



International
Trade
Centre

EXPORT IMPACT
FOR GOOD

WOMEN **ACCESS!** EXPORT SUCCESS

THE VOICE OF AFRICAN BUSINESSWOMEN



A DEDICATED PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA



ACCESS! Facts & Figures

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK:

A network of over 60 Certified National Trainers; 4 Certified Lead Trainers

TRAINING PACKAGES:

Comprehensive training with 32 modules in French and English

SECTOR COVERAGE:

Leather, Textile & Handicrafts, Horticulture, Coffee and Services

BUSINESSWOMEN SUPPORTED:

More than 2'500

It is widely recognized that women entrepreneurs across Africa are generating employment and adding value to exports in innovative ways. Yet, they face a host of challenges such as limited access to export training, market information and finance in addition to other barriers women face in the business environment. Since 2007, the ACCESS! Export Training Programme of the International Trade Centre (ITC) has been dedicated to addressing these limitations by strengthening the competitiveness of more than 2'500 women exporters and building the capacity of Trade Support Institutions such as Trade Ministries, Chambers of Commerce and Women's Business Associations to support them.

ACCESS! has grown to be a recognized programme for women exporters in Africa, helping them to realize their economic potential and thereby contributing concretely to poverty reduction and improved standards of living. Measurable results show how the programme has played a vital role for women exporters in 20 African countries.

The selected stories in this booklet demonstrate how women entrepreneurs in Africa have successfully managed their businesses in the face of considerable challenges and how the support of a well-targeted programme like ACCESS! can give them the edge they need to be more competitive in world markets.

In addition to generating employment and export revenues, many of these women have spearheaded the development of new sectors in their respective countries. Some examples include eco-tourism in Ethiopia, plant-based products with pharmaceutical qualities in the Republic of Congo and Benin, eco-textiles in Uganda and one-stop solutions for outfitting hospitals with medical equipment from South Africa.

What is also shared among these women is their commitment to business growth that benefits consumers, communities and the local environment. In Tanzania, Joyce Mbvette commits Foot Loose Tanzania Handicrafts to a triple bottom line, generating profits while caring for the environment and safeguarding workers' rights. In Kenya, Margaret Komen could have dropped chili exports in favor of higher profit non-native crops, but Mace Foods is

20 Partner Countries and Institutions:

- Benin:** Direction générale du commerce extérieur,
- Burkina-Faso:** Maison de l'Entreprise du Burkina-Faso
- Cameroon:** Groupement des Femmes d'Affaires du Cameroun
- Chad:** Centre de Développement des Entreprises
- Congo:** Forum des Jeunes Entreprises du Congo
- Democratic Republic of Congo:** Fédération des Entreprises du Congo
- Ethiopia:** Centre for African Women Economic Empowerment
- Ghana:** Ghana Export Promotion Authority
- Kenya:** Export Promotion Council
- Liberia:** Liberian Chamber of Commerce
- Mali:** Fédération Nationale des Artisans du Mali
- Mozambique:** Centro de Aconselhamento de Desenvolvimento Industrial
- Nigeria:** Enterprise Development Centre Pan African University
- Rwanda:** Rwanda Development Board
- Senegal:** Agence Sénégalaise de Promotion des Exportations
- South Africa:** Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Tanzania:** Small Industries Development Organization
- Tunisia:** Maison de l'Exportateur
- Uganda:** Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Ltd.
- Zambia:** Zambia Chamber of Small and Medium Business Associations



The ACCESS! network in the COMESA and SADC regions ready to deliver export services to women entrepreneurs



In addition to building on the experiences and recognized successes of the programme's outreach into African countries, ITC is now adapting ACCESS! to meet the needs of women entrepreneurs in other regions of the world, such as in Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East and Asia. For more information on the programme and a complete list of ACCESS! Focal Point Institutions, please visit our web portal:

www.womenexporters.com

determined to keeping the sector, the farmers and the indigenous seeds on solid ground. Ruffine Koukoui's commitment to non-harm nature and consumers has led her to patent toxin-free cosmetics of award-winning quality. Samrawit Moges has made her business ventures in Ethiopia community-centered and this in turn has motivated communities to care for their natural environment. In Congo, Josephine Bouanga's research has led to the patenting of nutritional beverages that enhance health and well-being.

Women entrepreneurs say the ACCESS! programme has given them visibility and courage to overcome the barriers and tackle new international markets, through the knowledge, confidence and networks gained. Several women business leaders say the technical support they received through the export training and the tailored business counseling

programmes have led them to restructure their businesses to optimize efficiency performance and maximize the opportunities to trade regionally and internationally.

We hope this publication will inspire other women entrepreneurs and institutions to seize the opportunity to invest in women, programmes and services that give them what they need to expand their businesses. The demand for innovative products, the ingenuity and tenacity are there and African women are ready to meet the challenge.

ITC offers its heartfelt thanks to the women entrepreneurs who generously offered their time and agreed to share their personal stories in the preparation of this booklet as well as the ACCESS! Focal Point Institutions for their usual outstanding collaboration in the process.

The ACCESS! programme was developed and implemented with the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) under the Programme for building African Capacity for Trade (PACT II) and in close collaboration with public and private partners in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
développement international

TESTIMONIALS AT A GLANCE



◀ **Benin**
SUCCESS WITHOUT COMPROMISING ON
QUALITY OR THE ENVIRONMENT
Ms. Ruffine A. Koukoui

Cameroon ▶
FROM PRIVATE CATERING TO
GLOBAL MARKETS
Ms. Blanche Eyadi



◀ **Chad**
SUCCESS OF THE MANY IS
THE SUCCESS OF ONE
Ms. Antoinette Koudjal Mangaral

Republic of Congo ▶
THE FRUIT OF MANY YEARS OF RESEARCH
Ms. Joséphine Bouanga



◀ **Ethiopia**
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Ghana ▶
FROM TWENTY PIECES TO THREE TONNES
Ms. Pauly Appiah Kubi



◀ **Kenya**
A FATHER'S CHALLENGE
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Ms. Margaret Komen

South Africa ▶
ONE-STOP SOLUTIONS FOR HEALTH
CARE PROVIDERS
Ms. Bernadette Zeiler



◀ **Tanzania**
THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE
Ms. Joyce Mbwette

Uganda ▶
A PRODUCT FIT FOR ROYALTY
Ms. Sara Katebalirwe



SUCCESS WITHOUT COMPROMISING ON QUALITY OR THE ENVIRONMENT



Ms. Ruffine A.
Koukoui

COMPANY

Coopérative Arti-Savon

BUSINESS TYPE

Cosmetics and natural products

INTERVIEWED

April 2012

Benin



Ms. Ruffine A. Koukoui, founder and chairperson of Arti-Savon Co-operative has always had a passion for medicinal plants. Her co-operative, which produces luxury soap and a wide range of other innovative products with pharmaceutical uses, has won several awards in the beauty care industry, making her a leader in Benin in the promotion of sustainable organic products.

