Roots and Flowerings of

Ethiopia’s Traditional Crafts

Jacques Dubois
Front cover artwork by Memere Legesse

Celebrating the diversity of Ethiopia’s compelling aesthetic traditions.

Clockwise: basketwork, metal jewellery, wool and cotton weaving, metal work, spinning, natural fiber weaving, leatherwork, woodcarving, pottery.
Weaving, pottery and basketry are ancient crafts developed in Ethiopia as in many countries of the world. Ethiopia is unusual in that hand-made woven, pottery and basketry items are still essential items in every household.

In the house of an average family in any village you are certain to find hand-made household objects of clay, grass, leather, wood, horn and the like. In the Western World these objects would probably hang on the wall of a modern living room or be exhibited in a glass case or on the sideboard as examples of original craftsmanship too good and too rare for everyday use.

In Ethiopia, traditional handicrafts have always been and remain both a vocation and a way of life. Visitors to Ethiopia can experience for themselves the living museum of this most diverse culture where ancient traditions co-exist with modernity as part of the everyday life of its peoples.
Ethiopian artisans, as elsewhere in Africa, stand in sharp contrast to the unabashed and aggressive counterparts in South East Asia, who are known for their corporate capacity, cyber facilities and industrial organization. In fulfilling their two main purposes of utilitarian day-to-day needs and expressing as well as preserving their given cultures, artisans involved in the production of cultural and spiritual products in Africa are being overwhelmed by plastic-based commodities, whose impacts amount to no less than a sweeping avalanche. African handicrafts are threatened to extinction due to this phenomenon that is growing to the extent of a forceful invasion.

As things stand now there prevails a strange situation with respect to traditional handicrafts: on the one hand, a great number of arts and crafts people, who may be highly skilled, are living under the poverty line. And on the other, there exists a market and a very real demand, locally and abroad, for genuine handicraft products.

Hence, what has to happen seems clear and simple enough, although it is not expected to be that easy practically. The challenge before us is this: while continuing to draw inspiration and techniques from their unique past, at the same time our handicrafts must be attuned to the present demands in order to retain the essential, indigenous character inherent in their heritage and applied to bring forth new products to attract the potential market and be capable of competing in every way possible particularly with the Asian products.

In this regard, it has to be understood that the dilemma of Ethiopian artisans lies in the fact of their being heirs and carriers of a tradition who's creative spirit is constrained today by socio-economic imperatives that have been preoccupied with a routine way of production aimed only at the family’s survival.

Considering the fact that the artisan is neither a creator nor a trader, he or she needs to be assisted to explore the negative issues and working conditions that confront them. This in turn would help them evolve methods of thinking and working that contribute to making the whole enterprise a meaningful interaction the creative aspect, production and modern marketing skills.

To this effect sustainable culture-based tourism is seen as an indispensable element of a development strategy while the recent fair trade regime offers indispensable trading partnerships and cooperation commitments based on dialogue, transparency and respect for each others’ interest and working for mutual benefits.
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I am specially grateful to UNESCO and in particular its former director and representative in Addis Ababa, Mr Awad Elhassan and its programme specialist for culture Ms. Fumiko Ohinata for giving me this opportunity to engage myself once again with what has been an almost life long affection and interest: Ethiopia’s culture and especially its prodigious heritage of arts and crafts. This has allowed me to review all that I have been involved in and to express my vision of traditional handicraft activities, not only in their value as reflections and achievements of creativity but, more importantly, as a breeding ground and vital forces for developing everyday consumer goods and décor with a distinct and exotic character of their own. Doing that, I know, will allow traditional handicrafts to continue to be a reflection of their unique cultural context while at the same time their aesthetic appeal and functional utility, adapted to contemporary life, will bring the needed market demand; that in turn will directly translate into socio-economic benefits for the artisans, make them proud, and see and value the positive aspects of their culture and traditions.

Jacques Dubois

In the pot making tradition, it is the woman potter who, stooped and bent over, works her way circling the pot, in a constant physical round that often prematurely damages her back. During a training workshop* in Lalibela in 2004 this young lady discovered a simple device which changed her life ....her smile speaks volumes.


Here are only a glance of the many prototypes produced during a training workshop* of farmer artisans. Pottery craft, Rugs, Dolls & Figures, Painting & Calligraphy, Weaving, Embroidery & Netting, Leather Products, Home Furnishings by the “Nika l’ide Tibebe” (Awaken for Handwork) Artisans Association of Lalibela.
FOREWORD

A systematic and comprehensive study of the decorative arts and crafts of the Ethiopian people—their clever use of materials, made possible by such a rich and vast country much of its attraction being in the diversity of its natural endowments and eclectic culture (facilitated by its position at the crossroads of cultural highways of the world’s civilizations) — has yet to be done. This should be done soon; some of the know-how of the latter has started to vanish from the scene already, while those of others is at a growing risk of doing so forever, at least as living traditions and applications that they once enjoyed. What is even more disappointing in this regard is the fact that, because artisans have been, by tradition, marginalized, scholars have not been seriously concerned with documenting and preserving for posterity this fabulous expression of a culture. This is not to underestimate the role and great contribution that modern education, the advent of industrialization, tourism, and growing urbanization have made in fostering and promoting gradual changes in attitude towards craftspeople.

By contrast, as early as 1972 some civil servant colleagues and Jacques Dubois had a very auspicious opportunity when they presented to none other than Emperor Haile Selassie our ideas of how to develop and beneficially exploit Ethiopia’s arts and crafts within the tourism industry, by constructing tourist facilities employing indigenous designs, know-how and materials wherever possible, such as in hotels, catering facilities and lodges. The concept was exactly what is now being promoted as culture-based and eco tourism. The emperor was very open to our proposal and keenly supportive. Unfortunately everything got overtaken by the political events that overwhelmed the country as a whole with the 1974 revolution.

The purpose of this booklet is only to highlight some aspects of an extraordinarily rich heritage and not just present a catalogue as we have in museums and archives. It is meant to be more of a reference to ongoing craft traditions for those looking for the promotion of Ethiopian culture through high-quality artisan products.

The development and safeguarding of this heritage should be seen not only as a condition for the revitalization of the objects and their makers but equally as a means of promoting Ethiopian culture itself.

H.E. Mr Hapte Sellassie Tafesse
Former State Minister of Tourism
“On the edge of the western escarpment of the Ethiopian Rift Valley, we sit in awe, not of the surrounding environment of some of the world’s most spectacular scenery, but of an elderly woman deftly manufacturing stone scrapers as she prepares food, answers an inquisitive child, and chats with a neighbor.”

“In our world of electronic and digital gadgetry, it is surprising to meet someone who uses stone tools in their everyday life. Yet, over the past three decades, researchers have identified a handful of ethnic groups in Ethiopia’s southern highlands whose artisans live by making stone scrapers and processing animal hides.”

Woman the toolmaker by Steven A. Brandt and Kathryn Weedman. Archaeology (Sept/Oct 2002).

“Traditional handicrafts in Ethiopia: a vocation and a way of life”

a. Decorated leather in the form of hides, with intricate and beautifully painted patterns, is frequently seen nowadays in the desert areas of the eastern seaboard and inland to Harerge and the Sidamo regions. The skins are used as wall decorations, bed coverings, and even clothing. The designs are coloured with a mixture of ox blood and clay giving a rich dark red on the natural yellowish tan background.

b. Leather clothes vary from the untreated sheepskin flung around the shoulders of the highland shepherd to softest kidskin, rubbed on a stone or trodden until acquiring suppleness required by the world of fashion.

c. “Rock Art,” cave painting near Dire Dawa dated at 4000 years (after G. Bailoud)

d. Ethnic and geographical map of Ethiopia.

e. A woman of the Suri group (South West Ethiopia) wearing a large lip plate made of clay. Lip plates are usually round or triangular, varying in dimensions from about two to fifteen centimeters and sometimes weighing over a quarter of a kilo.
I. OVERVIEW OF ETHIOPIAN ARTS & CRAFTS

1. Introduction

Crafts are a mirror of the cultural diversity in Ethiopia - they result from a combination of the creativity, culture and the heritage and the environment of the craftspeople. Ethiopia can boast more than eighty languages and as many ethno-linguistic groups. For each and every such community, crafts form an important part of everyday life. The knowledge of craft production is passed down from generation to generation and involves everybody from children to adults of both genders. Certain artisans have specialized, such as scribes that make sacred objects, while some communities have members responsible for specific trades such as pottery and metal making, tanning and weaving.

The use and production of handmade objects goes as far back as Ethiopian history which can be characterized by the feudal form of social organization throughout the centuries. The arts and crafts of Ethiopia have also benefited from its geographical location, situated at one of the busiest and eventful crossroads of civilizations: Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The country is famous for yielding some of the oldest traces of humanity, as seen by its rich archaeological and paleolithic heritage of stone tools and pottery.

Ethiopian arts and crafts have diverse forms and applications as seen below:

- Beadwork;
- Body scarification, tattoos, body decoration (body paint, hairstyles);
- Carving (on leather, wood, stone);
- Farming implements and harvesting tools;
- Housing, construction methods, furniture, everyday household objects;
- Iconography, church murals, dypthics and triptychs, bookmaking and illuminations; sacred crosses, ceremonial and ritual props of all kinds;
- Jewellery;
- Pottery;
- Textiles;
- Weaponry.

The varied topography of Ethiopia ranges from several 4,000m high mountain ranges to the below sea level Danakil Depression. Ethiopian crafts make use of the variety of materials that are available naturally thanks to the country’s biodiversity. These include:

- Animal bone, horn and skin, feathers and human body (scarification and tattoo);
- Soils, stones and rocks;
- Minerals (metals and their alloys);
- Plants (fruits, gourds, leaves, tree bark and wood), pearls, roots shells, and vegetation (bamboo, bulrushes, creepers, date palms, fibers, grass, hemp and reeds and vines);
- Recycling of textiles, plastic, metals.
Women to watch.

They are irresistible: to the artist, to the photographer, to the eye of the simple tourist, Ethiopian women pursue their everyday activities oblivious of the stranger.

a. A Tigrean noblewoman, with her servant, wearing a shemina and reclining on her angarab, or bed. (Lefebvre, Atlas 1, 38)

b. Basketmakers in Gondar.

c. Whatever she is doing, an Ethiopian woman never looks ungainly. It might be the ageless and basic nature of her occupations, it might be the strict training that every girl child receives, it might be natural grace, but whatever the reason, the job that an Ethiopian woman is doing always seems to become her and she moves with easy, comely confidence to carry it out.

d. Passing through a compound of small thatched houses one may catch further glimpses of women at work: she is sitting in a doorway modeling animal food containers out of mud mixed with cow dung.

e. In the village markets, women sit on the ground, legs outstretched before them or drawn up so that their knees form a rest for their elbows modest with their wide white skirts covering them to the ankles.

f. A woman carrying her baby on her back, his sleepy head lolling against her spine and his tiny feet protruding at each side of her waist. Each mother makes her own baby carrier (called a mahazel or sankalba) using a traditionally treated hide decorated with cowrie shells. It is the voice of the cowrie shells that soothe the baby during mother's walk.

g. Woman pounding grain in a large mortar (wofcho) hollowed out of a tree trunk, the heavy wooden pestle thumping down to a steady rhythm. It is heavy work, but the woman's body moves with cheerful assurance and ease making the work look light.
1.2 Ethiopia’s Arts and Crafts: Still existing as in times gone by

Despite increasing threats from much cheaper, more convenient and readily available substitutes, Ethiopia’s age-old handicrafts are not yet banished to books, museums, and as allures of gift shops for tourists. On the contrary, they are decisively instrumental in the lives and occupations of many people. Let us demonstrate the importance of crafts in the everyday lives of Ethiopian people by shadowwalking a typical highland family with an orthodox Christian background.

