

10th

a n n i v e r s a r y z i n e

Issue Three
Summer 2017

indegO * africa

WHO WE ARE

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Indego Africa is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering artisan women in Africa through employment opportunities and education. Our mission? To help artisans lift themselves and their families out of poverty and become empowered businesswomen.

We partner with more than 1,000 women across 33 artisan groups in Rwanda and Ghana to sell products that are designed in New York City and handmade in Africa— combining traditional techniques, local materials, and amazing artisanal skill. We provide our partners with steady employment and fair income for their work and help young women build career paths in the artisan sector.

We invest all of our profits from product sales, coupled with grants and donations, into business, leadership, and technology education programs for the women who handcraft our products and the youth in their communities.

Learn more at www.indegoafrica.org

INDEGO TURNS 10!

Welcome to Issue Three of the Indego Africa Zine!

Indego Africa was founded in 2007 by father and son, Tom and Matt Mitro. During the 11 years the Mitro family spent living in Africa, they were struck by the incredible talent and entrepreneurial spirit of female artisans. They were also struck by a glaring problem: these women, without access to markets to sell their goods or the education needed to run their businesses, were living in poverty with few ways out. Indego Africa was launched to address these issues of access and opportunity.

In celebration of Indego Africa's 10th anniversary, this publication presents highlights of our work with artisans in Rwanda since 2007 and in Ghana since 2015. We seek to convey our mission to empower women and provide artisans in Africa with the tools they need to become financially independent and prepared for the future.

In the pages ahead, you'll hear from members of the Indego team, past and present, on what makes Indego so impactful and inspiring- including an exclusive interview with Indego's founder, Matt Mitro, on pg. 5.

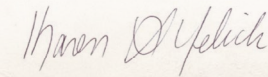
We'll introduce you to Indego's #FirstFriends: Our earliest artisan partners in Rwanda who continue to provide mentorship to other women and leadership in their communities (pg. 10); and one of Indego's most dedicated sponsors, Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP (pg. 23). We'll also take you inside Indego's education programs in our special feature on empowering generations of entrepreneurs on pg. 25.

I'm especially proud of the team culture we've built among and between Indego employees in Rwanda, Ghana, and New York. On pg. 31, you'll get an inside perspective from our Creative Director on the history and future of Indego's brand as a global design company. You'll also hear from our Country Directors in Rwanda and Ghana on what makes Indego's model and mission so relevant in each of their communities (pg. 37).

Always looking towards the future, we're proud to highlight our newest artisan partners, the women of Akeza Burundi Cooperative at the Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda (pg. 43). Employing Indego's institutional knowledge and experience, we launched an on-site Vocational and Business Training program for 50 refugee artisans in September of 2016. By the end of November, these remarkable women were already earning income handcrafting and exporting products for the Indego Africa collection.

This retrospective Zine showcases Indego's evolution over the past decade, giving context to our initiatives and celebrating our artisan partners across Rwanda and Ghana. It is a true illustration of the values that have inspired us every day since our founding!

Sincerely,



Karen Yelick
CEO, Indego Africa



2007

"EVERYTHING IS CLEAR NOW."

*Fatuma Nyiramana
Covanya Cooperative, Rwanda*

LOOKING BACK

For the past ten years, Indego Africa has been on a mission to empower women and support artisans around the world. That's why we're looking back at our favorite moments from the last decade and celebrating the people who have helped make all things Indego possible!

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A FOUNDING VISION FOR A POWERFUL FUTURE

"Indego Africa does not shy away from complexity and instead does the hard work of tackling these issues in concert."

Indego Africa was founded in 2007 with a simple idea: empower women artisans in Africa by showcasing their beautiful craft and investing in the power of education. Founder Matt Mitro recounts his own journey with Indego- from our earliest years in Rwanda to the pivotal points in Indego's evolution that have helped shape us into the global nonprofit and design company we are today.

People are sometimes surprised to hear that Indego was founded by two men! Can you tell us a little bit about why women's empowerment is so important to you?

When my father and I started to design what would become Indego Africa, we drew inspiration from the story of my grandmother Olga. She too had simultaneously been an entrepreneur and a mother - with a thirst for education. Like many of Indego's artisan partners, Olga grew up in a rural community and couldn't pursue formal education due to poverty. But because she grew up in the U.S., she could more easily start a business and became the primary income-earner in her family. All three of her sons went to college - including my father.

It's well-known that women in developing countries are far more likely to invest in their family's basic needs and education. But we didn't need the data to tell us what we already knew instinctively: give women like my grandmother access

"It's well-known that women in developing countries are far more likely to invest in their family's basic needs and education."

to markets and education, and they'll do the rest.

Tell us about your initial vision for Indego. When you first founded Indego Africa, did you ever imagine we'd be where we are today?

