

## CRAFTS AND DEVELOPMENT

MAIGA OUMOU MAIGA

Malian crafts are a legacy from the past but also very much a part of the present—and the future.

People generally think of crafts as the artistic expression of a civilization or culture, but they are much more. Crafts are an important economic resource for Malians, and in 1995 the government adopted a Craft Code to protect and develop craft activity, which the code defined as all basically manual extraction, transformation, or production of goods or services, in metalwork (such as tool-making and appliance repair), woodworking (from carpentry to paper-making), textile and leather work (such as tailoring and tanning), mining and building trades, food processing and preparation (from meat-cutting to milling grain), health and body care (from hairdressing to incense-making), as well as arts. Crafts encompass not only objects used in rituals and traditional ceremonies, but also objects used in daily life.

Craft production requires smaller-scale investment than other sectors of the economy, and this is an advantage for a country



like Mali where investment capital is scarce. Nearly 60 percent of the Malian work force is employed in craft production, which creates many jobs and contributes 15 percent of the GNP. In rural areas as well as cities, the production of crafts has a ripple effect on income and thus plays an important role in fighting poverty. Profits from the sale of crafts contribute to the improvement of the artisans' living conditions and are a source of income for the country. Craft businesses broaden and improve skills, especially among women and youth. They allow marginalized groups, such as lepers, to earn a living by working. Crafts help to develop human, economic, and financial

resources, while at the same time serving to promote tourism and commerce.

The durability of the crafts sector has always been assured by the role it plays in social and cultural life. Religious celebrations, family ceremonies, customs of dress, and culinary traditions all illustrate how inseparable and mutually reinforcing are Malians' daily lives and their craft heritage. Each generation of artisans has added its signature to the historical legacy of Malian craftsmanship, enriching it further. Including craft production in Mali's development strategy will considerably reduce poverty and contribute to Mali's socioeconomic success. ■



(Top) Nakunté Diarra of Kolokani uses a bamboo stick to apply the mud design on a cotton cloth. Photo © Tavy Aherne

(Top right) Nacani Kante makes a pottery vessel. Photo © Barbara Frank

(Left) Tuareg leather workers display their crafts in Timbuktu (Tombouctou). Photo © Baba Alpha Cissé

Maiga Oumou Maiga is Director of the Centre National de Promotion de l'Artisanat (CNPA).