Getting ready for the day

Since they undertake two-thirds of the workload, women in Ethiopia, as throughout Africa, are the first to rise in the morning though the last to retire in the evening. The woman gets up as soon as there is light. She puts on her soiled everyday coverall (kemis) that she probably also uses as a blanket, gathered up and tied at the waist with one or two rounds of a textile belt (mekenet) edged with bands of several colors. She then goes to the homestead’s garden plot or the village fallow commons with a jar (toffa) of water, to answer calls of nature. She probably straps her baby on her back with a leather baby harness (anqelba) with its outer edges divided into thongs; each adorned with cowrie shells at the end of the thong and their sounds soothing and lulling the child to sleep.

In the early morning, she does her routine chores: grinding grain in a two-piece handmade stone mill (weficho), or making the traditional pancake-like bread (injera) on a round, flat baked clay griddle (mit’ad) set on three pieces of stone or a conical clay stand (goolicha). For making the injera, she takes the runny dough from a big clay or calabash container (bo’haka) with a mug (mesferra). The dough is then poured over the hot griddle and covered with its lid (moogd) woven from bamboo and plastered with a baked mixture of dung and mud. Going by nothing other than judgment based on experience, she removes the lid with one hand and lifts the injera off onto a flat, wide, woven plate (sefaed) held in the other hand and puts it away in another round woven basket (malaste).

As she must make enough injera to last the family for several days, if not for a week, this task takes some time and she may not have enough time to do anything else in the morning other than organize family breakfast, clean the house and animal quarters where she will take the dung from the livestock in a big wooden bowl (gebeta) or basket (koona) mix it with hay, shape it into discs (weranta) and leave it in the sun to dry. She may then fasten a big clay pot (insira) onto her back with a vegetable fibre rope or leather strip, both made by a family member, and head off to fetch water from a source that may be quite a distance away.

Meanwhile, the man of the house takes the livestock out to the village common and looks after them until a young shepherd takes over from him. He then sets out for the day either to harvest a crop or till some plot. If he is going to farm one of his fragmented, often far apart and maybe distant smallholding plots, he will have to carry his fourteen-piece ox-drawn ploughshare (maresha) to each site. Except for two metal parts, which are the work of ironsmiths, the farmer himself makes the rest of the wooden, leather and fiber components. Ethiopia is one of the few countries where this ancient implement is used as the main farming tool. Its age and origin...
a. Everyone comes to market with homemade goods for sale.

b. Every Afar in the field holds a large curved knife (50 cm long and 8 cm wide) across his stomach, held by a leather strap and belt of his tribal cloth. The knife is produced by skilled blacksmiths from forged car springs. The knives are highly demanded by both locals and tourists and they are apparently related to the Tumal, the biblical blacksmith tribe also called the Bonta. Tubal was the father of the blacksmiths and when the Portuguese explored the Red Sea coast in 1520 they were called the sons of Tubal.

c. A farmer using a wooden plough pulled by two oxen. (Acton 2)

d. Anywhere in Ethiopia, women old and young are very skilled in the art of basketry. Different kinds and sizes of baskets are woven from grass, rye grass and sometimes sisal rope although usually, they are made from plain grass. Sefinesh Dagnew substitutes the rare and expensive colored grass with nylon threads she recovers from the food aid nylon bags, to make a mesob. Invention is necessary in discovering the link between recycling and creating...

Recycling materials to transform them for practical use has enabled a large part of the Lalibela population to survive long years of crisis.

e. Thick woolen pile carpets are hand-woven in the church, in handicraft schools, by disabled people and also in the prison using intertwined geometric border patterns taken from the “Arak” of the old manuscripts illuminations.

f. The mesob of Ethiopia catches everyone’s eyes. It is a basket made in a variety of colors with slight variations in shape, very practical for use, may be bought depending on size and the amount of work involved in its making. These baskets are used to serve the traditional food, the lid being lifted off to reveal the flat open basket in the pedestal. Injera, a flat circular spongy pancake-like bread, is placed inside, and a variety rich of sauces are ladled onto it. A family and their guests will all eat from the same communal “dish”.

(Photograph by Buzuayehu Tadesse)

g. In Gondar city, Senelt Gebeyu, 18, self trained, has produced this beautiful mesob from straw. It took her some 3 months to do it (on and off). Although some tourists express intentions of buying this typical, exotic if bulky product, there is no commercial structure that takes care of handling and dispatching such craft items. Payment is by cash since credit cards in general cannot be used.

h. Spinning is practiced in almost all households to help with the family income. Note the tattoos on the face and the arm of the old lady spinning; this is a practice persisting from the time when kings made the wearing of the cross compulsory for Christians. For those who suffered from land scarcity like the highland Muslims, trade was necessary for existence and thus weaving became the mainstay for certain cultural groups.
are unknown and while elsewhere the actual tilling part consists of sharpened wood, in Ethiopia it is metal.

If it is harvesting season, the man needs nothing more than the sickle he obtains from a smith and a piece of rope of his own making for harvesting. However, if he is going to thresh, let’s say teff (**Eragrostis** **abyssinica**), he must have a wooden poker (**mensch**), a wooden winnowet (**manka**), a skin blower (**margajebia**), and a large basket bowl (**weranta**) for pouring the grain into big goat or calfskin sacks (**aqomada**). These have now been replaced almost everywhere by burlap or plastic sacks since the country was flooded with these modern sacks following the 1984 famine.

The young boy of the family takes over the livestock for the day carrying his lunch in a round basket with a leather covered lid (**agelgil**) or in a rectangular one made of date leaves (**aqofada**). The latter is usually made from palm leaves and it is the single most important possession of church school pupils. They use them for collecting and keeping the food they obtain by going around begging from the people in the parishes of the church with which the school is connected. They keep their books, needles for mending clothes and the things they need to make fly whisks (**chira**) of horse or mule tail hair and an iron or copper handle. In the rainy season, the boy will carry or put on a raincoat (**gesso**) made by himself from reeds, and perhaps play a three-holed flute (**washint**) he has made from a bamboo stem.

People who live near lakes use natural materials available around them to make boats. Interesting examples are the **tankwa** made of papyri around Lake Tana, the high-plowed **ambatch** balsa wood boats of the Rift Valley, the dug-out canoes of the Omo and the reed boats of Lake Haik.

At around midday, the woman may start weaving baskets or spinning while mentoring her young daughter. In the case of cotton work, she lets her daughter take out the seeds from the raw cotton by pressing it with an iron rod over a small smooth flat stone (**medamecha**). She then has to card the cotton before beating it by pulling the gut string of a bow (**digan**) over it with the neck of calabash cut out into a funnel (**mequntebia**). Using the traditional two-piece spindle (**inzirt**), she spins the fluffy cotton into cylindrical balls of thread that have to be transferred into smaller oval ones around a hollow bamboo stem or a sorghum stalk as it is in this form that the weaver must have the cotton thread prepared.

The thickness of the spun thread depends on what it is to be used for. The everyday men’s big wraparound (**gabi**) and women’s cover all (**kemis**) need relatively thick threads while the blanket form (**bouluko**) takes the thickest of all. A lighter version of the gabi (**koota**) requires a thinner thread while the very light women’s wraparound that goes with their main dress needs the finest (**netela**).

If the young girl is learning basketry, she will most likely begin by weaving coasters that she then enlarges into the big flat plates (**sefaed**) used for cleaning grain. This will be followed by weaving baskets of increasing sizes, going into table forms, having round bases with flat tops (**kelemshash**) again of increasing sizes. She may then progress straight into making the largest of such traditional woven tables either plain for everyday use or highly decorated with multicolored patterns. However, if she feels she is not ready for the **mesob**, she may make
Ethnic is unique
Due to being hand made, each ethnic item differs from any other and could be considered a piece of art: buyers who cannot afford to collect art pieces made by painters, sculptors or potters can thus transfer their artistic sensibilities and their collector’s interest to another form of art e.g. ethnic objects which, while costing less, are embodied with the same creative spirit, the same sense of mystery, and a unique cultural legacy as any piece of art conceived by an artist.

For foreigners, ethnic is magic
Nowadays, in the world of decoration and fashion, the word ETHNIC has taken on a new dimension: ethnicity that includes “ethnic” objects (furniture, various accessories, fabrics, etc.) handmade in Africa, Asia or Latin America by small-producer artisans including items that usually have a genuine, rough or modest appearance.

Despite the steady growth of a modern economy, with its factories, jet planes and skyscrapers, the majority of the Ethiopian population still lives a “traditional” way of life.

Many handicraft items are common to different ethnic groups and found all over the southern and western regions. The fact that they are made to be used warrants their genuineness as far as the tourist expectation of cultural authenticity is concerned.

In the meantime, as a successful result of age-old experience, aesthetics most of the time, merges with functionality.

a. The calabash or gourd, grows in a great variety of shapes and sizes; since they have a much longer life than pots they are more carefully decorated, making ideal containers for milk, water and local beer and are also used as bowls, spoons, ladles, money boxes and pipes.

b. Highland shepherd boys, exposed to the cold winds of the plateaux, dress in warm sheepskin and make their own natural woolen hats in black, brown and white patterns.

c. Although honey production may not exactly be called a handicraft, it is a fact that this old tradition is not just to produce a sweet delicacy, but has alternative functions, for example as a medicine and has evolved to a true art and its commercial potential involves thousands of farmer families.

d. Artisans’ products have to compete more and more with mass produced machine made goods that are more adapted to modern needs by being functional, cheaper and “fashionable.” However, there is a new tourism and export - demand making up for the demand decline in the home market for traditional handicraft goods because of their ETHNIC origins and characteristics.

e. The practice of using tobacco had been strongly controlled in Ethiopia for decades. In the 19th century Emperor Theodros used to have the nose of a snuff taker cut off and Emperor Menelik forbade cultivating or importing tobacco in his provinces. A calabash is used for the bowl of the water pipe, called a “gaya” in Oromo and “matatcha” in Amharic, the pipe stems are made of horn and carved wood. The elegant shape as well as the cultural background makes it an ethnographic object much prized by collectors.

f. Country folk bringing their wares to market, making their own purchases, pausing to exchange gossip about relatives in a village that may lie hundreds of miles away.

g. Coffee, originated in Ethiopia, is incorporated in the Zar cult, called more respectfully, “Gods of our forefathers” or “Guardians Gods” and dates from time immemorial. Drinking coffee is a ritual observance. The tray is an altar where initiates swear their oaths. The grass on the ground represents the bush country where spirits live. The brewed coffee is the blood to be shed for the spirits. The ground coffee remnants (ateta) are a medicine to be applied to a sick person’s sores. (source: Jacques Mercier).
THE COFFEE CEREMONY is an important social and cultural tradition which has left an attractive heritage of creativity. In this case the star performers are the coffee and handicraft items.

1. Jebenah (coffee pot) - A double lip jug to allow the devil to fly away on one side while coffee is poured on the other...
2. Sene (clay coffee cup) with a Falasha style figurine as a handle
3. Rekebot, a wooden tray carved in a single piece from a large tree trunk
4. An incense burner made out of recovered rifle bullet shell cases
5. Colorful straw baskets for displaying “buna qurs” (snacks and sweets)
6. Coasters, spoons, gourds, softwood goblets, horn drinking mugs, ...

On Saturday, countryfolk cannot afford to miss the weekly local market. For rural people markets are more than a place and time for bartering, selling or buying goods; they are occasions for all sorts of social functions and exchanges: for sending and getting messages about distant relatives, for fixing dates of weddings, or announcing appointed funerals (for those who couldn’t make it at the time of death), for resolving disputes, for hearing what is being talked about different topics and events in the near and far world and just for seeing and being seen.

Our couple dress up in their best attire to go to market. The woman is likely to be carrying a bag of grain on her back, another on her head, a calabash pot (kit) with butter in one hand and perhaps another calabash pot with honey in the other, all to sell. The man may be leading a goat or sheep with a rope, carrying a raw animal skin (koda) and probably guiding a donkey with a sack of grain on its back secured with a leather rope (mechagna). Essentially, country markets are a comprehensive mirror of all that each area has.