The Indego Africa of 2017 exceeds my wildest expectations in 2007 every day! In the beginning, we only had a vision for change and a model that we believed would work. And there was good reason for such modest expectations. At the time, I had little experience in all the key areas that were critical to our success: education, sales, product design, fundraising, import-export, etc. In our first year, I traveled to 13 cities in the U.S., sleeping on friends' couches, and making in-person sales pitches to 200+ stores. I hosted a fundraiser with only four people in attendance (myself included).

These learning experiences were all a part of my own entrepreneurship journey, one which was remarkably similar to that of our artisan

partners. By learning together and remaining undaunted, we gained confidence and fostered deeper commitment to each other. As that happened, I began to see Indego Africa as a movement that could not fail.

From your perspective as the founder, what has been Indego's most pivotal moment?

There have truly been many pivotal moments and I still believe we're in one right now! It's very hard to pick one, so I'll pick two.

First, in 2010 we secured our first order with a major company - Ralph Lauren - for handwoven banana bracelets. This moment helped position Indego Africa as a design brand that could deliver for high-profile clients and lead to many other sales.

Second, in 2014 we launched the Leadership Academy in Rwanda, a six-month advanced business-training program specifically tailored for our artisan partners. This moment demonstrated that Indego Africa's education programs offered something entirely new and delivered clear results: 100%

of graduates report that they now have the skills needed to start a new business.

We care deeply about our artisan partners' livelihoods. For me, both of these moments represented significant leaps forward for them and for Indego Africa.

Looking back at the last 10 years, what has been the most inspiring moment for you as Indego's founder?

Maybe because I'm an original member of the Indego Africa team, I'm most inspired by the persistent success of one of our first artisan partners: Cocoki. They have created beautiful products for major international stores and brands like J.Crew, Anthropologie, and Nicole Miller. Cocoki has been lead by the amazing Emelienne Nyiramana, a graduate of 10,000 Women and our Leadership Academy. They've added many new members and now mentor other tailors in Rwanda. I couldn't be prouder to call them partners now for ten years!

What do you think makes Indego Africa so impactful?

Indego Africa has impact simply because it executes well, hires the right people, and has a simple philosophy (yet, make no mistake, a very intricate model!). We know that long-term partnerships lead to profound changes in people's daily lives and outlooks on the future. It's not enough to provide short-term income or a rich education in isolation. There's no use in helping one generation, while another languishes.

Indego Africa does not shy away from complexity and instead does the hard work of tackling these issues in concert. We succeed by hiring exceptionally passionate and capable people who believe in our vision and focus on getting everything right - from social impact assessments and teaching, to client service and quality control. It's not easy but we know it works! (And have the data to prove it...)

What are you most looking forward to in Indego's future?

I'm still looking forward to tomorrow! Every day I'm grateful that Indego Africa has such a bright future after ten years.

I'm most excited about expanding our work in Ghana and at the Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda. We have so much to learn from these new artisan groups and so many beautiful products to offer the world. Ghana presents a new challenge to adapt our educational programs and prove that the Indego Africa model works outside Rwanda. Working at Mahama gives us the chance to show that market access and education can deliver sustainable income even in the most isolated and complex environments. If we can help refugees reach export markets, we're really changing the game!

* * *

2008

**" BEFORE INDEGO,
I FELT LIKE A FORGOTTEN PERSON,
BUT NOW I FEEL LIKE I AM
USEFUL TO SOCIETY BECAUSE I
CAN PRODUCE SOMETHING.**

**I AM NO LONGER A CONSUMER;
I CAN CONTRIBUTE."**

*Olive Mukabuzizi
Covanya Cooperative, Rwanda*

#FIRSTFRIENDS

Conversations with Indego's Earliest Artisan Partners

We sat down with some of our earliest artisan partners to find out what education means to them and why they are so passionate about their work with Indego!



EMELIENNE

Founder of Cocoki Cooperative
& current Indego Africa Teaching
Associate

Emelienne Nyiramana is one of Indego Africa's first artisan partners (yes, from way back in 2007!), the founder of Cocoki Cooperative, and an inspiring testament to the power of education. Ten years ago, Emelienne was struggling to lift herself and her family out of poverty, but today - thanks to education and determination - Emelienne is a full-time Indego Africa staff member, a Teaching Associate at our Leadership Academy, and an influential mentor and leader in communities across Rwanda.

"I am continually learning from the work I do and it feels good to know other people are learning from me."

When I was first introduced to Indego's mission to empower women through education programs and business training, I was really interested. I wanted to partner with Indego to fulfill that mission for myself and other Rwandan women in my community.

My life has changed a lot since working with Indego. Ten years ago,

I had no education, but since 2007, I've founded Cocoki Cooperative and learned how to manage a business, I graduated from the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women Initiative and won the Peace Through Business competition, and I passed Rwanda's national examination to earn my Senior 6 Certificate which allowed me to continue attending school at the university level.

