

Aid to Artisans

Winter 2019 Newsletter



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Cover Image: Training Program in Mexico
Photograph by Lauren Barkume

Overlooking the Mediterranean and overflowing with talent

ATA hits a home run with artisans in Tunisia

Nine months into our Tunisia project, 10 artisans from the North African country showed their products to buyers at one of the world's premiere gift and home trade show for the first time. For the artisans, the Las Vegas Market was the culmination of months of design work, product development and marketing by ATA, with our partners the International Organization for Human Development (IDH) and the National Office of Handicraft (ONAT). Our Tunisia adventure began in March 2018 with ATA's largest-ever local Market Readiness Program (MRP) and concluded with a Product Development (PD) workshop last December. The program is being funded by the US State Department, through the US Embassy in Tunis.

The goal was "to further knowledge and artisans' businesses in total, including export

to the United States," says Alex Bates our New York-based designer. This was Alex' first ATA foray in North Africa.

As part of her work with the Tunisians, Bates worked with local artisans to enable them to better understand international market trends and the US marketplace so they could develop products with staying power. "The range of skills and knowledge is vast," says Bates who helped identify the two dozen entrepreneurs from the original group of more than 50 artisan businesses to participate in the international product development workshops. "That was heartbreaking, having to choose," says Bates. While "The skills are there. The quality is stunning. [But some] artisans who were very rural and [we couldn't] consider their work for export." There was, for example, a shipping



Tunisian products featured at Las Vegas Market



CAP-X Project Manager Mohamed Basti in the booth at Las Vegas Market



challenge for ceramicists who live in the mountains. “The work is beautiful ... but it’s a very fragile clay,” says Bates. Shipping, Bates explains, requires a lot of cardboard to protect the product from breakage and there’s a dearth of cardboard in the Tunisian countryside. To meet this constraint, Bates worked with the women on a product for the future that wouldn’t require both an inner and an outer carton.

Business skills are the key to selling beyond the local markets. Therefore, to participate in the product development workshops, the artisans needed to display “basic language skills, basic access to technology and the ability to fill an order,” says Bates of the selection process. The first 12 artisan entrepreneurs focused on developing product for NY NOW in August

2018. The second group of 11 were selected to craft products for the January 2019 Las Vegas Market.

Bates collaborated with two Tunisian designers whom she mentored to create marketable designs the artisans could produce. “If the goal is to ‘do good, by doing well’ then

you have to create a product that has the broadest appeal to the greatest number of people because you want to build a product that provides socio-economic development and an income that’s not mercurial or subject to fashion trends,” says Bates of the new looks she created for the two US home shows. “The technique is there, the culture is

there, the heritage is there ... it just needs to be tweaked a bit” for a global marketplace.

“It was a very, very good experience [for the artisans] to face the criticism from someone who is neutral and brings experience and assets that, if followed, will allow access to the American market with a competitive product,” says Mohamed Basti, IDH Project Manager. But, “It was hard for some of the artisans who were told, ‘this is where you are and this is where you need to get’ and sometimes you see it as a mountain and you are a little bit afraid to climb it, and sometimes you just find the courage to do it.”

While Bates was back in New York conducting Skype coaching sessions with the artisans, the Tunisian designers she’d mentored worked

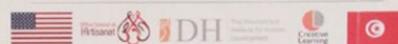


CAP-X booth at Las Vegas Market

IDH Executive Director
Emna Jebblaoui, CAP-X
Program Manager Mo-
hamed Basti, ATA Program
Manager Rachel Landale,
& ATA Director Maud Obe

CAP-X

Building Export Capacity in Tunisia



face-to-face with the selected artisans. In December, Bates returned to Tunisia to assess and make corrections to the prototypes.

“Some of the artisans came to me after the product development process and said, ‘this is something I made; this is my product.’ They didn’t believe they were capable of doing something as modern and clean as ... they had,” Basti. “The experience was very positive.”

