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Aid to Artisans

Haiti MarChe: Craft Means Business

Women embroiderers in Camp Perrin, Haiti, see hope and economic potential with new training workshop

On May 10, 2009, Moro Baruk left his place of business in Jacmel in the South of Haiti on a mission. He was tasked with teaching groups of women embroiderers how new designs, better quality and price analysis would greatly increase the potential of their sales in the local market, including the tourist market in Labadie.

The much needed business intervention was led by Aid to Artisans' staff, Anne Pressoir, and is a part of the USAID/CNFA funded MarChe (Market Chain Enhancement Project) project. Within this large initiative, Aid to Artisans has been selected to transform the artisan and creative industries sector into a powerful catalyst for economic growth in Haiti itself, with reach into the entire Caribbean. Haiti MarChE is designed to build on the synergies between the tourism, craft, and agriculture sectors, by stimulating the vigorous development of competitive interrelated market chains and increasing linkages between players. The project expects to create a thriving SME service sector, providing technical, marketing and training services on a commercial basis to sustainable enterprises and organizations.

When Moro first set his eyes upon the artisans' textiles, he noticed potential. However, the potential lay amidst some major problems that would adversely affect the products' marketability if not changed: amateur looking designs, unrefined sewing and appliqué, poor color choices, and a lack of business training.

To start the training workshop, Moro conducted several seminars that included designing sellable product lines, lessons on raw material and quality control, the cost of production, calculating a fair wage for their time, marketing their products, and setting prices for different target markets—retail, small volume wholesale and large volume wholesale. The women took in all of Moro's lessons, but he realized that in order for them to



understand fully how to change and innovate from their current methods of craft, they would need to see something tangible. He thought of an idea. They escaped to a landscaped hotel garden to study shapes and colors of the leaves and flowers. As they touched the leaves surrounding them, the women listened to Moro explain that leaf motifs are fashionable and trendy right now and are being used on home décor and fashion accessory products.

Back in the workshop, they chose three leaves from the garden to make into patterns, the same leaves praised in a traditional Haitian song called “Taw fey,” and each took home 20 copies of those leaf patterns to practice designs.

The women grew excited and began cutting green fabric and carefully embroidering veins in the leaves, becoming so engrossed that they finished the first day two hours later than programmed. They made 40 samples of products. They sewed a small loop allowing each leaf to be hung for decoration. They also added their own personal touch—their names pinned on the back of each leaf they made—an important marketing tool that would help buyers, especially tourists, know that they purchased authentic and unique Haitian products.

Moro discussed with them the possibilities of showing their finished products to the buyers of Labadie, a cruise ship destination in Northern Haiti that attracts a growing number of nearly 20,000 tourists a month.

Their comments were promising and show the great potential for this project. Here are some key highlights below:

“When the seminar progressed, we became very emotional about the leaves we made. We never suspected we would be able to accomplish that. When I came home at the end of the first day and showed my family what I did, I was touched by my daughter’s reaction. She loved it so much that she wanted to learn to do it too. We are grateful to have learned something new,” Luce.

”It seems our eyes are more open to nature around us. The leaves we just made are so different from the leaves we used to do before. We are proud to have a new product for our area. This seminar is very important for us,” Promise.

“We would like this new product to sell well so that we can produce and make money,” Matanie.

“I feel a great discovery was made in Camp Perrin and I hope this great discovery will turn into a beneficial reality for our area, our future, and that of our children,” Dieumaitre.

“I would like, on behalf of all of us, to thank USAID, Mrs. Pressoir and specially Moro for his patience with us as he showed a new product and helped us make it well,” Francoise.