One of my ongoing professional goals is to mentor other women and help people in my community run their businesses and earn an education. I am very proud to say that several women I have mentored over the past few years have now started their own businesses, decided to go back to school, and continued earning income and working at their cooperatives- just like me!

My personal goals for the future have a lot to do with my education. Something I worked really hard for in the past was completing my secondary school education. I not only achieved that goal but am now in my first year of college and planning on earning a Bachelor's degree in Economics

and Cooperative Management. Indego Africa has been incredibly supportive over the years and has helped me achieve my goals!

My partnership with Indego Africa has impacted my life in numerous ways. In terms of professional development, I have grown so much. Since I began working at a cooperative in 2007, I have developed the skills and ability to work for an international NGO-which is an opportunity I would have never received if it wasn't for my partnership with Indego!

I am also continually learning from the work I do and it feels good to know that other people are learning from me. Since working with Indego, I started having a more open mind and thinking outside the box. I now tell the women I mentor that anything is possible if you have a purpose and goals to achieve.

Before partnering with Indego, it was difficult to earn even \$1 a day. I was entirely dependent on my husband, but now I am financially independent and a full-time Indego Africa employee! One of my most memorable moments was when I signed that employee contract. I

am now able to pay my own school tuition fees and create more goals for myself in the future. I still have a long journey ahead of me but I move forward every day and look to the future with confidence.

One of the things I enjoy the most about my job with Indego is standing in front of trainees and sharing my experiences with them. Most of them have become motivated to pursue new job opportunities and go back to school. Some of them continue to stay in touch even after the class to ask for advice that might help them accomplish the kind of success I have earned over the past years. I am proud to be a part of Indego's Business Training programs because even when I am teaching, I am always learning.

In the future, I am most looking forward to completing my degree and having all of my family members earn an education. This is the biggest personal goal I hope to achieve. Indego Africa helps women help their families and I believe someday, this may pull a huge part of our world out of poverty.

* * *



2009

**" I'M GAINING MANY THINGS FROM INDEGO,
LIKE MANAGEMENT AND COMPUTER TRAINING.**

**THE MONEY THAT I'M EARNING IS BEING USED TO
HELP MY SIX CHILDREN ATTEND SCHOOL
AND MEET THEIR NEEDS."**

*Clementine Kabkind
Covanya Cooperative, Rwanda*

JACQUELINE

President of Twiyubake Cooperative

Jacqueline Musabyimana is one of Indego's first artisan partners at Twiyubake Cooperative. As president of Twiyubake, the manager of her own cleaning company, a mother of six, and a leader in her community, Jacqueline knows what it means to be a hardworking and empowered woman. Since she began partnering with Indego in 2009, Jacqueline has used the lessons she has learned to build a prosperous future for herself and her family.

I decided to join Indego Africa because I understood Indego's "big picture." I wanted to change my life and Indego gave me an opportunity to get myself out of poverty.

I was very vulnerable after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. I lost both of my parents, and for many years, I felt hopeless about my future and the future of my seven brothers. Together, we strived to survive with limited resources, but I couldn't provide any help because I didn't have a job. Indego Africa explained to me that they were not going to

give me fish but instead, teach me how to catch them. After hearing that, I had zero hesitations about joining Indego Africa.

Three months in, I sold my first order! I sold eight plateau baskets and it was the first time in my life I was able to buy enough food and clothes for my family. I even had enough money to purchase a mobile phone! In 2009, a mobile phone was a true symbol of a civilized citizen in our village, and I will never forget how proud I felt in that moment.

I now own a piece of land and a big house with multiple television sets. My entire family is covered by health insurance and we eat good food. But I know material things alone cannot fully represent my growth. I have grown in many ways since partnering with Indego. I've learned to think big! My self-esteem has gone up and I am proud of the dignified and empowered woman I've become. It is because of the skillsets and mindset Indego has equipped me with that I can wear so many hats in life.

The part of my work that I am most proud of is the time I get to spend

at the cooperative. I am responsible for more than 40 members, young and old. We've recently been joined by a group of younger women and we love them. They are the new life blood of our cooperative! The responsibilities I assume at Twiyubake are a good exercise in management and remind me of the things I can do to help improve other people's lives.

When I used to set goals, I sometimes worried that they would only be wishes, or that they would be forgotten and unachievable. My prime goal in life used to be to own an adequate home. Today, I own a big house and although it's still under construction, my goal is to complete that house by next year. Another goal I've always had is educating my children. I strive to make sure my children grow up well and receive quality education.