According to Ruffine, 'It is possible to make money without compromising on quality and still take care of our bodies and the Earth.' Ruffine's passion is encouraged in her home country, Benin, where the production of organic agricultural products has more than doubled in recent years. A proactive national policy encourages producers to decrease the use of pesticides while improving the quality of soil by natural means. This strategy appears to meet the expectations of foreign markets since Arti-Savon products, which bear the Organic and Fair Trade labels, are selling well in Italy, France, Burkina Faso, Senegal and the United States, so much so that the co-operative has to work hard to keep up with the demand.

FROM MISFORTUNE TO FORTUNE

Arti-Savon realized early on that the principles of alchemy apply as much to entrepreneurship as to the crafting of fine soap. Two years into her business, Ruffine won the top prize at the Cotonou Agricultural Fair. Her fortune was met with misfortune at the hands of her main competitor, who at the time, supplied most of Arti-Savon's raw materials. On seeing her success, the competitor quietly substituted Arti-Savon's usual orders with raw materials of very poor quality. In this experience Ruffine recognized the risk in not securing her own supply chain and quickly set out to establish her own raw material sourcing and processing. In

Benin, the harvesting and processing of precious oils and other fine materials is done by women using traditional knowledge and processing techniques handed down over generations. Ruffine sourced traditional producers of her own and trained them to meet the specific requirements of Art-Savon's growing line of products. The adversity in getting sabotaged by her main supplier actually turned into one of her competitive advantages.

'By training women, we could actually secure and develop much better quality essential oils than what we originally started with.' Thereafter, Arti-Savon made a name for itself by pursuing its production of innovative and high-quality products. In 2006, the company won the prize for best innovator in Benin and in 2010, the Ministry of industry awarded the co-operative the Award for best quality in her respective business sector.

Arti-Savon started by manufacturing soaps for personal and other household use at very affordable prices. Driven by her love of the craft and inspired by concepts that she was exposed to during trade fairs, Ruffine slowly developed a range of fine soaps, creams and gels for the face and the skin. Twenty years of work with women in the co-operative gave Ruffine insight into traditional recipes which helped Arti-Savon develop products with unique medicinal properties. Arti-Savon now has several patents for antiseptic ointments, creams for muscle



pain, anti-ageing soaps and soap which is made without the use of sodium sulfate. Arti-Savon says its products are one hundred per cent natural and contain oils and butters such as shea butter, palm oil, sesame oil, neem oil and lemon grass.

Arti-Savon was one of the first companies in Benin to upgrade from artisanal to industrial scale production. The co-operative has continually modernized its operations to meet ISO standards and Ruffine is seeking financial support to increase the company's production capacity, which is approximately 34 tons per year. In terms of challenges, Arti-Savon faces regular power shortages, a common concern for businesses in Benin. In response, the co-operative is developing solar energy solutions to secure its power generation autonomy.

ACCESS! HAS GIVEN US THE COURAGE TO GO FURTHER!

Ruffine's impressive business growth attracted the attention of the General Directorate for External Trade, the national Focal Point for the ACCESS! programme. According to the Directorate, Arti-Savon was approached to participate in ACCESS! because of its wide range of products, the scale of its production capacity and its ability to seek out new market opportunities. After her participation, Ruffine had this to say about the programme:

'The ACCESS! programme is absolutely wonderful. The trainers are very capable and they helped us tremendously. I particularly appreciated the module on negotiations and I expect the technical trade material certainly to assist me in every field of expertise. Collaboration with the national Focal Point was good and they have followed up to see the results and achievements. I really feel they are looking out for us in international markets. Obviously, there is still so much to be done but with the support extended by ACCESS! we feel no challenge is insurmountable.'

While Arti-Savon has a strong presence in the local market with clients such as luxury hotels, the company now exports nearly 80% of its production. Arti-Savon employs 34 people and works with another 13 producer groups who are members of the co-operative. As demand for natural products is set to grow, investment in Arti-Savon is set to generate more job opportunities, more demand for sustainable raw materials and, thus, contribute significantly to reducing poverty in Benin.

WOMEN ARE BRAVE AND COURAGEOUS TOO !

When asked about her success, Ruffine says, *'Most women in business believe that to be successful means to benefit not just themselves but the people around them in their communities'*. Besides her work with women producers, Ruffine spent many years promoting other businesses as the coordinator of the West Africa Association for the Promotion of SMEs on behalf of Benin. For her work in supporting business development in the region, the Union of African Shippers Councils (UASC) awarded Ruffine a certificate of excellence in 2008, citing her contribution to the expansion of African economies. Last but not least, Ruffine has done all of this as a mother raising nine children. In her words,

'Courage and bravery are not the monopoly of men. Women are also brave and courageous. For them to succeed in the face of so many challenges, women need this courage, and patience and resolve. Others do not have our determination and patience! As successful businesswomen, we are appreciated because our clients know we are determined to see things through'

FROM PRIVATE CATERING TO GLOBAL MARKETS



Ms. Blanche Eyadi

COMPANY

PAM's Beverage

BUSINESS TYPE

Beverages and fruit juices

INTERVIEWED

April 2012

Cameroon



Mrs Blanche Eyadi is the General Manager of PAM's Beverage, a small enterprise which produces 100% organic fruit juices. She started by making natural juices for private functions and parties in her family home. Blanche says that people liked her creations so much that they urged her to put them on the market.

Motivated by the encouragement she received from family and friends, Blanche paid a visit to one of the major hotels in the city, getting a rare appointment with the Head Chef to offer a tasting session. The Head Chef and his team were so impressed, that an order was placed on the spot. *'After that experience, I had similar success with other hotels and restaurants and I soon realized that my kitchen was too small to handle the growing demand. I therefore found new premises, hired staff, learned the basics of business management and, above all, created a proper supply chain from production to delivery,'* Blanche recalls. Soon, Blanche began attending trade fairs, where she met French industrial entrepreneurs who sold her modern processing machines.

A MOVE TOWARD LARGE-SCALE PRODUCTION

In 2009, PAM's launched a promotion campaign as part of a strategy to scale up the company's production. Just as her product launch began, some of the bottles which had been placed in window displays in shops and supermarkets across the city started to burst in the heat of the sun. PAM's had to cancel the launch, withdraw all of her products from the stores and undertake a full sanitary inspection of the production line. The inspection led to the conclusion that the problem was caused by the encapsulating machine she had recently purchased from suppliers, which was defective. In order to regain the trust of her clients

and restore her company's image, Blanche knew she would have to offer products of perfect quality.

