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*Original Research Paper*

## Handicraft Cooperatives Movement in Rwanda: The Boat Has to Stay Afloat before it Takes on any Passengers

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The title of this paper is based on Ignace Pollet's phrase that the boat has to stay afloat before it can take on passengers. This paper aimed to establish the economic role and social impact of craft cooperatives movement in Rwanda, which is supported by the Government of Rwanda (GoA) as a tool to alleviate poverty and boost income generation for rural households in Rwanda. In many developing Sub-Saharan African countries, the craft sector appears to face similar challenges, such as illiteracy, low level(s) of education, lack of knowledge about product development, marketing, distribution and exportation of handicraft products in the global market. The data for this paper was collected through a project workshop with La Copabu Cooperative, located in the southern province called Huye (former Butare), in Rwanda. The conclusion made was that if attention is offered to individual cooperatives, yet expensive, but it could make it easier to monitor progress and growth of the cooperative movement within each country. Lessons learnt from the experience of including design students and the design ideas they shared, show that this is one way of decreasing the costs of intervention strategies because the inclusion of students makes it possible for such community and society related issues to be-integrated into research projects in the fourth year level of tertiary study.

**Keywords:** Cooperative movement, handicraft product, artist, crafters, development.

### INTRODUCTION

Celestine Hategekimana (2011) states that the handicraft sector in Rwanda has been found to have potentials in job creation and income generation for mainly rural households. He adds that the Government of Rwanda (GoA) has identified and adopted co-operative movement as a development strategy for rural communities in the country (Hategekimana, 2011).

The Ministry of Trade and Industry (2009) report, reveals a growing economic and social impact of handicrafts in Rwanda. The report states that handicraft production has seen upswing and is seen as a possible way of including and integrating crafters/artisans into trade and export opportunities available in the country (2009). In this regard, the Ministry of Trade and Industry formed a Secretariat body to assist in facilitating the development of the craft sector and to expedite the implementation of the existing National Handicraft Strategy (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2009).

Authors Barber & Krivoshlykova (2006) assert that the growth of international markets for home accessory products and the growing interest in global goods has opened up new

market opportunities for handicraft artisans, which has become one of the most productive sectors and export commodities for many developing countries. These authors state that handicraft production is a major form of employment, forming a considerable part of the export sector in many developing African countries. Barber & Krivoshlykova (2006) conclude by stating that the success of the handicrafts sector is growing and the number of small businesses going into handicrafts production and exportation has also seen a rapid increase.

However, Barber & Krivoshlykova (2006) argue that to increase exports/production over time, weavers or artisans have to be trained in different skills to improve their expertise in innovative product development, entrepreneurial and managerial skills. This can enable them to diversify and differentiate their products such that they not only rely on the peace baskets (Barber & Krivoshlykova, 2006).

The population of Rwanda was estimated at 10.7 million in 2011, with a high illiteracy rate of 48 per cent, amongst both rural and the urban population (Vision2020, 2011). A year later, in 2012, the total population was estimated to have

increased to 14 million, with 48.9 per cent (6.9 million) of males and 51.1 per cent (7.2 million) being females (Usengumukiza, 2012).

The World Bank (2011) asserts that most of the rural household/population depends on tea and coffee export whose prices tend to fluctuate in the international market making it difficult for the Rwandan population to rely on agriculture alone. The craft cooperatives/sector within which the majority of individuals are females has been recognized as a potentially high growth export sector with significant social benefits that can support other export sectors like tourism (World Bank, 2011). According to Hategekimana (2011) there are approximately 509 cooperatives in Rwanda, which bring together 22, 945 organized crafts people and artisans.

One of the systems that have been introduced to encourage exportation of handicraft products to the US is the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). An analyst in International Trade and Finance, Brock Williams (2015) defines the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as a nonreciprocal trade preference program which provides duty-free treatment for export of particular products, from selected Sub-Saharan Countries (SSA) to the United States (US). Williams explains that Congress first authorised AGOA in 2000 to encourage export led-growth and economic development in SSA countries and improve US economic relations with the region (2015).

