



SUCCESS STORY

Opening International Markets to Artisans

A rural weaver gains business skills and market exposure



Photo: Peace Corps/Elbert Hardeman

Abdelati Nejar weaves one of his popular designs.

With support from USAID, Abdelati Nejar has gone from rural artisan to international exporter in just five months.

Abdelati Nejar was born in 1959 in Tamslouht, Morocco, a small town near Marrakech, known for its pottery and textiles. He became a weaver's apprentice at age seven. At age 21, he began selling his weavings wholesale to bazaars in Marrakech. However, as tourist traffic to Marrakech slowed, shops began placing more emphasis on price rather than quality. The fierce price competition of the 1990's drove Abdelati out of the market, and he lost the majority of his sales outlets.

His prospects took a turn for the better when he learned of a USAID program to aid artisans. Through the program, he participated in three Nomadic Craft Caravan events that exposed him to larger markets and helped expand his business.

At the events, rural artisans showcase their work to potential buyers. Select artisans also participate in valuable on-site training sessions covering a range of topics designed to help their business grow, including product display, sales techniques, product development, costing and pricing, and future planning. Abdelati's revenue from the three fairs totaled \$1,385 — four times more than his average monthly sales.

Abdelati's superior quality and leadership skills were immediately apparent during the Caravan events, and USAID offered to help him prepare for the international export market. As a result, Abdelati's weavings made their U.S. debut at the New York International Gift Fair in August 2005. Abdelati's orders totaled \$1,705. He filled and shipped the New York orders within two months, and then went straight back to work — to develop his spring collection for the next New York fair.

Abdelati has big plans for his weavings and the export market. He intends to expand his production line by hiring other local weavers in Tamslouht. He also plans to hire someone to handle international orders through the internet. With the experience and exposure he received through USAID, Abdelati is now well on his way to fulfilling his dream of becoming an international exporter.