

Indego Africa
Zine
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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 for youth in their communities.

Learn more at www.indegoafrica.org

REFLECTING ON VALUES

As the weather cools and a new year approaches, we find ourselves reflecting on the values that shape the work we do—values like empathy, empowerment, collaboration, education, integrity, sustainability and community.

In the pages ahead, you will see these values come to life through stories of the people and the programs that make us who we are.

We'll introduce you to Clarisse Iradukunda, a young woman who, facing unemployment in her rural Rwandan community, finds unexpected opportunity in the artisan sector (pg. 4). We'll give you a closer look at our Technology Training programs and show how they are helping young people in Rwanda and Ghana build life-changing workplace skills (pg. 7).

In our center piece, you will hear from trailblazing female entrepreneurs in Rwanda and Ghana as they tell inside stories about their businesses and share empowering advice for other women who are looking to make their dreams a reality (pg. 11).

Next up, we'll take you on a tour of the Handspun Hope farm, where Rwandan widows are spinning organic wool into yarn—and into hope (pg. 20).

Finally, we'll share our Live Colorfully photo series (pg. 25), a celebration of happiness, positivity, and the values that inspire us everyday. We hope you enjoy the stories ahead and find inspiration too.

Best wishes and happy holidays,

Haron Oyelich
CEO, Indego Africa



Live Colorfully (pg. 25)

**" INDEGO AFRICA IS A HAPPY ORGANIZATION
BECAUSE IT HELPS WOMEN BECOME
CONFIDENT AND INDEPENDENT "**

- JACQUELINE MUSABIMANA

THE STORY OF A GIRL IN RWANDA



“I started from zero but now I know many things.”

Imagine you were born in Rwanda in January 1994. Three months later, the genocide began, sending you and your family scrambling across the country. You, your mother, and your brother managed to survive. Your father did not.

When the violence ended, your mother brought you back to Kayonza, the town where you were born, and tried to piece your lives back together. For years, she worked tirelessly to support you and your brother, scraping by on subsistence farming, but you never knew when a bad harvest might send

your family spiraling.

You grew older and your brother became a mechanic. He was able to pay for you to attend secondary school. You dreamed of going to college and becoming a journalist. But, when the time came, you were met with disappointment: you could not afford to attend a university.

So, in 2014 at the age of 20, with your secondary degree in hand, you set off to find a job. What you found, however, proved another disappointment: there were very few employment opportunities available in Kayonza. Without marketable skills or a business background, you struggled to find a job.

Fast forward two years to January 2016, when you attended a meeting to learn more about Indego Africa’s youth Vocational Training program. You applied and, along with eight other girls, were chosen to intern at Twiyubake, a banana-leaf-weaving cooperative in Kayonza.

The first week, you were a little skeptical—you had never considered artisan work before and the techniques were very new. But you found that you loved learning how to weave products out of banana leaf, and you were good at it.

The following week, it was time to travel to Kigali, Rwanda’s capital, where all 45 vocational trainees in Indego’s program were coming together for business training.

When you arrived, you were given a laptop to work on and immediately dove into the course materials. You liked the way that business concepts were taught and were excited to meet young people from across the country who, like you, had not been able to find a job.

For the next six months, every Monday and Tuesday you went to Kigali to participate in business training, and every Wednesday through Friday you interned at Twiyubake Cooperative.

On June 22nd, 2016, there was a wonderful graduation in Kigali for the students and their families. Your mother was in the audience, and it made you proud.

Twiyubake made you an offer to join their cooperative as a full-time member, and you gladly accepted. Today, you are busy working five days a week, earning income, and weaving beautiful banana leaf products that are sold around the world.

You said, “When I started, I did not even know how to use a needle. I started from zero but now I know many things. I am good at weaving—if you give me a picture of any product

you want, I can make it. But Vocational Training by itself would not have been enough. By adding business training, I learned the skills to manage a cooperative, like bookkeeping. I know I can make a difference with the knowledge I have—I feel confident.”

This was the story of one of our Vocational Training students, Clarisse Iradukunda, whose life was transformed within the span of six months. Out of the 45 young people who participated in the first semester of our Vocational Training program, 100 percent are now employed as artisans.



