aklala

batik du Togo

A Case Study in Artisanal Entrepreneurial Development

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Small Enterprise Development 2007-2009

Togo, West Africa

Hand dyed batik fabrics created by Chantal

The beginning…. …. 2007

Part of me joined Peace Corps as a career change, and to explore new interests. The other part of me wanted to remove myself from all things normal and dive into a culture so strange and uncommon that in it I could truly see myself, a complete venture out of the ordinary. I was working as a product designer in Chicago for *Eastern Accents* a high-end bedding and luxury home textiles manufacturer. Though I loved my job, and had accomplished much success, I wasn't completely satisfied. Instead of finding a new position in the field or seeking out a graduate degree, I decided pursue a chance to donate my time to volunteering. Peace Corps was an option I stored in the back of my mind since college and in a year I found myself preparing to leave the US behind and head to Togo, West Africa. It was only a matter of time in Togo before I realized that "you are who you are, some things don't change." I was seeking out projects during my time here as a volunteer so strikingly similar to what I had done in the states that I began to realize my interests in work hadn't changed at all. They were very much part of who I am and what interests me. The only difference is that I was now using Africa with its complexity and limited capacity to challenge them.

Before leaving for Togo, I attended my final trade show (or so I thought) in High Point, NC. I was there representing my company and the final collections I had designed for market. I had already received my invitation to join Peace Corps Togo as a Small Enterprise Development Volunteer and had notified them of my resignation. It was there I discovered the West African Trade Hub booth. West African Trade Hub (WATH) is a USAID funded organization assisting West African export-ready business in exporting to the US through training and technical support. www.watradehub.com They were exposing some artists and trades people from West Africa who were already at the capacity for exportation. I talked with them about my future position in Togo and since I would be close to their offices in Accra, Ghana, I planned to keep contact. I had no idea what was available to African artists and trades people nor how to assist them in their development until I immersed myself in their world and got to know their capacities. Most of what I knew was that the artisanal culture was strongly rooted in tradition, attracting mainly a local tourist market. How could I learn from them and at the same time help them expose themselves to the outside world?

Within time connections were made, and I found some very talented artists to learn from and in turn offer assistance. One of whom was Chantal, a seamstress and batik artist located in a nearby town.

Hand batiked fabric and products made by Chantal

I met Chantal through another volunteer at the end of her service. At the time, Chantal was working as a couturier. From conversations with Chantal I found out that she had studied traditional batik techniques from numerous West African countries and would, on occasion, make the hand-dyed fabric to sell. I noticed she had some of the batik she had created laying around, and quickly ordered a dress to be sewn from it. She returned a week later with the dress and a small bag she had sewn out of the scraps. It was well constructed and exactly what I wanted.

Chantal working from her home

Later, she showed me bags made from locally bought fabrics that she had sewn to sell to volunteers and tourists, in an attempt to see if I was interested in purchasing one. I asked her if she had ever thought to use her own hand dyed fabrics to transform into bags. Since I had received many compliments on the batik dress and aware that the fabrics she created were original and different, I was sure she had a demand. Thus, starting in February we began to develop ideas to transform the batik into ready-made items. The target market was of course volunteers and other local expatriates. Her location in Kpalimé (a major tourist hub) and her connection with many NGOs helped her find an available saturation of locals to test out her new products. It was also through my assistance in helping market her products to other volunteers that gave her an inside edge to exploring the foreign consumers' desires.

Growth…… …March-Aug 2008

In March I asked her to attend the Peace Corps IST (In Service Training) as my counterpart. I felt that the seminars would be very beneficial at this time in her development to teach about financial management and growth. She arrived at the training not only ready to learn, but also to show what she was currently producing. Along with some of the other volunteer's counterparts, she exposed her items and made quite a bit of sales through the generated interest. She received many requests for her batik creations that I helped facilitate through taking orders and delivering them to the volunteers. I then installed some of her items in my locker at the Peace Corps volunteer lounge in the capital to fulfill current and future demand amongst my comrades.

At the time, her capacity was minimal and she was only able to create the product based on orders with a given down-payment to finance the purchase of materials. Therefore I started to explore options in

which I could help her assist in financing her development. Local options are scarce and interest rates are high so I started to think of outside resources. I remembered the presence of USAID WATH and thought to contact them at their offices in Accra, Ghana to see if there is any assistance they could give an entrepreneur like Chantal. I talked this over with another volunteer working in the same sector and together we organized a meeting at their head office to speak on the behalf of the needs of the local artisans. We arrived with a small sampling of their products and in a short time found out what was necessary in going forward. WATH's focus was in assisting those who were already at a capacity for exporting so at the moment it was up to us the volunteer to help facilitate the present growth. We were given some valuable training materials to share with the artists, and I began to think of the next step to take in assisting Chantal.

During the same meeting, there was also mention of SIAO, the Salon International de l'Artisanat de Ougadougou. This exposition is held in Burkina Faso every other year. This year was to be the 11th edition of the trade show which focused on representing arts and crafts from numerous African countries. There, artists could rent a booth to display their handicrafts in hopes to attract outside interest and make some profit through sales. I thought back to my days as a designer, working on developing product to then expose at trade shows like this one. I thought how great it would be to help Chantal expose herself at this level, since I had so much experience in the past. The only catch is that the cost of preparing and attending is a huge investment for the local artisan. I proposed the idea to Chantal in thoughts that we would go just to scope it out and see what she could aspire for two years down the road.

She was very interested in the idea of attending a show like this and in a matter of time had found others who had exposed at SIAO in the past. She talked with them about their experiences, and began to create a strong desire in trying it out for herself. The only problem was getting there. In Peace Corps we are taught the ideas of sustainability, so I hadn't intended on finding financing for the project solely on outside forces. I wanted her to create that capacity herself from local sales. This was difficult though since a large part of her business revolved around financing production on a "made-to-order" basis. She saved what profit she made from the sale of the bags and then turned a portion back into fulfilling new orders. It was the endless cycle of financing that existed on the need to have made the sale before the product could be created.