On arrival, if the market is located in a town, the man will take time out to visit a tej (the alcoholic drink made from honey) or areki (a grain distilled using a traditional five-piece still) bet (house). There he may participate in a competitive display of mental agility and witticism by offering impromptu spontaneous verses to a traditional minstrel playing a masinko (the two-piece popular fiddle like soundbox). On the other hand, if the market is in the open country, both husband and wife may stop at one of the spots...
a. MUZE (wedding dowry)
- the most ornate, largest chest pendant metal jewelry found in the Horn of Africa;
- originally made from silver nowadays from a silver – nickel alloy. Due to lack of exposure, this is now an activity of Harar at risk of being lost.
- only two jewelers now produce the muze in Harar: Sheikh Abduwahid aged 92, is one of the two.

b. Jewelry and ornaments play an important role in Ethiopian dress. Ornaments of many kinds are used by all ethnic groups. They vary from some of the finest examples of gold and silversmith work to a simple bracelet of plaited stalks of grass worn by a shepherd in the field.

Ethiopian jewelry and ornaments can be divided into the following main groups:
- Smith-made jewelry crafted from gold and silver or, occasionally, of brass or copper, but always fine
- Coarse metal jewelry made simply and often crudely from brass, copper, iron, aluminum, nickel, etc
- Bead jewelry (including amber) and decorative beadwork, and
- Ornaments from natural materials, such as wooden shells, ivory, horn, nuts, seeds, animal hair, leather, grass, etc.

c. The costumes of the Ethiopians are as varied and interesting as the population itself, reflecting ancient and modern trends in decoration, the fanciful as well as the practical.

Argobba women singing in the evening twilight. In the 19th century, Harris wrote: “Unrestricted by harem laws they fidget about in every direction their great sparkling eyes piercing through a mass of coal black hair, half concealed by a crimson cowl, whilst the large shining necklace of amber, reaches nearly to the waist.” (Harris, Illustrations, 19)

d. The traditional white cotton highland dress is worn these days in adapted form by both the country folk and the city dwellers who prefer the comfort of the hand-woven cloth to the synthetic industrialized attire. Every “Kemis” is hand-embroidered around the neckline and down the front of the bodice.

e. Many things have been said about headrests: “the mixture between aesthetic and utility, the fundamental purpose of protecting and conserving elaborate head-dresses and hairstyles, the strange meanings of the shape and decoration adopted for them, and many others.” (Ethiopian Pillows–Institute of Ethiopian Studies)

f. Many hairstyles are so elaborate as to require the use of a wooden headrest when the wearer wants to rest.
along the road or at the market itself where women sell tella (the local beer made from barley).

While enjoying a flask of tej, somebody may start singing or playing instruments. What is shared amongst diverse communities in Ethiopia is love for music and there are many different forms of musical instruments. One of the most commonly seen instruments, the masenko, has been used for centuries by the azmari (the troubadour of the highlands) and has a firm root in Ethiopia. There are other instruments which reflect the influences from neighboring cultures over time, such as the Krar - which is reminiscent of the Lyre of ancient Egypt, and the drum and the flutes of the southern Ethiopia - that evoke the instruments of Central Africa.

Finally home, after a long and often backbreaking day, the poor rural folk have little more to sleep on than, at best, a leather bed made by a tanner or a thin criss-crossed timber frame put together by the farmer himself. This will have some straw or hay on top, a single piece of cow hide dressed by a tanner, a hard leather pillow stuffed with hay for bedding. The people often sleep wearing their ordinary clothes worn during the day as blankets. What is even more disheartening is that their good night’s sleep is subject to the mercy of ravaging bed fleas (koonicha), bed bugs (tibuan) and lice.

For Christian highlanders every day of the Ethiopian calendar is devoted to one of the archangels, the biblical patriarchs, Mary, Jesus, the Trinity, and the saints. As there are numerous churches in the big towns, our townsfolk are likely to start their day with a visit to one of these.

The couple put on their best white traditional dress (both tailored) and a light Shema (the woven cotton wraparound) or koota with a multi-colored edge. The man may also have a fly wisk in one hand and in the other a long shoulder high stick topped with a metal Tau cross or a globe (mequamia). This stick is used for support while standing or as a musical instrument by the clergy.

The lady wears the best and the latest tibeb of her wardrobe, the most elaborately embroidered dress of women, but not any different in material and form from the regular kemiss (coverall). If she is not elderly she would be wearing earrings, bracelets and several types of necklaces with different kinds of crosses. If she is elderly, she may wear a cross and prayer beads.

Regular holy mass of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is full of ritual and pageantry with its glittering ceremonial umbrellas, brocaded velvet clerical robes, multicolored capes, and shining and towering gold and silver processional crosses held high by deacons. The cross predominates on all the ceremonial vestments, in the very architecture of the church building, on the vestments of the high priests and on the hands of every junior priest, that the faithful kiss as part of their greeting. They are also on the garments and even tattooed on the faces and hands of the congregation and on the parchment books that the priests read from. Ethiopia is perhaps the only country where high quality parchment is still produced in the traditional way as are the black and red inks and the reed pens to write with.

The celebration and worship at the Ethiopian churches consist of public meditations, prostrating and rejoicing with priests performing sacred dances to the music of Saint Yared. This saint of the sixth century AD was the canonized composer and father
a. Manuscripts of both faiths (Christianity and Islam) are in most cases primarily religious but some are secular, covering such subjects as history, law, philosophy, medicine and astronomy.

b. The late Kabir Ali Shok, formerly head of the Harar Koranic School, the city's last bookbinder.

c. Christian scribes are still writing the texts of the manuscripts, invariably in Ge'ez, the country's ecclesiastical medium, a Semitic language related to Hebrew and Arabic, which gave birth to the Amharic script.

d. Parchment or vellum as it is also called, is made mainly from the skins of cattle and goats. Ethiopia is perhaps the last country to continue to produce high quality parchment for paintings and books.

e. A typical example of the great skill inherited from the ancient Axum artistic tradition: Ato Mahred Wolde Gabriel, a multi-talented artisan-creator, taught by the church, carves a large sized drum called kebero out of a solid trunk. This kebero is exactly the same as the one seen in an 18th century wall painting in the Church of St. Mary of Axum.

f. Folk art painting showing a traditional music band. Amongst the features often found in Ethiopia, its musical instruments echo well-known forms in the neighbouring cultures: for example, the Krar reminiscent of the lyre of Ancient Egypt, the tomb (finger piano) and the flutes of the South, evoke the instruments of Central Africa. At the same time, Ethiopia is the original birthplace, for others like as the masenko, used for centuries by the azmari-the troubadour of the highlands.

g. "Magic Scrolls" are rolled up into little leather boxes and hung around the neck as "talismans" or "charms" against evil or illness.

h. Perpetuating Axumite tradition: A bible stand carved by Tebebe, who migrated to the USA in 2001, and painted by Tekeste Sibehen.

i. Ethiopian neck crosses, are usually named after towns or highland provinces and are either cast by the lost wax method or cut directly from Maria Theresa silver coins.

j. The church is a melting pot of time honoured know-how and tradition. Here, a nun produces an intricate church umbrella from simple split bamboo.

k. In Lalibela, a blind priest teaching Digua (religious music composition) to young students who have built their own tiny houses around him (graduation period takes 4 to 6 years!). Debre Roha, the local religious authority, constitutes a major establishment with a great influence on peoples' lives. However, this is considered double-edged because community members have to contribute a lot to the church in terms of free work and contributions in kind. In most areas, young talents cannot develop and evolve outside the church environment. This may be seen as a major reason for the restricted conservative activities of the craft people.

l. Fresco painting by Sr. Emahoy Welete Yohannes.

m. Outside the church, young talents blossom.

n. Even in the most remote areas as at Yemerehanna Kristos, a cave church, famous for its 1000 years old decorated interior, the daily mass celebration is a full ritual.
of the church's liturgical music, whose attempt at musical notation precedes similar exercises in Europe by at least 1000 years. Yared's music is accompanied by the big sacred drums (kebero), the sistrum (said to be part of ancient Egypt's musical instruments but nowadays used only in Ethiopia) and the prayer stick (mequamia).

All these icons and sacred objects used to be made by hermits, monks and the debiera (the highly learned members of the clergy or scribes) attached to the monasteries and churches. They were also maintained by an artisan community and by the courts of the emperors, kings and high-ranking nobility.

One of the most visible and omnipresent of all icons is the Ethiopian cross. The cross is tattooed on the body or carved from clay, stone and wood. It may be made from reeds, leather, metals and their alloys. It is used simply as jewellery and for exorcising evil spirits and for healing by simply touching. While there are main regional forms, such as the Axumite, Gonderine, Gojam, Lalibela and Menz, there are said to exist over 3,000 different types of Ethiopian crosses. The Ethiopian cross with bent arms – misnamed the swastika—goes back to the pre-Christian era of Ethiopia. In addition, the repertoire of Ethiopian crosses includes the ankeh associated with crosses in Egypt, the Taw Maltese of Tibet, the Greek, Moline, Latin and Sarcelly.
The marginal position of the artisans

The shadow of the Falashas

Wolleka, a Falasha (Black Jew) village 5kms north of Gondar was a significant tourist attraction until the early 1980s when the Falashas started migrating to Israel. In May 1991 Israel commenced its "Operation Solomon" a dramatic airlift from Addis Ababa airport of some 14,500 Falashas during the dying days of the Derg regime so finalising their exodus within 36 hours.

The "Black Jews", are believed by many to be descendants of the Lost Tribe. They pursued their ancient form of Judaism, relatively untainted by outside influences. One of their traditional crafts consisted in making fine black pottery of birds, animals and humans, sometimes exceptionally graceful in shape, and sometimes almost grotesque.

Even though there is very little left of this unique culture, many tourists, usually well aware of the "Black Jews" journey, want to visit and see the remains of their village - now just a few houses with a synagogue bearing its star of David used as a peasant's house with a couple of women potters seizing the opportunity to sell a few crude clay figurines at an exorbitant price...

With the help of Japanese technical assistance during the 1990's, a ceramic workshop was established in Wolleka and more modern technology such as the potter's wheel, and high temperature firing and glazing were introduced. However, the high cost of energy (gas firing) doesn't allow the local population to purchase the ceramic products which are therefore targeted at the tourist market and to Addis Ababa galleries.

Papyrus work by a group of poor and disadvantaged people: THE WAYTO TRIBE

This is a typical example of people who, for reasons which are not clear, are somehow rejected by others: For many years they had lived in Bahar Dar town center. However, the city's development, which doesn't seem to involve them, pushes them progressively further and further out of the busy central area.

A LEGENDARY ORIGIN

Some interpretations relate their coming to the region with the biblical crossing of the Red Sea by Moses. Legend says that one group which came too late to cross the sea had to go back but because of the vindictive Pharaoh, was forced to move south following the Blue Nile up to its source at Lake Tana.

This may explain the specialty of the Waytos in building papyrus boats which look like those boats found in the early Egyptian temple frescoes.

Other people call them "the Hunters" (Adagnoch) and avoid their company to the extent that glasses out of which they have drunk water must be broken afterwards because of their tradition of eating the meat of wild animals.

ECONOMIC CONDITION AND SOCIAL STATUS

The consequence of this attitude is an isolation of the tribe; the members do not get access to education and the ensuing rewarding economic/social status. Today the Waytos live below the minimum poverty line and their only means of survival is for the women to produce baskets, for the men to chisel stone for grinding seeds and for their children to weave mats, fencing and boats from the papyrus stems which they bring from Zege Island, 6 hours navigating the lake from Bahar Dar.