Vocational Training students at Twiyubake Cooperative

TECHNOLOGY TRAINING FOR THE WORKPLACE: EMPOWERING AFRICA'S YOUTH



Technology training students in Ghana

As technology spreads across the globe, it brings with it possibilities of innovation, economic growth, inclusion, and better quality of life.

Yet, in Rwanda, Ghana, and across the developing world, many people lack the technological skills needed to participate in this increasingly digitized economy. Our new Technology Training for the Workplace (TTW) workshop was created to help close that gap.

Launched in June 2016, TTW provides young college graduates in Rwanda and Ghana with training in technology and business soft skills to help them enter and succeed in the workforce.

Research shows that there is a pervasive “skills mismatch” between what young people learn in secondary schools and universities and the skills they need to participate in an increasingly digitized workforce.

Many young Africans are unable to secure wage-earning jobs because of limited skill-sets.

As one Rwandan TTW student, Doriane, said: “Nowadays, Rwandan youth are facing several challenges in finding jobs, but the biggest one is lack of experience. Most jobs available require skills and experience that we don’t have.”

While previously most of our education programs have focused on training artisan women, we were inspired to start TTW as part of our growing mission to address the livelihood challenges facing youth in Africa today.

Our TTW Workshop provides young people with training in foundational computer skills and relevant software programs like Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. It also includes job

application guidance, such as resume-writing, cover letters and interviews.

Further, the program emphasizes training in business soft skills, which are critically important but often not taught. Lessons in time management, public speaking, project prioritizing, and office communication, among others, help to provide young people with a holistic introduction to the kinds of skills they will need in the workplace.

Out of 50 spots available in the first round of the workshop in Rwanda, more than 400 young people applied—a statistic which highlights the incredible need for these kinds of programs in Africa, where many college graduates remain persistently unemployed. Based on popular demand, we have now launched additional TTW workshops

in Rwanda and expanded the program into Ghana.

By the end of our first Technology Training for the Workplace workshop, almost one-fourth of the class had secured a job. Students cited the resume and interview skills lessons as crucial in helping them navigate and excel in the job application process.

Moving forward, we’ll be staying in touch with our TTW graduates to find out how this program has impacted their experiences both in the job search and in the workplace. We are excited to see these aspiring entrepreneurs, accountants, NGO leaders, social change-makers, and more, put their knowledge into action—paving the way for generations to come.

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Training classroom in Rwanda



INDEGO'S INSPIRING WOMEN

In Rwanda and Ghana, our partners are embracing the entrepreneurial spirit, getting creative, and overcoming challenges to start their own businesses. We wanted to hear more from these inspiring women about what entrepreneurship means to them and why they do what they do.

In the interviews that follow, these trailblazing women share inside stories about their businesses (and the growing pains that come with them)—about achieving work-life balance, navigating stumbling blocks, building future goals, and finding inspiration. They also share empowering advice for other women—any age and anywhere—who are looking to make their dreams happen.





CLAUDETTE MUKESHIMANA

*Vocational Training graduate
Founder of Gabembe Cooperative
Bugesera, Rwanda
25 years old*

“Determination and a strong spirit can take you wherever you want to go.”

How does it feel to start your own business and become an entrepreneur?

Indego trained me to be an entrepreneur. Before I had nothing, but now, I know how to save and manage a business. This job has made me an open-minded person. Sometimes you might struggle to make a product or make a mistake on an order, but you continue to work. I used to think that I would be an entrepreneur, but I didn't think that I would be an artisan. Indego's Vocational Training program helped me so much because at the end I was confident and capable of doing anything.

What does empowerment mean to you?

To me, empowerment is more than earning money. It is building knowledge and skills that will help you in your life.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned in starting a new business?

Do what you love, what you are passionate about. Before I started this business, I had nothing. Some of my friends in the village laughed at me. But I decided to borrow money and start my business and today everything is good. I did that because I love this work. It is valuable. Determination and a strong spirit can take you wherever you want to go.

I have started to advise other youth. Today, I am no longer a job-seeker, and my advice to them is to start their own businesses and do what they love. Where there is a will, there is a means. They should use their full potentials and turn their dreams into reality because everything is possible with a willing heart.

Are there any women you look up to or admire? If so, who and why? How have they influenced you?