Over the next two years, PAM's did more than restore its reputation. Within a short time, the products were back on the shelves and PAM's could barely meet the demand of retailers and wholesalers, many of whom requested exclusivity rights to distribute her products. *'PAM's has become a leader in terms of quality, according to many clients and private consumers,'* says Blanche. PAM's produces a wide range of fruit juices made of local fruit like mango, guava, ginger, passion fruit, golden apple (cassimango), guanabana and sorrel. PAM's fruit juices are entirely organic, in their ingredients and in their preparation. They contain no coloring agents and they are processed using natural preservatives. Soon the company will start using honey instead of sugar.

'I've decided to go organic because of my strong passion for nature, which is close to my heart. In addition to that, organic products have many beneficial effects on health, which is good from a business standpoint,' adds Blanche. Before closing a deal with her suppliers, Blanche makes a point to visit the supplying farms to ensure that only organic or natural fertilizers are used, that there are no industrial plants in the vicinity and that the land is cultivated using natural methods. *'For some of the raw material, we have to travel quite a distance in order to find the quality and the farming practices we are looking for.'*



THE ACCESS! PROGRAMME HELPED ME OPTIMISE MY PERFORMANCE

In 2011, Blanche attended the ACCESS! training programme and says, 'ACCESS! made us more aware of the need for certification and traceability of our products if we are to sell to foreign markets.'

The company is finalizing HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point), ISO 9000, Global GAP and other certification standards and processes which are necessary to sell fruit juices to international markets. The next big project that will give PAM's Beverage an international dimension is the upgrading of its production line to meet the demand in international markets, as Blanche says, 'We've received purchase orders from CEMAC and EU countries.'

'The ACCESS! Programme helped me to optimise the performance of my company while also enabling us to identify new business



partners. Thanks to ACCESS! I made new contacts with other businesses. The training and support that were extended to us have proven very useful and we are now optimising the output of our plant, organising our accounts, and just better managing our business' adds Blanche.

ADDED VALUE FOR THE ECONOMY

Today, PAM's employs a staff of 21 persons thanks to new partnerships and new sales opportunities. Blanche believes that the modernization of her company will help her to increase production and multiply her sales figures at least tenfold. 'The growth of our business will mean an increase in both direct and indirect employment.' The company will soon launch its new line of production with a capacity of 2,000 bottles per hour and will upgrade its water treatment facility and packaging line. The company has already approached banks and financial institutions and prepared a strong business plan with excellent guarantees.

Through all of her business expansion, as a businesswoman, Blanche admits that it hasn't all been so easy: 'Even though the law entitles women to own property, in the cultural context of Africa, married women do not always have access to the property titles which are required as security for loans.' As for other women in business, Blanche offers this advice,

'In the current state of affairs, you have to love what you're doing and strongly believe in it; believe in yourself and persevere, and accept constructive criticism if you want to move forward and progress.'

SUCCESS OF THE MANY IS THE SUCCESS OF ONE



**Ms. Antoinette
Koudjal Mangaral**

COMPANY

Établissements KAMA

BUSINESS TYPE

Cosmetics and natural products

INTERVIEWED

April 2012

Chad



After completing a vocational training programme in 1995, and with her husband's financial support, Ms. Antoinette Koudjal Mangaral launched her own business, Établissements KAMA, specializing in the collection and processing of nearly 5 tons of shea butter per year.

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to most of the world's production of shea nuts but it has still not reached its full potential. Europe consumes annually up to 60,000 tons of shea butter, most of which goes into the chocolate industry. Of the millions of trees reported in Chad only a very small percentage are harvested, in spite of the strong demand. Chadians use shea butter in their local cuisine and in cosmetics produced for local consumption and it is estimated that further processing opportunities offer a high potential for export.

When she launched her business, Antoinette knew that her own success would depend on the development of the sector in the country as a whole. Antoinette thus positioned herself to head the Chadian Association of Agro-business Operators (ATOSA) in 2003, and once elected, she worked hard to create a dynamic that would support investment and development of processing in the agriculture sectors across the country. Under her leadership, ATOSA grew from strength to strength and to date, many of its members, who are composed of small agri-businesses across the country, are developing the shea butter niche among many others.

Outside of ATOSA, Antoinette joined an association for women artisans working in the informal sector with a membership of over 1,000 women, some of whom are the suppliers of raw materials for Établissements KAMA. Also a member of the Chadian Association of Women in Business (AFCCET) for more than ten years,

Antoinette is a figure in the movement and still finds time to mentor small businesswomen in rural areas in the area of business management.

As a result, Antoinette has won recognition in Chad for her contribution to the development of the country's economy, as a strong advocate for women in business and, more generally, for developing the agriculture sector which is so important for the overall economic development of Chad.

BECAUSE OF ACCESS! I'VE LAUNCHED A RESTRUCTURING PROCESS

Antoinette says that *ACCESS!* launched a transformation process that did not stop once she completed the training: *'I undertook a total restructuring process of my business. I set out to organize all of the tasks being done in the company, we strengthened our accounting system and I got more involved in certain areas that required better supervision. I now train my staff so that they can manage business operations at home while I am away developing export markets. I have also transferred skills for better managing the supply chain. Everything is up and running now!'*

Antoinette had this to say about the training modules: *'I particularly benefitted from the training sessions on INCOTERMS® 2010, negotiating skills, and pricing. In the past I did not concern myself as much with these areas. In my*



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business transactions, people would approach Établissements KAMA directly to purchase our products but I knew very little about the terms and conditions of contracts. The ACCESS! training helped me to formalize contracts around business deals and these have proven to better secure my interests. I also enjoyed sharing my experience with the other businesswomen who took part in the programme.'

As for the national Focal Point for the ACCESS! programme, Antoinette says 'the Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture, Mining and Crafts, is doing a wonderful job and is keeping in touch to see how we are developing. The ACCESS! Focal Point has really shown their commitment to offering the programme and its services to all women, by developing the programme in other regions of Chad while establishing linkages for us with business opportunities neighbouring countries.' Établissements KAMA has been exporting to the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo and to Europe.

EXPANDING HORIZONS

Établissements KAMA is extending its line of products to include peanuts and sesame oil. All of the company's products are certified organic which Antoinette says gives her an advantage in new markets vis-à-vis her competitors who don't

have this certification. In the coming months, Établissements KAMA will also be improving their packaging in order to better access export opportunities.

'We have to face up to many challenges. However, since our products are of an excellent quality, to date we have not met with any major challenges in accessing new markets.'



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THE FRUIT OF MANY YEARS OF RESEARCH



Ms. Joséphine Bouanga

COMPANY

ENOCE Bio

BUSINESS TYPE

Food processing

INTERVIEWED

March 2012

Republic of Congo



Determined to fight malnutrition in the Republic of Congo, Mrs. Joséphine Bouanga, an agronomist by profession, decided to transform fruit and vegetables with strong medicinal properties into bottled drinks. Nutritional ingredients and special diets are gaining popularity in their use for reducing health risks and slowing the development of some diseases.

In more advanced countries, these are considered 'new' methods to complement and support conventional healthcare treatments. In the Republic of Congo and neighbouring countries, where medical treatment and medicines are either not available or not affordable, such alternatives are not 'new' or even 'alternative' sometimes they may be the only treatment available.

In 2004, Joséphine registered her company under the name of ENOCE BIO and began a diploma programme in advanced studies in nutrition and agri-food processing technologies at the Marien Ngouabi University at Brazzaville, where she focused her research on the qualities of pumpkin as an inhibitor of prostate cancer. In 2008, she completed her studies and was encouraged by her research. Convinced by the evidence of its healing qualities, Joséphine sought to extract and preserve the healing concentrate of pumpkin in liquid form so that it would be easy to consume. Since pumpkin milk cannot be preserved and stored for long periods of time, she had to find a way of stabilizing it. After a period of trial and error, she came up with a solution and registered a patent for her invention with the African Intellectual Property Organization (AIPO).

Today, ENOCE BIO produces 29,000 litres of pumpkin milk monthly and offers many other products, such as fruit juices and concentrates, a range of plant milks and vegetable preserves, dried vegetable fingerfoods, soy flour, garlic

tinctures and syrups as well as ginger and bissap, all contained in special packaging to ensure the food items have a shelf life of at least one year. Each product is patented and is the result of many years of research. The move from the trial phase to the industrial phase was gradual for each product and many tests were carried out in the market to determine consumer interest before they were released. The company's products are now sold in drugstores, supermarkets, hospitals, health centres and primary schools in the Republic of Congo. In order to target export markets, the company sells through wholesale exporters who then sell to distributors abroad.

ACCESS! GAVE US GREATER VISIBILITY AS A COMPANY

ENOCE BIO has just completed an international marketing campaign, focusing on neighbouring countries such as Angola and Benin. Currently, direct exports represent a modest share of 10% of the company's sales but Joséphine is confident that ENOCE BIO will continue its path into new markets thanks to the interest shown during its participation in many trade fairs. It was during one international trade fair that the national Focal Point in the Republic of Congo discovered ENOCE BIO and introduced the company to the ACCESS! Programme.

According to Joséphine, 'ACCESS! provides an outstanding training opportunity. I especially



benefitted from the training in packaging, quality control and INCOTERMS® 2010 . Thanks to the programme, I am now better informed about my rights, including my rights around dealing with cross-border customs officials.’ Joséphine adds ‘more than anything else, the ACCESS! programme has highlighted the value of our company and gives it much greater visibility, that would not have been possible otherwise.’

SCALING UP

Growth in demand for organic products world wide is expected to remain robust. Although future prospects for ENOCE BIO look positive, to date, ENOCE BIO has had to rely on its own financing. As ENOCE BIO increases its international market share, and in the absence of serious competition, the company expects to register a 44% sales increase per year over the next two years. According to its business plan, ENOCE BIO expects to see its profits jump to 116%, a huge leap compared to the 15% margin reported by the most successful companies listed nationally. Scaling up to a larger industrial processing facility is likely to generate a number of employment opportunities, directly in production, and indirectly in sales.

BETTER FOOD SECURITY

Thanks to its innovative range of products, ENOCE BIO is committed to fighting malnutrition and improving food security by encouraging local agricultural production. With over 10 years of experience, an in-depth understanding of the



organic niche, excellent patents and a strong commercial presence in the country, Joséphine has every reason to be optimistic.

As a mother of a two-year old girl, Joséphine takes care to balance work and family life and spends quality time with her daughter, enjoying walks by the seaside. As regards other women in business in the Republic of Congo, she has this to say:

‘I urge business women in the Central Africa region, who seek to export their products, to work within the norms and standards and to attend business training and support programmes such as ACCESS! because information is the key for success!’

TRADING SECURITY FOR ADVENTURE



Ms. Samrawit Moges

COMPANY

Travel Ethiopia

BUSINESS TYPE

Tourism

INTERVIEWED

February 2012

Ethiopia



Samrawit Moges had been working for the National Tour Operation for ten years when she decided to leave the security of working for someone else and venture out on her own. It took four years of careful savings and a hard-won business loan until, in 1997, Travel Ethiopia could purchase a fleet of Land Cruisers to shuttle tourists in comfort to the spectacular sites in Ethiopia's countryside.



cultural, scenic, natural wonders and safaris.' Travel Ethiopia is well positioned to make these attractions accessible, given its 60 partners in communities across the country and its strong focus on community development and environmental sustainability.

THE ACCESS! BUSINESS COUNSELLING PROGRAMME WAS REALLY AN EYE OPENER FOR ME

Just as the business started to take off, however, conflict broke out with Eritrea. Even though this was the worst time for tourism, Samrawit had to sustain the business loan. Through hard work and innovative strategies, Travel Ethiopia made it through those difficult times and has come out as one of the top operators in the country, with 35 permanent employees, a steady clientele from Europe and North America, and several sister companies in the communities in which they work.

In order to take full advantage of the growth opportunities, Samrawit was introduced to the ACCESS! Business Counselling Programme by CAWEE (Centre for African Women Economic Empowerment), the ACCESS! Focal Point in Ethiopia. *'The Business Counselling programme was really an eye opener for me,'* said Samrawit. *'I had been in business for over a decade but I had never set targets. The programme worked with me to set targets and develop a full set of recommendations to reach them. The ITC-trained Business Counsellor gave excellent advice in a very collaborative and professional manner. I have embarked on a six-month plan to implement the recommendations; including restructuring the company and a training plan for my employees. Even a lifetime of education could not have matched the solid advice, which was given for a very small fee.'*

Despite recent shocks in the travel and tourism sector worldwide, international tourism continues to grow at a record pace. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), Africa is expected to continue to lead the world for growth in tourism. The number of international arrivals in 2011 to destinations in Sub-Saharan Africa grew by two million over 2010. According to Samrawit, *'Tourism in Ethiopia is doing very well now and offers diversified attractions – historical,*

As per the recommendations of the ACCESS! Business Counsellors, Samrawit has hired

¹ <http://asiapacific.unwto.org/en/event/3rd-world-ecotourism-conference>

a consultant. *'I had never done goal setting previously. We did an evaluation and now there are a number of things to implement. We aim now to totally transform the company and become Ethiopia's premiere tour operator.'*

PIONEERING HIGH VALUE ECO-TOURISM SUPPORTS THE LOCAL ECONOMY TOO

The company is in a solid position to do so with the niche it has developed in eco-tourism. As one of the founders of the Ethiopian Ecotourism Association, Samrawit has made sure her company established deep roots in the communities in which it has been leading eco-tours. High value eco-tourism is the fastest growing sub sector within travel and tourism and is considered one of the key pillars stimulating growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. Not only is eco-tourism generating high value-added revenues, it typically generates the most significant benefits for local communities, providing supplemental income to rural farmers, women and young people.

Travel Ethiopia has also established a sister company, Village Ethiopia, with a sustainable, community-based Eco-Lodge in the Afar region. *'Our eco-lodge concept is to really work with the community. When they thrive and benefit from the investment they are more likely to be gentle with the environment. In our communities, people earn money to send their children to school. They see the benefits and therefore they take care to protect the natural resources,'* said Samrawit. Village elders appreciate the economic value of the visits which have turned temporary visits into something more permanent, including creating permanent jobs. Through this relationship, the company has partnered with village elders to develop the local school and even to end harmful traditional customs such as early marriage.

The more Travel Ethiopia invests in local partnerships with the communities, the more opportunities arise for Samrawit as an entrepreneur. Community engagement has led to several spin off companies in industries that serve the tourism sector. Among them, a flower farm in Koko that employs 400 people, 300 of these are women.

FAMILY AND GENDER DYNAMICS – A KEY TO SUCCESS

Samrawit's advice to other women entrepreneurs is to not be discouraged. *'If you want to be successful, you have to sacrifice something.'* Samrawit says



she struggled when she had to choose business activities over spending full time with her children. When they were still young Samrawit also had to opt out of many networking events in order to be with her family. On balance, Samrawit says that growing up with the business was an enriching experience for her children. Travelling with their parents during business trips offered Samrawit's children a window into the ancient culture and rich heritage of the country and the world.

Samrawit's husband Thomas has been a supportive force behind the business, personally leading many of the tours. Samrawit attests, *'His European background and facility in three Ethiopian and six international languages really upgraded the profile and productiveness of the company.'* Samrawit also gives a lot of credit to the guides, saying they are the greatest assets in the business. *'Our guides know the countryside and have the relationships with the hotels and the small communities. We are also the first company in Ethiopia to employ full time female guides. The knowledge women have regarding the ins and outs of the culture, the communities and the family life is a major advantage.'* Samrawit says that getting direct feedback from the clients is critical, and ensures that she and her husband are present when tours come to a close.

SHARING THE WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE

Ethiopia is just starting to tap into the potential for tourism to boost its economy and foreign exchange reserves. In order to do so more effectively, Samrawit Moges has been invited to play a more formal role in promoting Ethiopian tourism overseas. In addition, Samrawit was recently elected for the second time to sit on the board of Ethiopia's Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce. The future looks bright for Samrawit. With her pioneering role in developing eco-tourism and successful spinoff initiatives in remote communities Samrawit's increasing role in developing the tourism and travel sector in Ethiopia is surely something to watch.

FROM TWENTY PIECES TO THREE TONNES



**Ms. Pally
Appiah Kubi**

COMPANY

Ebenut Ghana Limited

BUSINESS TYPE

Food processing

INTERVIEWED

December 2011

Ghana



Pally Appiah Kubi's business idea began after she witnessed quality produce being wasted due to a lack of storage and processing facilities in rural Ghana. She realized that with simple drying technologies, she could save large quantities of quality produce from waste, while boosting exports and offering farmers a buffer against the seasonality of their business.

Ebenut Ghana Limited began in 1996 as a small, local workshop with only one dryer processing 20 pieces of fruit or vegetables at a time. Although the company had only a handful of competitors, Pally sought from the beginning to differentiate her business in the market. Her research indicated that consumers were beginning to pay more attention to the nutritional value in their food. As a food scientist, Pally knew how to maintain the high nutritional value in fruits and vegetables during the drying process. She made a commitment that Ebenut would use a process which does not use sulphites or other preservatives. Using carefully selected suppliers, Ebenut created a line of products that qualified for Fair Trade (FLO CERT) and organic certification from the Institute for Market Ecology (IMO). These two certifications allow the company to maximize the value added to the products.

Ebenut grew during a boom period for Ghana's exports. Between 2003 and 2007, Ghana's



exports of fresh fruit such as pineapples grew by 45%, with Ghana becoming the third largest exporter to the EU. Ebenut grew to 47 employees and purchased from 21 farmers. Currently, Ebenut processes, packages and sells three tonnes of dried produce per month.

ACCESS! TRAINING BROUGHT A NEW SENSE OF CONFIDENCE

Pally says the ACCESS! Export training programme managed by the Ghana Export Promotion Authority (GEPA) was an eye-opener for her. *'The programme covers so many topics about export business which are important to get right. I particularly appreciated the training modules on INCOTERMS® 2010 and negotiations. From ACCESS!, I developed a better understanding of the responsibilities of clients and suppliers which helped me with my own negotiation processes. With this new sense of confidence, I was able to talk to customers in a way that was win-win. It was empowering just to access this information. Knowledge can remove fear as a barrier to tackling new markets.'* Ebenut now exports to West Africa, Europe and the United States.

Pally was recognized for her business acumen in 2008 when she was nominated by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for the annual Woman in Business Award, which considers innovation, entrepreneurial talent and company performance. In addition, she is a respected member of the Association of Ghana Industry and of the Empretec Business Forum. Still,



she confesses, *'The highest point in my business was the sense of satisfaction in taking a simple idea from scratch, bringing it to life and being well received by clients.'*

CHALLENGES APLENTY – FROM CAPITAL TO MORAL SUPPORT

Despite excellent market prospects, a very fine line of products and international recognition for her company performance, it remains near impossible for Ebenut to access working capital from a formal financial institution. Women in Ghana have very little access to collateral which the majority of institutional loans require. *'For three years the banks have been reluctant to lend to me. They offer to lend based on orders, of which I have plenty. But I cannot risk taking on large order increases if the banks are not going to follow through.'* Like so many women in the region, she has to plough her profits directly back into carefully stewarded expansion. For this reason, Ebenut turns away an estimated seven tonnes in orders per month, missing the opportunity to purchase from local farmers, hire more employees and boost Ghana's exports.

Paully notes that the tight cash flow affected her company's level of preparedness for the economic downturn, saying, *'That would have been the time to step up marketing efforts and get into trade fairs and more market development.'* Like other successful small exporters, Paully



responded to the changes by strengthening Ebenut's local market presence. *'Once you go through so many obstacles, you get used to it and you just find solutions, you are not going to run away in the face of an obstacle.'* The obstacles for small business in Africa are plenty.

The lowest point in the business for Paully was very early on when she had to deliver on a large order to Europe and the night shift did not turn up. *'Products have to dry overnight and I had to explain to my husband that I was not coming home.'* Paully says it is not easy as a wife and mother to balance business with family life. *'You have to take extra time to plan for things especially when the children are young.'* Paully and her husband found the right balance and successfully raised three sons, two of whom are medical doctors while the other is an accountant.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS - NEW COUNTRIES, NEW PRODUCTS, NEW STRATEGY

Exports by women entrepreneurs like Paully in this sector are critical for Ghana's economy. The good news is that the demand for exotic dried fruit and vegetables is expected to rise steadily for many years to come. To position Ebenut for this opportunity, Paully participated in the ACCESS! Business Counselling Programme and hopes it will work with her to build the best strategy for the launch of a new line of products into North America. Ebenut has recently expanded its traditional line of dried fruits, nuts and vegetables, to introduce instant versions of traditional Ghanaian Jollof rice and Gari Foto. With fine-tuned packaging, labelling and insights into US food distribution chains, Paully plans to introduce the new products into US supermarkets in 2012. *'I have no doubt the ACCESS! Business Counselling Programme will be a significant factor in this next step!'*

A FATHER'S CHALLENGE TO HIS DAUGHTER



Ms. Margaret
Komen

COMPANY
MACE Foods, Limited

BUSINESS TYPE
Food processing

INTERVIEWED
February 2012

Kenya



Margaret Komen had a successful career with a British non-government organization developing new products in the horticulture sector when her father challenged her to venture out on her own. Margaret says, 'He told me, 'You are already in the market, why don't you do it under your own name?'' After some reflection, Margaret left her job and went to Europe to advance her education as a food technologist. She returned to Kenya with a degree and a joint-venture partner, and started MACE Foods.

Margaret says MACE Food's first export experience was humbling. *'In 2001, I attended ANUGA in Germany, the premiere world food show, as a visitor. I amassed several key contacts. Buyers were asking for spices and chillies, so I returned home and researched the possibility with Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture.'* She discovered that the business opportunity for Kenya's prized chillies and several spices had never been fully developed for international markets. Within a few months and following extensive sourcing, Margaret successfully collected a full container load of dried chillies.

FINDING SOLUTIONS IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

Chilli farming in Kenya has been affected by severe drought, but that wasn't Margaret's biggest challenge. She says her biggest challenge by far was getting the farmers to actually harvest their chillies. *'There was a time when I was getting orders from Europe for the African Bird's Eye chilli but the farmers were renegeing on their supply agreements. I could not understand it. The chillies are grown on farms across the country, but the farmers were not picking them.'* Margaret thought the most likely reason for this was that farmers were favouring the cash crops that offered them higher returns. Meanwhile, the fields were still full of chillies.

Determined to get to the heart of the matter, Margaret and her team spent six months observing the labour dynamics on the farms first hand. She says that she and her team made some interesting observations. *'Women were the ones planting, tending, harvesting and drying the chillies. Their husbands were the ones taking the chillies into our buying stores to receive payment but not sharing the payment with their wives. The women stopped harvesting the chillies because there was no reward for their work. I had to find a way to compensate the women for picking the chillies that would not undermine the family relations.'* Furthermore, Margaret had to find some kind of reward that was not cash and was not one of the family's staple crops such as maize.

During the months she spent observing the workers, Margaret realized how important sugar was. It is part of an important cultural tradition that binds people together. Margaret and her team devised a system to peg of one kilogramme of sugar for every 15 kilograms of chillies the women harvested. This immediately impacted MACE Foods' supply challenges. *'The 'Sugar Reward System' helped increase the quantities produced per farmer at any one delivery, which increased the overall supply volumes.'* Margaret says that the strategy is still working well because *'it became more than just a reward, it really served to bind the community together.'*



In spite of the challenges she has faced with chilli farming, Margaret is adamant about staying the course with small-scale farmers. *'I will never abandon these farmers I have worked with for 10 years. As a woman I am not purely in this to make money. It is easy enough to just make money. What keeps you going in spite of the challenges is the community. It is witnessing these jobs and the prosperity in the community that really keeps me driven to succeed as an entrepreneur.'*

ACCESS! WAS REALLY GOOD FOR MY BUSINESS

The recent economic downturn and drought conditions in Kenya prompted Margaret to start thinking about new directions for MACE Foods. Kenya's Export Promotion Council, the ACCESS! Country Focal Point, encouraged Margaret to attend the ACCESS! sector training on horticulture export which includes post-training mentorship support. Margaret says she wasn't immediately convinced, *'I was a bit reluctant at first to let a stranger come in and look at my business. But then I thought, what is the worst that can happen? And in the end it was really good for my business.'*

The ACCESS! business mentor reviewed some of the challenges MACE was facing. Margaret says the approach was very useful, *'There are times when you can't see the forest through the trees. It is really helpful to have someone come in from the outside and look in with a fresh pair of eyes. The ACCESS! programme took me out of the forest and into a helicopter to really look at the direction I was heading to.'* Margaret says the business mentor assigned to MACE Foods helped her reassess her financial planning and to reshape her overall strategy.

THE SEEDS OF FUTURE SUCCESS

One of the outcomes of the support from the ACCESS! mentor was the strengthening of MACE Foods' position in the local market, by developing new packaging and distribution strategies. In the export markets, MACE Foods is now developing higher value-added product lines, while capitalizing on a decade of experience as Kenya's pioneer exporter of premium African Bird's Eye chilli. The company has been instrumental in getting seed certification for Kenyan Bird's Eye chilli and will be the first to offer this seed in the world market. In addition, MACE Foods has obtained Fair Trade certification, which has boosted its trading profile.

Margaret's advice for other potential businesswomen is:

'Women really have to fight to come out of their shell. Even after ten years in my business, I still face obstacles every time I go to the bank! Even my own male employees are reluctant to take instruction from me because I am a woman. We have to let everyone know that what women are doing is not to be diminished.'

ONE-STOP SOLUTIONS FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS



Ms. Bernadette Zeiler

COMPANY

BMZ Import & Export Agencies

BUSINESS TYPE

Pharmaceuticals and equipment

INTERVIEWED

February 2012

South Africa



Bernadette Zeiler saw that buyers of medical and dental equipment were dealing with multiple specialized manufacturers, causing the buyers to coordinate myriad sources and deliveries. Recognizing a gap in this USD 300 billion per year¹ market, she created BMZ Import and Export Agencies (BMZ).

BMZ is now the leading sourcing and consolidating agency in South Africa for medical, laboratory, orthopedic and dental equipment, offering a one-stop shop for clients like hospitals and ministries of health. As the owner and managing director, Bernadette recently received South Africa's Gauteng Award for Export Services for succeeding as a supplier into particularly difficult markets.