She had connections with other NGO's in town that could possibly finance her production and exhibition. One of them had also mentioned the idea of exposing to her years ago, though at the time she wasn't sure what she would offer aside from clothing sewn out of locally purchased prints. Now, since she was creating products from scratch and engaging her talents in all aspects of the design she had reason to

attend. Yet there was still so much development to take place. She still worked from home and even though she had formed other women in the techniques of batik to assist her, their capacity was limited to working with only the available materials and tools invested in by Chantal.

She was not formally established in a boutique, nor was she currently exposing her products locally. She had been discouraged against selling her products through others due to miss-management on their part. Boutiques and stores locally would take her products on consignment and inflate the price to create a larger profit for them. In turn, it would discourage buyers from purchasing the item. If they did happen to sell it, sometimes Chantal would never be notified and paid. These actions resulted in her losing confidence in applying the local commerce to assist in exposing her products. Thus, she created a future budget for opening a technical center in batik as well as a boutique for a plot of land she had purchased back in March. She remained independent in order to have full control over her profits and losses.

Esse sewing headscarves using a production-line method.

With SIAO just a future thought, she continued to grow through the sale of her bags. She was conscience of her own need for development and never stopped thinking of ways to improve her business. When she had saved up enough profits from the sales she would research the purchase of materials in bulk in order to be cost-effective. When the construction of the bags came into question she would source better quality zippers and think of ways to reinforce the seams and handles. She taught the women working with her to create time-saving production techniques. She designated roles for each person to follow to assist in maintaining quality control and ease of production. She was also aware of the price fluctuation of her materials bought in neighboring markets in Ghana, and made attempts to try to economize when the prices fell. Through my weekly meetings with her and the women I watched her enterprise grow.

Some of her growth was facilitated by my intervention in giving advice and counseling but a large part was due to her own willingness and desire to succeed. In my past experiences in managing projects I always had a hard time delegating responsibilities and not taking full control over the process by a lack of confidence in another's abilities. But since I knew that I was only here for a short period and could not be a permanent fixture, I had to keep my distance in letting her develop on her own. There were times when I was worried that she wasn't aware of everything she needed to put in place. Every time she proved me wrong as she took the initiative herself. When I would question the need, she had already assessed the situation and was taking steps to find a resolution.

Popular Hobo-style bag made from her hand-dyed cloth with the addition of hand carved tropical hardwood rings.

One case was in her realizing her need to prove that her status as a tradesperson,

as well as other information needed in the future when she is ready to formalize her business. She had moved to Togo from Benin when young, and didn't have proof of her citizenship in Togo. She had also studied as an apprentice under an unregistered patron (boss), and was unsure if her diploma from her studies was valid. In Togo there is a system in which all the registered skilled trades organize under the government. They form the "Chambre de Metiers" (House of Trades) and registered patrons give diplomas based on completing exams after a three year study. Since her patron was independent she was unaware of the validity of her diploma so registered to take them over again for proof. Needless to say, her credentials and skills allowed her to have both issues resolved in a short time and put her back on the path to commercial growth.

I gave her counseling as to ideas for the design of the products, tailoring them to the tastes of foreign markets through colors and popular styling. I helped her understand the mentality of the Western consumer by creating an inspiration binder for her. I filled it with magazine pages of fashion, color trends, design and products similar to hers in the market. I made print outs of other local companies batik items to help her make comparisons in pricing and design. We worked on product development by looking in the local market where piles of discarded handbags had been shipped overseas for sale. Purchase of these second-hand items was the easiest way for her to understand construction and styling. Where we came across a need for a certain imported material we thought of creative ways to incorporate locally produced and crafted parts. One example in particular was, through showing her a popular style of handbag with a large metal ring. We discussed the options for construction. She mentioned that we would be unable to find the metal ring locally but that her father was a sculptor of wood and maybe we could replace the metal with a wood ring hand-crafted from local exotic hardwoods. "Even better," I thought as we began to adapt the designs to speak of "made in Africa" while respecting current trends elsewhere.

Detail of products showing the addition of local hardwood buckles and rings to replace imported metal parts.

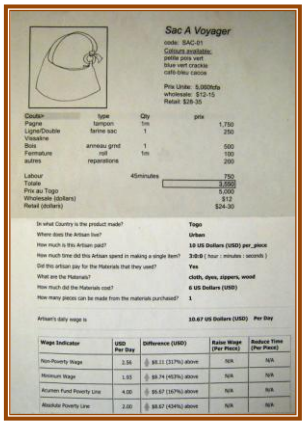
Organization and Practice…. …August-November 2008

While she was concentrated in developing her growth in the areas of production, I helped her organize a system of costing and pricing. In Togo, as well as many West African countries, artists are not aware of their base cost as most materials are found and do not hold a calculated value. They also don't have systems in place to determine labor costs easily, since there are no minimum wages and payment of labor is loosely structured on bargaining for services. Most items will sell at a negotiated price that in the end sale sometimes barely covers the cost of materials. Labor and time used to create the product is relative and never a factor in determining the value of the product. This is much different from the Western world where custom made items or items made using labor intensive methods are usually sold at a very high price.