Yes, I have some women. There is a woman who always inspired me; she is called Claudine. I knew her from many years ago. She started her business early, so I decided to follow her path. She built a house for her family, she has livestock and she has a very good marriage. She has a well-decorated shop, and I am sure I can do that as well. If she did that, why can't I do that too? Moreover, the president of Covanya Cooperative, where I trained, inspired me so much as she gave me many examples of what she achieved from being an artisan. She has animals and built a house as well. I have a number of inspirations.

What are your goals for the future?

My first goal is to continue to be a member of the Gahembe Co-op. My ultimate goal is to create my own shop of artisanal materials. Another thing I want to do is to teach the rest of the youth what I have learned. What I do is valuable, and I want to share it with others.

* * *

MAVIS ADONGO

*Founder of a bolga basket weaving cooperative
Kumasi, Ghana
Mother of three
29 years old*

“To be a good leader, extreme patience is required.”

Why were you interested in starting a bolga cooperative? What does bolga weaving mean to you?

Bolga basket weaving is the first trade I studied growing up. I love to make baskets and watch people admire, purchase and use them. It has always been my passion to start up a group focused on making beautiful and colorful bolga baskets for sale.

How does it feel to be a leader of your bolga



cooperative? What do you think it means to be a good leader?

I am extremely happy to be taking the lead in establishing a bolga basket cooperative in Kumasi. I believe a good leader has the interests of his or her co-workers at heart and truly cares about the welfare of all members both personally and professionally. To be a good leader, extreme

patience is required. People come from varying backgrounds, thus having patience as a leader can help you deal and work effectively with these people in order to succeed and enable the business to thrive.

Do you like partnering with Indego Africa? If so, why?

Indego Africa has been a godsend to me. They love me and are willing to help me show off my skills. They discovered me, and have showed that they love me. I pray all the time that people buy stuff from Indego Africa so that I can have many orders.

Have you faced any challenges as an entrepreneur and a mother of three?

Children get sick sometimes and as a working mother when they do get sick it is one of the worst experiences ever. I need to stay at home and care for my children, yet I still need to work and keep my job.

There are times when I have struggled with caring for my kids. There was a time when my husband lost his job, I had to pay off a bank loan and our rent was due. We really had a hard time.

Starting a bolga cooperative in Kumasi can help us make some money to support our families. With more hands on deck, we can improve on our designs, reach deadlines and collect large orders.

What are your dreams for your children's future?

I want them to have an education. With an education, they can get good jobs and become leaders in society. They will be able to care for me when I am old.

I know that one day I will not be here with them, so I want them to have formal education because I know they can survive in this world if they do.

JOSEPHA MUJAWAYEZU

*Founder of Ngwinukorebushoke
Cooperative
Rulindo, Rwanda
Mother of seven
49 years old*

“Being empowered to me means having the ability to provide for my family and myself without having to ask my husband.”

Describe how you first came together with other women to start producing products. When was it and how did you get the idea? How did you recruit other women to join you?

I used to work alone, teaching young girls including my own daughters how to weave until other women got interested in what I was doing and approached me to teach them as well because they wanted a way to earn money. There are now 10 women.





What is your favorite part about working alongside other women every day?

My favorite part is that I am able to continue teaching them new techniques and skills.

Do you feel that there are good opportunities in Rwanda for women?

Yes, we have great leaders that continue to uphold and encourage women to better themselves. I feel that in my craft, women are given the opportunity to showcase and sell what we make

through various expositions that take place every year.

What is the hardest part about being a working mom and why do you do it?

The hardest thing is having to leave my children when I go out to search for materials. Sometimes I go as far as Uganda because they are not always available here. I do it because I am their mother and it is my duty to care for them. This is my means of providing for them and their futures.

What does it mean to be an empowered woman?

Being empowered to me means having the ability to provide for my family and myself without having to ask my husband. I earn an income and therefore I can pay my children's school fees, feed them, clothe them and even afford health insurance.

What brings you joy these days?

I used to try and sell my products on the road, which is not allowed and therefore I would often get

chased around by police and sometimes even arrested. I am happy now because I work from home and sell my products to Indego Africa. I do not have to hustle on the streets every day worrying about police.