ACCESS! REALLY GAVE US A KICK START!

Bernadette attributes much of her success to the ACCESS! Programme and its Focal Point in South Africa, the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI). Bernadette says the training allowed her to achieve a greater potential, *'Prior to the ACCESS! Export training, most of our business was domestic and the amount I was exporting was minimal. I had no idea we would be able to get through some of the hurdles we anticipated.'*

Following the ACCESS! training and a regional trade mission organized by the ACCESS! Focal Point, BMZ decided to focus its efforts on selling South African made products within the region. As a result, BMZ obtained Southern African Development Community (SADC) Certificate of Origin certification which means clients in the region pay 15 to 20 per cent less in duties if they

purchase from South Africa than they would pay if they purchased from suppliers from outside the region. A second potential challenge BMZ worked out was transportation. In spite of the lack of fully developed infrastructure in the region, BMZ can deliver to many markets in Africa within a few weeks, something overseas competitors could not easily do *'ACCESS! helped me to realize that there were several advantages to selling within the region,'* says Bernadette.

In the beginning stages of the business, BMZ only sold to buyers in Malawi. Through the ACCESS! programme and its partner Focal Point, JCCI, BMZ Agencies went on a trade mission to Tanzania and Uganda. Bernadette says, *'Today, most of my sales are to export markets. ACCESS! really gave us a kick start.'*

THE ONE-STOP BUSINESS MODEL

When Bernadette began setting up the business, she looked at differentiating her business model from those of her competitors. As someone who worked for twelve years in the industry prior to starting the business, Bernadette knew the strength of BMZ's model would be in the services they offer. *'The customer can come to us for individual products but when a client plans to build a hospital we can offer the whole solution for them, setting up the hospital, training the doctors, right down to supplying branded bed linens. In Malawi, we outfitted an entire hospital in the capital and numerous satellite clinics in rural areas.'*

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/04/idUS181048+04-Jan-2011+MW20110104>

BMZ sources more than 10,000 products and consolidates the shipment for the client. Bernadette says the convenience of consolidation means a lot of time saved for her clients. 'Normally the client would have to deal with hundreds of suppliers and multiple deliveries while we can offer the whole package.' BMZ strengthens this package by ensuring agreements on guarantee maintenance, repairs and other support services. 'If anything breaks down, the technicians are there within a very short period of time.' BMZ now has a solid niche in this sector due to the agreements it has negotiated with top of the line manufacturers to be their sole representing agency for the countries where BMZ sells. Bernadette credits **ACCESS!** for this.

Bernadette says that her one-stop business model is not only a competitive and unique advantage internationally, but is so nationally as well. Other competitors' product ranges are less diversified and they may not offer the extensive follow-up services.

'ACCESS! boosted my confidence to negotiate solid strategic service agreements.'

ONE STEP AHEAD

The future looks bright for BMZ Agencies. Mrs. Zeiler says that, from her perspective as an agent, the healthcare market remains solid even during economic downturns. 'We are always looking ahead and since we source rather than manufacture the equipment and products, we can respond to shifts in demand. We also try to stay one step ahead of what our competitors are offering.'

In response to these growth opportunities, Bernadette plans to expand her export business to new countries, to increase her product range, hire more staff and move to new premises within the next year. BMZ is considering expanding its export strategy to the European market where the trade agreements with Africa will also give her an edge. South African manufacturers also have a potential edge in the United States, in terms of quality and price on some smaller medical items, as Bernadette recently discovered at the top medical trade show in the U.S.



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Bernadette says the best advice she can give to other women entrepreneurs is to not give up. 'Once you have a goal and vision, be persistent. There are many challenges but what we need to do is to just work through them and never give up. Then the vision will come to pass. I had a vision and a goal to develop this model in South Africa and in the world. I have succeeded and been able to adjust it to suit the different needs of various countries'.

Bernadette stresses that the support of an association or institution like JCCI can really help new exporters avoid potential pitfalls.

'Sometimes we don't have the time or can't afford to make mistakes,' she says. 'The ACCESS! programme and its Focal Point, JCCI, really helped and mentored BMZ through the process of exporting.'

THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE



Ms. Joyce
Mbwette

COMPANY

Foot Loose Tanzania
Handicrafts Limited

BUSINESS TYPE

Handicraft

INTERVIEWED

February 2012

Tanzania

Foot Loose Tanzania Limited Handicrafts was established in 1999 as an intermediary between Tanzanian artisans and international markets. Foot Loose builds a triple bottom line into its business model, generating good profits, sourcing sustainable raw materials in its full range of diverse products and treating its network of producer groups as partners in the business.

Foot Loose's company philosophy is to promote social justice and not maximize profit at the producer's expense. Annual sales have grown from USD 30,000 in 2002 to over USD 500,000 in 2008 with up to 75 percent of those sales in export markets. The company's export success to the United States, Germany, Korea and Japan effectively tripled its workforce within three years and at any one time the company provides a sustainable livelihood to up to 1500 people in villages across Tanzania.

Foot Loose's rapid growth is attributed to global growth in demand for African crafts, favourable terms under the African Growth Opportunities Act, the European Union's Everything But Arms Agreement and the company's strategic positioning of itself both in terms of productivity and marketing. Joyce Mbwette, Managing Director for Foot Loose Handicrafts explains,

'Over the past decade we have refined our production chain to make it possible to produce large quantities at market-responsive prices, while still guaranteeing a fair return for the producers. We work intensively with core groups of craft producers in each type of craft. Each producer group appoints a leader whom we train to work with our design consultants.'

Foot Loose regularly offers training to its producer groups on technical and organizational points and involves them in decision making. This creates the smooth feedback loop on quality and production that enables Foot Loose to respond quickly to large orders and adapt to rapid changing trends. Traditional village-based production is complemented by a 5,500 square-foot workshop and showroom in central Dar Es Salaam.

ACCESS! IMPROVED OUR EXPORT READINESS

Joyce Mbwette came to the ACCESS! Export Training through the Small Industries Development Organization/ Women Enterprise Development (SIDO/WED), the ACCESS! Focal Point partner in Tanzania. Joyce says, 'ACCESS! is a very important training programme for exporters. An entrepreneur can learn through experience certainly but you cannot be prepared enough for export markets. There is a lot of knowledge the exporter has to have at her fingertips and ACCESS! provides this. The first training I attended solidified my understanding on procedures for export processing. Certainly, I was exporting already but the training helped us to improve our export readiness, our ability to respond to export orders more effectively.'



As the business has grown, Joyce has appointed export managers.