Currently, there are 49 candidate SSA countries in AGOA of which 39 have already qualified for the preference benefits (Williams, 2015). Williams remarks that amongst some countries that make use of the AGOA preferences, the lower skill apparel production has not led to the production of higher skill manufactured products (2015).

Research Scholar Zainab Musoni (2011) highlights the importance of market access for non-traditional export as a source of sustainable employment and income generation in order to enhance the well being of the poor, and reduce poverty levels in developing countries. Her study titled, *'Do Free Agreements Affect Household's Welfare?'*, examines the impact of African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as free trade agreement on trade expansion of particular handicraft products and on the household welfare of the weaver's in Rwanda (Musoni, 2011).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Musoni (2011) explains that Sub-Saharan African (SSA) developing countries have been granted preferential market access in developed countries through specific targeted schemes like the Lome and Cotonou Conventions and recently by Everything But Arms (EBA) by European Union and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in the United States.

A variety of products are produced in Rwanda, in different regions and districts depending on raw material and indigenous skills (Musoni, 2011). Some of the major handicraft products include peace baskets (agaseke), wall hangings (Imigongo) and wood carving and masks, bracelets and jewelry products, ceramics and pottery (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2009).

Musoni (2011) describes Peace Baskets, locally known as Agaseke, as an art craft article woven using sisal, grass, raffia, banana peel, papyrus, osiers, willow, bamboo, palm and rattans. Daniel Plunnkett (2008) adds that the finely crafted, delicate baskets are made from natural fibres and woven using a technique that has been practiced for almost a thousand years. Different types of Agaseke baskets are made according

to the intended use, such as decorations or ornaments and come in different shapes and sizes, such as cradles, cases, shopping bags, table mats etc. (Musoni, 2011; Plunnkett, 2008).

The art of basket weaving is taught to women from a young age by their mothers and grandmothers as a way to carry the tradition/practice from generation to generation (Musoni, 2011). The Rwandan peace baskets symbolize a coming together of Rwandan women to provide for the needs of their families while instilling a love and appreciation in their children for their country and their culture (PPPMER, 2010). In the past, women used the smallest peace baskets (agaseke) to communicate with one another (PPPMER, 2010). However, the peace baskets now symbolize a fresh start for a country that is moving beyond a painful past (PPPMER, 2010).

Musoni (2011) and Plunnkett (2008) explain that peace baskets derive their name from the environment in which they are woven. Women whose husbands were killed gather and weave together with women whose husband's killed during the 1994 genocide, they both work for a common cause of peace, reconciliation and a need to earn a living and support their families (ibid). Their past experiences and the stories behind them combined with the distinctive techniques and characteristics of Rwanda handicraft builds a strong selling point to foreign market (Musoni, 2011; Plunnkett, 2008).

Musoni suggests that on the macro-level, Rwandan peace basket export (handicrafts) has gained market access to the US through AGOA due to the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers (2011). This has led to the increase in domestic production of peace baskets, peace baskets export volumes and formalised handicraft sector in the country (Musoni, 2011). On the micro-level, Musoni (2011) argues that an increase in exports increases employment in the sector, especially for the uneducated and illiterate women, enabling them to earn an income, which appears to enhance household welfare due to the labour supplied. Peace basket exportation has gained benefits more than other products in Rwanda from the free market access through AGOA, mainly exported by Gahaya Links (Musoni, 2011).

Gahaya Links is a company, which was started by sisters Janet Nkubana and Joy Ndunguste when the sisters gave women crafters a small shop to sell their baskets (Musoni, 2011). When the two sisters realized that the baskets had market with tourists, they began to meet the women in their villages, teaching them how to use traditional skills and techniques to better their lifestyles. They organized twenty women and taught them how to improve their weaving abilities with new design skills. The number of weavers has grown to over 4,000 weavers (ibid). Musoni (2011) states that Gahaya Links became the first Rwandan Handicraft Export Company to penetrate the US market through the non tariff strategy introduced by the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

Apart from the weavers in Gahaya Links, there are other women groups supported by NGO's and government institutions that also export to the US market (Musoni, 2011). Most women weavers who joined Gahaya links were trained through Women for Women, which is an NGO that supports women survivors of war to improve their opportunities for a better future (ibid). As aforementioned, many of the weavers are either widows or wives whose husbands are deceased or in jail, which makes it difficult for them to feed their families (Musoni, 2011).