What are your goals for the future?

I want to buy a house that is close to the road because right now my house is very far. I also want to continue paying my children's fees until they are able to finish their university studies.

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SPINNING YARN INTO HOPE



Merino sheep on the Handspun Hope Farm, Musanze, Rwanda

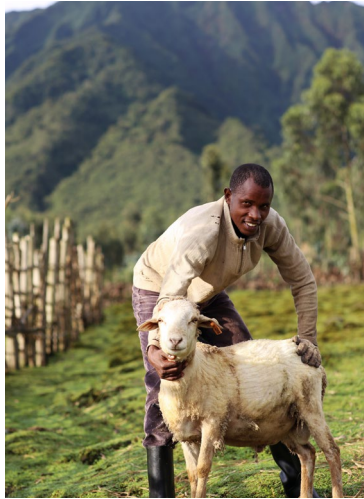
At the base of Rwanda's majestic Virunga Mountains, nestled among lofty trees and serene expanses of green, is a farm. It is a picturesque pastoral scene, amidst breathtaking East African beauty. A shepherd walks the fields caring for a flock of sheep, with Virunga's misty volcanic mountains rising in the backdrop.

This farm is part of the Handspun Hope project—a True Vineyard Ministries initiative to help women in Musanze, Rwanda lift themselves out of poverty by spinning local sheep's wool into high-quality, 100 percent organic merino yarn. Indego Africa partners with Handspun Hope to create wool vests, hats, scarves, and blankets that the artisans hand-knit and hand-dye themselves.

While spinning wool was once a common practice in Rwanda, the skill was lost in the 1994 genocide that ravaged the country and left its population 70 percent female. In the years that followed, women assumed the societal roles that were once traditionally male—they headed households, took in orphans, and became leaders in their communities. If there were roads to be paved, they paved them. If houses needed to be built, they built them. Women led the country's reconstruction efforts, all while suffering from the devastating after-effects of genocide.



Today, Rwanda is a politically stable, rapidly developing nation that boasts an impressive track record when it comes to women's rights and equality. For example, women make up 64 percent of the country's parliament—the highest female political representation in the world. Despite these accomplishments, however, many challenges remain, particularly in rural areas where poverty rates are high and employment opportunities are scarce.



Handspun Hope Farm, Musanze, Rwanda

Musanze, Rwanda is a rural, agrarian community where many people, especially women, live in extreme poverty, struggling day to day with hardships including hunger, illiteracy, lingering psychological trauma, and HIV/AIDS. Women are eager for opportunities to break out of this cycle of poverty—for opportunities to work, to support themselves and their families, and to contribute to the growth of their country.

Working with organizations like Handspun Hope and Indego Africa presents an exciting opportunity for these women to gain meaningful employment and to participate in the global economy in a way that is fair and empowering.

At first, the Handspun Hope artisans sold the yarn as suppliers for other fashion labels. But now, they also hand-knit accessories and apparel items themselves, which we sell on our website. Through the experience of working and earning steady income, the women of Handspun Hope feel more empowered as decision-makers and leaders in their homes, their communities, and throughout their lives. They are building brighter futures for themselves and their families, one spool of yarn at a time.

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LIVE COLORFULLY

Live colorfully. When we think about the spirit of our organization this is the phrase that comes to mind.

Many (too many) of the narratives we hear about Africa are negative. At Indego Africa, we are committed to telling a different story—one that reflects the joy, ingenuity, innovation, and vibrancy that we see everyday in the communities we work with.

As a global team, we are endlessly inspired by the amazing women we partner with in Rwanda and Ghana. They are proud moms, talented makers, creative entrepreneurs, and much, much more. Despite what they may have been through in their lives, they live every day with hope and determination to create brighter futures for themselves and their families.

Our Live Colorfully photo series celebrates this spirit of happiness and positivity—a spirit that inspires our work, our culture, our brand, and our vision everyday.

We hope you find happiness and inspiration in these photos too.



Live Colorfully



" WHAT MAKES ME SMILE EVERYDAY?

**WORKING WITH OTHER
WOMEN! I LOVE TO
LAUGH AND MAKE
THEM LAUGH TOO."**

- JACQUELINE MUSABIMANA



Live Colorfully

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