“The whole experience is a very interesting beginning of a long, new path for us as Tunisians to discover the American market,” says Emna Jebblaoui, Director of IDH. “Working on different levels to empower young people, empowering women, contributing to human development, building the capacities of the people here ... it is a very good experience, a new adventure in the life of our development. Still, to this day, I have requests to continue empowering artisans and even Tunisian designers on how to reach out and respond to the American market standard of design. It was a milestone of the project,” says Jebblaoui. She also cited the new catalogues prepared for the New York and the Las Vegas collections as “one of the great achievements of the project.” The new catalogue shows dozens of beautifully staged handmade products including hand blown glass, ceramics, handwoven pillows, throws and rugs, classic foutas, olive wood, baskets, pendants and mosaics.

By the end of January, those items were being admired by buyers at the Las Vegas Market.

“Maybe it was hard for the artisans at first to accept that they had to adapt their line, their design,” says Basti. “But in the end, look at the reaction from the professionals at the fair

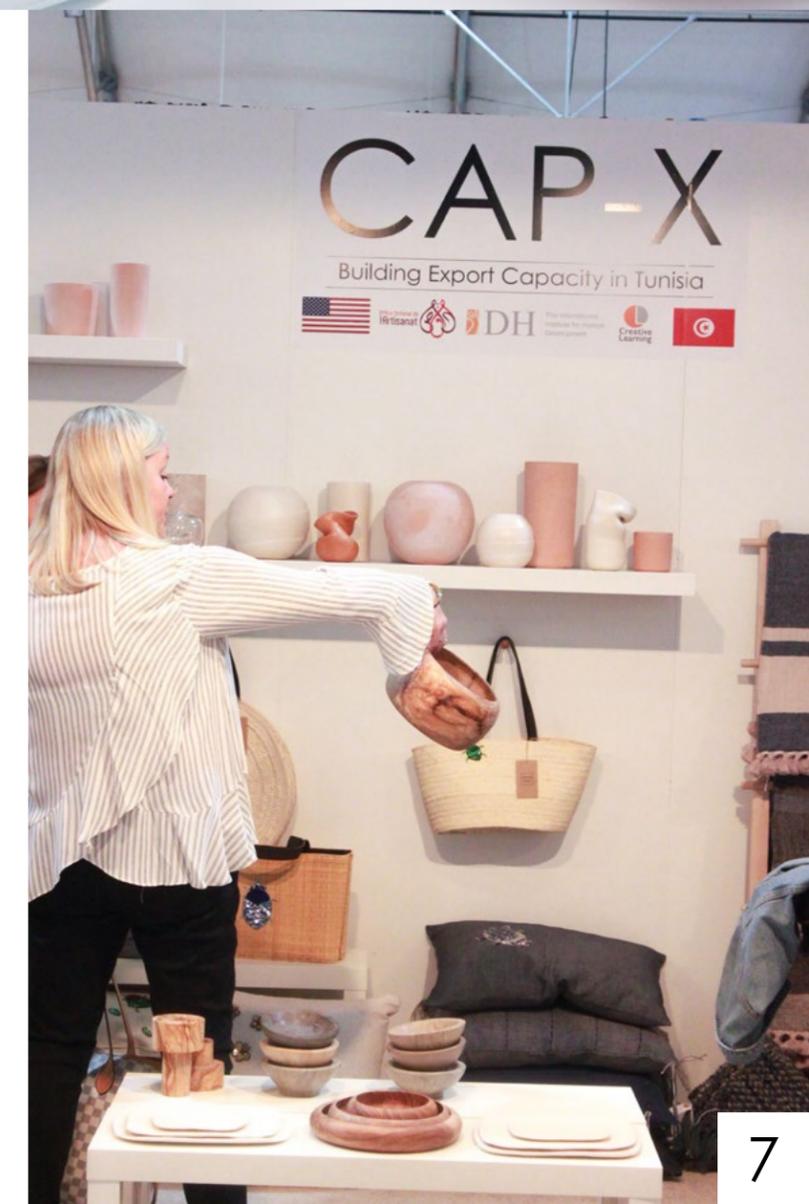


who were complimenting the finish and the technique.” Basti adds that the ATA program and Bates’ tutelage in particular used the artisan’s “know-how and techniques and just oriented it in a good way,” for a new marketplace.

