



The Alliance for Artisan Enterprise **CRAFTS A GLOBAL PLAN**

In the developing world, it is at the intersection of art and commerce where lives are changed. At the request of the State Department, the Institute sketches a plan for how to bolster artisans and transform futures.

BY KAREN SOMMER SHALETT • ALL PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY GLOBAL GOODS PARTNERS

Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy, a women's rights organization in rural Pakistan, provides education and access to employment for Pakistani women through artisan craft.

Throughout her travels in the developing world, former Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton** saw thousands of low-income women working in what is known as the artisan sector and knew there were millions more who could benefit from boosting this sector. Artisan businesses often lack the support that they need to realize their full potential. One of Secretary Clinton's priorities at the close of her term was to establish the Alliance for Artisan Enterprise, a member-based organization seeking to promote and accelerate what is already an economic driver, second only to agriculture in developing nations. "Secretary Clinton ensured... that our foreign policy efforts helped to lift people up, to lift their families up, and to lift societies out of poverty," said Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues **Melanne Vermeer** at the launch event for the Alliance. "This advances our own security, prosperity, and values."

Recognizing the Institute's global reach, role as a neutral convener, and expertise, Secretary Clinton tapped the Aspen Global Health and Development policy program to establish and manage the Alliance. "Our role, in some way,

This artisan rolls paper beads from recycled materials at Friends-International, a social enterprise in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, that employs parents of former street children.



Khamak is an intricate form of embroidery, unique to the Kandahar region in Afghanistan.

was like a spark," said Vermeer. "[It] blossomed into this groundbreaking organization under the dedicated leadership of the Aspen Institute, and into a wonderful partnership."

"Indeed, this unique partnership with the State Department has already allowed us to work together to increase jobs and create viable businesses for hundreds of thousands of women and their families around the world," said **Peggy Clark**, Institute vice president of policy programs and director of the Alliance.

The World Bank reports that women and girls reinvest approximately 90 percent of their income back into their families. "Empowering women economically serves as the leading barrier to trafficking, military conscription, poverty, lack of health care and education — not just for themselves, but for entire villages," says Alliance member and Dara Artisans Co-Founder **Dan Brewster**.

The time has never been better to stand up this sector. According to the 2010 United Nations' "Creative Economy Report," the global market for artisan products totaled \$32 billion in 2008. Even as the global economy plummeted by 22 percent, "exports of artisan products actually doubled over the period 2002 to 2008."

"There's a confluence of variables that point to future success in marketing artisan goods," says Brewster. "We've certainly got the supply



“Higher-end pieces marked with fair trade labels sold 14 percent more than the same products without the labels.”

of a highly skilled artisan product, and we have an emerging consumer in both demographic and psychographic terms.”

Brewster points to a 2012 MIT/Harvard study testing the appetite for fair trade goods at 111 Banana Republic outlet stores. Higher-end pieces marked with fair trade labels sold 14 percent more than the same products without the labels. “Not only is there increased market demand for products from the artisan sector, there is an urgency to invest in the sector for its other benefits — preserving ancient traditions and cultural diversity that respects the uniqueness of people and place,” says Clark.

“The fast fashion supply chain, tarnished by recent incidents like the building collapse in Savar, Bangladesh, leave people clamoring for a socially responsible alternative,” said **Conor French**, CEO of Indego Africa, a nonprofit social enterprise advancing African woman-owned cooperatives. “And the artisan sector, with its increasing focus on fair trade practices and producer well-being, can naturally fill that void. One recurring issue is that artisan enterprises, without a degree of support, have often proven difficult to scale or exist in areas cut off from functional access to global commerce.”

The Alliance hopes to help solve that. **Rangina Hamidi** runs Kandahar Treasure, the first woman-owned and operated business in one of the most difficult places in Afghanistan. She has turned traditional fine-needle embroidery pieces into viable

Afghan artisans embroider goods to export at Kandahar Treasure, which employs more than 400 women in Afghanistan's most volatile region.

Clockwise from left: Artisans from Swaziland, Pakistan, and Afghanistan use local materials and traditional techniques to sell to native and international retail partners including Global Goods Partners.



incomes for more than 400 Afghan women. Recognized by the State Department as an enterprise it wished to support, the company received guidance and a grant that ultimately led to a relationship with nonprofit online retailer Global Goods Partners. Since connecting with the Alliance, Global Goods, itself, has met other industry partners offering portals for the crafts it markets.

As a result, Kandahar Treasure is just one of the artisan-made brands represented by Global Goods that can now be purchased on Walmart's website through its Empowering Women Together program. "There are many challenges inherent in working with the artisan sector," said **Sarah Thorn**, Walmart's senior director of international trade. "We believe that by working with like-minded NGOs, businesses, and governments, we can devise strategies to overcome sourcing barriers and help artisan communities thrive." West Elm and Coca-Cola, among others, joined Walmart in using the Alliance to connect with the artisans in developing countries the brands strategically support.

"The handicraft blueprint for development is outdated," said French. "It needs new models, new ideas, and new collaborations to attract broader support and to help people understand its considerable power to change lives and catalyze economic and social progress in entire communities. The Alliance for Artisan Enterprise will accelerate and incubate this reimagining of the artisan sector's value." ♦

