

Indego Africa
Zine
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WHO WE ARE

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Indego Africa is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering and uplifting 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 work with 25 groups of more than 1,000 women 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 fair, consistent income for their work which, in turn, enables them to care for themselves and their families.

We invest all of our profits from product sales, coupled with grants and donations, into education programs for the women who handcraft our products. Our courses range from skills-based vocational training, to financial and business management and intensive entrepreneurship training at our Leadership Academy in Kigali, Rwanda.

Learn more at www.indegoafrica.org

2016: THE YEAR OF INDEGO!

Welcome to Issue One of the Indego Africa *Zine*—a brand-new publication bringing you a behind-the-scenes, inside look into our world of impact, design, education, and collaboration in Rwanda and Ghana. We wanted to give you an opportunity to see our work up close—to deep dive into the details and hear stories of determination, entrepreneurship, and positive change that will move and inspire you along the way.

2016 is already shaping up to be a watershed year for us. It is the year we completed our expansion into Ghana—a dream since the earliest Indego days. The year we grew our vision to include youth in Rwanda, and created new programs for the children of our artisan partners. The year our Leadership Academy became not only a bold experiment, but a proven entrepreneurship incubator. It is truly the year of Indego, and we are so glad that you're a part of it.

In the pages ahead, you will find exciting stories about our newest projects and undertakings, and the women who make it all possible. We start off with an in-depth look at our expansion into Ghana (*page 3*), followed by an exploration of the youth unemployment crisis in Rwanda and what we're doing to help (*page 12*). We then get to know the students at our Leadership Academy who, 22 years after the genocide, are leading their country forward (*page 20*). Lastly, we hear from the moms, artisans, and entrepreneurs who handcraft our products as they share their thoughts on motherhood and their dreams for their children's futures (*page 26*).

So take a step into our world with us...we hope you enjoy the stories, spotlights, and beautiful images you find inside!

Sincerely,
the Indego Africa team



INDEGO AFRICA GOES TO GHANA

It's official! After eight years in Rwanda, Indego Africa is now up and running in Ghana—bringing our mission of economic empowerment and education to artisans in the Kumasi region and beyond. But, you might be wondering, why Ghana? How did we decide to expand there and what has the process been like? Read on to have all your questions answered.

Since the beginning of Indego days, it's been our vision to expand our organization beyond Rwanda and into further countries in Africa. Why? Because we are passionate about empowering female artisans across the continent and committed to equipping as many women as possible with the tools and resources they need to achieve their full potential.

However, before we could embark on such an expansion (and do so in a responsible, sustainable way) it was crucial for us to establish a strong foundation in Rwanda—to build out our programs, staff and infrastructure, validate our impact, and develop best practices along the way.

In 2014—with thousands of lessons taught, orders for our artisan partners on the rise, and a strong in-country team in place—we began the first stages of our country expansion due diligence process (much thanks to a grant from the AllPeopleBeHappy Foundation!)



Artisans practicing block printing using wax

We conducted extensive research on ten different African countries, considering a wide range of factors such as infrastructure, governance, levels of corruption, human rights, logistics, pre-existing artisan activity and, most importantly, social impact needs.

In the end, we chose Ghana for several key reasons.

First, Ghana has a rich cultural tradition of craft-making, with a beautiful range of artisan techniques and products that differ greatly from

those we work with in Rwanda—think: brightly-woven kente cloth, intricate wood carvings, rustic bolga straw baskets, handmade ceramic beads, and more.

In Ghana's poorest regions, women on average earn less than 50 cents per day, almost 70% are illiterate, and up to 50% have no formal education.

Second, Ghana is a democratic, political-ly stable country with strong financial institutions, legal frameworks, and ease of doing business—factors which are important as they affect our ability to manage our supply chain, export products, and provide sustainable income for artisans.



Kente weaving

The most compelling reason behind our expansion to Ghana, however, was the deep need for social impact there. While Ghana has a higher GDP than Rwanda does, it obscures the vast income inequality that affects the majority of its citizens. In Ghana's poorest regions, women on average earn less than 50 cents per day, almost 70% are illiterate, and up to 50% have no formal education.

Despite these statistics, Ghana is a highly entrepreneurial country with undeniable dynamism—traveling through its busy streets it feels as though there is hardly anyone who isn't hustling to make a living by

selling something. While the energy is infectious, the overwhelming prevalence of people selling goods in the street illustrates the serious challenges that many Ghanaians face—lack of markets to sell their products and lack of education needed to start and run businesses.