“There is still a need to continue with the product development part,” says Jebblaoui. “The artisans are aware that the quality of the product is necessary to reach out to the American and international markets.”

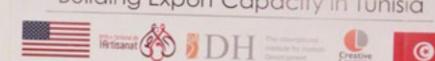
For Bates, the program was emotional. “I wonder if I taught them enough and well enough. I would want to go back and teach them more,” she says of her design adventure in Tunisia. And she might. “I’m madly, madly in love with the country. It’s my new favorite place in the world ... [There is so much] elegance and intelligence in Tunisia and it’s gone under Western radar.”

Written by Cari Shane.



CAP-X

Building Export Capacity in Tunisia



Customizing a plan for more than a thousand Mayan artisans in Mexico

ATA's "can do" approach focuses on the abilities of the artisans

Finding what communities can do is the essence of economic improvement plan ATA has launched in the Yucatán Peninsula and the Highlands of Chiapas. The strategy known as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) focuses on the abilities of entire communities and the skills of each individual in the community. The goal of the program, which is funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, is to create a development plan by and for a community, and then help launch activities that are self-sustainable.

"It validates and recognizes what the [members of the community] bring to the

table," says Monika Steinberger, Director of Programs and Development at ATA. Our Market Readiness Program (MRP), workshops are designed for individuals with few skills. The ABCD method focuses on understanding the current capabilities of the artisans. In this way the artisans realize that they have something important to offer. "It's such a beautiful message ... It validates the ability of the artisans," says Steinberger. Stepping away from the "paternalistic approach, ABCD is not designed to begin and end but to continue. Sustainability is the key. The community really buy into a co-run project. That's why we have artisans on staff."



Training Director Lauren Barkume and Artisan in Chiapas



Manos Vivas Marketing Guillermo Jester and ATA Country Director María Eugenia Pineda Melendez

Eight staff members, called "promotoras [promoters]," who speak the native languages, Tzotzil and Tzeltal are from the remote communities MV is focused on. The promotoras play a key role in communicating with the local people. In total there are more than 1200 artisans participating in the projects in more than 60 communities.

"I am most excited about how grassroots the program is," says Lauren Barkume of ATA. Having the promotoras on staff "makes this a truly collaborative approach to development. It allows the program to effectively respond to the needs of each communities which are all very different ... it's not a one-size-fits-all. We can do what's going to work for each community because we have people from that specific community explaining the program says Barkume. The promotoras also lend credibility to ATA, making it easier

for us to work effectively. Plus, "it helps that they themselves have artisan skills, such as embroidery and weaving so they can provide technical expertise while also teaching about empowerment."

Working with other local organizations and alliances that tackle other community issues such as water, health and transportation, ATA is helping to "build up local leaders who care about both their own development, and taking care of issues across the board," says Barkume. ATA has also teamed up with the non-profit Trickle Up, which specializes in financial programs. In Chiapas, an ATA and Trickle Up representative visit communities as a team weekly. ATA is also working with other NGOs, such as UK NGO Oxfam in the Yucatan peninsula, to support this community led process.





ATA Country Director María Eugenia Pineda Melendez



Staff in Yucatan learning Asset-Based Community Development

“Our alliances with other NGO’s are ... very important to create a bigger impact in the municipalities,” says the Director of ATA Mexico, María Eugenia Pineda Melendez. “We are creating new expectations and new choices for artisans to improve their well-being,” says Pineda Melendez.

“It’s about building up ‘toolboxes,’” says Lauren Barkume, Training Manager at ATA, who helped inaugurate the three-year Manos Vivas (MV) project during a two-week training for new staff members in January. The tools include platforms where community members are encouraged to express their ideas; mechanisms for responding to community-initiated viewpoints; and community-led accountability for finding solutions bottlenecks in development. The trainings were held at the ATA’s new office in Yucatan’s capital city of Merida.

