



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**WEST AFRICA**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Designer Carves Out Market Niche

**Entrepreneur connects local works with world through her ventures**

Clarisse Djionne caters to a high-end market, whether redecorating homes (the King of Morocco is among her clients) or selling her original furniture to shops in her native Senegal and boutiques worldwide.



Photo: WATH/Vanessa Adams

Designer Clarisse Djionne (right) discusses with Cost Plus/World Market's Gail Fuller how to promote home goods from Senegal, Mali and Guinea-Bissau.

***"I want to stay with an exclusive product and clientele. That is how I make money," said Clarisse Djionne, who made business connections in the United States through USAID.***

Telling Our Story  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Washington, DC 20523-1000  
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Her business gained new exposure with the opening of Ebèn Designs/Africa Outpost, a 400-square meter showroom in the Wynwood Art District of Miami, co-founded by Clarisse and a new business partner. "I could not have found better for the clientele I want," said Clarisse of her partner, who contacted her in early 2006 after spotting her furniture in a Caribbean boutique. For the Miami store, Clarisse shipped the equivalent of almost 2 20-foot containers of her furniture and original art from Senegalese painters to Miami. Even before opening, the showroom has already made its first sale, sending \$12,000 worth of merchandise to a customer in Geneva, a contact of Clarisse's partner. They plan to open showrooms in New York and Los

Angeles.

Clarisse still produces furniture for the local market through Eberis Studios, which she founded in 1986, later adding African Outpost as its export arm. In 2004, as the local furniture market began slowing down, Clarisse visited USAID's offices in Senegal for assistance in connecting to overseas markets. The staff put her in touch with USAID's West Africa Trade Hub in Accra, which provides training to export-ready businesses across the region. The Trade Hub provided technical assistance, sponsored booth space and facilitated deals for Clarisse at the Sources NY trade show in 2005 and Sources LA show in 2006. There, she made her initial U.S. contacts and got a first-hand look at the U.S. market, giving her the know-how to target appropriate clients.

In February 2007, the Trade Hub matched her with Cost Plus/World Market, a large U.S. home décor retailer, as the regional agent promoting items from Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal.