

Aid to Artisans

Fall 2018 Newsletter



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*Cover Image: A Lesotho artian creates her first drawing at a Creativity and Business Workshop in Maseru.
Photograph by Lauren Barkume*

*Table Of Contents Image: a new basket design from Lesotho by Jane Taylor that will be shown at Las Vegas Market in Jan 2019.
Photograph by Justice Kalebe*

Maud Obe teaches the value of a smile and teamwork

Maud Obe and her ATA team spent months designing a marketing program for artisans in Djibouti, a small nation on the Horn of Africa. But, within minutes of welcoming the all-women audience to the September trainings, Obe realized the strategy wasn't going to work. Time for creativity!

The backstory

After an initial assessment of crafts produced in remote villages and a series of product development workshops, ATA was back in Djibouti, a country bounded by Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. "It is a virgin land," Obe explains of this little-known country where rural women artisans produce traditional products mostly for their own use. Creative Learning,

through Aid to Artisans, is the first organization to help female artisans in Djibouti make money by selling their baskets and beadwork. "Projet de Promotion de l'Emploi des jeunes et de l'Artisanat" (PROPEJA) is funded by the World Bank and the Japanese Government. It was developed to provide design, business training and financing to more than 3000 women.

The marketing phase

PROPEJA's long term goal is to enable women rural artisans to sell their products to boutiques in Djibouti City, the nation's capital, and to the international hotels that dot the country's coast. The ultimate goal is for the women to sell to neighboring countries and finally to buyers in the United States.



Confidence boosting team building workshops were held by Maud Obe in four villages in Djibouti.



The short term goal was to teach the women that just because product is beautiful doesn't mean it will sell. To sell the artisans needed an organization and marketing strategy. So, ATA designed a training-- one that needed to work around two big obstacles: illiteracy and language. None of the women could read and write and many spoke different dialects of Obe's native French.

Teaching confidence

The training took place in three different locations: Djibouti City, Ali Sabieh and Tadjourah. During Obe's trip 75 women were trained, representing 21 associations from 6 rural villages.

"Just to get them to speak was very difficult,"

recalls Obe of how painfully shy the women were. "Some couldn't speak above a whisper. I had an icebreaker planned where they had to ask each other questions about themselves. But some couldn't do it." Obe spent the mornings boosting their confidence to get them speak to each other and speak up.

Teaching through pictures and simulations

One objective was to teach the women about accountability and teamwork when running a business. Obe showed the women a picture of people standing in a circle holding each other. "They understood that picture immediately," Obe recalls. A bigger challenge was explaining four key positions to run a marketing team: marketing/sales, quality control, designer and producer. Obe showed the women a picture



of a person looking through a magnifying glass and an image of a woman smiling and looking confident. “With each image, they were so intrigued,” Obe remembers. To further convey the meaning of each position, ATA used buyer-seller scenarios. “But, I realized immediately that because the women didn’t know what it meant to be a buyer, I couldn’t simply stand by as a facilitator. I had to play the role of the ‘buyer.’”

The simulations, Obe says, were the game changer. Acting out the parts not only helped the women understand the nuances of each position but how their own, individual personalities could make them better suited to particular jobs.

“‘I want to order 20 baskets from you,’ I told a group, acting as a buyer from the Sheraton Hotel in Djibouti. I was speaking directly to the woman playing the part of the marketing/sales person,” explains Obe recounting the interaction. “‘Now what do you do next?’ I asked.” It was an ‘aha moment’ for the entire team,” recalls Obe as the women quickly understood that being able to communicate well was a key trait of the marketing position. “They were all laughing because they saw that by playing out the roles they were learning. It was wonderful to see.”

“‘I cannot accept this order,’ Obe told another team. “‘The product isn’t what I asked for.’” The group was confused, but then soon understood how important it was for someone

to hold the position of quality control-- to oversee the workmanship as well as the packaging of the sold products. The quality control issue resolved, Obe says she “handed fake money to the financial person and asked her to, ‘show me how you would distribute the proceeds to the group’. All the women started laughing, again,” Obe recalls. “The treasurer didn’t know how to count.”

How to sell

To teach the women about presentation – of their products and themselves-- Obe set up a mock fair. Each group had a table on which to display their products. Obe again played the part of the buyer, walking from table to table.

The women were very enthusiastic.

“I am not coming to your table,’ I told one table, ‘because you are sitting down,’ and I walked away,” Obe says. “I was very tough on them.”