Lots of Immediate Goals

“Right now [the artisans] don’t sell anywhere but in their local community. Any expansion would be an improvement” says Barkume. For the first time, ATA is working with food artisans as well as those in handcraft. “The [food] artisans are very excited to be able to participate in the project because ... it will help them improve their commercial and productive skills, explore new markets and create new and different artisanal foods with the regular harvests and the processing they are used to,” explains Pineda Melendez. “We need to be sure that the artisanal foods will meet US standards to be sellable in the US market.” As an example, the Yucatan peninsula produces excellent spices such as pepper or Chile Habanero. However, for the US market, “spice mixes” may respond more directly to a current market demand.

Barkume’s first goal was to show that ATA truly understands the rural artisans, their needs and

possibilities and communicate these things to the promotoras. “To get the promotoras on board and really understand the big picture, we went through the overall vision of how this program can help, how the US market fits in.” Barkume took the promotoras to the best shops in cities in Chiapas and Yucatan to look at the product design and packaging. “It was so they could see the end product, in a different market than the local one in their communities” says Barkume.

The second goal we are currently working on is connecting the artisans with designers who want handmade products, such as embroidery or weaving. Our crucial links between local producers and designers are our promotoras. Even local designers often do not realize that there is so much talent in Mexico’s rural communities. “You’ve got groups who don’t even speak Spanish, they speak Mayan dialects. They are not

connected on line. They just work in their homes. How would anyone in the city doing a search on line for talent ever find them?” Barkume asks.

The third goal, for more developed artisans and communities, is to show at the NYNOW home show this summer. ATA’s local product designers in Chiapas and the Yucatan are currently hosting creativity workshops; the next step will be sending an international designer to work with the artisans on a collection for the August show.

It’s all just starting

To strategize all the goals, Barkume worked with the promotoras and other ATA Mexico staff on how to use the tools of the ABCD method for each community, keeping in mind that the approach will vary among communities.



Manos Vivas team

The focus of the first phase, presently underway, is building trust with the communities. “We don’t come in and tell people what to do,” explains Barkume. “It starts with a soft introduction to creativity workshops and human development programs. We let the communities take the lead on this.”

We begin with human development. Community members must be empowered to speak out, express themselves with confidence, and take the first steps to individual responsibility and accountability for community welfare. ATA prepares the local promotoras first. They have the confidence of community members, and they speak the local idiom. It is up to the promotoras to disseminate the ABCD tools and methods and explain how individual community members can use them.

“They have a workshop every Monday,” says Barkume. “They work on building confidence or discuss how to work in a team, how to resolve conflict, and work on getting people feeling like they are capable, are empowered, and that we trust them to make decisions.”

As they organize “their groups, [create] agreements, schedules, and [participate

in] the human development workshops ... the artisans get excited to initiate all the processes themselves and learn about our trainings,” says Pineda Melendez.

While most workshop participants are female artisans, ATA is sensitive to the paternal culture that exists in most of the communities. “Part of our strategy is to include men in gender focused workshops,” says Barkume. “You have to include the men and get them on board. Otherwise, men may prevent their wives from coming to trainings.” The possibility of economic enrichment is a big persuader for the men. “These are some of the poorest areas of Mexico,” says Barkume who adds that most of the income for those from Chiapas is government support and remittances from family members in the US. “The communities don’t have a lot of cash. They are so remote, it’s really difficult to have a business that connects with the outside world, logistically.”

The economics of things

“One of the things that struck me during the workshops with the promotoras,” says Barkume, “is how much time goes into making the things that they produce. And how little money they make are selling in the local community.” For example, it may take a

month to make a hammock. During a cost and pricing exercise, ATA looked at the number of hours spent on making the hammock and it translated to 20-pesos per hour (\$1 U.S.). When they calculated the price they would have to charge to make a profit, “they had a real shock moment,” says Barkume. Artisans realized they would not be able to get that price in their communities. This “shock moment” is the beginning of change. It is not a line to be crossed, but a new path to be taken. A journey into new territory - of market-based thinking, of fact-based costing and pricing, of validating the real cost of artisans’ labor hours, and of the community itself becoming initiators of progress.

Another business lesson is the need to use high quality materials to make products saleable. The artisans quickly learned that, “If I spend a lot of labor producing a produce but use cheap materials, no one is going to pay the price that will give a decent return,” says Barkume. ATA is addressing this problem by establishing a raw materials bank to give the artisans access to high quality raw materials.

“We will be giving the creativity workshops so the artisans will be able to develop their own creativity and designs,” says Pineda

Melendez. Design and product development workshops will follow. By August, the artisans will have collections to show at NYNOW.

More on ABCD

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a term coined by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann at the ABCD Institute in Evanston, Illinois – a partner of Canada’s Cody International Institute. ABCD recognizes the strengths, gifts, talents and resources of individuals and communities, and helps communities to mobilize and build on these for sustainable development.

By focusing on assets and capacities rather than needs and deficiencies, energy is directed toward opportunities at the community level, while remaining conscious of how the policy environment could be changed to further strengthen citizens’ capacity to drive their own development.

At its core are the various assets (human, social, financial, natural and physical) that already exist in the community, especially the formal and informal associations that mobilize assets and strengthen the social relationships that are important for bridging local initiatives to external opportunities.

Written by Cari Shane.



Manos Vivas staff participating in training



Winter 2019 TEAM Exhibitors and Mentors

Bringing Global Entrepreneurs to Market

ATA Completes Third Show at the Las Vegas Market

In January, Aid to Artisans, partnering with the Las Vegas Market, held its third "Training Entrepreneurs in Artisan Markets" (TEAM) session. TEAM provides a unique opportunity for entrepreneurs to learn about how to sell in the US. TEAM provides one-stop-shop to companies looking to enter the US retail market, TEAM combines one-on-one counselling and training and a booth at the fastest growing trade show in the US. We also provide industry experts to coach TEAM participants during the show.

During the Las Vegas Market TEAM featured 9 business selling handmade products from Mexico, Colombia, Lesotho, China, Pakistan, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, making this our largest show yet! The atmosphere of the TEAM collective was one of high energy and support, as entrepreneurs received mentoring from our on-site experts as well as the invaluable discussion

from their fellow entrepreneurs. Raymond Ruzvidzo, Sales Manager for Batiqua, reflected on his time with TEAM and stated "I met great people, with an understanding of art, and in the process learnt a lot of skills of how to present a product in the best way possible to attract the right buyer. Last, but not least, the help, encouragement, guidance and professional dialogues from ATA personnel was priceless!"

TEAM is a unique tradeshow experience. Exhibitors not only receive pre-show training and preparation, but access a team of experts to help with everything from setting up a booth, to effective interactions with buyers. Special thanks to our amazing industry experts Carola MacNulty (BDH Global), Mimi Robinson (Mimi Robinson Design), Laurie Kanen (12 Small Things) and Kristine Jones Market Expert. Read more about our TEAM! ->

AZURE JEWELRY MEXICO

The clean, contemporary designs of Azure Jewelry is the work of Carlos Ruiz. Based in Mexico City, Carlos & Cynthia began 15 years ago, boot strapping his business, and now exports their handcrafted work to galleries and museums in Europe, Canada, the US and Central America. Each piece has its own story and inspiration and many of his pieces are limited additions because, says Carlos, "we truly believe everyone is different and unique. Despite age or gender, there shouldn't be lines, rules or categorization when it comes to wearing a piece of our beautiful jewelry." Azure Jewelry exhibited in Las Vegas for the second time with ATA. [WEBSITE](#)



BATIQUA ZIMBABWE

Founded from the need to connect Zimbabwean artisans with the global marketplace and create more sustainable employment opportunities, Batiqua poses as a catalyst to support real change in the communities we operate in. Specialized in the manufacturing and distribution of textiles, we use a unique production process that transforms oatmeal porridge on fabric into beautiful textiles for home decor. Their product line includes pillows, wall hangings, table runners, napkins and throws. During the LVM, Batiqua was represented by Raymond and Zoe Ruzvidzo. [WEBSITE](#)



