

The Role of the Crafter in Development

Evelyn Senna



Craftspeople, or crafters, play an important role in all six areas of the South African government's Reconstruction and Development Program: education and training; arts and culture; youth development; building the economy; the environment; and industry, trade, and commerce. "Craft is important," says Kushu Dlamini of KwaZulu-Natal, a potter and bead-worker, "because craft is a way of life. It is part of the culture of the people, what people rely on to earn a living."

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In recent years entrepreneurship, especially in small-sized enterprises, has become a dominant theme in development economics. This sector is seen as essential for growth, job creation, and social progress. Those with entrepreneurial talents should not only survive, but prosper.

This emphasis in policy is ideal for a craft industry composed of small, flexible enterprises that adapt easily to changing market opportunities. Crafts require relatively little capital, can com-

Small-sized enterprises such as this brass factory have become a dominant factor in development economies. *Photo courtesy SATOUR*

bine simple and advanced technology as appropriate, and, being generally labor-intensive, contribute significantly to job creation.

There is a major need for craft awareness programs to show that creating crafts can actually be a lucrative business. In the words of Dave Innes at the First National Bank (FNB) Vita Regional

Craft Now Exhibition in North West Province in 1997, "South Africa's unique and excellent craftsmanship stands out in a world where production-line mediocrity has become acceptable. To avoid the melting pot syndrome, we must protect and acknowledge every single entity of our country's heritage."

Tourists are no longer looking for

galleries to showcase the best of the province," says Steven Modise, a Northern Cape textile designer and printer, "and to facilitate craft development through teaching."

"When we attend workshops," says Louis Thabo Muir, a woodcarver and potter in the North West Province, "we want to be awarded with certificates

teaching of others, while opening up career paths and additional income-generating activities for them;

- enabling partnerships between schoolteachers and crafters in order to enrich the experience and skills of teachers by introducing them to cultural activities;
- stimulating the creative and cultural development of in-school learners through crafts; focusing and developing the creative energy and potential income-generating skills of youngsters through crafts; and developing teachers' confidence and enthusiasm as they develop their own skills;
- encouraging the use of museums and galleries as educational resources;
- harnessing the capabilities and resources of professional craftspeople for the purposes of promoting arts and culture education and training in all areas of learning.

Through advocacy, education, and training, we are investing in the future development and support of the arts.

A craftsperson puts the finishing touches on a doll. Job creation is a major component of the South African crafts industry.

Photo courtesy GCIS



ethnic craft per se but are seeking well-made and original crafts; as a result, there is a need for training in product development, in creating objects that can be marketed all over the world. The craft industry's major concerns are lacks in financial assistance, public exposure, export opportunities, and organizational infrastructure.

Crafters need to develop the skills to coordinate their own exhibitions, to have their works exhibited to the local public, and to promote an interest in and appreciation for craft on all levels in all regions. Workshops are needed in rural or other underprivileged areas to develop skills in basic business management, accounting, craft marketing, sustainability, quality control, retail sales, and running permanent provincial craft galleries.

"We need permanent provincial

that empower us to teach others."

There is also a need for a craft magazine or journal that can help the industry, giving crafters exposure, putting them in touch with one another, and creating a network among people in the craft industry. And there is an ever-increasing demand for a single, detailed, and continuously updated database of crafters.

To address these and other needs, the Craft Development Project Trust has entered into partnership with the National Crafts Council of South Africa (the former Craft Action Body) with the following goals in mind:

- increasing opportunities for craftspeople to participate equitably in arts- and culture-related industries;
- adding levels of self-investigation, creative conceptualization, and communication for crafters through their

Suggested Reading

Meyer, L. 1994. *Art and Craft in Africa: Everyday Life, Ritual, Court Art*. Paris: Pierre Terrail.

The journal *Craft News*, published by the National Craft Council of South Africa, Craft Action Body since 1997, contains many articles of interest.

Evelyn Carrass Senna is chairperson of the National Crafts Council of South Africa, a fine arts lecturer at the University of the North West, crafts panelist member of the National Arts Council, and managing director of Ngeba Crafts. She is also provincial chairperson of the Craft Action Body in North West Province and interim chairperson of the province's Arts and Culture Council.