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Press Release

For décor and accessories buyers, AfricaNow is AfricaWow

NEW YORK CITY— *Presence. Volume. Convenience.* You need all three, plus amazing products, to lure buyers and clinch orders in the midst of a bustling trade show like the New York International Gift Fair. This January, the African home décor and accessories industry seized those advantages with a custom-designed, 14-booth pavilion modeled on traditional West African architecture, housing 30 exporters from seven countries – all under a centralized, U.S.-based purchasing system. The debut of AfricaNow — a joint effort from USAID’s West Africa Trade Hub (managed by CARANA) the African Development Foundation (ADF) and Pangea Artisan Market and Café — drew raves from buyers, exporters and visitors.

“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.”

“The traffic flow to the booth is excellent,” said John Agana of Yuri Enga in Ghana, whose woven grass baskets were in high demand. “Now that we’re all together, they know they’re coming to Africa.”

“This really shows that Africa can compete,” said Florie Liser, the Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Africa, at a January 26 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 110 buyers placed orders, including the Carnegie Museum, Overstock.com, New York’s Museum of Natural History, CharityUSA, and CB2, a division of Crate & Barrel. Though individual exporters still took their own orders, the majority of buyers opted for a new system run by Pangea, a gift buyer with (continued)

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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.

CARANA's USAID Trade Hub oversaw the design, Ghana-based construction and shipping of the 1,120 square foot (341 square meters) pavilion, as well as marketing materials distributed throughout the show. The West African exhibitors were among the Hub's more than 200 clients across the region, receiving training and technical assistance to help them compete in the global market. ADF shared the cost of the pavilion and coordinated the participation of the East African exhibitors. During the show, the group also enjoyed on-the-ground logistical and technical support from CARANA, the Hub, ADF and Pangea.

"It's fabulous, awesome to have it all together like this," said returning buyer Jimmie Vaughan of Jiva Design in New York. "To get vendors on one strip, on one order form, makes it much easier for us."

Exporters agreed: "It's well organized, to have everything on the computer, all the price tags in place," said Rehema Ambokile of Tanzania. Organization extended to the presentation of products, from jewelry to dishes, throw pillows to leather handbags, she added.

"We are used to putting everything out like this – *whoomp*." Ambokile tossed an imaginary load to the floor. "It's not appealing to the eyes. Now we see how things can be grouped by category, how important it is to choose carefully what you display and have some space so people can take it all in."

Impressive as the pavilion was, exporters said they realize the work is only beginning. Trade show veterans say it generally takes three appearances to convert visitors into buyers – and meanwhile the producers must fill sample orders worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Exhibitors said, however, that AfricaNow made the American market much more accessible. Furniture designer Joelle le Bussy said she'd always been too nervous to exhibit in the U.S. before, but she was greatly encouraged after the show.

"You feel sure, because you're not alone. It gives you confidence," said le Bussy of Galerie Arte Dakar in Senegal, gesturing to her fellow producers. "We're proud to be part of the African image."

CARANA Corporation designs and directs market-led solutions to economic development challenges. For 25 years, we have guided practical approaches to help businesses and countries compete globally, reducing poverty and raising living standards around the world.