The artisan sector in Ghana is no exception. Despite their incredible talent and skills, local artisans struggle to find customers for their goods and do not earn consistent or sufficient income for their work. We at Indego Africa are committed to changing that!

As of October 2015, we are now

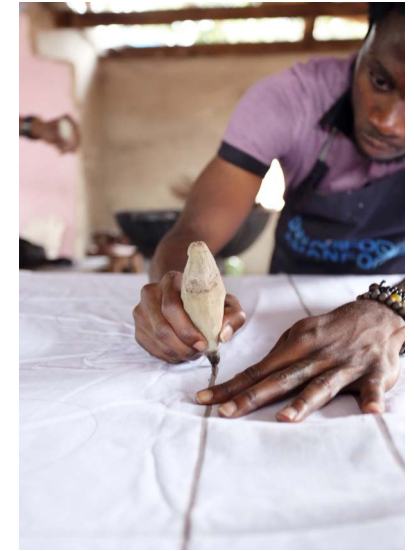


partnering with eight artisan groups in Kumasi, the capital of Ghana's Ashanti Region, to help them improve their livelihoods and succeed as entrepreneurs. We've hired two fantastic staff members and are growing our vibrant Ghana product collection. Our Basic Business Training programs started on February 2nd, 2016 with 50 students who will graduate in June of this year.

While our initial programs closely mirror those which have been so successful in Rwanda, it is important to note that, of course, there are

some key differences between the two countries that have required us to adjust and recalibrate our model.

For example, unlike artisans in Rwanda who almost uniformly work in structured cooperatives, artisans in Ghana tend to operate in loosely-affiliated groups and often work on their own. The artisan sector in Ghana is by and large younger than that of Rwanda and also more male-dominated, as many of the ancient crafts its artisans practice were at one time reserved for the Ashanti king and chiefs—a distinctly male domain.



*Artisanal skills in Ghana
From left to right: batik being laid to dry; a kente loom; block printing; bolga grass for weaving; recycled brass shaping*

While we are excited to support these male artisans, we are fully committed to continuing our founding and driving mission of empowering women. Thus, we will take on a greater advocacy role in Ghana, educating and incentivizing local groups to employ more women, while also facilitating the formation of new women-owned artisan businesses. We hope to better integrate women into the artisan sector, which will both increase its productivity and create a powerful multiplier effect across Ghanaian communities (women in the developing world on average invest 90% of their income in their families.)

We are fully committed to continuing our founding and driving mission of empowering women.

The artisan sector is, in fact, the second largest employer in the developing world. Yet, despite its potential, the industry remains untapped as a resource for income generation, job creation, and economic growth. We are dedicated to changing this in Ghana, Rwanda, and beyond (!) by providing artisans with the access to markets, vocational training, and education they need to take their businesses to the next level. We hope you'll stay tuned as we continue this adventure, creating a vibrant and empowering artisan sector for generations to come!

Right: a bolga basket in the making

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GHANA SPOTLIGHT: A NEW FOCUS ON YOUTH



As the old adage goes, the youth are our future, and in Ghana, we are focusing on working with youth to help them build the skills they need to grow sustainable businesses. Our Basic Business Training program, which launched on February 2nd, 2016, has enrolled 50 young people in its first semester, who are mostly between the ages of 18-25. These students are learning lessons in foundational business topics ranging from invoicing, to inventory

management, book-keeping, product pricing, budgeting, and more.

The entrepreneurial spirit and dynamism in the classroom are palpable as students dive into the material and work together to think through some of the most pressing challenges they face at their artisan businesses and in setting up new ventures of their own. Equipped with knowledge and skills, there's no telling just how much they will achieve!



*Left: Three students at our Basic Business Training program in Ghana
Above: Indego Africa's first youth Basic Business Training class in Kumasi, Ghana*



In Rwanda, only 8% of young adults go to college. College tuition fees are high and, for many struggling families and individuals, the need for immediate income often outweighs the potential long-term benefits of higher education. Many of Rwanda's youth go straight from high school and into the workforce. Some go even earlier.

When they do, they find themselves without job skills, searching for employment in an economy with few wage-earning jobs on the market.