When it comes to my professional goals, I still want to own my own handcraft store so I can utilize all of the vocational and business skills I've learned from partnering with Indego Africa. I've been trying

to save money so I can invest in this project because owning my own store is my number one professional goal.

I like to remind myself that with hope and persistence, my dreams can become a reality. If you make plans and feed your ideas hope, persistence, and education, your projects will be successful.

"I've learned to think big! My self-esteem has gone up and I am proud of the dignified and empowered woman I've become."

In the future, I'm looking forward to continuing to have good health because I know any sickness will only impede the progress I'm making on my projects and I really want to see all of the projects I've undertaken be successful. I also want my children to finish their studies and grow up happy and healthy.

I will sum up what my partnership with Indego Africa means to me in just a few, important words: Education is a powerful tool to change women's lives. My life has been greatly impacted by the education I've received from Indego Africa and I am very thankful for that.

* * *





CHANTAL

President of Imirasire Cooperative

Chantal Nyirabambari began partnering with Indego Africa in 2009 when she joined Imirasire Cooperative and learned how to weave. She graduated from Indego's Leadership Academy in January of 2016 and has since been elected president of her cooperative twice! Chantal uses the business skills she's learned from her partnership with Indego to better the management of her cooperative and local community.

I wanted to partner with Indego because I knew they provided us with access to markets. This has enabled each woman to find work and in turn, earn money and help their families. Indego's payment system also encourages us to work hard and create good partnerships with each other. The Indego team also gives great advice! In my business and leadership classes, they are always mentoring us and providing opportunities for follow up.

Before partnering with Indego,

I was a farmer and earned very little money. Now, I am a business woman with a bank account! I have three houses and two motorcycles that my child and husband use, I have a television, and I have clean water and electricity in my home. I was able to purchase all of these things because I saved my money and invested the income I made from fulfilling purchase orders for Indego Africa. I am proud to say that I can also afford my child's school fees. These are not things I was able to do before working with Indego.

Indego has been my savior in terms of getting a job and earning an income. Every positive change in my life has been the result of working with Indego. I was also very happy to be a part of the Leadership Academy because I got the chance to learn and receive powerful advice from members of the Indego team, including Rwanda Country Director, Rosine Urujeni.

“Every positive change in my life has been the result of working with Indego.”

When I was elected the president of Imirasire Cooperative for the second time, I got very emotional. It feels good to know that I am a

person who is trusted by others to help lead the cooperative and the community. I am also proud to be a talented woman who helps bring money to the cooperative. By helping other people, I am building both my community and my country.

In the future, I am looking forward to living my best possible life. I have goals to finish building a third house for my family, continue mentoring new cooperative members so they can be successful, and continue saving the money I make from working with Indego. I know I will be able to retire safely and successfully because I am committed to my work, patient with life, and an active participant in my community.

* * *



2010

" INDEGO AFRICA HAS ENABLED ME TO ENVISION A NEW LIFE FOR MYSELF."

Marie Rose Nyirandabaruta
IKU Cooperative, Rwanda



#FIRSTFRIENDS

Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP

Since our founding, the law firm of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP has played a crucial role in Indego's success. Read below for a special feature on Orrick's support over the past ten years!

Since 2007, Orrick has been a committed sponsor of all things Indego, providing donated office and inventory space to Indego Africa in New York. The Orrick team has also provided pro bono legal services to support our artisan partners in Rwanda and Ghana.

Benjamin Stone, one of Indego's original architects and a college friend of Indego's founder, Matt Mitro, joined Orrick as a Managing Associate in 2006 and brought Indego Africa on as a pro bono client in 2007. The following year, Orrick orchestrated an unprecedented arrangement which allowed Ben to work full-time as Indego Africa's COO. Ben went on to serve as Indego's CEO through mid-2012 and currently serves as

the Vice Chair of the Board of Directors.

Today, two Orrick attorneys serve on Indego's Board of Directors and two sit on Indego's Board of Advisors. They, in addition to other members of the Orrick staff, have been involved in a number of critical projects for Indego over the years, including securing intellectual property, registering Indego as a charity in the UK, helping secure an award from the Positive Planet Foundation, and providing guidance and support for Indego Africa's expansion to Ghana.

Orrick's unwavering support and demonstrated commitment over the last ten years has allowed Indego Africa to maintain a centralized work and inventory space, enhance and grow its education programs and product line, and help improve the lives of women artisans across Rwanda and Ghana.

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EMPOWERING GENERATIONS OF ENTREPRENEURS IN RWANDA

In the 23 years since the genocide in Rwanda, women have been at the forefront of the country's economic, social, political, and physical reconstruction. We are proud to work at the heart of this development as women continue to take the lead in their communities and spread economic growth, social progress, and hope across Rwanda.