code	Style	Pagne	Ligne	Vissaline	Fermature	Boire	Autres	Material Prix	Labour	Total	Prix au Togo	benifice	Prix Wholesale (dollars)	Prix Retail (dollars)	Prix Comparable
SAC-01	Sac A Voyager	1,750	250	0	100	350	200	2,800	750	3,550	5,000	1,450	15	32	
SAC-02	Sac Bateau	875	350	100	200		200	1,725	2,500	4,225	5,000	775	15	32	
SAC-03	Sac de Journee (reversable)	3,500	0	0	0	1,000	200	4,900	750	5,650	5,000	-650	15	32	
SAC-04	Sac A L'University	1,750	250	0	200	100 perle	200	2,500	1,000	3,500	5,000	1,500	15	32	
SAC-05	Trouse (Sac Cosmetic)	450	125	0	200	0	200	975	1,000	1,975	2,000	25	6	15	
SAC-06	Sac Patchwork petite	2,000	250	200	0	100 perle	200	2,675	3,000	5,675	6,500	-675	15	32	
SAC-07	Sac Patchwork grande	2,500	250	200	0	100 perle	200	3,175	3,000	6,175	8,000	-175	18	36	
A-PB01	Porte Bebe	2,200	0	0	0	700	200	3,100	750	3,850	6,000	1,150	15	32	GM $38
A-C01	Ceinture	450	0	100	0	300	200	1,050	500	1,550	2,000	450	6	18	GM $9
A-F01	Foulard														
H-P01	Pantalons Envelope	5,250	0	0	0	0	200	5,550	750	6,300	7,000	700	21	42	GM
H-J01	Jupe Envelope	3,500/4,000	0	0	0	0	200	3,700/4,200	750	4,450/4,950	5,000	50/-450	14	30	GM $28
H-C01	Chemise (Hommes)	3,500/4,000	0	50		100 bouton:	200	3,850/4,350	2,000	5,850/5,350	6,000	150/650	18	36	GM $32

Chart detailing product information and cost-analysis used to make adjustments to pricing and determine labor charges.

In order to come up with a verifiable pricing for the labor charges I had her create a breakdown of materials and time used to construct each style of bag. I showed her how to create a product spec that broke down the product into its parts to see where the cost in creating it was dispersed. I took one example and used an online tool called the Fair Wage Calculator (www.fairwagecalculator.com) to compare the labor charges with current wage rates in Togo to make sure she was making a fair wage. After determining her salary was not lower than normal we created a rate for labor and began to finalize the pricing of each bag.



Sac A Voyager

code: SAC-01
Colours available:
petite pois vert
blue vert crackle
café-bleu cacoa

Prix Unite: 5,000cfa
wholesale: $12-15
Retail: $28-35

Couleur	type	Qty	prix
Pagne	tampon	1m	1,750
Ligne/Double	farine sac	1	250
Vissaline			
Bois	anneau grnd	1	500
Fermature	roll	1m	100
autres	reparations		200
Labour	45minutes		750
Totale			3,550
Prix au Togo			5,000
Wholesale (dollars)			$12
Retail (dollars)			$24-30

In what Country is the product made?	Togo
Where does the Artisan live?	Urban
How much is this Artisan paid?	10 US Dollars (USD) per_piece
How much time did this Artisan spend in making a single item?	3:0:0 (hour : minutes : seconds)
Did this artisan pay for the Materials that they used?	Yes
What are the Materials?	cloth, dyes, zippers, wood
How much did the Materials cost?	6 US Dollars (USD)
How many pieces can be made from the materials purchased?	1
Artisan's daily wage is	10.67 US Dollars (USD) Per Day

Wage Indicator	USD Per Day	Difference (USD)	Raise Wage (Per Piece)	Reduce Time (Per Piece)
Non-Poverty Wage	3.56	$8.11 (317%) above	N/A	N/A
Minimum Wage	1.93	$8.74 (453%) above	N/A	N/A
Women Fund Poverty Line	4.00	$6.67 (167%) above	N/A	N/A
Absolute Poverty Line	2.00	$8.67 (434%) above	N/A	N/A

Product spec sheet and calculated wage analysis

This was also necessary in determining how much to pay the women who were assisting her. Since they did not hold equal shares in the investment of the enterprise we had decided that at the time it is best that she pay them on a salary basis. This calculation helped her determine their wages along with her own, based on their production capacity and cost of materials.

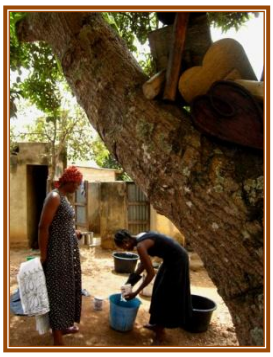
I helped her think of ways to market and brand her enterprise as her items became more and more popular. While working stateside in product development I was fully aware of the importance branding has on distinguishing your product from another. I had experienced the capacity overseas factories had in manipulating the copy of designs from prominent labels, from seeing some of the products I designed for my former company copied in factories in China and sold at cheap prices through retail competitors. As the creator of these targeted products, I was upset at the vulnerability of the artist through consumer practices. I also knew that since her product was not currently found locally we needed to create a name for her enterprise in referencing it to potential interested parties. So, I had her think of descriptive words that explained her products, and the techniques used in creating them. I also asked her to think of expressions in her local language that could describe her craft. So we made a list and in the end came up with "aklala" which in Ewe means "traditional white cloth, which is usually dyed with traditional methods and worn" Since the name explained her products well and also had a nice ring to it that was pronounceable, her label became "aklala, Batik du Togo"

aklala batik

B.P. 408
Kpalimé, Togo
West Africa
www.aklala.blogspot.com
aklala.batik@yahoo.fr

Aklala's logo and contact information

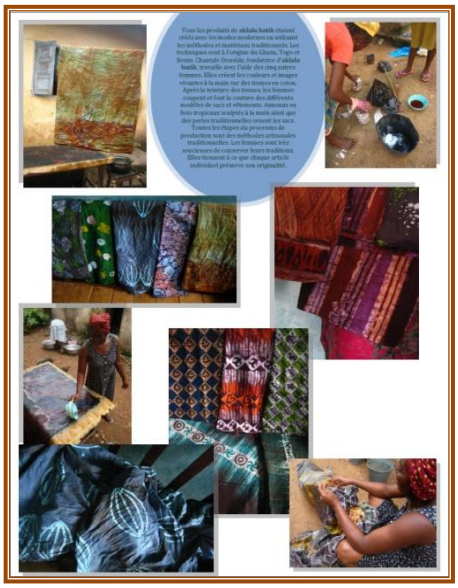
Through all this growth, she was still thinking of attending SIAO. But the time was fast approaching and even though little by little she was making profits, she didn't have enough to finance her ability to expose her new enterprise at the trade show in October. The potential NGO donor option had fallen through due to budget cuts on their part and it left us looking into other sources. I knew she had the potential to handle a production to showcase but part of me wanted to take it slow and not rush her into a potential demand she may not be able to sustain. Another part of me wanted to be able to be here for her chance at attending a trade show. Since my term is officially over in the summer of 2009, I didn't think I could stick around to see it happen in 2010 (the next official SIAO) so we explored local financing options.