'I sent my export managers to attend the second phase ACCESS! export training. They came back far more knowledgeable and I feel I can better rely on them. It frees up my time to attend to high level meetings, travel to the trade fairs and refocus my efforts on design and overall strategy aspects of the business.'

COMPETITIVE BY DESIGN

As one of five large handicraft traders in Tanzania, Foot Loose finds that competition within the country can be a challenge. The company has dealt with this through cultivating a trust partnership with producer groups. Joyce says that each producer group for Foot Loose commits to not duplicating the design pattern of another group without their permission. *'We make sure they exchange information and have joint workshops, meet to discuss common issues and take collective action as needed. This creates a positive working environment but it also protects us from internal competitive disputes.'*

As for competition in the international market, naturally it is a big challenge. Joyce says, *'The only way to survive is to design original crafts with the Tanzanian signature- there are some products like the traditional baskets, ebony carvings and the Tingatinga paintings that cannot be produced in China or India because they come from natural materials and artistry which are indigenous to Tanzania. Our use of natural dyes, our focus on*

high quality and environmental sustainability is something that mass producers cannot match.'

Joyce is herself a designer and has cultivated design expertise within the network of small scale craft producers, investing in 14 individual lead artists in each type of craft. In this way, Foot Loose has the capability to develop a stream of new products which the company can market under its own brand, while continuing to produce on a sub-contracting basis.

SECURING THE FUTURE: DIVERSIFYING AT HOME AND ABROAD

Locally, tourism is down, which has led to weaker demand in Foot Loose's signature shop and hotel locations. In response to changes in demand, Foot Loose is capitalizing on its many years of cultivating design capabilities. The company is now working on specialized branding and specialized products using the natural fibres and dyes available to them, and has recently begun marketing a line of home furnishings for the local market. For international markets, Foot Loose has developed a line of designer bags for higher end clients which are now sold in major cities in the United States.

Foot Loose has also begun diversifying into a new sector that continues the company's tradition of working closely with rural producers. Recently Foot Loose began exporting high quality edible sunflower oil. The new business venture into edible oil has created more jobs and a steady income for farmers, generating profits which are reinvested to help finance the intensive product and skills development work.

A PRODUCT FIT FOR ROYALTY



Ms. Sara
Katebalirwe

COMPANY

Marie-Sar Agencies,
Limited

BUSINESS TYPE

Handicraft and fashion

INTERVIEWED

February 2012

Uganda



Sara Katebalirwe had more than fifteen years' experience as a local made-to-measure fashion designer when she decided to focus on an innovation which she believed had a high potential for sales. With an eye for international fashion and textile trends, Sara recognized the appeal of Uganda's traditional bark cloth as a versatile material for modern fashion and house ware products.

Ugandan bark cloth was honoured by UNESCO in 2005 as 'a masterpiece of the heritage of humanity.' It is associated with royalty and has a deep cultural history which predates weaving. Yet, Sara explained:

'Local people are so used to seeing it that they don't realize its potential value to clients in foreign markets.'

Sara saw that she had the opportunity to be at the forefront of introducing this product material to the international market, and formed Marie-Sar Agencies Ltd. To improve the production capability and the quality of the product, she incorporated artisan and farmer training into production activities and developed new techniques to strengthen and add color to the material. *'Marie-Sar is really moving artisans to produce higher quality products.'*

Marie-Sar became a pioneer in soft furnishings made from bark cloth, with products ranging from home furnishings and office accessories to handbags, jewellery and other fashion accessories. The cloth is appreciated not only for its fine finish and versatility, but it is a renewable resource, which enhances its appeal to conscious consumers in the European markets where the products are sold.

ACCESS! POSITIONED US FOR EXPORT MARKETS

Sara says the ACCESS! training she attended in 2007 and 2008 helped to better position her for the new business venture, 'I was relatively new to exporting and I was struggling with aspects like export documentation and getting paid on time.' It was following the ACCESS! training that Sara professionalized all aspects of her operations. Marie-Sar Agencies Ltd has since become the largest and most innovative company in Uganda working in bark cloth.

Shortly after Sara started her business, her husband passed away and she was raising her two small children on her own. The only way she could balance the needs of her family and her business was to base the business out of her home. *'Working from home, there were times when I felt alone in the business environment,'* she says, adding that her affiliation with the Ugandan Women Entrepreneurs Association (UWEAL) helped her break through the isolation that women entrepreneurs can experience while trying to balance work and family. UWEAL, the official Focal Point institution for the ACCESS! programme in Uganda, offered Sara opportunities for Export Training and for identifying loans at more manageable rates than those available from formal financial institutions. *'These are opportunities I would not have had otherwise. My*



advice to other women is to seek out business associations and mentorship relationships with business associations like UWEAL.'

Sara says that in the few years since she participated in the ACCESS! Export Training for Women Entrepreneurs, her sales, production capacity and number of employees have more than doubled. She now has 19 full-time employees and 90 women working part-time. *'I have benefitted so much from programmes like ACCESS! and from the support of organizations like ITC. These people gave me their time, so even though I am very busy with the business, I make sure I take time to give back.'* Today Sara is mentoring other businesswomen who are venturing into export markets.

SUSTAINING AN INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

In 2008, Sara embarked on a joint venture with a Dutch company to form a second venture, Royal Bark Cloth Designs (RBCD), to boost production and design capacity and access the Dutch market. When RBCD was launched in 2008, it was well received but was quickly hit by the economic downturn. *'The business would have been better prepared for the downturn in international markets, she says, if it were easier to access the capital they needed to invest more in marketing'*. In the short term, Sara is responding to uncertainty in global demand by developing new products and strengthening her original brand, Marie-Sar Agencies, Ltd., which has its own web presence and markets its products domestically, regionally and internationally.

SECURING THE FUTURE THROUGH COLLABORATION

In order to better position herself on the longer term, Sara plans on using the ACCESS! Business Counselling component, which she says could not have arrived at a better time. *'The Business Counselling programme is an excellent follow up to the export training. Now is the right time to bring in hands-on business expertise to strengthen my management team and to fine tune my business performance and export strategy.'*

As part of her long-term strategy, Sara is petitioning the government of Uganda to obtain geographic indications labelling for Ugandan bark cloth. *'The process for obtaining geographic indications is long and requires commitment and the investment of resources. It must be nominated by the country, however, the authorities will only commit to the process when they see the value.'* *'Exports account for 80% of Sara's sales'*, a testament to the international appeal of the company's products.

Sara, through Marie-Sar and Royal Bark Cloth Designs, is now working with other bark cloth stakeholders to form a common association.

'If we are better organized we will be in a better position to advocate for the geographic indications, labelling and national recognition generally.' Sara says she is optimistic, *'There is vast market potential. We have barely tapped into it. With the right strategy, there are many opportunities to be had.'*



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