The Waytos are Muslims but other Muslims do not consider them as such because they still believe that they are eaters of wild meat.
Overview of traditional craft production

Contemporary popular folk art showing Emperor Menelik II and Empress Taitu fighting at the battle of Adwa in 1896.

Recognizing the value of the traditional craftsmen, Emperor Menelik II proclaimed a decree on 25 January 1908:

"Therefore do not insult the artisan for the trade he practices... All human creatures take their root from Adam and Eve... This is all due to ignorance. God said to Adam, 'you will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow.' If this no longer holds and everyone indulges in sloth, then there is no government, there is no country, and you who proffer insults, you empty my country and bring ruin upon it by depriving it of those who sharpen the ploughshare. From now on, for he who thus proffers these insults, it is I he is insulting, not the other one."

1.3 The current situation of craft production in Ethiopia

By tradition, craftspeople in Ethiopia belong to a low-cast and are looked down upon. This artisanal group has suffered from prejudice and relative isolation in society. Craftspeople often live in very poor conditions (typically with no latrines and suffering from water shortages, congested conditions, no waste collection systems, insufficient social service facilities and organizations, with mud houses used for both dwelling and working) and their settlements tend to be separated from the rest of the community. They have no right of land ownership and illiteracy is particularly high amongst them. Craftspeople generally are subjected to low self-esteem and apathy for a better future due to the hardship of their living conditions.

The skills of craftsfolk are gained as a family inheritance. Training is limited to the transfer of know-how from parents to children in a learn-as-you-do process and they are not exposed to reference materials in the use of raw materials and designs. Routines prevail in the operation of craft production – the activities of women are normally restricted to pottery and men to weaving. Until recently, local and traditional demand for craft products was easily satisfied, and therefore competition was limited.

Craftsmen and women in Ethiopia have been without the incentives or inspiration to improve either their skills or their products. Creativity was not encouraged since many craftspeople, are also farmers engaged in repetitive craft making routines to gain a supplementary income for feeding themselves and their families. This reflects the conservatism whereby the community demands routine work and copying what has previously been
a. Shop owners and intermediaries like tourist guides get richer while the producers do not really benefit from the new tourist arrival.

b. Embroidery is traditionally done by men and restricted mostly to the highland regions of Ethiopia.

c. Weavers still use the common pit loom where the treadle is pulled with the feet and the simple boat shuttle thrown by hand. For centuries spinning was practiced by almost all families throughout Ethiopia in sustaining their self-sufficiency. The production method is tiresome generating little income and the youngest children and the elderly are extremely exploited. In each weaver family there may be eight to twelve dependants and the present economic climate favors “production” over “creation”: a weaver once brought this dilemma into focus saying, “it costs money to become inventive. I am an artisan, I cannot afford to become a creator.”

d. The kemis is a popular full length embroidered cotton dress; the colours and pattern always incorporate the cross motif. (Picture taken in Gondar prison’s workshop).

e. Jonas G. EGZIABER produces very interesting furniture: the unique shape and technique denote a close connection with the old chairs (which must be registered and protected!) however a shortage of the right wood prevents continuous production despite a high demand from foreigners.
done. Their methods of production remain archaic and do not lend themselves to creativity, innovation and efficiency, in terms of both quantity and quality. Furthermore, the search for new and alternative raw materials was limited even though Ethiopia is endowed with rich natural resources.

Most households have no regularly monthly income and self-employment, unemployment and underemployment are common. Lack of exposure to enterprise and market trends means that the operations of craftspeople are low in productivity and without effective cost analysis of raw materials consumption, labor and time. Their products are often poorly presented and craftspeople have limited distribution networks and resources for exploring market opportunities. The income that craftspeople receive is often not a fair price relative to what retailers, tourist guides and shop operators earn. There are examples, whereby the trade of carved goods (e.g. painted icons, triptychs and diptychs, and book stands) has been monopolized by a few intermediaries. They split the phases of the production and distribute the work to remote villages in order for the producers not to organize themselves and compete with the merchants.

The degradation of the environment results in limited or unreliable supplies of raw materials, transportation problems and high costs of products. Given the orthodox background of many craftsfolk in Ethiopia their work is further affected by the many non-working holidays imposed (sometimes half of the month) and obligatory contributions for religious festivities through labor, time and money. Traditional craft products have to compete increasingly with machine-made goods that are cheaper and fashionable. Until recently, the livelihood of the artisans was guaranteed by the communal needs of the traditional rural way of life with its mutual sustainability and reciprocal exchange. The transition to a modern mode however, has changed this and greatly individualized and fragmented their community life.

1.4 International trend in craft production

It is the craftsfolk's efforts to meet local demands that give rise to the handicraft trade expressive of a certain culture. Although the demand is still there, the means of satisfying it are shifting more and more to industrialized goods. For instance, in many African countries, the local textile activities are either suffering or in near collapse despite NGOs and bilateral initiatives to bolster production and nurture the sector. Many textiles with alleged indigenous prints sold to Africans who use local dressmakers to create tunics and wraps (particularly in the west and south of the continent) are now manufactured in Asia and sometimes the prints are even designed in Europe.

Even though the world at large may be experiencing globalization, there is a parallel tendency to appreciate cultural diversity and richness of each cultural tradition. Tourists, for example travel to experience different cultures and appreciate them by purchasing mementos and souvenirs. Furthermore, decorative arts and crafts have been rejuvenated by stimulation from foreign themes which gave birth for example, to Indian styles, Chinoiserie, Japan-influenced looks, or Orientalism and Arts Premier-inspirations; the craftmarket
The tradition lives on in the carver’s work. Craftsmen are able to carve alternatively in stone or wood, through painted icons, triptychs and diptychs, book stands, often elaborately carved. However, trade in these items has been monopolized by a few middle-men who split the phases of the production and distribute the works to remote villages to prevent the producers from grouping themselves and competing with the merchants.

a. It is no wonder that stone cutting should be the leading craft inherited by generations of Axumites from their ancestors of Yove. There are still at least 12 kinds or classes of stone that the Axumite stoncutters put to use.

b. Fewer wooden artifacts remain from antiquity simply because wood is not so durable. However, the 9th century, church of Debre Damo, stands as a monument to the Axumite architectural style and is still in use today. (Deutsche Axum Expedition 1906)

c. The stone carver’s trade began to revive in a big way quite by chance with the start of tourism some 30 years back. A certain Ato Assefa Dagne stumbled on a small piece of a stone cross and took his find to a team of French archaeologist digging in Axum who offered him 5 Birr for it. He declined the offer, went home, searched for a similar stone, made a faithful reproduction of the cross he had found and sold it to the French archaeologists for 5 Birr. Ato Assefa’s example was followed by his friend, by his friend’s brother and others.

d. Unless they are trained in a well-known artist family, young artists do not find both exposure and the support for their art inspire of an in-born talent with potential. The only alternative they have to get around a monopolized market is to try to sell their work to tourists in the streets of Axum near the hotels or the shops.

e. A major aspect of the artistic ethiopian tradition transfer lies in the following trilogy: Master Mahred Wolde Gabriel teaching his son watched by lenient church members examiners.

LAKE AND RIVER BOATS

f. Since the earliest days of civilization, the Ethiopian craftspeople have sought to satisfy the elementary needs of a rural society by employing the natural materials available to them - clay, horn, wood, animal skin, the grasses of the plains were all equally employed challenging their ingenuity.

- the tankwa made of papyri around Lake Tana,
- the high - plowed ambatch balsa wood boat from the Rift Valley,
- the dug-out canoe of the Omo and
- the reed boats from lake Haik

are all typical examples of the clever use of materials provided by diverse ecosystems.

10c. lake Haik, 20c. lake Abaya, 30c. lake Tana, 60c. Baro River
continues to search for products that are ethnic and exotic but which can also be incorporated into modern life.

1.5 Considerations on the future craft production in Ethiopia

A paradoxical situation presently prevails with respect to traditional handicrafts in Ethiopia. On the one hand, a great number of talented craftspeople are living below the poverty line and, on the other hand, there is a market - locally and abroad - with a high demand for genuine handicraft products. Handicrafts are not commodities merely produced by hand, but something created by artisans whose energy and spiritual outlook were translated into products with the aid of raw materials, tools and his or her skills. This is why one of the key issues is to find out how the production of handicraft articles can be adapted to the needs and tastes of the foreign customers while retaining the essential local character inherent in the traditional crafts. It is also important that craftspeople are assisted to explore issues that confront their working conditions and helped to evolve methods of thinking and working that contribute to making this process a meaningful interaction amongst creator, producer and seller. To this end, those involved in developing the Ethiopian craft sector should ensure that craft related activities are sustainable and based on a fair trade regime.

The strength of the Ethiopian craft sector lies in the fact that it can satisfy both domestic and international markets. This is because the use of craft goods is clearly integrated in the daily lives of ordinary people, while they can have a universal appeal for non-Ethiopians particularly if the
Handicrafts and Sustainable Tourism

The exceptional quality of the handcrafted items especially for the export markets, requires that appropriate promotional material and packaging must be developed simultaneously.

Sustainable Tourism: should be the ultimate objective promoting the idea that all tourism should be conceived in terms of the resulting benefits to, and involvement of, the local population.

Tourists soon get tired of guided tours around established shops and showroom outlets and prefer rather to go out and visit the workshops or villages of the craft people – especially when such visits are coupled with live demonstrations and exposure to the ways of life of the artisans. City tours should include the discovery with crafts as part of the cultural product, as follows:

- a focal point where sales of handicrafts are supported with ancient and modern ethnographic references; and
- demonstrations/sales of handicraft products in traditional lively settings just as here at Wo. Etiene's residence.

There is an extraordinary diversity within Ethiopia, of topography and of its some 83 different languages and 200 dialects and their customs, and their whole manner of living which is clearly expressed through the different indigenous housing styles.

The craftsmen and women who sell their products to tourists would come to regard the foreign traveler less as an intruder but more as someone likely to contribute to their daily "injera" (local bread).

They should also become aware of the inherent values of their cultural heritage that attracts the tourists to their particular villages however remote and thus develop greater zeal in cherishing and protecting their legacies and resources whilst attracting more potential customers.

A RICHNESS AT RISK OF BEING LOST

Although the Ethiopians are conscious of their archaeological treasures (most of them protected and hidden for future generations) it is a common attitude not to pay much attention to what one sees every day that could be considered archaic, or below modern standards. Many countries of the Gulf, for instance have suffered from such negligence, developed during the oil boom of the 1970s and are now struggling to recover their lost cultural heritages.

Today, the economic opening of the region favors modern construction materials and techniques and the old style houses are becoming progressively victims of the modernization process: some of them are definitely lost and many are becoming endangered.

C. The recently restored so called “Rimbaud House” in Harar is an example of what typical house architecture may offer to meet the tourists’ expectation for a lifestyle discovery.

STIMULATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR HUMAN/CULTURAL RESOURCES TO MERGE.

d. When a Dorze house starts to decay or gets eaten by termites, the house is dug up. Bamboo is sewn round it to keep it in shape, and everyone rushes to help carry it: with poles poked horizontally through it, and the women with their backs against the wall grasping the lower edges, the children holding poles to prevent it toppling and everybody cheerfully singing, it is taken to its new site, a little less tall than before.