The Agaseke Project, which is under Kigali city is another NGO that has trained women weavers to create employment for vulnerable, unemployed and landless women in the city (Musoni, 2011). This project is made up of 16 cooperatives

with over 3,000 women. Musoni explains that this number has reduced, forcing artisans to return to less sustainable and insecure ways of gaining an income for their families (2011).

David Plunnkett (2008) argues that it has been difficult to increase export of craft products due to failure to adapt to consumer needs in international markets in terms of quality, designs, dimension, standards, sizes and the ability to muscle a critical supply capacity in the sector. He mentions poor design skills, specialization, inconsistent product standardization, poor finishing as some of other detract from product quality upgrade (2008).

Plunnkett further argues that low product development and limited knowledge of market access and low market development efforts are still inhibiting export growth in the sector. He says that many producers tend to not only disregard the seasonality and trendiness of craft products, but also, the socio-environmental requirements of the market. He recommends continuous trainings in order to upgrade products and come up with new innovative designs and product ideas in order to overcome issues of under productions and poor quality of finished products (Plunnkett, 2008).

With regard to market access, Plunnkett (2008) affirms that craft products, target both domestic and international markets, domestic buyers are either tourists or local buyers that serve as market intermediaries who sell in the local markets in urban areas or export directly. He explains that Rwanda's crafts trade are largely informal marked with inconsistent and adhoc market access, entry and market entrance approaches, and market supply networks that appear to be insufficient (2008).

This suggests that Rwandan handicraft exporters need assistance with market information, trade leads, and technical help. The strategy for handicraft exports, by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and Export Promotion Agency has identified this need or requirement in order to enable artisans to penetrate the medium and lower-value markets in the US, which are considered to be enormous (Musoni, 2011; Plunnkett, 2008). In response, the Agency set up the Craft Industry Secretariat based within the Ministry of Trade and Industry, to help exporters, producers and the handicrafts sector to upgrade and develop products and expand the market (ibid).

Musoni (2011) claims that the removal of tariffs and non-tariffs for Rwandan exports in the US could enable expansion of peace basket exports due to increased demand which could lead to creation of trade, employment and income which results in improved welfare. Agreeing to Musoni, Nafukhu (2003) points out that the failure and dependence on foreign and other development strategies, economic development in SSA countries through trade is being encouraged. She states that free-market access for non-traditional sectors like peace baskets exports to the US through AGOA in developing countries in Rwanda can help alleviate the poor living conditions of the populations mainly depending on agriculture (2003).

Both Musoni and Nafukhu highlight that in the country's Vision 2020 goals, the Rwandan government intends to put in place favourable macroeconomic stabilization policies to enhance private sector growth and enlarge domestic resources base to increase exports (2011; 2003). This is believed to be one way to help the country reduce dependency on foreign and develop strategies to expand tax base, attract foreign investors and address the debt situation (Vision2020, 2000; Musoni, 2011; Nafukhu, 2003).

Ignace Pollet (2009) defines the Cooperative Faculty for Africa, known as COOP Africa, as a regional technical cooperative programme of the International Labour

Organization (ILO), operating over a four year period between 2009 and 2010. He informs us that the International Labour Organization commissioned Hoger Instituut Voor de Arbeid (HIVA) Belgium to carry out a baseline study on the cooperative movement in the nine countries across Southern and Eastern Africa, namely: Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania (including Zanzibar), Uganda and Zambia (Pollet, 2009).

In addition, Pollet (2009) states that the registration of cooperatives is one of the few available sources that can be used to appraise the dimension and extent of cooperative enterprise. He argues that the reliability and validity of the data is highly questionable because many of the countries who were involved in his study do not apply any institutional mechanism to deregister dormant or defunct cooperatives (2009). As a countermeasure to this problem, he suggests that a policy regarding submission of the report or the minutes of the Annual General Meeting could be adopted (ibid).

