

MASHI MOVING ON



Over the past 18 years Mashi has developed from an NGO supported Community Based Tourism Enterprise (CBTE) into an independent thriving community run business. Turnover has crept up year after year, however with the establishment of a new, larger, eye catching market it has enjoyed even greater growth over the last two years through the sale of greater volumes of crafts. The emphasis now is to source and develop working relationships with bulk buyers, lodges and retail outlets. In addition to this Mashi has diversified its product range to include natural resource products in order to attract further custom. Now they stock chitenge wraps, elephant energy solar lights, basket posters (a set of four posters have been framed for tourists to see as well as providing an attractive display in the craft centre) and post cards. They sell honey when it's in season on behalf of the Caprivi Bee Keepers Association and, in partnership with Kwando Community Forest, and stock and supply campers with firewood sold from the building in front of Mashi Crafts. The new signage alerts tourists to what is available. Discussions are taking place with Kasheshe project and the Department of Forestry in Katima who support a community project some 50km east of Kongola where they make marula juice and jam and mungongo oil to retail it from the Honey stall

Also promoted and sold is processed devils claw made by a Namibian company, Ecoso, which is harvested locally and developed into an effective treatment for arthritis and other ailments. Information on both the plant, how it is harvested and what conditions can be treated will be displayed for educational and promotional purposes.

An exciting new range of crafts made from locally harvested natural resources was launched at the Omba Arts 21st birthday celebration in Windhoek on the 15th August 2013. The new products which were well received, ranged from wooden seed pod key rings, table mats, necklaces and bracelets to chitenge baskets and table runners. They have already attracted orders and production is underway. An alternative to traditional crafts is found in the new Mukololo chitenge collection, a range of bags and apparel designed from the traditional cloth worn by all the women in the East Caprivi region. Prototypes have been developed and a follow-up training is planned.



If travellers are weary from the heat there is a new refreshment area and a fridge stocked with cold drinks. These can be consumed under the new shade area sitting on a mukoro bench or mealie stomper stools.

Further development in 2013 was the addition of an ablution block built alongside the centre along with a guard house for the two part-time security

guards that Mashi employed to work during the evenings when the centre is closed. Water pipelines were installed, electricity to enable the installation of a telephone/fax machine to receive orders and contact customers, and in the longer term a computer. Many of Mashi's early visions are now being realised. After the construction work was completed the site was replanted with over 45 indigenous trees that have been secured under a NAMPLACE landscaping grant.

As a result of their two week placements, part of the CDSS/MCA work attachment programme at Omba Arts in Windhoek, the sales staff realise the importance of knowing their products, where they come from, what they are made from and who makes them and are learning more about them in order to help promote them to customers. Their training has improved their confidence and willingness to interact with visitors, their vision of what can be done at the centre has been enhanced by the experience and enabled them to feel more confident about ringing their buyers. They have returned to Mashi with new ideas and a knowledge of systems employed in another busy craft shop, some of which can now be adapted and applied in their own craft centre.



Mashi set target for their sales to work towards, Efforts are made by the Manager and Sales Assistants to find buyers, in particular wholesale buyers, in order to keep the current growth trend going.

Mashi is moving from strength to strength with a committee and staff who now realise the importance and impact of the business they are running on the lives of their community producers. New management strategies and sales incentives motivates them to work on increasing their sales. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities in their job descriptions helps them to identify what else must be done, and whilst the centre is expanding in its role with news products and tenants and the increased responsibilities of running and maintaining a bigger enterprise the Manager is learning to devolve tasks down to his staff so allow him more time to manage the business at a higher level.



Mashi, the staff and its management have a healthy attitude towards growth, understanding that it requires personal and financial input from them and the funds that the Voluntary Association has accrued in order to facilitate its growth. The recognition that they must reinvest earnings back into the 'business' is a significant step that Mashi should be credited for, their willingness to contribute towards costs of upgrading, training and buying assets is commendable.