Chantal and Dora mixing color to dye the cotton material. Hand-carved wooden stamps rest in a tree to be used to design the cloth using wax.

She talked with microfinance institutions about loans and interest rates. We also talked with a representative of *Kiva* (www.kiva.org) an online organization that helps finance entrepreneurs with small loans supplied by multiple personal donors and distributed using local institutions. The only problem with these sources for financing were the delay in time waiting before acquiring the full sum (approximately 30 days) and the relatively high interest rate associated with repayment. There was no way she could have her start-up money in hand to finance the production in time to showcase at SIAO in two months.

As a last resort I remembered the offer put in place to finance "aklala's" debut at SIAO this fall made by the parents of my boyfriend, also a Peace Corps volunteer in Mauritania. Since we have been together for many years and I had built a strong relationship with his parents before and after our decision to serve, I respected their offer. But before making an appearance of the ease in receiving for money from parents stateside, I wanted to make sure Chantal understood her capacity and ability to accept and repay the loan. I had her create a budget for the show outlining but not limited to production costs as well as costs associated with exposing (stand rental, inscription and customs fees, lodging, meals, transport and incidentals). I also made sure she was aware of her ability to repay the loan in full plus the small additional charge of the bank transfer. In agreement of the terms, we wrote up a contract and I asked his parents to assist in wiring me the sum of the loan to my local bank account to then disperse to Chantal. In a matter of days and a week later Chantal had the capital in hand to purchase all the materials needed for production and began the process of planning her debut at SIAO in a few months time.



Tous les produits de **aklala batik** étaient créés avec les modes modernes en utilisant les méthodes et matériaux traditionnels. Les techniques sont à l'origine du Ghana, Togo et Benin. Chantale Dossiale, fondatrice d'aklala batik, travaille avec l'aide des cinq autres femmes. Elles créent les couleurs et images vivantes à la main sur des tissus en coton. Après la teinture des tissus, les femmes coupent et font la couture des différents modèles de sacs et vêtements. Amusants en bois tropicaux sculptés à la main ainsi que des perles traditionnelles ornent les sacs. Toutes les étapes du processus de production sont des méthodes artisanales traditionnelles. Les femmes sont très soucieuses de conserver leurs traditions. Elles trouvent à ce que chaque article individuel préserve son originalité.

An excerpt from one of aklala's publications, detailing images from the process and creation of the batik.

During those two months that followed, I helped track the use of the loan in purchasing the materials and aided in facilitating where needed in the production. There were problems encountered in the spike of prices of her raw materials, not factored into the plan. Though, since she had enough

capital to now purchase the majority of the materials in bulk, she could relieve some of the inflation occurred elsewhere. As much as I felt completely responsible for monitoring the use of the funds in order to preserve the relationship of both parties, I had to let her take control of her own finances. So again, I took a sideline to her spending and hoped that she was smart in understanding the need of "repayment" in the end. I would question her on her present investments in the production and what amount of the loan was left for financing the exhibition of the product. She set aside a ledger and kept me informed of her status at all times.

She determined how many products she would take with her to the show based on talks with other local artisans who had participated in previous years. They had mentioned the past years show when most all of the vendors made large revenues from the products they exhibited. I stressed to Chantal that not all trade shows are in place to make profits from sales. Most of the time trade shows are a way to make connections with buyers and other sellers as well as conduct market research. I tried to calm her ideas of making huge profits out of large amounts of merchandise and had her agree to again, be aware of the primary budget.

The local artists of Kpalimé she was corresponding with, were all members of the regional branch of "Chambre de Metiers." It was also through them she would share the cost of the booth since the price for a stand was well above the budget we had discussed. They had organized to attend SIAO under the assistance of the trade association, just as they had done in years past. Since I had never been to this event, and since Chantal had now found others who had, I left it to her to organize her trip

As time quickly approached, Chantal began to fully immerse her operations into a fully fledged line of production. She and the five other women took charge of their respective responsibilities and began to make 50 of each model of bag to sell. I soon realized the potential for growth as I noticed how Chantal had sought out others in village to assist in the production since her capacity was limited to two sewing machines in her small living space. She would cut and prep all the materials then drop them off at locals willing to help for an hourly wage. A certain friend of hers had left his job as a driver to start up another trade as an upholsterer and since he had a workspace and machine but no clients he needed something to keep him busy. There were other friends of hers in village, who were also willing to help with production. In the same way as before, Chantal would drop off prepared materials and demonstrate the necessary construction, then return a week later to pick them up and pay the person an agreed salary.

Chantal explaining construction techniques to a locally commissioned tailor, assisting her in handling the production for SIAO.