At Indego Africa, we know that income alone is not enough to drive sustainable change in the lives of our artisan partners. We believe that women need not only access to international markets, but also the business knowledge and skills to take their futures into their own hands, achieve financial independence, and become agents of change in their communities. That is why we invest in their education.

The Leadership Academy

One of the most pivotal moments in Indego Africa's history for CEO, Karen Yelick, was the launch of the Leadership Academy in October of 2014. As an innovative, six-month, advanced business training program, the Indego Africa Leadership Academy is dedicated to building the next generation of Rwanda's powerful female entrepreneurs and leaders.

The Leadership Academy was created in response to feedback from over 600 artisan partners who had mastered Indego's on-site basic business curriculum over the course of five years and were

eager for opportunities to take their education to the next level. They asked; we listened.

Since 2014, 100 of Indego's most innovative artisan partners have graduated from the Leadership Academy and developed the life-long knowledge and skills they need to grow their own businesses and become successful entrepreneurs and leaders.

Vocational Training

In 2016, we took our programming in Rwanda to the next level by launching Vocational Training for young people seeking a career path. Karen cites this as one of Indego's most successful education programs because it not only equips young women with the marketable skills to help them achieve sustainable livelihoods, but it also helps ensure the longevity and sustainability of artisan cooperatives across Rwanda.

We have been able to fill a critically-needed gap in the communities

we work with by providing more than 135 young people to date with on-the-job artisan vocational and basic business training. Most of our partner cooperatives are comprised of survivors of the 1994 genocide and as their members grow older, some cooperatives have faced challenges with their production capacity. Training and employing younger women have

“We're not only locally embedded in the communities we work with, but also committed to creating jobs and providing financial education for our artisan partners across generations.”

not only helped create opportunities for young women to rise up as leaders and grow their cooperatives, but has also helped generate economic activity and employment opportunities in communities across Rwanda!

In June of 2016, Indego held a joint graduation ceremony for both Leadership Academy and Vocational Training students. During the ceremony, Karen recalls alternating between each group of graduates as names were called and diplomas were awarded. Graduates stepped up to the stage from both sides and hugged each other as they met in the middle to receive their

diplomas. This was an incredibly inspiring moment for Karen and the Indego Africa team as the ceremony truly reflected the intergenerational power of Indego's model.

“This is what makes Indego Africa so effective,” says Karen. “We're not only locally embedded in the communities we work with, but also committed to creating jobs and providing financial education for our artisan partners across generations.”

Since the Leadership Academy's launch, our students have continually taken the lead in their communities and spread economic growth, social progress, and hope across their country. Last year, over 90% of our Leadership Academy students started or planned to start a new business after participating in the program, 74% took on new leadership positions in their cooperatives and communities, and over 12% expanded pre-existing businesses.

The Young Leaders Academy

This year, as we celebrate our 10th anniversary, we're taking Indego's success to the next level and launching a Young Leaders

Academy! Modeled after the Leadership Academy, the Young Leaders Academy will provide underprivileged young women in Rwanda with the advanced business education and technology training they need to successfully enter the workforce and participate in the artisan economy.

It is because of the success of our programs that we can build on this foundation and continue to address the unique livelihood challenges young people face for years to come.

* * *

A woman wearing a vibrant blue headwrap and a matching blue dress with intricate yellow and red patterns is sitting on a bright blue door. She is looking to her right. The background is a light-colored wall.

2011

" I AM A ROLE MODEL IN MY VILLAGE AND MY COOPERATIVE.

I AM GLAD THAT I CAN MOTIVATE AND ENCOURAGE OTHER PEOPLE TO DEVELOP THEMSELVES AND NOT JUST ACCEPT LIFE AS IS, BUT LOOK TO THE FUTURE FOR OTHER OPPORTUNITIES."

*Donatha Tuyishimire
Imirasire Cooperative, Rwanda*

2012

" IN THE PAST, WOMEN COULDN'T RUN BUSINESSES OR HAVE THE SAME JOBS MEN HAD.

TODAY, WE ARE CONFIDENT AND READY TO TAKE THE LEAD."

*Elizabeth Yankurije
Agatako Cooperative, Rwanda*



LOOKING FORWARD

At Indego Africa, we are always looking for opportunities to deepen our impact and advance our creative vision. Take a peek at what the future holds for our global brand and inspiring programs!

OUR BRAND STORY

Below, Indego's Creative Director, Deirdre King, reflects on the path (and strategic decisions we made!) that brought us where our brand is today.

“Seeing how much dedication and passion they have for their craft is so inspiring. It helps shape the vision of our brand in the best possible way.”

As Creative Director, I've helped shape the lifestyle brand that Indego is known for today. Our colorful collections of home decor, jewelry, accessories, baby & kids' products, art, and apparel are all the beautiful results of long-term, collaborative relationships with our artisan partners in Rwanda Ghana.