Furthermore, Pollet (2009) informs us that the cooperatives movement of a country is usually made visible by its confederation, federations or apex-body, its support structures and the promotional institution of cooperatives in related government policy domains. He explains that Rwanda has a two-tier system/structure: primary cooperatives and professional federations, the cooperation requires cooperative members and staff as well as government department staff to be aware and informed about procedures, policy and norms, a proper training system should be in place (ibid). Pollet (2009) emphasizes that the quality of this system is indicated by its curriculum, its stability, its staff and its enrolment (i.e. both the number and the type of trainees or students).

Pollet (2009) explains that cooperatives training programmes in Rwanda are mainly offered through the Rwandan Centre de Formation et de Recherches Cooperatives (IWACU), Projet de Promotion de Petites et Micro Entreprise Rurals (PPMER) and Centre de Service aux Cooperative (UGAMA-CSC). The IWACU Centre has 44 training modules, which are tailored to the needs of cooperatives. The Centre also educates about environmental protection, which has seen new cooperatives created to care for rehabilitation of the environment (Pollet, 2009).

Some of the non-academic courses offered in the centre involve full-time attendance and can be organized through distance learning or weekend courses (Pollet, 2009). Currently, cooperative management, accounting and marketing are training modules/subjects offered at all levels in many countries. Other modules include, intellectual development, SACCO management, human resources management, procurement and supply management, cooperative legislation, cooperative banking, statistics, computer operating, agriculture, marketing, participatory approach and gender studies (Pollet, 2009).

The baseline study by HIVA involving nine SSA countries, states that in all these countries, a ministry is held responsible for the legal monitoring of cooperatives (Pollet, 2009). Within the ministry there is an institutional window (usually a department) for cooperatives. In Rwanda, the Ministry of Trade/Commerce within the Ministry/Department of Cooperatives is the focal point for cooperatives development, which is the Rwandan Cooperative Agency (ibid). Pollet advises that international agencies could support African cooperatives by officially recognizing, promoting or championing them, which is a strategy adopted in the United Nations General Cooperatives with their recent being resolution 62/128 on the role of cooperatives in social development (UN, 2008; Pollet, 2009).

Pollet further argues that the idea that cooperatives should serve as vehicles for carrying out other programmes is not always realistic because cooperatives themselves are still in a process of maintaining and structuring themselves as a self-conscious movement led by cooperative principles and values. He states that before confederations, cooperative unions or primary cooperatives take on social development campaigns, they should assess the extent to which they are performing their prime role, which is to strengthen the self-reliance of groups of people who may not have access to basic goods and services (Pollet, 2009).

In a study carried out in 2005, it was found that cooperatives have the advantage of not excluding the not so poor, but capitalize on their expertise, the social capital and the financial contribution of this group helps poor individuals to cooperate their livelihoods out of poverty (Develtere & Pollet, 2008). Pollet argues that the cooperation may be a way to combat poverty, but if such an intention is to be sustainable, it should focus upon economic viability and only target the poorer segments once viability is established (2009). He says that cooperatives can create the critical mass of capital that lifts the competitiveness of territories in particular sub-sectors of the economy that have the resources to provide opportunities to the poorest segments of society (Pollet, 2009).

Indeed, there is a need to empower women to participate in micro and macro level policy formulation with regard to issues connected to gender and development. They also need to be empowered to participate actively in the management of the society (Pollet, 2009).

In the study by Mukamana Liberata (2012) titled, *'The Contribution of Women Organizations to the Economic Empowerment of Craftswomen: A Case Study of the National Association of Women Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU)'*, Anna (2010) points out that women empowerment is mainly administered through craft based interventions because craftwork tends to be compatible with their domestic roles because of the flexible hours and because of the fact that the work can be done within or near the home. She states that craft is an important sector in women's livelihood because it is the most viable option for employment and income generation for many poor women with low level(s) of skills and education (2010).