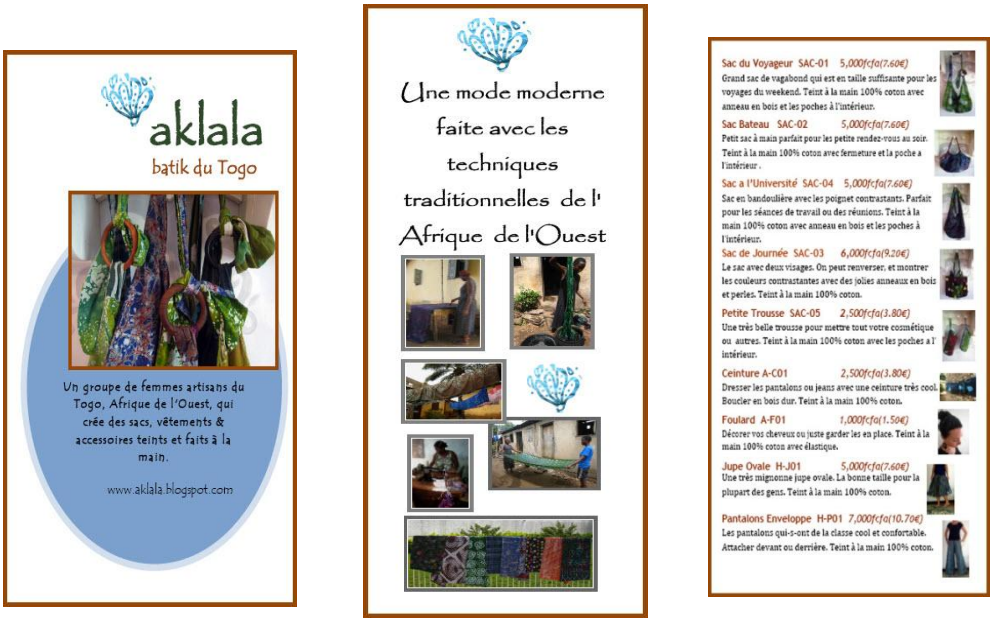
Une petite histoire...

Tous les produits de ***aklala batik*** étaient créés avec les modes modernes en utilisant les méthodes et matériaux traditionnels. Les techniques sont à l'origine du Ghana, Togo et Benin. Chantal Donvide N., fondatrice d' ***aklala batik***, travaille avec l'aide des cinq autres femmes. Elles créent les couleurs et images vivantes à la main sur des tissues en coton. Après la teinture des tissues, les femmes coupent et font la couture des différents modèles de sacs et vêtements. Anneaux en bois tropicaux sculptés à la main ainsi que des perles traditionnels ornent les sacs. Toutes les étapes du processus de production sont des méthodes artisanales traditionnelles. Les femmes sont très soucieuses de conserver leurs traditions. Elles tiennent à ce que chaque article individuel préserve son originalité.

I went to visit Chantal and the women as frequently as possible but concentrated my time on making sure other items were set in place for her. Marketing is something that is not

practiced strongly here and because of that reason it I have found myself teaching the importance of it often. aklala already had a name and I knew Chantal was aware of the need to market that name and brand but how? Her focus was on the production, in order to be able to make a profit at the show to repay the loan. Thus, I decided to start with some basic ways of publicity. I created another blog linked to my personal one to act as a temporary website for aklala. Through all my time spent with the women I had taken many photos documenting their work and progress. On aklala's blog (www.aklala.blogspot.com), I posted "Her story," a statement describing how the project formed along with product images and a photo journey through the process of how the products were created. Blogs are an easy way for an artist to begin to promote themselves online. They are free to use and simple to update and maintain with installed templates and step-by-step directions.

I also began to think of how we were going to create marketing materials to bring to SIAO. This included attaching labels to each bag, creating price lists, and designing brochures to hand out to interested buyers. From my experiences in the past attending trade shows all these items were just as important as the product itself. If you had no information to give an interested buyer, they could quickly forget about you and your product all together, let alone have no way of contacting you with further interest. I started by selecting each style of bag to use for product shots and photographed them at home.



The brochure created to promote aklala at SIAO detailing their history and available products complete with pricing, and ordering and contact information.

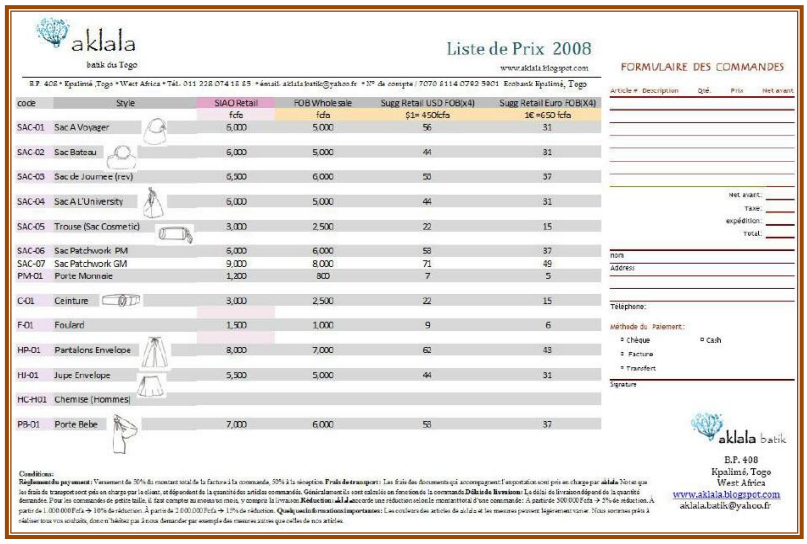
Having been smart to bring a laptop with me to Africa, I was able to edit and format all the photos into market publications. I used a simple template on my computer to make a tri-fold brochure describing aklala and listing products and pricing as well as contact information and ordering procedures. I translated the document into French with the help of my APCD (Project Director), and other volunteers. I then made a similar four page spread with more photos and documentation of aklala's creation in English. After

creating these beautiful publications I became quickly discouraged by the lack of color printers in Togo. "*Kinkos,* anyone*?*" I researched a couple places in the capital that could do color copies but at a hefty price, approx $4 for one brochure. This was way beyond her budget so I printed what I could in black and white and decided to upload the files to her blog for the availability to view in color. In the end I managed to find a local resource with a color printer and they allowed me to make a few laser copies to hand out to very interested buyers.