A house lasts for about forty years and is then abandoned, lying as a stark memorial to the life that it sheltered until the rains and the earth consume it.

e. Despite the destruction and loss of so much of its artistic heritage, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church contrived to keep hidden a large repository of ancient illuminated manuscripts, painted triptychs and diplychs also frescoes and murals in cave churches and monasteries (excavated Church of Guh, Tigray Region, 14’th century).

f. Although today's artists from Bahar Dar and Lake Tana, Lalibela, Gondar and Axum, are the heirs of the painting tradition, they can hardly find access to their unique cultural heritage for inspiration and are forced to rely on calendars, illustrations or postcards! (Artist Berhane Meskel Studio)

In this crossroads of cultural diversity where curiosity for what is GENUINE is cultivated, the traditional Ethiopian handicrafts which have been historically, and remain still, both a vocation and a way of life, appear to be a virgin breeding ground for contemporary creators in search of inspiration.

g. There are only few years between the coil method Messob beautifully done with grass (right) dyed in brilliant colours and the loosely made messob (left) where the coil is wrapped with wool instead of threads. Although the time gap between the mother's work and the daughter's work may look short for a consumer society approach, its origin goes as far back as hundreds of years.
products can be further developed in terms of quality and quantity. There are four different groups of potential customers: nationals (both residents and diaspora), transit travelers and tourists (including infrastructure requirements for travel industry), the foreign community in Ethiopia, and foreigners living abroad. In every group, the potential buyer has to weigh a number of factors when making a purchase, such as cost, design, quality, size, weight, authenticity, capacity to withstand hard handling, compatibility with modern interior and contemporary taste, and aesthetic sensibility.

What makes Ethiopian culture unique is its diversity. The country is home to peoples with the most diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds, and so are their customs, arts and crafts. Contrary to the experience of many developing countries, Ethiopian crafts have maintained their artistic originality for centuries free from outside influences. Although the sense of the past was ever present, the Revolution and the socialist Derg regime ended years of self-imposed autocracy in Ethiopia. The liberal political and economic changes since 1991 have opened up the country, and ushered in an era of a consumer society that encourages the production of all types of goods, including handicraft items. The fact that the country has to this day preserved its cultural traits untainted adds immensely to its potential as a major tourist attraction. But unfortunately, preservation also means that cultural traditions have not been given due expression.
a. The children of Ethiopia's traditional craftspeople do not have time to play in the open fields like the children of the farmers, clergy or merchants. That is considered a luxury and they have rather to sit by their parent's side, to observe, to assist and practice to enable them to subsist. At last, practice will make them perfect.

b. Women potters and men weavers belong to despised categories of manual workers.

c. The Ketchene Women Potters Association has seen the number of its members declining constantly from around a hundred potters in the 1990s to 38 in 2006. During the last few years, “enseras” (pots for carrying water on women's backs) have been substituted by plastic containers throughout Ethiopia.

d. Women assist their husbands by spinning the cotton on archaic spinning wheels.

e. Pottery making requires constant physical effort; the excavation and transportation of the clay mud on the women's back involves a tiresome walk from the quarry up to the work place. Socio-cultural constraints, such as the looking down upon certain crafts, complexes, taboos and beliefs, inhibit initiative and innovative powers and thus restrict the activities to relatively primitive methods and to limited knowledge of possible market opportunities.

f. In the village of Ketchene Medhane Alem, at the northern outskirts of Addis Ababa, many aspects of the life of the artisans are suggestive of what has been called “the culture of poverty”, a culture which suffers from the very limited range of choices possible to those existing on the border of starvation.

The original target of the project was the rehabilitation of fuel wood women carriers.

g. Even though the situation of craftspeople is precarious enough, their traditional way of life deteriorates while retailers, tourist guides and bazaar operators get richer at their expense. The WPA seizes any sales opportunity given by non-profit organizations for self-improvement and direct distribution thus avoiding the exploiting go-betweens.
II. CASE STUDIES: DEVELOPING ETHIOPIAN CRAFTS

There have been numerous attempts to develop crafts by Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian individuals, institutions and NGOs. Many souvenir shops and craft workshops have opened in Addis Ababa and in other cities and there are regular crafts fairs in the country and abroad exhibiting a range of products - both traditional and innovative - which reflect the results of such efforts to support craftspeople in Ethiopia.

While it is not possible to review each and every project undertaken in Ethiopia, this section presents six of them that are noticeable for different characteristics, in terms of quality improvement, creativity interventions, design development, marketing and partnership.

Through the analysis of the different projects, a set of common results and lessons are drawn which may be useful for future activities related to the development of craft production.

II.1 Women Potters Association in Ketchene Medhane Alem

Background

In the Gulele sub city at the northern outskirts of Addis Ababa, there are 3,000 potters out of some 350,000 residents. The majority of the potters are residing in the Ketchene locality; and some are organized under four potters associations with some 630 members in total.

The Women Potters Association, which has about 30 members, originated as a cooperative during the socialist Derg regime, which tried to rehabilitate the status of manual workers by giving them land owning rights. The Association was formally established in 1991 with its own administrative structure. The potters collect income according to each member’s sales and a monthly contribution fee of ETB 10 (USD $1.2).

In Ethiopia, there has never been any systematic encouragement to develop the basic pottery craft into an art form and its shapes remain strictly utilitarian, adapted only to home needs. As a consequence, the country’s artisans have been without the incentive or inspiration to improve either their skills or their product. It is interesting to note that pottery is not taught at the Addis Ababa Fine Arts School, but it is part of the programme at FEMSEDA, the official apprenticeship center of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The process of traditional potterymaking is primitive and exhausting. The clay soil is dug and
A SUCCESSFUL ACHIEVEMENT OF A PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP:

ETTE (Ethiopian Tourist Trading Enterprise) - WPA (Women Potters Association, Village of Ketchene)

Mrs. Margaret CHANDLER, Canadian ceramist, has been the head of the project; her leadership and contribution have been determining factors for the success of a pilot enterprise. Assessing this novel experience, Mrs. Chandler wrote:

"The success of this project has been greatly facilitated by the incentive provided by the potential market of a governmental institution, the Ethiopian Tourist Trading Enterprise. Training programs and the purchasing procedures have encouraged an improvement in quality which was rewarded by an increase in income. There is a direct cause and effect. That other markets have developed simultaneously, as quality and product design improved, has been a welcome result.

The partnership with the ETTE developed naturally in that several workers in its ceramic workshop studio, with relatively modern technology and high temperature electric kiln firing capacity, come from Ketchene Village, as does the clay used by the ceramists.

Working in the reverse direction, the ceramic workshop benefits from the in-born knowledge that traditional potters have for their materials, such as source and quality of the clay.

ETTE was looking to expand its own production and it was logical to turn to the village. What began in a minor way with small purchases and some advice has evolved into a system whereby, on a regular basis, ETTE places orders made to the head of the project; her leadership and contribution have been determining factors for the success of a pilot enterprise. Assessing this novel experience, Mrs. Chandler wrote:

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There is a direct benefit to both parties. The ceramic workshop gets good quality work of a consistent standard. The women have a constant market without having the expense and labor of firing, or selling on the street. All work is criticized for quality of design, clay compositions, method or production, etc. If it meets the requirements, an order is placed. If not, alternatives or improvement are suggested. In this way training is given with incentive to improve. During these sessions, areas of concern are identified and further training programs are planned.

The strategy presents the dual advantage of an active participation of the target group and a guarantee of the perenniality of the project.

Over the period of time this system has been in place, there has been a remarkable improvement in all areas. They are also gradually becoming self-sufficient and self-reliant. The income of the trained women potters has improved considerably, adding to their social stature and the prestige of the craft. Some of these women are now trainers themselves imparting the skills they have acquired to potters in the remote areas of the country.

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Working in the reverse direction, the ceramic workshop benefits from the in-born knowledge that traditional potters have for their materials, such as source and quality of the clay.

ETTE was looking to expand its own production and it was logical to turn to the village. What began in a minor way with small purchases and some advice has evolved into a system whereby, on a regular basis, ETTE places orders made to its design and quality standards. The work purchased in unfired form and paid for at the time of collection. The price paid is based on a fair market price for work the women potters would normally fire and market.

There is a direct benefit to both parties. The ceramic workshop gets good quality work of a consistent standard. The women have a constant market without having the expense and labor of firing, or selling on the street. All work is criticized for quality of design, clay compositions, method or production, etc. If it meets the requirements, an order is placed. If not, alternatives or improvement are suggested. In this way training is given with incentive to improve. During these sessions, areas of concern are identified and further training programs are planned.

The strategy presents the dual advantage of an active participation of the target group and a guarantee of the perenniality of the project.

Over the period of time this system has been in place, there has been a remarkable improvement in all areas. They are also gradually becoming self-sufficient and self-reliant. The income of the trained women potters has improved considerably, adding to their social stature and the prestige of the craft. Some of these women are now trainers themselves imparting the skills they have acquired to potters in the remote areas of the country.

Mrs. Margaret CHANDLER, Canadian ceramist, has been the head of the project; her leadership and contribution have been determining factors for the success of a pilot enterprise. Assessing this novel experience, Mrs. Chandler wrote:

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transported usually on the women’s back while the source of the clay soil is deteriorating. The potters often only have obsolete hand tools. Transportation to market and returning unsold goods is an onerous task. Furthermore, the clay products are increasingly forced to compete with glazed ceramics, plastic and aluminum.

**Activities**

In 1986, with the help of Belgian technical aid, the potters formed a self-help group. The group established a link with the Ethiopian Tourist Trading Enterprise (ETTE), which is a public institution aiming to contribute to the revival of Ethiopian arts and crafts through training activities. The ETTE placed regular orders with the group and the work was purchased in unfired form and paid for at the time of collection at a fair market price. The women potters benefited from a constant market without having the expense and labor of firing. All work was examined and criticized for quality of design, clay compositions, method or production. If it met the requirements, an order was placed and if not, alternatives or improvements suggested. In this way, training was given with incentives to improve and train women potters to gradually become self-sufficient. Their income improved considerably, adding to their social status and the prestige of their craft.

With financial assistance from the French Embassy in Addis Ababa in cooperation with the Alliance Ethio-Française and the Association for Artistic Activities in Paris, a Danish sculptor-ceramist of Ethiopian origin, Etiye Dimma Poulson was invited in 2002 to develop a pottery collection with new designs with a view to explore different markets for tourists, local resident foreigners and export.
a. Genet, liaison craft woman between Ketchene village and ETTE’s ceramic workshop said: “Just like my mother and my grandmother, I used to see my profession only as a means to feed my stomach and some days I couldn’t even do that! After I started working for the project, I discovered the potter’s wheel, firing and glazing techniques and I suddenly realized that I was an artist”.

b. Anne Cassiers, the Belgian crafts researcher and writer, spent many years in Ethiopia; she was a pioneer in revitalizing traditional know-how for helping the producers coming out from the downwards poverty spiral. She was exchanging information on traditional utensils destined to be miniaturized for the ETTE program.

c. A nun from the Muger Gedam convent, - in North Shewa where most of the craftspeople of the Ketchene come from, travels 400 km every month, in order to deliver to the project in Addis Ababa the miniature pottery and accessories for the dolls collection.

d. In 1990, a UN export sensitization mission to the Ethiopian Ministry of Industry (new Ideas for Export Development Aid INC.), evaluating the joint venture production, stated: “ETTE has the vision and talent to translate traditional designs and techniques into objects whose distinctive style would be a new expression of this ancient culture.”

e. The visit to the WPA workshop has become a must for Addis Ababa’s foreign residents such as diplomats’ wives, visitors and tourists. Traditional coffee ceremonies are organized to facilitate socialization and to create a convivial atmosphere for purchasing. This tourism trend i.e. to associate oneself with problems physically observed is called “Solidarity Tourism” and promotes similar principles to those of the “Fair Trade” concept. The growing tourist market brings new opportunities to the artisan potter community for facilitating the transition from the legacies of the past to modern needs such that the traditional skills are regenerated in a productive framework.

f. The exposure of the potters brought an invitation to a jar making competition during the 2002 Cultural Olympics in Athens; Woizero Negatua participated there representing the African Continent and it was the first time that a traditional Ethiopian artisan, a woman potter at that, traveled abroad to demonstrate her skills.

g. It is sometimes surprising to observe how the awareness could develop from a collective visit of craftpeople to a museum or to an exhibition since exposure opportunities are never given to despised handworkers. Women potters from Ketchene and men potters from ETTE visiting the Addis Ababa archaeological museum and paying a particular attention to the Axumite old pots exhibition.
markets. Stimulated by the exchanges with Etiye, the women potters produced unexpectedly high quality results in terms of formal and decorative “sculpted objects”.