According to Anna (2010), participation in the craft sector has become a survival strategy for many poor women of Africa, Asia and Latin America (in Mukamana, 2012). She explains that this is the reason that in various developing countries, improvement strategies related to the improvement of women's opportunities to contribute cash to household incomes focus on the development of the craft industry. The process results in the availability of additional information for the identification of economic opportunities and also boosts women's self-confidence and enables them to better manage their enterprises (Anna 2010 in Mukamana, 2012).

Mukamana (2012) adds that craftswomen face the problem of climate changes. For instance, when there is too much rain, some of the raw materials such as grass fibres and raffia, cannot be dried up for being used. In addition, poor health conditions for some HIV/AIDS infected women reduces their working capacity when they are taking medication. Also, some married women do not receive enough support in the household activities which reduces their time to concentrate on their craft business, which results in failure to deliver orders in time. Moreover, this tends to affect the efficiency and reliability between the organizations and its customers, which leads to loss of market in the long term (Mukamana, 2012).

Mukamana (2012) further points out the challenge of the fluctuating dollar rate against local currencies, which reduces the profit for organizations because in many cases the invoices are established in the local currency. Mukamana also identified language barrier as another problem during training in product development because majority of artisan little or no command of the English language, which is used in training workshops (2012).

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper was collected through a 6 day collaborative project workshop between the Department of Creative Design from the University of Rwanda, the Department of Architecture Science/Polytechnic School from the University of Genoa based in Italy and lastly members of La Copabu Craft Cooperative in Butare, situated in the Southern province of Rwanda. From the University of Genoa, there were two representatives who headed the workshop, namely Prof. Carlo Vannicola and Alice Cappelli, who travelled to Rwanda for the workshop. They were joined by three lecturing staff members and ten students from the Department of Creative Design, supported by the Head of Department, Arthur Joash.

The lectures included Aziza Cyamani, Jeanne Shange and Abdul Dumba Yawe. The ten students included Sandrine Karekezi, Pascal Muhoza, Patience Iwacu, Jules Cesar Dirimasi, Marius Kamugisha, Robert Gatsinzi, Jasmine Mahoro, Aristide Gatera, Serge Muhizi and Eric Rukundo. Although La Copabu cooperatives has many members, only five members were available to participate in group discussions during the second day of the workshop. The cooperative members included Emmanuel Tegeso (president), Frederick Nyandwi (vice-president), Emmanuel Gwaneza (marketing manager), Liberee Mukamurenzi (weaver) and Emile Twagirumukiza (wood carver).

The theme for the workshop was *'Relationship Design: The Strategic Project between Product and Service'*. The workshop was divided into three phases. In the workshop outline, Professor Carlo Vannicola (2015) explained the three phases as the sharing of information and experiences, analysis and understanding of the problems of the local production system regarding product management, and co-design as an experience applied to cases of reference territories. The main discussion was centred on the issue of management of the design process, the expansion of modernization of available fair trade system and resources, which Prof. Vannicola (2015) describes as an important component in the distribution of handicraft products, both nationally and internationally.

Furthermore, Prof. Vannicola states that the fair trade system, AGOA in the case of Rwanda, is one of the resources available in terms of understanding the communicative power of this action (2015). Fair trade organizations are able to put in logical sequence, analysis of moments and experiences, communication related to manufacturing, marketing and distribution, which has the ability to strengthen the relationships between product and service. He goes on to list some of the components informing product and service relationships as: Area + Product, Designer + Manufacturer, Designer + Product, Product + Market, Producer + Customer, Customer + Territory, Service + Producer, Service + Customer, Service + Designer, Service + Designer and lastly Service + Market. Based on these ten design relationship components, the objective of the workshop was to provide answers to questions, such as who, for who, what, where, how and why (Vannicola, 2015).

Therefore, it may be concluded that the project workshop geared to establish how handicraft products can be marketed and distributed focusing on increasing income for Rwandan artists. Some of the issues mentioned by other authors in the literature review were observed during the workshop. For example, the need for differentiation, innovative design ideas and the quality of finished products. This gives credence to the phrase by Pollet that the boat must be able to float on its own before it takes on passengers, meaning that there are some domestic issues that need to be addressed within the cooperatives before they may be fully able to tackle and take advantage of economic development opportunities, such as exportation trade.