Aklala swing tags created using hand carved locally made stamps

I also talked over with her the need to create a logo and make swing tags to hang from each of her products that provided her contact info and name of the company. Since I had such a difficulty with the availability of printing facilities for making the brochures, we were faced with thinking out local options. Here in Togo, many businesses create custom hand-carved stamps for their affaires to stamp letters and official documents. Since time was running out, and a stamp only took a matter of days to create, we decided to order one for the swing tags. We chose a small logo from one of her batik patterns to represent the look of aklala and I created a stamp design complete with her contact information, website and in the middle, aklala's logo. She ordered a similar stamp to be made as well, solely stating "aklala, batik du Togo, 100%coton" This is product specific information detailing the construction and origin needed to be placed on the product as an inside label when it is ready for export. The stamps were perfect in the way they spoke of the manner in which her batik prints were created. It was also a great way to capitalize on what works well locally before compromising it with an outside approach.

Chantal was aware of the need to go equipped with business cards and other forms of contact after talking with the others who had attended in the SIAO in the past. I had already created a website where people could contact her with interest in her products but she was not used to accessing the web and checking the site for comments and questions. I told her that when we would find a moment, I will give her a crash course in emailing and publicizing over the web. In effect, this would be the easiest way to contact directly with buyers and maintain relationships. The only problem is that internet connections in West Africa are unreliable with only a select few who own personal computers, let alone have electricity to power them. However, most all Africans own cellular phones due to their increasing affordability, thus she could be reached most times by phone. Therefore, after creating an



aklala
batik du Togo

Liste de Prix 2008
www.aklala.blogspot.com

B.P. 408 • Kpalimé ,Togo • West Africa • Tél. 011 228 074 18 85 • email: aklala.batik@yahoo.fr • N° de compte / 7070 8114 0792 5901 Ecobank Kpalimé, Togo

code	Style	SIAO Retail fcfa	FOB Wholesale fcfa	Sugg Retail USD FOB(x4) $1= 450fcfa	Sugg Retail Euro FOB(X4) 1€ =650 fcfa
SAC-01	Sac A Voyager	6,000	5,000	56	31
SAC-02	Sac Bateau	6,000	5,000	44	31
SAC-03	Sac de Journee (rev)	6,500	6,000	53	37
SAC-04	Sac A L'University	6,000	5,000	44	31
SAC-05	Trouse (Sac Cosmetic)	3,000	2,500	22	15
SAC-06	Sac Patchwork PM	6,000	6,000	53	37
SAC-07	Sac Patchwork GM	9,000	8,000	71	49
PM-01	Porte Monnaie	1,200	800	7	5
C-01	Ceinture	3,000	2,500	22	15
F-01	Foulard	1,500	1,000	9	6
HP-01	Pantalons Envelope	8,000	7,000	62	43
HJ-01	Jupe Envelope	5,500	5,000	44	31
HC-H01	Chemise (Hommes)				
PB-01	Porte Bebe	7,000	6,000	53	37

FORMULAIRE DES COMMANDES

Article # Description Qté. Prix Net avant

Net avant:
Taxe:
expédition:
Total:

nom
Adresse

Téléphone:

Méthode du Paiement:
Chèque
Cash
Facture
Transfert
Signature

aklala batik
B.P. 408
Kpalimé, Togo
West Africa
www.aklala.blogspot.com
aklala.batik@yahoo.fr

Conditions:
Règlement du payement: Versement de 50% du montant total de la facture à la commande, 50% à la réception. **Frais de transport:** Les frais des documents qui accompagnent l'exportation sont pris en charge par **aklala**. Notez que les frais de transport sont pris en charge par le client, et dépendent de la quantité des articles commandés. Généralement ils sont calculés en fonction de la commande. **Délais de livraison:** Le délai de livraison dépend de la quantité demandée. Pour les commandes de petite taille, il faut compter au moins un mois, y compris la livraison. **Réduction: aklala** accorde une réduction selon le montant total d'une commande: À partir de 500 000 Fcfa → 5% de réduction. À partir de 1 000 000 Fcfa → 10% de réduction. À partir de 2 000 000 Fcfa → 15% de réduction. **Quelques informations importantes:** Les couleurs des articles de aklala et les mesures peuvent légèrement varier. Nous sommes prêts à réaliser tous vos souhaits, donc n'hésitez pas à nous demander par exemple des mesures autres que celles de nos articles.

The price list I helped create to be used as a quick reference guide when discussing prices with customers. Complete with retail and FOB prices as well as suggested retail mark-ups in dollar and euro.

email address for aklala batik to be used in the future, I noted it on her personal business card along with her address and cell phone number and she ordered 100 copies to bring to SIAO.

When attending an international trade show you must be prepared to offer pricing to potential buyers that includes the cost of shipping to their required destination. You must also be aware to calculate the conversion into Euros as well as Dollars so that the buyer can make a quick analysis of the end retail price. This way of advertising your price is not common to many African producers as much of what they sell is always disputable. Therefore, the process in trying to figure out a system for pricing was difficult. We looked into shipping options to know how to adjust the price given to outside interested buyers. All this information needed to be ready in order to publicize a willingness to accommodate all buyers. So after we finalized the pricing, I created a template for a price list that would provide a quick reference for buyers.

We then discussed the issue of payment and how buyers would be able to transfer funds to Chantal directly. This is another obstacle in export development in West Africa where many people do not hold a primary account at a financial institution. She had an account at a local microfinance institution where a potential client could send her funds via Western Union for a purchase, though she would take a cut on the profits due to transfer fees. Many people like her become discouraged at opening an account at a proper bank because of the high service fees and the need to continue making deposits. I helped her look into other options amongst the banks and found that *Ecobank*, a relatively new chain of banks in West Africa, had the best services to offer her. There, she could have buyers transfer funds directly into her account, bank to bank. The service fees in opening and maintaining the account were minimal compared to the benefits it would provide for her growth as an entrepreneur. So she visited her local *Ecobank* branch on her own, and upon receiving counseling of their services, decided to open her account.

