

Kenyan Woman-Owned Home-Décor Company Enters Mainstream U.S. Market

SUCCESS STORY

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Mohazo team, Zohra Baraka and Jake Steve, crouch before their ready-to-ship home décor items, destined for the U.S.

Zohra Baraka stands in a sea of hand-carved home décor items. Her bright taffeta Swahili-style dress is especially vivid against the wooden items drying at her feet: 20,000 pieces in 62 variations. Big Five African safari animals feature prominently in the bowls, stools and figurines. Once the wooden items reach the proper moisture level, they'll be boxed for shipment to U.S. retailer HomeGoods, which has hundreds of stores scattered throughout the states. It's her largest U.S. order to date, valued at \$200,000, and a game changer for her Kenyan-based home décor company called Mohazo.

Zohra has already paid the nearly 400 artisans who contributed to each hand-carved piece. The remaining profit will go to finance her next big export to the U.S., which shouldn't be long given her now proven capacity for high-volume supply.

In East Africa, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face significant hurdles to growing their businesses because of a lack of access to appropriate financial services. Zohra has just overcome this problem by making a 40% profit on her largest-to-date shipment.

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USAID has been working with Zohra since 2009, supporting her to attend several of the trade shows that have informed her understanding of the U.S. market and helped her create linkages with serious buyers. Her game-changer deal resulted from a combination of a trade show linkage and a U.S. buyer mission supported by the USAID East Africa Trade and Investment Hub (the Hub).

The HomeGoods website states its commitment to the American consumer, “finding what you love at a price you adore.”

Increasingly, U.S. buyers are coming to East Africa to find the products that Americans love and at a price they are willing to pay. African trade show exhibitions organized by USAID Hubs play a critical role.

“Only through exhibitions and organizations like yours (the USAID East Africa Trade and Investment Hub) do we get direct access to buyers,” said Jake Steve, Zohra’s on-the-ground manager and recent participant at the Hub-supported MAGIC trade show in Las Vegas, Nevada.

TJ Maxx, sister company to HomeGoods, requested samples at MAGIC. Mohazo’s momentum continues to grow.

The U.S. is the largest consumer market in the world. It offers a massive range of opportunities for exporters, and the African Growth and Opportunity Act provides a competitive advantage.

When Kenyan companies capitalize on AGOA, they drive economic growth and job creation in their home country and in the U.S.