On the first day, Prof. Vannicola and Alice Cappelli as leaders of the workshop briefed participating lecturers and students about the order of events for the 6 days. The second day was a trip to the Southern province, Butare to visit La Copabu Craft Cooperative. The third and fourth days were for group discussions back at the Department of Creative Design. The discussions were based on the observations and interviews carried out by students because they had the advantage of language. Once again, the problem of language barrier identified by Mukamana (2012) was visible because the artists could only communicate in the local languages of iKinyarwanda and French, in which out of the five lecturers involved, one speaks French and one could speak both languages, iKinyarwanda and French.

The last two days of the workshop were reserved for designing of promotional materials that could assist cooperatives, such as La Copabu, in marketing and distributing their craft products. After two days deliberating about the problems and the possible solutions between product and service, students began designing promotional materials as a way to establish basis for new relationships/linkages between different disciplines in order to attend to some of the existing domestic issues in the craft sector. The students worked together to design (improve) the corporate identity of La Copabu.

A brochure, product labels, signage and display posters for the cooperatives shop was designed using photographs taken during visit to Butare, with permission from members of La Copabu. It is on realising the relevance of creative design department's in product development, marketing and distribution of handicraft products and also the active participation of design students in the workshop, that led to the writing of this paper.

Worth mentioning is that some of the data included in the discussion of this study is based on undocumented data, which has been obtained from verbal interviews with relevant staff members of the Department of Creative Design at the University of Rwanda. Grounded on the relevance of the department in the vision 2020 goals of the country, it was imperative to include the views of design staff members, and more importantly the view from the Head of Department, in which instance it would have been beneficial to the paper to reach the Dean of the Architecture and Design Department. Some lessons learnt is that in Rwanda, any creative arts/design projects you might wish to partake have opportunity to be framed within the design fields.

## DISCUSSION

This section of the paper will focus more on the discussions on the third and fourth day of the workshop. The reason for this is that, it was during these days that all workshop participants were able to debate about the various relationship structures

involved between product (handicraft) and service, based on observations, interviews and experience during the visit to La Copabu. Although guarded by the ten relationship elements by Prof. Vannicola, but the discussions did not follow the sequence as listed, instead it allowed non-structured debate regarding all topics. From a research point of view, this may be regarded as phenomenological research method, which is usual for art/design based research studies.

The first topic discussed was the relationship between the product and customer, which included elements such as, territory, designer, product, manufacturer, service market and customer. Thoughts, insight and the experiences of individuals within their environments was highlighted as one of the important elements for artist/designer. These are elements that motivate the process of storytelling as a way to set the tone for the development of innovative product ideas, which could help differentiate Rwandan handicraft products in the global market. The history and cultural background of the artist is one of the unique elements that can be used to come up with unique communicative craft products that not only sell the product but also educate people about culture and experiences of the Rwandan society. Borrowing words from Prof. Vannicola (2015), many different typologies can be changed into different elements to bring about new meanings.

Second topic discussed is the relationship between designer and the artist, which highlighted the need for interaction/collaboration between the two. It was suggested that experimentation with techniques and using the knowledge and skill of the artist only changing small/basic elements could lead to new interesting products.

Third topic discussed is the relationship between the product and the market, which emphasized the importance of the visual graphic/pattern, the history of the product, quantity of materials used, the time taken to do work, the measurements, dimensions and technique used to construct the craft item. It was observed that La Copabu had no packaging for their products. In addition, in terms of the management of the products, the artists estimates the price, but the product is priced by the shop. There is no control of how much quantity the artist produces and there is no indication or differentiation of each artists work on the shelves, similar products are placed in the same shelf without identification of the artist.

In addition, there were some non-appropriate products, which may have been crafted based on market demand. Although this is one way of increasing income, however, it is confusing to find these products mixed with traditional and culturally inspired products. It was concluded that the artists of La Copabu tend to prefer quantity over quality, more stock is more important. Perhaps, this is the reason the shop appears over stocked and they are running out of space, which leads to the grouping of similar items together, making it difficult for buyer to select products that suit their taste.