Views of one of the pavilions in preparations for the participants to arrive.

Finally, thoughts about how she would install her items in the booth were discussed and we made preparations for displaying her creations in an organized fashion in the space planned to exhibit. Since time was limited in setting up your stand, you had to pre-plan as much as possible to maximize time and create a marketable appearance. We decided to make batik panels to act as walls in decorating the stand. They were created using her logo and name written across to advertize her brand. We discussed options for displaying the bags and how to incorporate different materials to create a pleasant atmosphere that spoke of the way the product was created and where it originated from. I then helped her gather tools and props needed in displaying her creations successfully at the show.

Facilitating a seminar on "Optimizing Trade Show Performance" given to participating exposants in the Design Africa booth at SIAO

At the same time I was helping Chantal wrap up her final preparations, I was also busy with arrangements of my own. In maintaining contact with the trade hub WATH, I had offered to help assist in formations to participants attending SIAO on business practices and enterprise development. They agreed to my offer and I was asked to help facilitate with seminars on e-commerce, product design and development, optimizing trade shows, and marketing for high-end and volume buyers. I had discussed the WATH's desire for my assistance to my Peace Corps director and since I had already planned on seeing Chantal debut at SIAO, I was permitted to count the time spent in Burkina Faso as a work trip. USAID's WATH offered to help me finance my stay with a per-diem allowance for animating the seminars and helping buyers from the states communicate with producers through facilitating language translation and cross-cultural understanding. So in the week that leaded up to our departure I created power point presentations on the topics and prepared materials to facilitate discussions. Since I was scheduled to give the first seminar a day before the show officially started, I arranged all my travel plans and made the trip up country ahead of Chantal by way of Togo's nation-wide newspaper delivery car.

Entrance to the 11th edition of SIAO, Ougadougou, Burkina Faso Nov 2008

Chantal and the group of other exhibitors from Kpalimé had rented a van to take them and their products up country and across the border into Ouagadougou. They all left together to arrive in time to secure the two stands promised to them by the "Chambre de Metiers." They had not made arrangements of their own to register since this had always been the responsibility of the "Chambre." Instead, they made arrangements amongst each other on how much each person would pay towards sharing the stand and the space they would occupy. On their way up to SIAO they would meet with the Chambre de Metiers at its regional offices to pay their sum and receive the location of the booths. It was not perceived that upon meeting them at their offices, the Chambre would notify them that this year no stands were reserved to represent the artists of the Kpalimé region of Togo due to budget cuts. This was the first time this has ever happened since in the past there had always been at least 2 booths reserved for their participation. Thus, she realized one more reason to never "put all your eggs in one basket" and rely solely on others. Chantal and the others learned the importance of independence and self-responsibility through this discovery.

Aklala batik at SIAO, located outside between the two pavillions.

Chantal notified me of the situation upon her arrival and after a long trip up country. Already there, I began to do what I could and source out other potential options, but since SIAO's organization committee was a bit behind in planning there was little to be done on her part. In time, they

had been able to rectify the situation by securing a couple of outside booths available to the overflow of participants. Chantal and the others were tired and upset with the new developments but never once lost confidence. So, "when life hands you a lemon, you make lemonade." That's just what we did. Afraid that I had seemed upset at the turnout of events and unwilling to compromise for an outside stand, I held my convictions and let her make her own decisions. I find it easy to be the instigator and "mover and shaker" so it was hard to take a back seat to their reactions and resolutions. So we made do with what we had and I helped her display her products.

I bounced around from helping USAID, visiting with Chantal and the others, and seeking out information on other participants and business advisors at the show. Even though I felt divided in my time with Chantal, I knew that it was better to let her work things out on her own, and so, after helping her establish her place and giving her some advice and counseling I had to step away to let her be independent. This was again very hard for me to do since I wanted to do all I could to see her succeed. I knew of success in trade shows in the States but we were here in Africa, and as much as I could try to inflict what I feel is right, you have to be aware of their own cultural tendencies.

I noticed that difference when I was helping demonstrate how she could display her items. I stepped in after she had finished setting up her booth and began to give tips and advice as I proceeded to take apart and re-organize her display. She had already hung a huge number of her bags all over the walls of the stand making it hard to distinguish one from the other. I am sure she was proud of her end production and wanted to show every available style but it just made it hard to clearly see the product. You can show confidence in the value of an item by giving it some space to represent itself. In allowing for that, "the product will be able to sell itself." In retrospect I realize that my criticism may have been too much, as I thought she may have been sensing my disappointment in her performance. Sometimes you need to be sensitive to their current understanding and try to take a submissive approach in letting them discover the need for changes on their own.

Chantal displaying her products in her booth at SIAO.

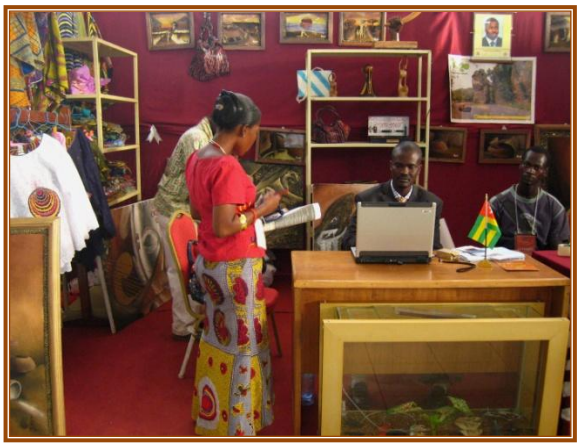
I also saw how she and the others reacted to the buyers' interest as they passed by, demanding that they enter and look around. It was a forced way of attracting the buyer that I tried to calm by offering the alternative passive approach common to Western consumers. Let the product speak for itself, greet and acknowledge their arrival to your site pleasantly and allow them to enter at free will, standing by to answer questions and facilitate interest. If they are interested but are not ready to purchase, you should offer them your contact information or ask for their business card to maintain contact. But again, in Africa, the market scene is much different. There is so much pressure placed on the seller to make profit

that they use force to attract their buyers. This method is a quick turn-off to the Western buyer. So I offered her and the others some tips and left it up to them to decided which approach they would facilitate. We were still in Africa and that tactic worked with most African buyers, but I felt the need to add a cultural exchange to explain the sentiments of the foreign buyer.

