

SUCCESS STORY

Southern African handcrafted accessories making it big on the U.S. market

Southern African accessories suppliers are sending their unique pieces to U.S. consumers, setting them up for bigger sales in the future.



Proud moment as some suppliers of Zoggs Design send off the packaged products to the United States, from their workshops in the Lubombo region of Eswatini

“Consumers are moving away from mass produced products, and the rise of the millennial buyer has made authentic hand-crafted pieces a strong market trend. This group are choosing to buy natural, handmade products that tell a story. Products from Southern Africa are well positioned to take advantage of this trend, and USAID and SWIFT’s support is helping them to make it big in this new market.”

– Julie Nixon, Country Director, SWIFT

Consumers in the United States can now own beautiful, handcrafted products made in Southern African countries thanks to the efforts of the Trade Promotion Service Provider (TPSP) Swaziland Fair Trade (SWIFT), which is supported by the USAID Southern Africa Trade and Investment Hub (USAID TradeHub). Typically, firms in the handmade home décor, leather and fashion accessories, and natural skincare sectors across Southern Africa, struggle to connect with buyers in the United States. These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also saw domestic markets shrink. Consequently, the marketing expertise provided by the USAID TradeHub-contracted SWIFT was instrumental in supporting these firms to finally get a foot in the door with retailers based in the United States.

Between 2020 and 2021, 52 firms from Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa were featured in the product catalog produced by SWIFT the ‘Southern Africa Handmade Look-Book’, which was disseminated widely to U.S.-based buyers. Furthermore, 27 of these firms received tailored marketing and brand development support to participate in a series of virtual tradeshows (buyer missions). This resulted in linkages being made with well-known sourcing agents and buyers with access to approximately 2,000 retail outlets across the United States.

Following this well coordinated and targeted sales approach, the Eswatini-based handicrafts and accessories manufacturer Swazi Candles closed a deal to supply candles valued at \$65,000 and Zoggs Design, a maker of handicrafts, shipped decorative bowls and ornaments valued at \$10,067 to the U.S.-based retailer HomeGoods. Likewise, other Eswatini firms are starting small but now have sales expansion plans, including Baobab Batik’s deal to supply cushions valued at \$1,500, Tsandza Weaving to supply clothing and textiles valued at \$2,247, and Gone Rural’s baskets and homeware order worth \$3,090, all of which are destined for the U.S.-based buyer A Bridge for Africa. As women-led and women-focused businesses, employing women artisans in Eswatini, exports to the U.S. market from these small firms will increase their collective incomes. Their champion, Julie Nixon, leads the women-focused SWIFT and understands the value of developing women’s supply chains. She notes, “The handmade sector in Eswatini is very advanced in design, quality and social responsibility. These aspects are key to fulfilling the market need for products that are authentic and make a difference.”