I started at Indego Africa six years ago, when many of our partners were also just

forming their businesses, and looking back, I feel like we were all babies on this journey! We've worked through cultural challenges, business-related bumps in the road, collaborative successes, (epic) failures and, most importantly, we've experienced moments of incredible joy, growth, empowerment, and pride – all together as partners. I consider the commitment of these women to our shared mission to be the most essential element to the success of our company. I love building this brand together, hand-in-hand with them!

In terms of the design process, we always start with the artisan element itself. What can our partners make with the skills and materials they have? What will be a good fit for our brand aesthetically and will it showcase their artistry? Indego's brand is all about celebrating the beauty of traditional African artistry, while adding a playful and modern twist. I want our product lines to feel happy, interesting, well-made, cohesive, and collectable. What are the designs that would be able to tick all of these boxes while also following trends in the markets we serve?

The design process can feel sort of like a puzzle sometimes – and that's before we even start sampling! Once we have an idea that will work, I communicate with our production teams in Rwanda and Ghana, who then sit down and work with the artisans to see if the piece can come to life the way we want through a traditional sampling process. From there, we review, redesign, and resample. Then, within a few weeks, months, or seasons, we have a new product. Being a part of this truly global design process is my favorite part of the job.

A few years ago, we had somewhat of a lightbulb moment when we realized we had the potential to develop a brand and build a product line that was completely our own. We just had to start putting the time and resources in to do it! With interest in partnerships coming from many high-profile companies, and a nonprofit mission to put every extra cent into our artisan programs, it was a challenge to figure out how to say no to some opportunities, and how to spend our dollars on the inherent costs of building a line: sampling, branding, photography, and marketing.

However, we trusted our gut and gave it a shot! Slowly but surely, by lessening our focus on brand partnerships that ate up staff and artisan capacity, and putting valued resources towards our line, we began creating our own voice, aesthetic, and story. Now, we are much more confident in our own abilities and more strategic when we do collaborate. We have a robust and unique product line that is compelling as is – with our own name on it. As a small team, this creative control was essential to our growth. This in turn, has led to more consistent work for our artisan partners, less setbacks and missteps, and a clearer vision for the future of Indego Africa.

One of the most special things for me is to see how much our brand has grown in the past ten years. I love how collaborative and (in the best way) codependent the process is behind our success. Our artisan partners in Rwanda and Ghana look to us for market and business opportunities, and we look to them for production and a chance to show the world their exceptional artistry and craftsmanship. Seeing how much dedication and passion they have for their craft is so

inspiring. It helps shape the vision of our brand in the best possible way. As partners, we've truly grown together!

As we look to the next ten years, I believe there is potential for us to create lasting impact through creativity, education, and design for thousands of more women, both within and beyond Rwanda and Ghana. Who knows what opportunities lie around the corner for Indego Africa? We can't wait to see what the future holds!

* * *

2013

" INDEGO AFRICA REINVIGORATED MY CONFIDENCE AND GAVE ME A NEW PATH FOR THE FUTURE BY INTRODUCING ME TO THE WORLD OF BUSINESS AND ALLOWING ME TO LEARN NEW SKILLS THAT CAN HELP ME SUCCEED.

I HAVE DIRECTION AND HOPE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME."

*Eugenie Ufitikirezi
Abasangye Cooperative, Rwanda*



2014

**" IN EVERY WAY, MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY,
MY LIFE HAS CHANGED SINCE WORKING
WITH INDEGO AFRICA.**

**AT WORK, I AM HAPPY BECAUSE IT FEELS
GOOD TO BE AROUND OTHER WOMEN
FOR COMPANY.**

I DO NOT HAVE TO BEG TO SURVIVE.

THERE IS A FUTURE FOR ME."

*Fabiola Nyirangendahimana
Cocoki Cooperative, Rwanda*

RWANDA & GHANA: PROGRAMS, IMPACT, AND VISION

Get an inside glimpse at our programs in Rwanda and Ghana from Indego's very own Country Directors, Rosine Urujeni and Louisa Adu.

ROSINE URUJENI

Rwanda Country Director

Rosine joined Indego Africa in 2012 after studying international law in Geneva and leadership in the U.S. A former prosecutor for the High Court of Huye in Rwanda, Rosine left law in search of an organization with a mission to uplift Rwandan women and help them become more confident, self-reliant, and economically-advantaged. Indego Africa was the kind of organization she was looking for to make a direct impact on society. Since joining Indego, Rosine has been essential to growing the Rwanda team and providing training and employment opportunities to people across the country.

LOUISA ADU

Ghana Country Director

Louisa was inspired to join Indego Africa in 2015 because of her love for handmade products and passion and devotion to helping women lift themselves out of poverty. A women's empowerment and health care advocate, Louisa previously taught soap-making, sewing, and entrepreneurial skills to socioeconomically marginalized women in Ghana's northern region. Today, she works to showcase the talented work of Indego's artisan partners and help transform the lives of Ghana's next generation.