“I am not coming to your table because you are

not smiling or making eye contact with me,” Obe says she told another group.

“As I walked away from each table to shop at the competition’s table, the women immediately changed their demeanor-- standing up, smiling, looking at me. I went from table to table telling them why I wouldn’t buy from them. They appreciated how tough I was.”

Time for a field trip

The week of seminars was followed up by a marketing trip to Ethiopia. “That’s when it became more real for the women,” Obe says. They met artisans with whom ATA had worked six years ago, “women who were like them, from small villages who didn’t know how to read and write,” Obe says. “They saw how the women worked as an organized team, with inventory and categorized raw materials.” And, as they watched the women selling, smiling at buyers, negotiating pricing and selling, Obe says the Djibouti women understood the



Djibouti artisans and project staff take their first flight ever to Ethiopia for a marketing mission to visit successful Ethiopian craft businesses.

potential outcome of their own training. And they saw, too, that there was room in the marketplace for their products. “They don’t do black and white baskets in Ethiopia,” Obe explains. Buyers wanted to sell the Djibouti baskets. “The women realized their products had value outside their own country. It was a wonderful moment. They went back to their communities and associations with stories and pictures and said, ‘this can work for Djibouti.’ The trip gave them a sense of hope and clarity,” says Obe.

By October, most of the associations had assigned leadership positions, matching up personalities and fortes with job descriptions. Then, just two months after ATA’s training, in November the associations participated in a fair at the French Institute. In total, they made more than \$4,000 in sales.

“We had never sold that much and that well! I am so happy! Everything we’ve learned from Aid to Artisans paid off,” says Madina, a



participant in the training. “We even received our first orders from buyers.” In fact, one of those orders was from a real buyer from the Sheraton Hotel in Djibouti. The hotel had never purchased handmade goods from Djibouti artisans. Now, handmade crafts are on display throughout the hotel, including a wall design of dozens of colorful woven plates that hang in the shape of Africa.

"We will continue to work hard!" says Madina

Written by Cari Shane.



*Djibouti weavers visit Ethiopian basket weavers at their workshop
Photographs by Maud Obe*



In a Kingdom far, far away...

ATA sends international designers to Lesotho and new styles make their way back to Paris and Las Vegas

Aid to Artisans was front and center as the Kingdom of Lesotho launched Fashion Week in November.

An independent mountain kingdom in Southern Africa, Lesotho Fashion Week (LSFW) founder, Mahali Granier, calls LSFW “[an] artistic renaissance driven by the millennial generation.”

Few on the continent and in the world at large see the new fashion talent in Lesotho. That’s why the Government of Lesotho through the World Bank financed the Private Sector Competitiveness and Economic Diversification Project and engaged Aid to Artisans to help Lesotho artisans to create viable businesses that showcase Lesotho’s artistic talents.

“Our recommendation was to develop strong exporters for artisans who don’t have email access or the skills to keep international buyers happy and make export ready products,” says Maud Obe, ATA’s project lead for Lesotho.

The Creativity Workshop

ATA’s first step in Lesotho was workshops to prepare artisans for small-group and one-on-one product development with designers. Lauren Barkume, ATA’s Training Manager, and Justine Watterson, Director of the Imbali Visual Literacy Project based

*An artisan creates a headpiece from found materials at the Creativity and Business Workshop in Maseru.
Photograph by Lauren Barkume*

in Johannesburg, led workshops to “...help artisans get the confidence they need to work outside their comfort zones and realize how capable they are of making beautiful things,” says Barkume. It was important, too, to make sure that the artisans saw designers as colleagues and that ideas and products developed would be the result of a collaborative effort.

The workshops included lessons to develop the artisan’s artistic eye and teach drawing. As Barkume noted, “Many artisans didn’t have the skills to draw or understand a sketch. That’s a key element to turning an idea into a product a buyer will buy.” During this creativity workshop, the artisans worked on understanding color through color wheel exercises and games to support creation of cohesive product lines in wearable fashions and home decor.

Sending in a fashion consultant

“One of the goals of the Government of Lesotho is to get young people to see craft as cool and a place for economic opportunity,” says Obe of ATA’s mission in Lesotho. Having young people get interested in artisan work is crucial for craft’s future in the country. That is one reason ATA sent Paris-based fashioned consultant, Agustina Cattaneo, to Lesotho. The internationally renowned brand influencer is a regular at the “Big Four” Fashion Weeks — New York, Paris, Milan and London — and reports on the latest international styles for Argentina’s largest newspaper, *La Nación*.

Cattaneo’s mission to Lesotho’s remote villages grew out of her graduate degree thesis that envisioned a way to work on fashion design with impoverished artisans. Her ambitious goal



A found color wheel exercise at the Creativity & Business Workshop in Maseru. Photograph by Lauren Barkume



LSW LESOTHO FASHION WEEK 2018 AUTUMN | WINTER 18



1-4 NOV 2018 THABAMOSIU CULTURAL VILLAGE

Photograph by Khalala

is modernizing Lesotho craft so their work can accent world fashion. “In preparation for this trip, I had to think about what I wouldn’t have access to as teaching tools.” Without access computers and printers, Cattaneo used a Polaroid camera and mood boards with hundreds of design cutouts. “They looked at the moodboards as if I were showing them magic,” Cattaneo recalls. “I also knew I had to keep myself flexible, adapt my designs, for example, to the size of a loom or the materials available.” Finally, as a teaching tool, she brought accessories from her own closet as well as items from flea markets and Parisian boutiques.

Cattaneo worked with basket weavers in rural Botha Bothe to add purses to their home decor lines, Sobo, a jeweler in Morija who works with recycled materials, and weavers at Leribe Craft Centre who make ponchos, blankets and scarves out of mohair and wool.

She visited each artisan group twice. Her first visits to the three different villages revealed the skills and the traditions behind the local crafts, and she worked with the artisans on updating their designs. On her return trip, Cattaneo discussed quality control and collaborated with the artisans on solutions to various problems — such as fixes to stubborn latches on bags or



headbands that were too itchy to wear.

Fashion Week Seminar

Cattaneo was the keynote speaker at Lesotho Fashion Week. “I gave the same level of seminar as I would in New York,” says Cattaneo who conducted six different seminars. There were 21 ATA sponsored artisans at Fashion Week along with 200 fashion designers and artisans from throughout the country. Cattaneo’s presentations included a seminar on detecting fashion trends, understanding the fashion calendar, understanding consumer behavior



and multi-generational marketing.

Sending a home decor consultant

Home décor consultant, Jane Taylor, also worked with the basket weavers in Botha Bothe. Taylor is Zimbabwe-based and for nearly two decades has been running The Collaborative Craft Projects, a basket exporting business. A recent graduate of Aid to Artisans' Market Readiness Program, Taylor is on the leading edge of the home decor marketplace.

Taylor's biggest challenge was to take the artisan's beautiful products and extraordinary weave designs and curate them into a marketable line. According to Taylor, the artisans used colors that didn't work well together and therefore could not be marketed or sold cohesively.

"It was hard work but rewarding to meet

women with such wonderful talent and inherent skill. With little education, these women have exceptional basketry skills, and a real love of their craft. I was humbled by their... ability to transform a bundle of grass into an exceptional art piece," noted Taylor. Taylor worked collaboratively with the artisans to create a black and white line and expanded some of the basket designs developed by Indian designer Palash Singh in a previous program.

"This is now my way of making a living, I am the father and the mother of my kids, and weaving I found the platform to fulfill all my role as a key provider for my family," says Mmaseboka Mosoe, who participated in Taylor's workshop. "...the baskets are my ultimate way of life."

"I am happy when I weave, even happier when



Lesotho basket weavers in a product development workshop with Jane Taylor

Photograph by Justice Kalebe



*Lesotho basket weavers at a product development workshop in rural Butha Buthe
Photograph by Justice Kalebe*

my children have food on their tables at the end of the day, its gift of life to me” - Mmamochoba Chakela, another participant in Taylor's workshop.

The new crafts are coming to Las Vegas

One of the home decor basket lines is on its way to Las Vegas for the upcoming international trade show, Las Vegas Market. New fashions from Lesotho are also headed to the trade show including jewelry and belts and a new overlapping coat design that combines a poncho and scarf (called the Darling Poncho).

The agents, Mantai Mpesi and Mohapi Lephallo, both located in Lesotho's capital, Maseru, are now in charge of following up with the artisans and representing their products with international buyers. They will remain the eyes on the ground for Cattaneo, Taylor and the rest of the ATA team.

“Artisans and myself are working together in developing new beautiful products (for the) Las Vegas market. Its an amazing experience,” Mantai Mpesi shared.