Where does this all lead? A debilitating 63% youth underemployment rate throughout the country.



Left: Vocational Training student at Abasangiye Cooperative Above: members of Abasangiye Cooperative

That's where we want to help. Given the economic landscape for youth in Rwanda, there is a pressing need to equip young people—and especially young women, as they are less likely to be formally employed than men—with marketable skills to help them enter the workforce. So we put our heads together and came up with an idea: to create a brand-new Vocational Training program designed to address this exact challenge!

There is a pressing need to equip young people—and especially young women—with marketable skills to help them enter the workforce.

help them enter the workforce, gain a career path, and achieve sustainable livelihoods.

How does it all work? Here's the scoop: three days a week, 45 young women learn artisan skills at five of

our partner cooperatives. The lucky five this semester? Twiyubake (banana leaf weaving); Ejo Hazaza (beading); Abasangiye (sewing); Imirasire and Covanya (both sweetgrass weaving).

Launched on February 8th, 2016, our Vocational Training program provides underprivileged young women in Rwanda with artisan skills training and business education to

The other two days a week, the young women gather in Kigali to take our Basic Business Training course where they learn fundamental business skills like bookkeeping,



budgeting, quality control, marketing, and technology.

“I hope to learn how to weave baskets and how to run a business so I can start my own one day and employ others.”

By combining artisan skills training with business education, our Vocational Training program will help young women in Rwanda achieve long-term economic security and prosperity. At the end of each six-month cycle, our goal is for the trainees to have the option to either join the cooperatives as full-time members, having mastered the skills necessary to produce products for local and internation-

al markets, or to start businesses of their own.

The young people participating this semester were all chosen from the local communities around our partner cooperatives. 89% of them currently do not earn income, and the remaining 11% work odd jobs that do not earn steady or substantial pay. While they all graduated from high school, none were able to continue on to college because their families couldn't afford it.

Therefore, they are eager to take advantage of this opportunity to gain valuable job skills. As one woman, Dancille (Imirasire Cooperative) enthusiastically stated, “I hope to learn how



to weave baskets and how to run a business so I can start my own one day and employ others.”

Our Vocational Training program is not only valuable to the participating trainees, but also to our partner cooperatives themselves. Most of our artisan partners are survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the age demographics of their cooperatives are getting progressively older. They are excited about the opportunity to train and incorporate younger women in order to ensure the longevity and sustainability of their businesses in the long-run. This, in turn, creates opportunities for younger women to rise up as leaders, grow their co-

operatives, and help generate economic activity and opportunity in their communities.

We are so excited about the possibilities that lay ahead for these young women as they seek to build brighter futures for themselves and for generations to come. They are motivated, ambitious, entrepreneurial, and ready for action. As one young woman, Olive (Twiubake Cooperative), kindly noted: “Thank you Indego Africa for thinking about the youth and helping us support ourselves by learning new skills. I am ready and excited to put the knowledge I am receiving into practice.”

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Merino sheep in Musanze, Rwanda

VOCATIONAL TRAINING SPOTLIGHT: BANANAS FOR BANANA LEAF



Twiyubake, which means “to rebuild ourselves” in the Kinyarwanda language, is an artisan cooperative made up of 27 women in the Kayonza province of Eastern Rwanda. An Indego Africa partner since 2008, Twiyubake specializes in the art of banana leaf weaving—making rustically beautiful handcrafted products using locally grown leaves (that they often pick themselves!)

While we’ve been big fans of Twiyubake’s work since day one, it took a while for their products to catch on (and we sometimes struggled to get them enough orders because of it.) However, that all changed when we launched our SS ’16 collection, which prominently featured a selection of gorgeous summer beach bags handmade by the ladies of Twiyubake! All of a sudden, orders began to pour in and the artisans of Twiyubake found themselves so busy they could hardly keep up.

That’s where our Vocational Training students came in. A group of nine eager and talented young women from the Kayonza community, they caught onto the craft of banana leaf weaving right away and are already working quickly to help Twiyubake meet their deadlines and sustain the growth of their business for years to come.

As Jacqueline, the president of Twiyubake Cooperative said,



“We are really excited to train these young women and bring a new generation into our cooperative. We believe that this will improve the way our business is run and keep it going far into the future.”