From your perspectives as Country Directors, what has been Indego's most pivotal moment?

Rosine: For me, Indego's most pivotal moment was when we started investing in our education programs in Rwanda, particularly when Vocational Training and Technology Training for the Workplace were created. By investing in youth who face tremendous issues of unemployment because of a lack of technology and soft skills, Indego is able to fill a much-needed gap.

Louisa: I think Indego's most pivotal moment was when we launched Vocational Training in Ghana this past March. It has been incredibly satisfying to watch these young women eagerly pursue a course that I know will completely transform their lives. Indego's Vocational Training program is of crucial importance to developing young people and empowering them to be change-makers in their

communities.

Looking back at the last 10 years, what has been the most inspiring moment for you as Indego's Country Directors?

Rosine: One of the most inspiring moments for me is when I see an intern become empowered and later become an employee. I also love to see Vocational Training students finish their training and either launch their own business or work at the same cooperative they were trained at as full-time, contributing members.

Louisa: A standout moment that comes to mind is when Indego established a straw basket weaving cooperative in Kumasi. There were a lot of challenges in terms of culture and location, but despite the odds, we were able to partner with a group of brilliant women who were willing to make the cooperative a reality. Today, this cooperative still works with Indego! Its members continue to perfect

their skills to meet the demands of the international market.

What do you think makes Indego Africa so impactful?

Rosine: Creativity, innovation, trust, communication, and mutual respect.

Since I joined Indego Africa in 2012, we have been consistently growing and refining our program activities, with a special concentration on capacity building and vocational training. The Indego team prides itself on the strong relationships we have with our cooperatives partners based on trust, communication, and mutual respect. Over the years, Indego has made a powerful impact on the lives of artisan women and youth in Rwanda. Many of these women are now able to afford their children's school fees, renovate or build houses, pay for medical insurance, and much more. Our partners are also becoming more creative and innovative in their businesses every day, and that is

something I am really proud of.

Louisa: Indego Africa's education programs.

Indego's Basic Business Training program has been commended and applauded by many artisans. These participants continually express how much the training sessions have helped them successfully establish and run their own businesses. It has also encouraged them to refine their skills so that they can work with international organizations like Indego and compete in the international market.

What are you most looking forward to in Indego's future?

Rosine: Indego Africa's education programs empower artisans to become entrepreneurs who know how to better manage and grow their own businesses. I am really looking forward to assisting our partner cooperatives in Rwanda achieve their potential while putting into practice what they have been

learning through our education programs. I know that with Indego's on-site assistance, this potential can be achieved and Indego as a global organization can flourish. Moving forward, the entire Indego Africa team is excited to grow its programs for youth and empower generations of Rwandans to come.

Louisa: I look forward to seeing Indego grow and expand its skills-based Vocational Training in Ghana. I'm excited to offer more young people, especially young women, the opportunity to lift themselves and their families out of poverty, and be leaders of change and entrepreneurship in their communities.

* * *

2015

**" INDEGO AFRICA
DISCOVERED ME.**

**THEY LOVE ME AND ARE WILLING
TO HELP ME SHARE MY SKILLS."**

*Mavis Adongo
Bolga Cooperative, Ghana*

2016

" I AM CONFIDENT
THAT MY FUTURE
WILL BE BRIGHT."

*Marguerite Iyamuremye
Akeza Cooperative, Rwanda*

YOU MUST SEARCH TO FIND BEAUTY IN LIFE

In the fall of 2016, Indego Africa launched a pilot project in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide vocational and business training to Burundian refugees in the Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda. The goal of this project was to help female refugees improve their livelihoods by building the skills necessary to participate in the global artisan economy.