Some of the ideas raised to counter this problem was the need for a product catalog for the cooperation, which will include details like images of products, the artists name, description of the product, price and technique used to make product. Communication elements such as posters, brochures, product labels, shop signage and packaging were identified as elements that could help cooperatives improve how they display and promote their products. When we arrived at La Copabu, most of us walked past the shop because there was no clear signage in front of the shop.

Among the ten students the five majoring in interior design recognized the possibility of introducing shelving to the shop. This could help improve the issue of overstocking where the shelf would be designed to allow the bulk of the same variety

of the products to be stored at the back and only displaying one or three items in front.

Behind the shop, there is a large space presenting opportunity for a restaurant within the compound, which would also be good for advertising artwork. The utensils, cutlery and decorations could all incorporate some of the craft items available inside the shop. The restaurant or coffee bar could include a children's play area, which will have some of the handcrafted toys sold in the shop. This idea makes the shop to be a one stop outlet, which allows the customer to experience and interact with Rwandan culture and thus encouraging purchase of products. Lastly, since one of the objectives is to encourage export trade for artisans, there is need for a functional website and visa/credit card purchase resources within the shop and online.

## CONCLUSION

In as much as many of the issues discussed in the literature review were observed during the project workshop and visit to La Copabu, on the contrary one point was not the case. Earlier, David Plunnkett mentioned that artisans/crafters tend to ignore the seasonality of raw materials. Arguably, the five members of La Copabu who participated in interviews commented on this challenge. They shared that during some seasons it is either difficult to find the raw materials or if they obtain it, it is a challenge to prepare it for use, especially the grass fibres which need to be dried before use. This slows down their production capability and ability to complete and deliver orders on time.

Therefore, it may be said that cooperatives tend to have many similar strands, but clearly there is a chance that each cooperative faces similar challenges in different intensity. The most attendance challenge of one cooperative cannot be assumed to be the same as the next group of artisans. This synergy makes it difficult for effectiveness of any development intervention, which may approach the issue of slow advancement of cooperatives as one entity. Each cooperative is unique in its own respect and faces one challenge greater than the next group.

Thus, it may be concluded that in order to advance cooperative movement, each country as well as cooperative should be viewed as a unique case and any intervention offered should be directly in-line with that particular group. Correctly, this would be a costly undertaking economically and financially for any country in the short term, but in the long term, it may be worth the investment in maintaining some of the active and functional cooperatives within any country. Treating every cooperative as a unique case counters the insight from Brock that there are no strategic policies in place that measure the number of registered cooperatives, which are active against those who have become defunct.

Interestingly, the head research coordinator at the Department of Creative Design, Yusuf Nsanja, states that at the fourth year level, students are encouraged to choose topic that identify and address societal issues in their environment. Since the beginning of this venture, at least one project has been taken up by the government. The project concentrated on the extraction of banana juice from banana fruit, which was done by media student Babli Miheto (2012), whose study was titled the '*Empowering Kirehe District Communities in Banana Juice Production*'.

Worth mentioning is that in an ICT driven country like Rwanda, it has been challenging to encourage such projects because the access to the internet resources has both positive and negative impact on the students mental reasoning

capacity. The negative is that it makes students reluctant in obtaining library membership or reading books. This can be proved by the number of students who choose to conduct research on the 'poor reading culture in Rwanda', which the CRD research coordinator estimates at 12 per cent since the year 2010, which was the first time it was offered in the department in 2012. Comparing this percentage very roughly to the Vision2020 goals, it means that it is possible to have an 80 per cent degree graduate candidates in all sectors, but, the important question to ask is, is the country producing competence graduates to take over most of the positions offered to foreign citizens who come in for a stipulated contract time?

In conclusion, once again, repeating words from Prof. Vannicola that many different typologies can be changed into different elements to bring about new meanings. With that same understanding, many new relationships can be created from multiple disciplines with the objective of finding solutions to a particular societal problem. If each person plays their part, growth and advancement economically could move forward with some ease.

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