weaver in Ghana works on a sturdy Bolgatanga basket. A recent three-day workshop generated new designs for the artisans.

With erratic rainfall and rocky soil, farmers in the Bolgatanga region of northern Ghana cannot rely on agriculture to support their families. They grow some millet, corn and rice. They raise livestock. But subsistence farming isn't enough. Poverty in villages in the region is widespread; by some estimates it is as high as 80%.

Families supplement their income with craft production, particularly basket weaving. Basket weaving is a skill passed from generation to generation in Bolgatanga, where there are approximately 2,400 basket weavers. They use veta vera grass straw (which is locally known as elephant grass), forming a base and weaving to the top of the basket. These sturdy baskets are known throughout the world as Bolgatanga (or Bolga) baskets.

Our partnership with Trade Aid Integrated, a Ghanaian organization providing market access, business development, and financial services to craftspeople, connects us to 225

basket weavers and other artisans in Bolgatanga. Purchases for our catalog benefit these weavers in a number of ways.

- Our orders generate income during the dry season, when there are not crops. Without these orders, they would not have income during this time.
- The weavers make more money than they would selling locally. Before our purchases, they had no option but to sell in the low-paying local market.
- Basket weavers spend the money they earn in their community, which benefits everyone.

For basketmaking to have an even greater impact in Bolgatanga, building artisan capacity and increasing organizational resources are critical. We are working closely with our partner Trade Aid to provide skills and training which will help basket weavers better understand how to use their craft to earn an income in an area that offers few economic opportunities. The more the weavers learn, the better prepared they are to participate in the global marketplace.

We have provided the basketmakers with leadership training, a trend workshop, a three-day hands-on workshop, and new designs—all building blocks of utilizing craft production to improve incomes and reduce poverty. Our work will continue during the coming year, as we collaborate with Trade Aid in developing a product catalog on CD so they can increase their number of buyers and bring more basket weavers to greater income opportunities.

Ghana is also the source of the cocoa beans used in our popular Divine chocolate bars. These beans are grown by the 20,000 Ghanaian farmers who belong to the Kuapa Kokoo cooperative. The farmers are part owners of the Divine Chocolate company and are able to participate in decision making as well as share in profits.

www.agreatergift.org/divine



PRACTICAL, GRASSROOTS APPROACH SETS SERRV APART

Docey Lewis, SERRV design consultant, contributed these words about our work. Lewis works with artisans around the world on behalf of international corporations and development organizations.

In an international development climate that is often driven by the demands of funders, SERRV consistently puts the needs of artisans first by offering practical advice, product design and a market for their crafts. This is done with budgets that are typically a fraction of the cost of those of other development organizations.

How does SERRV accomplish so much with so little?

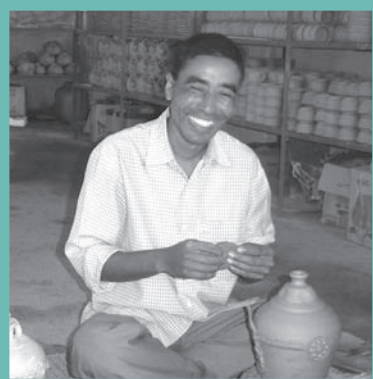
- SERRV uses its network of in-country artisan partners to assist its staff in providing development activities by organizing artisan workshops, identifying groups that may have special needs, or sharing information such as trend reports with a broader audience.
- By focusing development work on small-scale artisans and farmers, SERRV does not have overhead costs from layers of contractors and subcontractors usually involved in larger economic development projects.
- Much of SERRV's development work is carried out by its own staff members who know the needs of customers and also how

to work with tight budgets in limited time frames.

In the past three years, SERRV has conducted trend, pricing and product development workshops in the Philippines, Nepal, Kenya, Indonesia and Guatemala. The workshops give producers a snapshot of the U.S. marketplace, equip them to understand the product development process, and provide opportunities to collaborate on new products, share information, and solve problems.

Where larger organizations must accomplish targets in the millions of dollars in sales and thousands of artisans reached in a short period of time — typically two to three years — SERRV's goals may involve partnering with one small community for a longer time. For example, SERRV has a commitment to work with the Nyabigena Soapstone Carvers in Kenya over a period of nine years, ensuring purchasing goals that reach \$20,000 per year. Based on this commitment, the group members know they will have regular orders from SERRV, and they can build their market skills at the same time.

SERRV provides artisans with the information, opportunity and assistance they need to be successful, while maximizing resources for meaningful results over the long term.



OUR MISSION

is to promote the social and economic progress of people in developing regions of the world by marketing their handcrafts and food products in a just and direct manner.



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