In a context of extreme poverty, the success of members of the Women Potters Association, who participated in the training, aroused the hostility of those who were resistant to change. Nevertheless, the women realized what was at stake while the market confirmed its verdict on the merits of the new collection. The improvement of design is seen by all as a key strategy to make up for the progressive loss of the local market.

Finally, the beginning of success for the Women Potters Association in Ketchene Medhane Alem came from the opportunity to establish a partnership between public and private institutions. Artistic stimulation from outside was instrumental in triggering creativity in their work, to transform their products into art forms. Pottery making is re-established as a vital part of community life in Ketchene Medhane Alem, generating income amongst the poorest group.

Results and future prospects

Increased income: The average monthly income of each member of the Association is about ETB 500 (USD 60) compared to those who are working in other similar associations or individually that make approximately ETB 200 (USD 24). Furthermore, the Association has accumulated significant savings in the bank.

Model for others: Local authorities such as FEMSEDA (Ministry of Trade and Industry) and national projects such as the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project of the World Bank looked at the Women Potters Association as a useful case model.

Enhanced self-respect: the women potters no longer see their work as only a means to feed themselves and family but as an artistic expression. Some of the members are now being hired as trainers by local NGOs involved with rural project development.

Promotion: The “sculpted objects” collection has been exhibited at the French design event, St. Etienne Biennial Festival. In Ethiopia, “The Fire Women” exhibition was organized at the Alliance Ethio-Française in Addis Ababa. Furthermore, the new collection of pottery is promoted in different craft fairs and through several souvenir shops in Ethiopia. The work of the Association has also started to be exported to Austria and to the USA through MUYA Ethiopia PLC.

Too fragile: The pottery produced by the Women Potters Association is fired at low temperature. The fragility of the pots and their porous characteristic are still an obstacle to meet the export quality requirements.

Land: The Association has been told by the City Council to vacate the given holdings due to development pressures in Addis Ababa.

The women potters of Ketchene, no longer worry about finding buyers for their products nor do they spend their time or money marketing, as the customers come to their place to buy. “Not a day passes without a tourist or a foreigner living here visiting our workshop. Even if they don’t buy, it makes us happy just seeing their interest by coming”.

Ms Tizita of the Women Potters Association, Ketchene
Three centuries ago, most Ethiopians were self-sufficient and the average household provided its own raw materials. The women ground the grain and did the cooking and spinning, while the men tended the fields and wove the cloth for the family.

Spinning continued to be practiced in almost all households throughout the centuries.

However, weavers are still ostracised in Addis Ababa, particularly those who migrated during the turmoil out to the regions at the end of the Derg regime, and who are now considered as outsiders, working in poor conditions and missing the exposure despite their very high levels of skill.

A PRESTIGIOUS APPRAISAL OF THE WEAVING TRADITION "Twinning Designers and Artisans Action" at Bole International Airport Terminal Building Concourse.

MUYA was born from a trilogy of competence: a women entrepreneur - fashion designer, an engineer and an interior designer joining creative hands around a prestigious art work in the main concourse of the new terminal building of Addis Ababa’s Bole International Airport.

A PRESTIGIOUS GATEWAY TO ETHIOPIA

B. The banners, associate with an elegant plantscaping concept, optimize and harmonize the uses to which the airport concourse has been put for work or leisure, entertainment or worship, healing or learning.

Tradition and modernity merge to define the space and what it signifies for a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, be it power, authority, unity, security, wisdom, achievement, playfulness or serenity.

Dorze Tibeb weavers were carefully selected to produce high quality long lasting banners each 450cms long and 100cm wide. Each weaver took more than a month to weave a single banner. Every banner exhibits a specific artistic work adapted from traditional designs, handed down from one generation to the next, reflecting the high degree of skill.

The exposure given to the weavers brought a complete change in their attitudes and behavior.

The global success of the project prompted the stakeholders to extend the twinning of the designers and artisans’ creations into a permanent structure: MUYA (which means “the talent” in the Amharic language) was born from this synergy.

C. The brand new MUYA, was born out of diversifying a single iconic component of traditional Ethiopian dress, the hand-woven Tibeb border found on traditional shamma robes for men and kemis for women. For centuries, the multi-coloured Tibeb patterns have framed the white gauzy wraps and served as a pictorial narrative of tales that only the weavers are said to understand.

D. Weaving in Ethiopia is a home based male tradition. Quality control and management over the scattered weavers would have been a thorn in the side of developing an international product had not MUYA PLC been established as a creative center thanks to the support of the Addis Ababa Mayor, Mr. Arkebe Equbay.

Not only is the new work area for the weavers bright and functional, but they now have the feeling that they belong to a structure and that they are part of a system. Households now have a regular monthly income. When working individually, a weaver might have earned an average of Ethiopian Birr 400 monthly, whilst working at the MUYA workshop they make from Br. 800 up to Br. 1,200 on a piecework basis.

E. Alemu Tselea, a master weaver, didn’t want his son to come close to his loom. When he joined MUYA he changed his mind ...

F. Adjustments have been made on the looms to improve both the hygienic working conditions and the comfort of the weavers while keeping the familiar eucalyptus wooden frame structure.
II.2. The Art of Weaving by MUYA Ethiopia PLC

Background

MUYA Ethiopia PLC or Muya (which means occupation or talent in Amharic), was established in 2005 by like minded professionals who shared common aspirations to develop Ethiopian crafts into a brand responsive to a demand for modern lifestyles. The organization benefited from different perspectives and expertise brought together from an Ethiopian fashion designer, a French interior decorator, and a Sudanese-Greek engineer.

The objective of MUYA is to produce a range of articles that are innovative but at the same time based on tradition. This is achieved through improvising upon and exploring the potentials of the traditional 'tibeb’ - the multi coloured border of the hem of the highland women’s dress - and other designs, motifs and patterns from the existing repertoire and coming up with creations that are sophisticated, contemporary and even forward looking.

Activities

The project concentrated, in the first instance, on training some 120 selected weavers from the Shiro Meda area in a workshop situated in a historical building in the north of Addis Ababa. The weavers benefited from systematic training, facilities, subsidized lunches and guaranteed minimum monthly salaries; and such provisions freed them from material worries so that they could devote themselves to producing results that they could be proud of. In other words, one of the guiding principles of MUYA is to encourage weavers to overcome their debilitating attitudes and to develop self-respect, professional integrity and social responsibility.

Furthermore, MUYA can call beyond its in-house expertise for inspirations. It is able to bring from abroad artisans, designers and promoters with an international outlook and experience in developing craft activities. A good example is an ongoing twinning program between Ethiopian, Canadian and French experts through the design of logos, trademarks and catalogues. In order to stimulate the growth of the sector, MUYA looks for artisans - individual or organized - and encourages them by commissioning them or by just marketing their products for them.

The expertise accumulated through the activities of MUYA has been shared with projects initiated by other organizations. For example, it gave training for the UNESCO project in Lalibela and Weliso Women’s Prison as well as for UNIDO’s project involving Shiro Meda weavers village in Addis Ababa.

Results and future prospects

Increased income: When working on their own, these weavers earned Birr 400-500 (USD 50 - 60) a month. At MUYA, they consistently earn Birr 700-1200 (USD 80 - 140) per month.

International marketing: In Ethiopia, MUYA’s goods are available at the duty free shop in the Addis Ababa airport as well as at MUYA’s showrooms in northern Addis Ababa and in the compound of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The activities of MUYA and its principles have also featured in international publications such as British Airway’s in-flight magazine Impressions The International Herald Tribune and others. MUYA’s products have also been presented at numerous craft
A. Sara Abera created a collection of soft furnishings such as pillows, runners, throws, table settings and dinner sets by adding new colour schemes to the Tibet.

b. Sara has the charisma and vision of how cultural emancipation would benefit the craftspeople.

MUYA has uncorked the simmering Ethiopian yearning of cultural uniqueness by promoting awareness in them of the wealth of their country's traditional skills and socio-economic values.

C. Handbags by Harnold Haas

Harnold Haas, Austrian designer of fashion accessories, says: “I'm exclusively using textiles from MUYA. The most important part of my design is to reinvent the European savoir-faire in using Ethiopian textiles and to modernize them for high-end fashion boutiques.”

Through Haas handbags, MUYA's textiles have already reached some of the most up market shops around the world – from Club 55 in Saint Tropez (france) to designer shops in New York, Tokyo, Athens, Vienna and Zurich.

d. In summer 2006, MUYA opened its second sales outlet at the Rotunda, a recently renovated shopping arcade of the Africa Hall, headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, in Addis Ababa, in a revisited African Style - the result is very positive considering its short time in operation.

AFRICA IN FASHION

“Africa is fashionable,” so say fashion and decoration magazines...the “Africa Remix” exhibition on the African artists in the Georges Pompidou Centre, in Paris during spring 2005, “Africa Instinct” and other events express the rising interest for contemporary African creativity.

e. With the assistance of prestigious sponsors, MUYA was present in several major trade shows such as SIDIM Montreal, AMBIENTE Frankfurt, also New York, Ouagadougou “FIBERS AND MATERIALS FROM AFRICA,”... promoting a positive image of African ethnicity.

“AFRICAN LIFE STYLE”

When global fashion and luxury brands such as Gucci or Dior do African themed ranges or seasons, the prints and textiles are incorporated into their designs although Africa sees no return benefit from this cultural borrowing. MUYA anticipates that significant changes would be within reach if other entrepreneurs on the continent were more inventive in adapting their rich palettes of traditional arts and designs. Exposing these crafts to a large number of buyers will enhance their commercial value and exported volumes, which in turn, will force governments to pay more attention to help expand the sector by introducing meaningful incentives to would-be local and foreign investors.

The Ethiopian government’s Ministry of Trade and Industry acts as a facilitator of MUYA’s actions in simplifying procedures and supporting exposure and exchanges especially as far as export promotion is concerned.

f. The association of men weavers and women potters is now taking another dimension, that of artistic creativity stemming from the Ethiopian earth.

Once liberated from their socio-economic constraints, and when the appropriate insights and guidance are provided, the artisans express their creativity in the range of items they produce from the simple to the most delicate.

g. MUYA promotes the pottery of the Ketchene Women Potters Association through appropriate sampling, quality control and promotion in a “learn-as-you-do” process.

h. MUYA’s showroom attracts many shoppers as well as development specialists and visiting foreign delegations. Muya Ethiopia’s socially-responsible model has resulted in its becoming the first Ethiopian company to obtain coveted International Fair Trade Association (IFAT) membership.

TRAINING FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

In partnership with prestigious developers such as UNIDO, MUYA organized specific training sessions with appropriate reflection and subsequent curricula.

j. Celebrating, “By giving the craftspeople the respect that they deserve as well as the means to keep their ages-old traditions intact, there’s a precious inheritance for future generations. The broader objective is to raise their standards of living. Potters, wickers doing the basketry elements, silversmiths who make our silver items and so on these are talented people, who in the past, were outcast” (Sara Abera).

MUYA’s effort in exporting its products adds benefit to other small producers not having international exposure but whose output and skill is of international interest.
fairs such as New York Show, Frankfurt Ambiente and more recently at Montreal’s SIDIM Design Africa Trade Show and the Fibres and materials from Africa, for Fair Trade Fashion in Ouagadougou. The handwoven textiles of MUYA have also reached markets in Athens, New York, Paris, Tokyo, Vienna and Zurich.

**Enhanced partnership:** In order to stimulate the weavers creativity and to organize better the production of textiles, MUYA continuously explores new partnerships with artisans, designers, buyers and promoters. MUYA also established a mutually beneficial working relationship with the Addis Ababa administrations which facilitated the establishment of the workshop since MUYA created a sizeable employment for underprivileged weavers.

