

Week Two Artisan Profiles
June 26-June 30

Artisan Profile 1: Nyramana Antoinette

51, Rwanda, Treasurer, Weaver, 4 Children, Itawaza Cooperative

Growing up with 10 siblings, I didn't have much. My family could not afford to pay for me to complete school so they sent me to technical school, and I became a teacher. After the genocide, when I married and starting having kids, I could no longer support my family's needs on a teacher's salary. I began weaving because I realized it could bring a lot of value to my life. Even though I wasn't able to attend secondary school, I've always had strong math and bookkeeping skills. These skills, along with the trust and respect of my fellow weavers, were the reason I was elected treasurer of my cooperative. All Across Africa helps us learn valuable saving skills and, as treasurer, it is my responsibility to manage the cooperatives finances and keep track of the money we earn.

Money from weaving has transformed my life in so many ways. At a young age, I started having problems with my eyesight. I needed money in order to see a doctor and get glasses. If I am able to save enough money, I hope to see a specialist one day.

I have also been able to continue sending my kids to school. My goal is for them to finish high school. I see the value in a good education and want to provide for them what my family could not afford to provide to me. I hope that people who are buying goods from All Across Africa can see how their purchase is truly improving the daily lives of many families, and I hope the company's success continues.



Artisan Profile 2: Mukaruziga Felicite

52, Rwanda, Weaver, 4 Children, Widow, Itawaza Cooperative

My name is Mukaruziga Felicite, and I am a weaver for All Across Africa. I am blessed to have four children and three grandchildren, but I have experienced many hardships to get where I am today. Twenty years ago, I lost my husband. During the five years that my husband was sick, I would work during the day and weave all night to try to make enough to afford the healthy foods and medicine he needed. After he passed away, I was faced with the reality of raising the children on my own. This seemed like an impossible task at first, because I felt like something was missing all the time. When my children left for school, I would play the radio to fill the emptiness I felt inside. Then, in that

same year, I was absolutely devastated when I also lost one of my children. I couldn't believe that so much misfortune would come my way, and my heart filled with sorrow. My kids would always ask me why I was crying. I was constantly lonely and felt like I was the only person in the world.

I realized, after mourning for a while, that I couldn't sit and cry forever. If I let my sorrow continue, my children would end up hungry in the streets. I needed to stand up and be strong for my kids. I took up weaving again, and I did it with all my heart. I gave it everything I had because I knew that my family needed me now more than ever.

Weaving is a big part of who I am, and it is why I am here today. I can afford to feed my kids and I sent them to school. At the lowest point in my life, I couldn't have ever imagined that I would one day become a grandparent. Now, I am lucky to see my children starting their own lives and creating families of their own.

All Across Africa provided my family with security; they insured my life. My cooperative helped me regain my strength and gave me friends when I needed them the most. Weaving uplifts me and my family and I am so thankful to all the people who buy our baskets. Each product I make comes from a place of love and determination to live a fulfilled life. I hope to continue weaving with All Across Africa and watch my family grow.



Artisan Profile 3: Biziyaremye Erneste

30, Rwanda, Weaver, 1 Child, Married, Itawaza Cooperative

My name is Erneste, and I am one of the few men that work with All Across Africa. I started weaving after I was involved in a horrible accident. A motorcycle hit me as I was riding my bicycle. The accident proved fatal for the other person involved, and though I was lucky enough to survive, I could no longer participate in heavy work or labor. The accident was a shock, but I knew I couldn't sit around and do nothing afterwards. I was newly married at the time and needed to care for my family.

In the past, I had seen how women in the community were making good money, developing their homes, and improving their livelihood as weavers. Although weaving is seen as a traditionally female occupation in Rwanda, I wondered if I could also support my family this way. I explained my troubles to my neighbor, who was a cooperative leader, and she took me in, teaching me all the skills necessary to weave.

At first, I wasn't sure that I would fit in as one of only two males in the cooperative, but the women were so welcoming, caring, and encouraging. They taught me everything I needed to know. It is difficult because sometimes society doesn't understand or accept what I do. Many Rwandans believe that weaving is only for women, but I don't let it bother me, because I can see a better future in front of me. I am doing what I love and actively

working to support my wife and child. We are fortunate to have lots of food, a nice house, and I am starting to save for my child's education. None of this would be possible without my cooperative and All Across Africa. What happened to me was unfortunate but I have been able to overcome so many struggles and I hope to continue to do so. I genuinely believe in the power of hope. With hope, anything is possible.

(Pictured below with co-op leader)



Artisan Profile #4: Mpayishaka Lawrence

Weaver, Age 40, 5 Children, Married, Cooperative Indatwa Agaseke

During my childhood, my family was very poor and couldn't pay for many things, including my school fees. When I could no longer attend school because of the lack of money, so I started weaving for fun. During the genocide, I was displaced from my home and forced to escape to a refugee camp. My family was left with even less than we had before, and I saw marriage as an opportunity to protect myself and create a better future. In the refugee camp, I met my current husband, and we married when I was only eighteen. It was a very difficult time, because, at eighteen, I had to face the responsibilities of a wife and adult.

I was able to use my knowledge of weaving to create a life for my husband, five kids, and myself. The income is going to help me put my kids through school, something I wish I could have finished. I want them to grow up having the ability to be self-sufficient. I am also so proud of how I was able to work to build a home. Now I have a house of my own, a place where I belong, and where people can find me. I am so happy to be a part of All Across Africa and my cooperative; they give me so much support. Every time I face an obstacle I overcome it by finding a sense of inner peace and calmness. Thank you to All Across Africa, other weavers, and customers who buy our goods for helping me to be at peace and move forward in life.



Artisan Profile #5: Uwiziyimana Seraphine

Age 44, 4 Children, Weaver, Single Mom, Cooperative Indatwa Agaseke

My name is Seraphine, and I am a weaver for All Across Africa. I would describe myself as hard working and determined. Unfortunately, as a kid, I wasn't able to continue my schooling and had to stop after 6th grade. With my extra time, I started to learn how to weave and eventually turned this into my career. While other girls who dropped out of school turned to prostitution and begging, I continued to work and make a living for myself. I got married at a very young age, and by the time I was twenty-one and could make it legal, I discovered my husband was cheating on me. I decided to leave him with our two kids and remarried.

Today, I am a single mother with four children, which means I face many difficulties. One of my daughters gave birth to a baby at a very young age, just like I did, which is financially difficult for our family. She is also a single mother, and I see her facing some of the same struggles that I faced when I was in a similar situation. I want to continue weaving and selling baskets so I can help my daughter give her daughter a better life. I want my children and grandchildren to live a life of value and will continue working hard to ensure a better future for our family.

(pictured below with youngest daughter and granddaughter)



Artisan Profile #6: Mukarunyange Belthilda

44, Rwanda, Co-op leader, married, 4 children, Itawaza Cooperative



Artisan Profile #7: Mukandamajye Seraphine
44, Rwanda, Co-op leader, 4 children, Cooperative Indatwa Agaseke



Artisan Profile #8: Mukeshimana Solange
28, Rwanda, weaver, married, 1 child, Cooperative Indatwa Agaseke