*Left: Braided banana leaf ready to weave
Above: The leaves of a banana tree*

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22 YEARS AFTER THE GENOCIDE, MEET THE RWANDAN ENTREPRENEURS LEADING THEIR COUNTRY FORWARD



April 7th, 2016 marked the 22nd commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda, when approximately 1,000,000 people were killed over the course of 100 days. In light of this day, we took a moment to reflect on and celebrate the incredible progress that Rwanda has made over the past two decades and the women entrepreneurs who are moving their country forward: our Leadership Academy students!



*Left: Jacqueline, Leadership Academy student
Above: Indego Africa's third Leadership Academy Class*

Before the genocide, women in Rwanda did not have equal rights as men—they could not inherit land, open a bank account, or work outside the home without their husband's permission.

However, when the genocide ended, Rwanda was 70% female—women were left to rebuild their country. They cared for children on their own and took in orphans; they paved roads and repaired buildings; they sowed fields and collected the harvest. They tried as best they could to piece their lives back together.



*Above: Aulerie, Leadership Academy Student
Right: Alphonsine, Leadership Academy Student*

The new Rwandan government recognized that, in order to move their country forward, they needed to invest in policies that promoted the rights of women. Through their concerted efforts, and women-led activism movements across the country, Rwanda passed new laws to advance women's rights and increase their participation in the workforce, as well as in government. Today, women make up 64% of Rwanda's parliament—the highest representation in the world!

Even with these remarkable achievements, though, Rwanda still has a long way to go. To this day, more than 40% of the population lives below the poverty line, women are far less likely than men to have wage-paying jobs (when they do, they earn on average 50% less than men), and 1 in 3 women experience domestic violence.

In this landscape, our Leadership Academy, a six-month advanced business education program in Kigali, Rwanda, is helping women to move their country forward.

The Indego Africa Leadership Academy was founded in 2014 with a mission to empower the next generation of powerful female leaders, entrepreneurs, and businesswomen in Rwanda. The program focuses on teaching women advanced management skills that they can use to grow their own businesses, become entrepreneurs, and drive economic growth in their communities.

The second class of our Leadership Academy graduated on January 14th, 2016, and we could not be more proud of their accomplishments! Of the 25 students: 52% started a new business; 12% expanded a pre-existing business; and the remaining 36% plan to start a new business in the near future.

Those who started new businesses hired eight people and are now earning on average an additional 52,500 Rwandan Francs or \$70 USD per month. These women are now not only better able to provide for themselves and their families but are also creating employment opportunities and economic growth in their communities—paying it forward and using their newfound knowledge and skills to uplift others along the way (how great is that?!)

As we look towards the future, we are so excited to introduce you to our third Leadership Academy class, which graduates on June 22nd, 2016! We chatted with them back on day one to find out what they were most excited to learn and hear their thoughts on the importance of education for women in Rwanda, as well as their hopes for the future. Here's what they had to say:

"I am so excited to learn about financial management, business plans, and how to work with banks. Once I find out, I'm going to create my own business plan and ask the bank for a loan."

-Beatha, Cocoki Cooperative



“Because women are the hearts of their families, my hope is that we will continue to develop ourselves and invest in our children, who will in turn contribute to the development of our country.”

- Aisha, Covanya Cooperative



Emelienne, Leadership Academy Co-Teacher with Aisha, student

“I want to use what I learn at the Leadership Academy to improve my cooperative and empower other women. On a personal level, I plan to start saving, budgeting, and recording my expenses so that I can open my own business one day. I hope for all of us that we continue to live well and do the work that we love.”

-Celine, Ingenzi Knit Union

“Because women are the hearts of their families, my hope is that we will continue to develop ourselves and invest in our children, who will in turn

contribute to the development of our country.”

- Aisha, Covanya Cooperative

“Education is important because it will help us increase our confidence and be bold in all that we do.”

-Jacqueline, Imirasire Cooperative

“I am excited to learn Word and Excel programs to improve financial records and communication at my cooperative.”

-Josephine, Ibaba Cooperative

“Education is the foundation of community development. When you educate a

woman, you give her the means and the power to educate her children, and that is an important thing.”

-Liberatha, Ingenzi Knit Union

“My goal is to share the knowledge I receive with other women in the community and equip them with skills so that we can all start businesses and provide for our families. I hope that we will be able to eradicate poverty through access to educational opportunities for all.”