**Future development:** MUYA aspires to consolidate the many activities undertaken during the past two years and to build on the acquired experience. In particular, one of the development plans which is already in motion is expanding its operations by introducing another workshop at Senbeta, just outside Addis Ababa.

“Not having to worry where to get the money for the inputs and finding a buyer in due time, and instead being given all the necessary things including a spacious and attractive working area with a subsidized lunch, an assured monthly income that I can add to, is simply a freedom that asks of me nothing other than doing what I know how to do but do it with greater interest and undivided attention as never before and working with new patterns and with people who know much more than I makes the work enjoyable and motivates you to do more and new things all the time.”

*Alemu Tselea, Master Weaver, Muya Ethiopia PLC*
Trade but Not Aid

The presentation of the results of the intervention at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies has the dual purpose of creating "a textile revolution" and building self-confidence amongst the trainees; one of them expressed his feeling by saying: "A piece of cloth can be a piece of art ..."

Ancestral traditions build up the ethical elegance in harmony with Western expectation

By introducing new technologies and new raw materials, new products have been created to avoid competing with a saturated local market; this interaction resulted in ensuring low-income producers a decent living.
II.3 Culture Watch’s Shiro Meda Project: Textiles that talk “Tinegari Tibeb”

Background

CultureWatch is a project based in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa, which aims to promote cultural activities that are relevant to the social context of Ethiopia. In 2005 CultureWatch started a project with textile weavers of the Shiro Meda community in Addis Ababa.

The origin of the Shiro Meda weaving community goes back to the time of the imperial couple Menelik II and Taitu who were fond of the Tibeb, the intricate woven work with vivid silk or cotton threads. The first Minister of Defense in modern Ethiopia brought a group of weavers specialized in this weaving style from Gamu Gofa in southern Ethiopia. The weavers, who settled in the Shiro Meda area in Addis Ababa, were then appointed to provide textiles to the imperial court. The Tibeb lends richness and dignity to the humblest costume. CultureWatch encouraged the weavers to develop this well-established tradition one step further and to express their creative feelings through weaving. Under this project the weavers painted with their looms like their fellow artists do with a brush to produce textiles that tell their stories.

Activities

Out of the seven Shiro Meda cooperatives with a membership of some 190 weavers, 70 participated in the Tenageri Tibeb project of CultureWatch which lasted two years. The project encouraged the weavers to work on new forms and also to use new materials, both natural and artificial, such as acrylic, banana fiber, cotton strips, handspun cotton, satin ribbons, sisal, plastic strings, rayon, recycled plastic and wool. The aim was to explore modern approaches to traditional Tibeb for the contemporary use of products.

Contrary to the practice of many NGOs and international organizations, the trainees did not receive any per diems for taking part nor were they charged any payment. They were trained for half a day, allowing them the other half-day for their usual work. The main resource person for the training was a foreigner and the trainees being mostly illiterate, communications had to rely on interpreters. The training made use of visual aids through presentations of examples from abroad, but such examples were only shown and not made available to avoid a tendency to copy. The project also provided an opportunity to discuss social issues that affect the work of weavers such as HIV-AIDS and poverty.

The results of CultureWatch’s project were showcased at an exhibition entitled “Narrative Textiles” at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum in December 2005. This initiative was part of the objectives of the project which tries to develop public dialogues on culture and development and is also a reflection of the institutional support rendered by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

Results and future prospects

Increased income: As a result of the project, the income of the weavers increased significantly. For example, when a traditional netala shawl is retailed at ETB 60 (USD 6.5), The middleman’s buying price is normally around ETB 30. This means that the weaver receives ETB 30 for at least two days work and for which ETB 15 must be set aside for the cost of materials. One of the “narrative” woven shawls, produced as part of the project and took about the same amount of time and material as the traditional shawl, and was sold for ETB 400.

Entrepreneurship: After the training and the exhibition, 40 weavers decided to separate from the cooperative to form a joint business venture of their own. The weavers now look at their condition and social status differently from before.

Opportunity for new markets: As one of the weavers expressed, “a piece of cloth can be a piece of art . . .”, and yet all their works were conceived and handled by retaining the basic “Tibeb” designs but in new forms and appearance. The products developed through the project are meant to have their own application, and not to compete with traditional products and their existing markets. The textiles produced can be used for a wide range of products such as bedspreads, blinds, curtains, rugs, upholstery and wall hangings.

Promotion: The exhibition at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum enjoyed wide public attention. The results of the project were also presented at the ‘Fibers and Materials from Africa, for Fair Trade Fashion’ 2006 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
Capacity Building for Human and Social Resources for the Conservation and Development of the World Heritage of Lalibela
UNESCO /Japanese Funds-In-Trust and the Federal Democratic Government of Ethiopia

Lalibela the “Christian Citadel in the mountains of wondrous Ethiopia”

"By vast expense and hideous pain, the rock a church became”
(Hiob Ludolf, New History of Ethiopia, 1684)
Carved by hand out of the solid mountainside hundreds of years ago, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are awe-inspiring in their beauty and uniqueness. Almost all tourists to Ethiopia visit Lalibela despite its remoteness and the relative discomfort.

The World Heritage of Lalibela
Lalibela, which has been inscribed on the World Heritage List, is home to a range of ceremonial and decorative but mostly utilitarian arts and crafts - from mystical architecture, sacred art to farming implements, their users ranging from kings and queens, high priests and shamans to nomads.

Training to creativity
The UNESCO project in Lalibela brought product designers and experienced local experts to work together with artisans in creating tradition-based but market-guided product lines, for ensuring grassroots artisan participation in the tourism development.
As part of the training to enhance creativity, the participants were introduced to simple references from the historic city of Lalibela for inspiration and adaptation to diversified market-driven products.
The churches windows have been regrouped as established design elements; those forms that are easily identifiable through the thick texture of time and for everyone become “archetype” because they maintain simple principles and provide reference points for the memory of a community.
The artisans took as a challenge this cultural integration to produce pottery items, embroidery, paintings, carvings, etc.

b. Awareness Building: A Give and Take Experience
Various attempts have been made to adapt some typical leather tooling as indicated above, like the ecclesiastical bookcase into fashionable articles by simply reviving vanishing craft traditions.

\[\text{Mergeta Aymmetric Tshehay (left), a very multi-talented craftsman, applies an attractive sewing technique which he learned at the church during his childhood to produce a lady’s unique shoulder bag designed by Mammo Mengistu (right) an architect specialized in product design.}\]

b. How to strike a balance between preserving a centuries old culture on the one hand, and the external influences of contemporary demands on the other, has thus been the challenge of the training.
Local artisans are in no better position when it comes to the hardships of living in Lalibela or Lasta.
There is no need to enumerate again the monotonous catalogue of problems here. Suffice it to say that The Artisanal Development Training Workshop of Lalibela did address all of the key problems and relevant issues concerning the sector.
The relationship between art and religion is so sacred that the craftsman can impart little of his own creativity to his handiwork and merely makes a copy of what he is exposed to. Hence, the common efforts of the trainers aimed at a progressive liberation of the trainees from the taboos and beliefs while looking at the religious cultural heritage, not only as a precious achievement, but also as an inspiration for the creative development of a contemporary artistic expression.
Having shared the same training experience, with increased understanding of the market requirements for quality and style, the artisans are working together as a small business group, not as individuals.

Training Beneficiaries
A vivid contrast between the two photographs:
C. Women potters given a test before the training;
d. The same women after one week of training are dressed differently and look much more self confident.

With encouragement and exposure to innovative capacity and theoretical training, however rudimentary, an immediate positive impact on the lack of self-esteem resulting from a psychological complex, taboos and negative beliefs is evident.

Coming off the down spiral...
With the expected tourist demand for items which are culturally valued and not hopelessly threatened by imported goods, most of the social restrictions applied to the artisans...
are expected to gradually lessen; the social status usually follows the state of economic situations.

This typical production shifting experience was supported among others, during the visit of the prototypes exhibition, by a group of prisoners, through a briefing geared to increasing an understanding of the artistic value of craft culture and artisan work, as well as tourist spending opportunities in the historic city of Lalibela.

e. In this context, tourist market-guided product lines were introduced as key factors for successful reinsertion.

The same curious bias that applies to potters that landowning classes looked down upon them (probably because their power to turn natural materials into objects was associated with magic)- applied until recently to blacksmiths; Fantaye Getnet worked isolated on his pick until he heard about the training going on and came spontaneously to offer his services: he produced in one day 6 sets of forks and knives for the table dressing program, undeniably primitive but yet attractive for their originality.

II.4. Crafts Development Training in Lalibela

Background

Owing to its marvelous complex of rock-hewn churches, included on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978, Lalibela is Ethiopia’s number one tourist destination all year round. The greater territory of Lasta surrounding the town is, however, one of the most environmentally degraded parts of the country with continuous problems of drought, food shortages and poverty. Even though the people of Lasta (who are said to be related to the Beta Israel or Falasha) are known for their creativity, visitors to Lalibela can hardly find local souvenirs. Except for paintings on parchment and copies of old crosses, most of the items sold in Lalibela are imports from Addis Ababa and beyond.

With a view to improving the situation and to empower the local craftspeople to develop income generating activities, a three-week training workshop was organised in September and October 2004 in Lalibela, as part of the UNESCO/Japanese Funds-in-Trust project “Capacity Building for Human and Social Resources for the Conservation and Development of the World Heritage of Lalibela.”

Activities

At the outset, the project conducted a mission to assess the situation and determine the training methodology. The participants were then selected in such a way that the group had a good gender balance and a mixture of occupational backgrounds. The project focused on pottery, rugs, dolls and figurines, painting and calligraphy, spinning and weaving, knitting and embroidery as well as wood and wickerwork.

Through the training workshop, it became clear that craftspeople in Lalibela had not been developing their crafts partly because they have been trapped in routine activities and they lacked basic raw materials and
a. Ato Haile, representative of the Regional Culture and Tourism Bureau and Ato Getu from the ARCCH Addis Ababa giving their inputs to the trainees; they have been very concerned by the various aspects of the cultural heritage revival and especially by some orientation with the view to contributing to alleviating trafficking in taking out the Cultural Heritage of the region. While protecting the tradition products are diverted from their sole religious preoccupation without losing their quality and sacred characteristics - and turned into high quality handicraft products. The contribution of the Bureau to the logistics of the project has been well received by all parties.

b. Raw material producers have been tightly involved and some vanishing activities started to revive like the goatskin treatment needed for the parchment (vellum) as painting support. Mesmur Johannes Atefour has been supplying several skins for the workshop ordered at the time of the assessment mission, thus allowing time to reduce the smell.

c. Tebet Hailu G.Mariam, an over 80 year-old priest, is the only wood carver left in the Bugena area able to produce material for the worship; small icons, "tabots" (tabernacles) in a crude way of flat engraving; the project introduced appropriate high quality carving tools thus generating an immediate attraction amongst the contract carpenters who took them home for practice.

d. For a better understanding of the training context and for planning as well, future follow up of the trainees, some of their work places were visited; e.g. Mergetta Zelalem in his village of Nakutola. Most trainees had to walk two hours or more to come to the training site.

e. Ato Mulugeta G.Mariam, (left) Assistant Administrator of the Bugna Woreda and his team seen here visiting the prototypes exhibition on 17 October 2004, have been very enthusiastic about the workshop achievements - which have been said to be totally unexpected in terms of social, cultural and economic exposure - especially considering the short intervention time. They are now much concerned to build a project together that will extend and sustain this pilot scheme after giving the hope of a better life to the artisans and their families.

MARKET - DRIVEN PRODUCTS

during the training process, a few tourist groups were invited to evaluate the impact of the trial on an informal basis. The general assessment has been of great interest regarding the approach for solving the lack of originality of true artifacts as well as the lack of representativeness of the unique cultural environment experienced during the churches tour.

