

business women

Maasai women showcase art in New York

By a Correspondent

The Maasai Women's Development Cooperative is one of seven grantees of the United States African Development Foundation (USADF) that showcased their work during the New York International Gift Fair (NYIGF) held last month.

Five grantees from Tanzania - Footloose, Getting Old is to Grow Society, Kwanza Collection, Maasai Women's Development Cooperative, and Marvelous Batik - participated joined their Ghanaian counterparts - Yenok Wood Products Limited and Tekura Enterprises Limited in the fair which is a bi-annual event.

Products exhibited ranged from traditional home decor, textiles, wall hangings, ornaments to jewelry.

The Gift Fair is the leading temporary market in the United States and presents over 2,800 exhibitors and 6,000 products lines in 650,000 net square feet of exhibit space.

Speaking during the opening reception of the show, USADF Board of Directors' Vice Chairman, Jack Leslie said:

"The handmade goods made by African artisans build on existing skills of grantees, help develop local entrepreneurship, and create employment opportunities. The entrepreneurs are equipped with vision, determination, and commitment and are willing to take risks to overcome obstacles in the way to their success."

The grantees showed their work in the exclusive Africa Now Booth developed in collaboration with the West Africa Trade Hub (WATH), funded by USAID, and USADF.

An innovative grouping of home decor and accessories from producers in Africa, the booth had products influenced by African life and art.

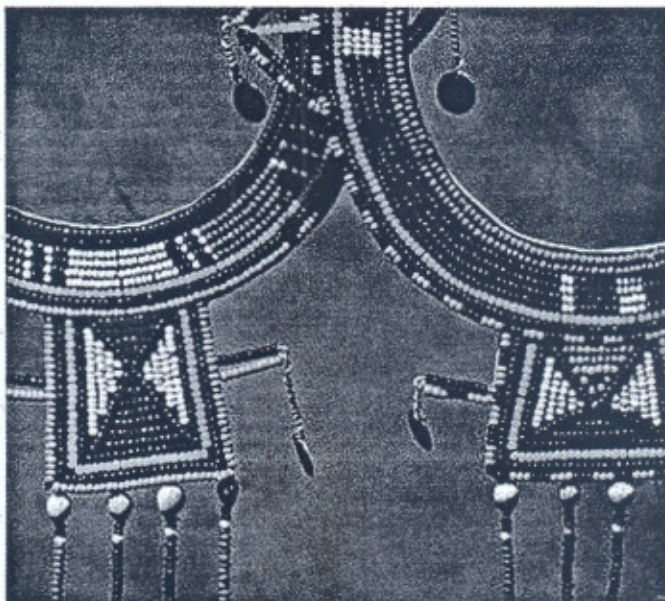
Buyers had an opportunity to view and order products made by African vendors, and therefore supporting traditional African handmade goods.

The African home décor and accessories industry seized those advantages with a custom-designed, the 14-booth pavilion modeled on traditional East and West African architecture, housed 30 exporters from seven countries - all under a centralized, US-based purchasing system.

"What a great presence this makes, such a wow factor," said Les Lupovich, owner of two gift shops in Connecticut. "To be able to turn a corner and see all this - it's like walking into a museum. This is what successful retailers look to do."

According to USADF program officer for Center for Sustainable Development Initiatives (CSDI), Penda Sem the fair is a very important event for traders.

"The groups learned the importance of



Traditional Maasai Jewellery.

working together for their expertise compliments each other's work.

They are coming away from the trade fair with the goal of promoting themselves together as a cohesive Tanzanian group.

They are very grateful to USADF and CSDI who have together helped them to build their capacity and support thousands of others," says the coordinator.

CSDI is USADF's partner in Tanzania. By funding African entrepreneurs, USADF helps to create jobs and secure a better quality of life for thousands.

Regional Program Director Kim Ward emphasized on this important facet of foreign assistance to Africa, saying: "By directly funding African projects, USADF grants provide funds to many grassroots Africans to help them grow their small businesses and earn additional income from their increased production and product sales."

"This really shows that Africa can compete," said Florie Liser, the Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Africa, at reception in the pavilion.

Praise followed from other speakers, including the International Fair Trade Board of Directors and ABC Home, a high-end, Manhattan-based home goods retailer, which also hosted a field trip for the African exporters.

More than 100 buyers placed orders, including the Carnegie Museum, Overstock.com, New York's Museum of Natural History, Charity USA, and CB2, a division of Crate & Barrel.

Though individual exporters took their own orders, the majority of buyers opted for a new system run by Pangea, a gift buyer with a store located in the International Finance Corporation headquarters in Washington, D.C. Pangea's system allowed buyers to order from multiple producers and will handle consolidation, packaging, shipping and distribution.

This is a must attend event for anyone in the global gift industry as it is the place where trends are established, new products launched and the industry comes together twice each year.

It brings together more than 36,000 buyers in prime spending mode, 2,900 exhibitors, hand-picked to reflect the industry's best, introductions to new products and new talents and provides insights into emerging design trends.

The event takes place along with brilliant, business-boosting seminars and workshops, networking opportunities with leaders in the field, amenities, to make participant's experience enjoyable plus all the excitement of New York ... the greatest city in the world!