“ATA opened a whole new wide world... it's the knowledge of the impact I am making in (artisan) lives, their kids and their legacy that makes this project a vein of potent life and hope to this community of artists,” says Mohapi Lephallo. “We couldn't be more hopeful... to achieve and part-take in this life transformation pilgrimage in partnership with strategic stakeholders like ATA and the Lesotho Government. Together, lives shall be permanently transformed,” Lephallo shared. He will be representing Lesotho artisans at the Las Vegas Market in January 2019.

Food, crafts and female empowerment

ATA's new programs in Mexico

Written by Cari Shane.

After working in several Mexican states, including Puebla, Tlaxcala and Chiapas, Creative Learning's Aid to Artisans (ATA) division is expanding into the Yucatán Peninsula. Along with the opening a new office in Merida, ATA's new three-year project, Manos Vivas (MV), will work with 1500 artisans in the Yucatán Peninsula and in the Highlands of Chiapas. Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, this program will work with food artisans as well as handcrafters.

Manos Vivas aims to “empower people by providing them with opportunities and skills to help themselves.” Since handcraft is one of Mexico's greatest resources, helping artisans transform their crafts into viable businesses can positively effect families and entire communities. Up until now, most artisans have been unable to fully benefit economically from craft work. “Low levels of education in indigenous areas have hindered artisans from being able to fluently navigate business and marketing outside of their communities,” Monika Steinberger, ATA's Director, explains. “Artisans are also disadvantaged by the high cost of financing through money transfers, difficulty in accessing high quality raw materials, and limited access to digital communication and broader market information. As a result, artisans compete with low-cost mass-produced goods, leading to low incomes and little market success.”

The traditional keepers of indigenous artisan skills and cultural heritage, many communities do not recognize the economic value of

women's skills and knowledge. One of the key goals of the program is to get local communities to recognize and value the contribution of women. Further, gender inequality, especially gender-based exclusion from decision-making, makes many female artisans unable to make their crafts financially viable. Human development and alliance-building are at the core of Manos Vivas, which will ensure sustainability and broad impact.

The program's geographic focus

ATA will work in Quintana Roo located on the eastern part of the Yucatán Peninsula. In Morelos, a coastal town in the northern part of the state, MV will welcome, for the first time, food artisans who specialize in honey, pepper and chile habanero.

As part of its expansion into the state of Yucatán, activities will be launched in six municipalities, all located in the central part of the state. The project will reach artisans in Maní, Mayapan, Teaboh, Tixmehuac and Yaxcabá whose talents

lie in hand and machine embroidery, hammock making and wood carving. Also, with additional financing from OXFAM Mexico, the project dubbed "12 Mexicans" will launch in Tahdziu. Here an additional 70 women who specialize in hand embroidery will participate.

In Chiapas, the southernmost Mexican state, ATA will begin working with 825 artisans. Also, with additional funding from the organization Trickle Up, ATA will provide training in financial education as well as access financing.

The Mexico team will be supervised by Creative Learning's Mexico Country Director, Maria-Eugenia Pineda Melendez, who has more than 20-years of experience leading human development projects in Mexico. She will lead the team of 30 staff and a range of national and international specialists. The MV Project Director Miriam Bernal, based in the Peninsula, will implement MV's day-to-day activities.

Written by Cari Shane.



What's Next

Join us this January and again in July for [TEAM](#), Training Entrepreneurs in Artisan Markets at Las Vegas Market. Though January TEAM 2019 is fully booked, it is not too late to apply for the July program; applications will close on February 28, 2019. TEAM is a full-support trade show experience for exhibitors--training that gives artisan businesses real opportunity to learn about selling and exhibiting and then participating in a US trade show. As part of the TEAM experience, ATA provides pre-show webinars and feedback on everything from pricing to merchandising. In January, ATA will host artisan businesses from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Colombia, Mexico, Zimbabwe, Tibet, Pakistan, Tunisia and Lesotho.

Applications are also open for [2019 August MRP](#), the Market Readiness Program that takes place annually in New York City. This program is a unique hands-on training experience that runs during NY NOW, the largest gift show in the U.S. The MRP is a crash course in everything it



takes to succeed in the artisan marketplace. We provide an intensive preparation for entering the US market including product development, design and trends. Throughout the 4-day event, industry experts are mentors for the participants. “The MRP gives a clear picture of what the handmade sector in the U.S. looks like and where an artisan fits in,” says Lauren Barkume ATA Training Manager. “People come away with inspiration and an action plan for their businesses.”



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