Most interesting also were the common wishes to contribute to an experience seen by most outsiders as an attempt at poverty alleviation, such poverty which they were shocked to witness without being able to help. While expressing their concern for knowing more about the project and UNESCO’s involvement, the Consultant was sometime requested repeatedly to give an evening lecture to the Roha Hotel guests on the integration of the handicrafts as a significant element of socio-cultural discovery.

g. Experience has shown that, when safely back home again, tourists often feel the urge to invite friends to taste the culinary curiosities of exotic lands. This opportunity has been exploited to promote the particular farmers’ production such as honey and spices using an original ceramic packaging inspired by the unique indigenous architecture of the historic city. The next phase will be to produce adequate literature and information regarding the special properties of Lalibela honey.

h. Original packaging is sometimes more important than the gift itself; here, a traditional food basket of much interest to tourists, finds a new function as packaging for a coffee set, appropriate for tourists to take home invoking a symbolic legend of Ethiopia: its coffee ceremony.

Passing on knowledge, hands to hands. This kind of action does not cost millions of dollars but is invaluable. Stay Teferi a craft master originally from Nakutola (a church site near Lalibela) returning from Addis Ababa where he migrated during the 1970s, with young trainees.
Involvement of the association members with the refurbishing works of the House of the Artisans has been the approach to create a conducive environment; proud artisans are now demonstrating making crafts in the courtyard (weavers and spinners, embroiderers, basket makers), under the shade (potters) and on the first floor converted to an art gallery designed not only to promote interaction between artisans and buyers but also as a venue for workshops. A self-service shopping area has been created on the ground floor together with a permanent project promotion area.

Enhanced creativity: Even though facilities were basic, the event was well received according to the evaluation given by the participants and by outsiders. The main outcome was that the craftspeople, once materials and elementary technical knowledge were made available, were capable of taking the initiative in creating a range of products as demonstrated in the production of the prototypes by the trainees.

The House of the Artisans

In early 2007 UNESCO's Addis Ababa Office started a follow up activity to support the establishment of a craft association in Lalibela. Apart from renovating a town house which became a center of craft activities and a sales point, UNESCO provided additional management training, as well as covering the initial rent of the house and start up assistance.

Self-reliance building: With the view to making the artisans' centre fully operational until the sale of handicrafts could do so, partnership collaboration was proposed between the association, the public sector (the regional Culture and Tourism Bureau), a private sponsor (BGI Ethiopia) and another association (Jamber, the Lalibela Youth Association) to diversify the items and activities offered to the tourists through the economic increase in value of the indigenous commodities. The House of the Artisans has now met its targets. These are mainly to offer an attractive and conducive environment for handicraft activities supported with appropriate basic skill training and technical and financial assistance. It is expected that in due course the Association will become a self-sustaining model.
II.5 Textile Training for Women in Weliso Prison: Rehabilitation and Empowerment

Background

In 2005, UNESCO initiated a training project on weaving for female prisoners in Weliso prison in collaboration with the Justice for All - Prison Fellowship Ethiopia and MUYA Ethiopia PLC. Most female prisoners at Weliso prison come from deprived backgrounds with no occupations and the prison does not offer any activities to improve the situation during their detention (contrary to male prisoners who are engaged in a number of activities including weaving). The project aimed to equip female prisoners with the basic skills of weaving, on which the women could rely for their livelihood and become self-sufficient when released from jail.

Activities

A purpose designed workshop was constructed at the beginning of the project and the space was equipped with six metal looms. Two senior weavers from MUYA Ethiopia PLC gave weaving training to 30 women in three groups, each of 10 people for one month. A male prisoner acted as a coordinator and interpreter. These groups of female prisoners who completed the training were given certificates during a graduation ceremony in January 2007.

Results and future prospects

New skill and hope for future: After one month of training, hitherto novice female prisoners were able to produce textiles with motifs of their choice. The female prisoners were so excited with the prospect of obtaining a new skill so that some of them who completed their prison terms begged to be allowed to stay in the prison to finish the training.

Basic income: Those female prisoners who completed the training immediately started to earn income by...
solving the textiles that they produced. This is a crucial change in the lives of the women prisoners, some of whom have to bring up their children in the prison. Lack of a market near the prison, however, presents a challenge in finding a reliable opportunity for selling the products.

**Awareness:** At the beginning of the project it was not always easy to engage female prisoners, particularly the elders group, with weaving activities. It was necessary to explain to them the potential benefit that the training would bring to their livelihood.

**Next step:** UNESCO has launched in 2007 the second phase of the project to continue the training in Debre Birhan. Once again, a new workshop facility will be built to be equipped with looms and training will be given to female prisoners by MUYA Ethiopia PLC. At the same time, Prison Fellowship Ethiopia will monitor the activity of the female prisoners of the Weliso prison during and after their prison terms to provide necessary support to continue weaving.

**II.6. Gulele Handloom weavers’ training**

**Background**

In 2006, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI) launched a project “Unleashing the Potential of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise in Ethiopia”. This project targeted the Gulele area of Addis Ababa where there are many resident weavers. The main objective of the project is to provide training to weavers in order to upgrade their technical skills to improve the quality of the woven fabrics.

**Activities**

The beneficiaries of the project were 60 weavers from the Gulele handloom cluster of Addis Ababa. The training took place for one month in Shiro Meda and in Addisu Gebeya, to which MUYA provided trainers and supervised all sessions.

Through the training, most of which was in the form of practical sessions, the weavers learned and discussed different aspects of textile production that included: the selection of raw materials, the introduction of new designs, the exploration of better marketing opportunities, the enhancement of product ranges especially fabrics for home decoration and furnishing, increased awareness of contemporary fashion trends and the possible establishment of professional cooperatives.

In addition, considerable time was devoted to discuss psychological and socio-cultural matters affecting the handicraft sector in general and handloom weaving in particular. The core issues were good working habits and discipline, the importance of networking and family planning.

**Results and future prospects**

**Promotion:** At the end of the training, the products such as Tibebe cushions, pouches and pillow covers, using the fabrics prepared by the participants of the training were presented at an exhibition organised at the training site.

**Job opportunities:** After the workshop, MUYA subcontracted some of the trained weavers to produce high quality fabrics. This has become a mutually beneficial relationship, allowing MUYA to obtain guaranteed quality products and the weavers an increased income and skill improvement.

**Reduced operating costs:** Since MUYA can make the raw materials available on credit, the selling prices were reduced, thus allowing the fabrics to become more competitive. This also provides flexibility in subcontracting according to orders and production schedules.

**II.7 World Bank’s Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project: Artisanal Craft Development**

**Background**

The Ethiopian Cultural Heritage project concerns a “Learning and Innovation Loan” of about USD 5 million from the World Bank to the Government of Ethiopia. The project is executed by the Programme Coordination Unit established within the Ethiopian Tourism Commission with the involvement of the “Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage.” The main objective of this project, which started in 2003 and will be completed in the beginning of 2008, is testing out and developing the means for integrating conservation and management of Ethiopian cultural heritage into the economic development of the country.

In order to achieve this aim, the project includes a component on artisanal craft development. Poverty alleviation and employment generation is a primary focus of the artisanal crafts development activities which are designed to reflect the idea that culture and sustainable development are closely linked and that cultural heritage can be an avenue of development.

**Activities**

The project provided pilot learning opportunities for artisans in Addis Ababa, Aksum, Gondar and Harar with design guidance, business training and improved technical skills. These activities were conceived to equip craft people with skills to become operational with market oriented craft designs and products.

Furthermore, the project envisages the creation of a craft centre in all pilot sites. The centres are intended
If
to be used for coordinating design development, sample production and for sales. They will also serve as ethnographic and design resource centres for craftspeople, designers and promoters.

Results and future prospects
Large numbers of craftspeople trained: As one of the main activities of the project, training was provided to more than 420 craftspeople in all four project sites to improve their technical skills. Some of them were identified as trainers who were then expected to transmit newly acquired knowledge to others. In parallel, business skill training was also provided to the craftspeople focusing on entrepreneurship, business planning, marketing management and partnership.

New designs developed: At the onset of the project, international and Ethiopian experts analyzed existing products, their designs and their market potential. Craft prototypes were then developed through a series of workshops. According to the project coordination unit, ninety-nine product lines were created with over 1,000 new individual designs.

Trade fairs: With a view to test the products, the project participated in nine local trade fairs in different parts of the country as well as in international trade fairs in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. While the products were well received - particularly leather goods, basketry and woodwork - at these fairs, the project learnt that it takes much organisation of product lines to be able to deliver goods on time and in large quantities.

Continuation of the project: Many of the activities envisaged in the project have not yet been completed and are ongoing until the end of the project in January 2008.

III Findings and lessons

While the case studies presented in the previous section have different approaches and characteristics, there are certain common lessons to be drawn.

1. Most activities implemented on Ethiopian craft development concern women potters and men weavers. They are among the most denigrated of Ethiopia’s traditional artisans while their numbers (there are said to about 100,000 weavers and 4,000 potters in Addis Ababa alone) are extensive throughout the country. This means that any socio-economic change that can be brought to the lives of these craftspeople have a significant impact.

2. Interventions in creativity, marketing and improvement of productivity brought immediate improvement in the level of income for craftspeople. Considering that most of them support a household of several people, this welcome change affects many more people than just those undertaking training activities.

3. Projects work best when craftspeople can be liberated, even temporarily, from their socio-economic constraints so that they can look at their environment critically. Only then would there be productivity, work discipline, professional integrity, the confidence and pride in their occupation or skill, especially when it is demonstrated and made self-evident that creative intervention pays off with a better income, job security and better prospects.

4. Cooperation between private and public initiatives can be beneficial in bringing together different experiences and resources for crafts development.

5. Some of the successful creative interventions not only improve the quality of production but they contribute to creating a new range of products that are based on tradition yet suitable for contemporary use in response to market needs.

6. The experience and guidance of resource persons was indispensable in all projects. Resource persons must have a deep understanding of the socio-cultural context of Ethiopia that affects the activities of craftspeople. In order for resource persons to operate effectively, they must be supported by institutions concerned for logistics and the approach taken. It is also necessary that the resource persons work with the craftspeople with patience and respect. The objectives or benefits of intervention may not be clear to craftspeople at the outset, and they may even resist change and new ideas.

7. Sustainability is a challenge that most projects with limited resources and duration of interventions face. Moreover, small credit opportunities or subsidies for procurement of raw materials made available to artisans can result in significant achievements provided that they are well thought out and properly administered. The establishment of a craft council may be another way to ensure continued support for craftspeople both in terms of design and quality guidance and of raising funds.
ROOTS...

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE IS BASED ON ITS ROOTS OF IDENTITY AND THE GIVEN ENVIRONMENT.

Going to market, this boy’s attire reflects the whole handicraft trade of his remote village: he is dressed in warm sheepskin and carries an egg basket made of split cane; on his shoulder he has a woven cotton gabi which is often worn as a turban to keep the head cool; on his feet he wears durable rubber sandals made from salvaged vehicle tires.

FLOWERINGS...

MODERNITY REINVENTS TRADITION.

At the new terminal of Addis Ababa International Airport, the Master Weaver with his magical talent and inspiration from an ancient legacy has taken Ethiopian textiles, and the Tibeb (the multi-coloured border on the hem of the highland woman’s dress), to a new dimension, with new forms and designs for the modern era and its new lifestyles.

Jacques Dubois, who’s involvement with Ethiopian Crafts goes back as far as Emperor Haile Selassie’s time, discloses opportunities offered by a unique cultural heritage as a breeding ground for contemporary creators; he also evaluates certain developments happening, and partnerships being forged, in potentially rich but paradoxically ostracized sectors – pottery and weaving – for bridging the apparent gulf between, and for bringing together, the traditional and the modern with the overriding concern of mitigating poverty and reducing unemployment.