CAP-X TUNISIA

As part of the "Building Export Capacity in Tunisia" (CAP-X) project funded by the U.S. Department of State, ATA brought together 10 different artisans based businesses from Tunisia to exhibit in the Las Vegas Market for the first time. Featuring a mix of textiles, ceramics, glass, olive wood & mosaique, the booth drew in many admiring buyers. Companies represented include Domaïska, Olivine, Caravanserail, Poterie Ghozzi, Weart, SATCE, Sadika, Ceramik A, Roumouz and Kerkenatiss. [WEBSITE](#)



CIEP Lesotho

Funded by the World Bank through the Lesotho Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Aid to Artisans has been working with artisans to bring the handmade products of Lesotho to the U.S. Retail Market. Product selection focused on Fashion Accessories and Basketry which were curated with the help of ATA consultants Agustina Cattaneo and Jane Taylor. Represented by Export Agent Mohapi Lephallo and Ministry representative Nthabiseng Sennance, the CEIP booth attracted many buyers who were curious and new to the handicraft sector of Lesotho. [WEBSITE](#)



HILO SAGRADO COLOMBIA

Since 2013 Hilo Sagrado has implemented a model of inclusive development which recognizes the deep cultural legacy and value of artisan communities in Latin America, and which seeks to empower women with the tools that allow them to improve their quality of life. Through education, economic empowerment and sustainable development, their aim is that the communities that they work with can become self-sustainable, providing women with the necessary tools to become micro-entrepreneurs, to take ownership of their own work, and to escape from extreme poverty. [WEBSITE](#)



DANCING YAK TIBET, CHINA

Dancing Yak Handicrafts is a training center for Tibetan women and produce handicrafts mainly made of yak wool, sheep wool, sheep wool felt and the beautiful Tibetan brocade fabrics. Dancing Yak combines the cultural Tibetan Handicraft with modern designs of high quality. This was Dancing Yak's first time in the Las Vegas Market but fourth time exhibiting with ATA. The products were represented by Market Expert Kristine Jones. [WEBSITE](#)



HOONARTS

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan

"HoonArts" is the fusion of the Tajik/Persian word for "craft" and the English word "arts," which reflects their mission. They offer extraordinary hand-crafted gifts and accessories for the true lover of world culture, while building community and empowering artisans. HoonArts is committed to Fair Trade principles in all aspects of their operations, so you can rest assured that your purchase are helping impoverished artisans build a brighter future for their families and communities. Founder Rikki Quintana is an ATA Market Readiness Program Alumni as well as a TEAM Alumni. [WEBSITE](#)

FINATUR DESIGN COLOMBIA

By providing product development support along with marketing plans and strategies to indigenous communities in Colombia, Finatur Design helps to bring these traditional crafts to international markets. "Our goal extends beyond just yielding revenue: through our work, we make an impact on culture and improve the livelihoods of the families in the communities we work with," says Magno Caterino, Finatur's founder, and director. During the market, Magno also received the "Global Goodness" award for his positive impact made on people and communities in Colombia. [WEBSITE](#)



INDUS HERITAGE TRUST PAKISTAN

Founded in 2004, Indus Heritage Trust is a Not-for-Profit Organization, engaged in preserving and promoting Pakistan's rich heritage of Arts and Crafts whilst empowering communities and substantiating change. Through their project "Developing Artisanal Livelihood in Rural Pakistan" (RANG) IHT has achieved targets of increasing the livelihood of over 2700 artisans in rural areas of South Punjab and Sind, in a timespan of four years. IHT is a longtime Alumni and partner of ATA. [WEBSITE](#)





Aid to Artisans

Artisans around the world need your support!
Please make a donation by clicking [here](#).



What's Next!

2019 Market Readiness Program™

Applications are 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." The MRP is your one-stop-shop for a Modern, Real and Practical training support for your artisan based business. Apply before June 15th and you will get a \$500 discount!

WATCH THE VIDEO [HERE](#)

Summer 2019 Las Vegas Market

Join us this 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 March 31st, 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.

What are our alumni saying?

"The climate of working with a team of experts who have been this industry is invaluable. The team dives you right at the heart of the well of their long term experience and business relationships with their long known buyers. Such networking and expertise they offer is worth every penny for the future performance of the business." - Mohapi Lphallo TEAM '19 Alumni