Chantal, No-No, and I after a WATH marketing formation I assisted facilitating, given to participants at SIAO.

I may have come in too harsh with the criticism and at a sensitive point since the beginning of the show had started in disappointment. So I tried to be patient and hope that these would be things she could discover through her time at SIAO. Instead of offering more tips, I told her to try to find time to walk around the show to see how other participants were installed and how they handled their customers. I introduced her to some other artisans who had worked with USAID WATH and had years of development and approach. I left it open to chance and hoped for her to discover the best option for herself and at a pace she was comfortable with.

I reminded her to try to find a moment to attend the remaining formations as well as explore other exhibitors' booths that were present to offer counseling and aid to artisans. Not only could she capitalize on attending the show as an exhibitor, there was a wealth of information on other countries and services at her disposal. We visited the COFTA (Cooperation for Fair Trade in Africa) stand, a network of Fair Trade Producer Organizations in Africa involved and working with disadvantaged grass roots producers to eliminate poverty through Fair Trade, to gain insight on how she could become a member. She also took time to visit other stands that gave her counseling on banking, shipping, and business financing. She was able to attend the final seminars and learn about the importance of marketing and export preparations. Although she focused concern on the sales of her items, I continued to remind her of the investment she was making and the skills and knowledge she was receiving through all of it.



The Togo National booth, funded by the country to represent their local artists. Chantal's handbag sits alone on the metal shelf.

And then there was the country booth. Most of the participating countries would finance a stand in the nice air-conditioned pavilion to represent their countries exposing artists in all trades. After what had happened with the lack of representation by way of the Chambre de Metiers , I decided to see what the country may have set in place for them. Was I surprised? Not in the least. I approached the man in charge of the booth; sitting at a desk all dressed in a three piece suit watching music videos on his laptop. I pleasantly presented myself as a Peace Corps volunteer working in his country in the domain of enterprise development and currently at SIAO to help artisans represent their trade. He handed me his business card and on it, noted his position as "Chef Division Promotion de

l'Artisanat (Togo)" working under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Thinking we were both here for the same reasons, and after seeing how underrepresented the booth currently was, I decided to intervene.

From my time living in Togo I understood well why the booth looked like the fancy office of an important official. It doesn't take much to experience the lack of assistance and development by way of the country itself. Corruption is popular in West Africa as everyone is looking to find their benefit, unwilling to put it back into development as an investment to be shared by many. So, I started by kindly asking him if he needed help meeting and talking with the other artists represented at the show from Togo to select and install their products in Togo's stand. I explained of my expertise in working at trade shows and told him I could offer my time and assistance to improving the look of the stand, making it more marketable as a place to find skilled trade. Excuse after excuse he didn't budge, mentioning that he was waiting for the "other" person responsible for the stand. So after many visits and pleads for help, the stand sat as is, filled with some unattractive paintings made by someone I assume holds the same blood line as the person in charge, as well as a tiny smattering of wood sculptures and a box holding key-chains for a discount price. Not to worry though, "his excellence the president" was watching over the stand, neatly propped on the back wall. In the end, Chantal was allowed to display 2 of her bags on the metal shelf after he noticed the popularity of her products. But by then, she and the others knew of their need to become autonomous.

Chantal in her booth at SIAO.

In the end there were many lessons learned. Chantal and the others like her now know what they need to do to improve their business and now I have a clearer picture of what sources to use to help them. She did get a bit carried away in the production hoping for a "blowout sale" but now has product she could disperse for sale locally. She will need to use the future sales of the bags to complete the payback of the loan since she overinvested her finances. But this forces her to market her products more at a local level and to use her local resources for return revenue. She is determined to clear herself of the loan repayment in the next month, while at the same time exploring other options for attending trade shows and attracting new markets. Like I said before, I felt as if this was rushing into development and moving at a pace too fast for her to handle. There was so much too quickly set in place to attend SIAO and in retrospect, I am glad we did it. She has now seen the whole picture; an insider's approach to business growth that she would not have experienced had she just went and "walked" the show. There were some success and some failures. Although she did not sell every last product, she did quite well in the end and has now made some contacts to further generate sales. The main purpose of

attending a trade show is not to make immediate profit, but to hope that it will aid in future profits. It provides direction in your endeavors and lets others become aware of your presence in the market.

So at what stage is aklala at now? We are going to sit down and create a plan to reorganize and continue development. We will return to the budget detailing the installation of a workshop and boutique and see what can be done for that. She will need to concentrate on her production capacity at the same time as moving forward in the promotion of aklala. Now that there is interest in her products, and she has researched the markets desires, she can be selective in the patterns and styles offered at the moment and try to create a promotional catalog to disperse locally. I also asked her to look into exposing her bags at boutiques and hotel gift shops locally as well as in the capital where many tourists and expatriates frequent. I am going to assist in training her to use email and manage the blog as well as use search engines to do her own research. We are also going to look into dividing the responsibilities of all the members of her group of assistance to see where they could best contribute to the functions of the business. By determining and delegating roles and responsibilities, Chantal would have more time to oversee and facilitate growth in all areas. Among all, there is also the need to formalize the business. I hope that with time there will be assistance in the development of entrepreneurs by way of the country. But one must be patient and also not wait for support, because here in Africa as I have come to realize, "in a land of many, to each their own."

To be continued…. ….there's more on the horizon

~Megan Rhodes

November 16, 2008

"In my afternoon walk I would fain forget all my morning occupations, and my obligation to society. But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head, and I am not where my body is; I am out of my senses."

– *Henry David Thoreau*