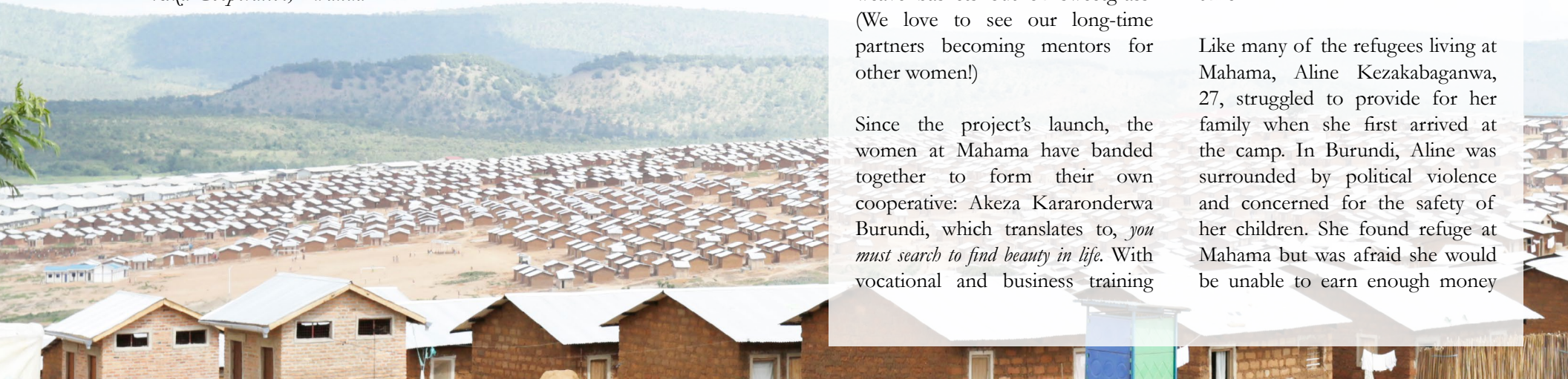
To assist our Rwanda Production Manager and Country Director, we hired three of our talented artisan partners from Imirasire, a weaving cooperative in Bugesera, to teach 50 refugee women on-site in the Mahama Camp how to weave baskets out of sweetgrass. (We love to see our long-time partners becoming mentors for other women!)

Since the project's launch, the women at Mahama have banded together to form their own cooperative: Akeza Kararonderwa Burundi, which translates to, *you must search to find beauty in life*. With vocational and business training

from our production and education teams who travel to the camp each week, the women of Akeza Burundi are now handcrafting high-quality woven products for the Indego Africa collection and securing long-term economic benefits for themselves and their families.

Adeline Ntirabampa, 50, is extremely proud of the education she's receiving from Indego Africa. "Indego's training has helped me come up with ideas and that will be helpful for me to run my own business in future," said Adeline. "For me, working with Indego is important and profitable because I'm not only gaining business knowledge and vocational skills, but also earning income at the same time."

Like many of the refugees living at Mahama, Aline Kezakabaganwa, 27, struggled to provide for her family when she first arrived at the camp. In Burundi, Aline was surrounded by political violence and concerned for the safety of her children. She found refuge at Mahama but was afraid she would be unable to earn enough money



to support her family in the camp. “My life changed when I joined the cooperative,” said Aline. “I like the spirit of teamwork at Akeza Burundi. Working with other women in a cooperative has helped me develop conflict resolution skills and work towards my goal of becoming financially independent.”

Esperance Butoyi, 26, also echoes the importance and comfort of working with other women in the cooperative. “Working with other women at Akeza Burundi every day has helped me become more sociable and create lasting friendships,” said Esperance. “I am proud of being a member of the cooperative because we avoid conflict, work as a team, and try to support each other.”

Since working with Indego, Esperance has also been inspired to encourage others in the camp to come up with solutions to problems together as teams. “I want to be a part of Akeza Burundi Cooperative

forever,” said Esperance. “One thing I’ve learned is that we can achieve so much more together than we ever can alone.”

When it comes to her goals and dreams for the future, Esperance, like many of the women at Akeza Burundi, wants to provide for her children and even buy a piece of land for them when she returns to her home country of Burundi. Emelyne Chishayo, 31, also dreams of helping her children attend school, as well as running her own boutique business someday.

Like these women, Evelyne Musaniwabo, 32, says she won’t stop dreaming big. “My goal is to learn more basket designs from Indego and fulfill as many purchase orders as possible,” said Evelyne. “I hope to make enough money to educate all of my children and send them to school.”

While life at the camp continues to be challenging, the women of

“One thing I’ve learned is that we can achieve so much more together than we ever can alone.”



Akeza Burundi are full of courage and hope. “Since partnering with Indego, I have become more skilled, knowledgeable, and organized,” said Marguerite Iyamuremye, 64. “I am confident that my future will be bright.”

The women of Akeza Burundi are a truly remarkable embodiment of their cooperative’s namesake—unwavering in their search to find the good and beauty in life. We are so honored to be a part of their journey and believe now, more than ever, it is necessary to come together to support refugee communities and ensure equal opportunities for women and artisans around the world.

We couldn’t be more excited to grow this program and continue to provide valuable livelihood and leadership skills to the lives of these resilient women in the future!

* * *

2017

“ EDUCATION MEANS SO MUCH TO ME.

**IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LEGACY WE
CAN LEAVE TO OUR DESCENDANTS AND
THE MOST POWERFUL TOOL WE CAN USE TO
CHANGE PEOPLE’S LIVES.”**

*Marie Rose Nyabenda
Akeza Cooperative, Rwanda*



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Thank you for reading Issue Three of the Indego Africa Zine!

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