-Judith, Ejo Hazaza Cooperative

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ENTREPRENEUR SPOTLIGHT: DAPHROSE



Daphrose reviewing her business' finances

Meet Daphrose: a member of the Leadership Academy's first graduating class. Since graduation, Daphrose started her own brick-building business, which now hires up to 60 workers per month!

Daphrose said that before starting at the Leadership Academy, she noticed that there were a lot of construction projects in her community. She thought that there might be a good market opportunity there, but felt that she didn't have enough money to get a business going, let alone the skills to manage it.

At the Leadership Academy, Daphrose learned how to create a viable business plan and gained the

management knowledge and skills she felt she had lacked before. She also gained the confidence to recruit others from her community to set up a cooperative and pool their capital in order to get the business off the ground.

Together, they've created a plan to bring in five million Rwandan Francs by the end of the year (around \$6,600 USD) and are well on their way to doing so, having already secured orders from several primary schools in their community. In Daphrose's mind, “anything is possible if you set a goal,” and we have no doubt that she will be successful in meeting hers!

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CELEBRATING THE MOMS WHO MAKE OUR PRODUCTS

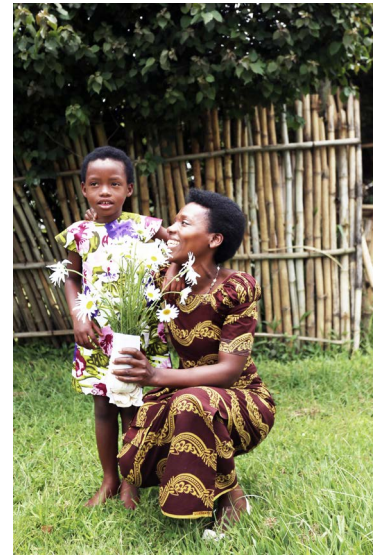


In May 2016, we launched our first-ever Mothers' Month—a month-long campaign to honor the incredible mamas who handcraft our products.



Mothers from Ibaba Cooperative

Our partners in Rwanda are not only talented artisans and entrepreneurs, but also mothers – strong, determined, loving women driven by the desire to create beautiful lives for their children. These working moms strive everyday to provide for their families. Whether it's making sure there's food on the table or earning enough to send their children to school, they never cease to inspire us with their passion, dedication, and dreams for the future.



We love partnering with moms not only because it tugs on our heart strings, but also because it's the smart, data-driven thing to do. In the developing world, women on average invest 90% of their income in their families versus only 30-40% for men! This means that financially empowering women is one of the most effective and impactful ways to make a difference in the lives of children and youth.

And the proof is in the numbers. Each and every year, our Social Impact Reports confirm just how powerful it is to support mothers in Rwanda. Last year we found that...

72% never ran out of food (vs. only 5% in 2008)

89% sent all or most of their children to school (vs. only 50% when we first began)

90% purchased medical insurance for their entire families

While these statistics paint an incredible picture, there's nothing quite like hearing the words of our partners themselves. We chatted with some of the amazing moms we work with to get their thoughts on motherhood, providing for their families, and what it all means to them. Here's what they shared with us:

"I want my children to have a good life - to have knowledge, jobs, families, and homes of their own. Right now we are poor, but I look forward to a day where we will rise above it."

– Juliet, Imirasire Cooperative (6 daughters, 4 sons)

"I work because I want all of my children to go to school. I want them to learn math, geography, physics, computers. Education will bring them bright futures, and that is what I want for them most of all."

– Francoise, Umutima Cooperative (2 boys, 2 girls)

"I love being a mom. I love coming home from a day at work and hearing my children running to the

door shouting 'mommy's coming! Mommy's coming!'" – Alice, Covanya Cooperative (1 daughter, 1 son)

"I want my children to grow up to be self-sufficient – to have good and healthy lives. I am a widow and have raised my children all on my own which has been very hard. I want for them to gain real knowledge and skills that they can use to support themselves and achieve their dreams." – Jeanne, IBABA Cooperative (1 daughter, 1 son)

"I hope my kids continue to study and to graduate from school. I want them to have the life I never had."

– Josephine, IBABA Cooperative (4 daughters, 6 sons)

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*Thank you for reading Issue One of the Indego Africa Zine!
Stay tuned for our Back-to-School issue, coming your way September, 2016.*

*To stay in the know on all-things-Indego,
visit our website and sign up for our newsletter:
www.indegoafrica.org
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