



## “Colours of Life” Program Empowers Co-op In Kenya

Life was always a challenge for women living in the poorest sections of Nairobi, and now the effects of HIV/AIDS are compounding the difficulties they face. Women who were already struggling to provide for their families are having to cope with the deaths of husbands and other family members, and to care for AIDS orphans. Some of these women are HIV-positive themselves, and are unable to do physically intensive work.

Handicrafts such as textiles, pottery, beadwork, and, in particular, woven products made from banana fibers are an important source of income for these women. Jisaidie Cottage Industries was created to produce these items. But although Jisaidie had successfully addressed key constraints such as product development and quality control, marketing has remained a challenge.

ACDI/VOCA fielded a volunteer consultant, James Thibeault, through the USAID Farmer to Farmer Program to help the group address its marketing constraints. Thibeault, a cooperative business and marketing consultant from West Virginia, helped transform Jisaidie’s marketing approach through a promotional campaign called “Colours of Life”. The goal of the campaign was to penetrate European and American handicraft markets by utilizing a label specific to Kenyan artisans living with HIV/AIDS.



Photo: ACDI/VOCA Sebastian Wanjala

HIV positive Kenyan women from the Jisaidie Cottage Industries launch the “Colours of Life” campaign.

USAID supports programs that increase rural household income through a strengthened micro- and small enterprise sector. ACDI/VOCA turned its attention to female-owned businesses, and its focus on HIV/AIDS as a multi-sectoral issue. Working with Jisaidie was a unique opportunity to help a group of women using agricultural by-products to help mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS.

Thibeault’s volunteer assistance transformed Jisaidie’s marketing efforts, and three shipments have already been purchased by Covenant House and St. John’s Episcopal Church in Charleston, WV. The use of green and yellow in the packaging of the branded products was introduced to reflect images of hope and renewal - green symbolizes life and yellow symbolizes sunshine or light. Better marketing has helped the cooperative members increase their income, which has helped them feed their families, send AIDS orphans to school, and even save money to start new business ventures.

“We give them something that helps them go on with their life.”

- association member

The women’s associations working with Jisaidie are now actively recruiting additional women living with HIV/AIDS. This work enables them to feel accepted into a community, receive practical and emotional support, and earn an income to provide for their families. According to association members, “We give them something that helps them go on with their life.”

Margaret Nduta and Joyce Wanjala, members of a women’s textile association in the poor Kawangware district, report that members left the association when they found better markets. Since Thibeault’s assistance, however, none of the members have dropped out, and the association has even been able to bring on new trainees.

Success Story

