



# Grassroots Business Initiative



## Gone Rural

Swaziland



### Background

Swaziland, a land-locked country in South Africa, has the one of the world's highest HIV/AIDS infection rate, with nearly two-fifths of their adult population infected by the debilitating disease. Aside from its severe health implications, HIV/AIDS, as well as environmental degradation and overall underdevelopment, has taken a significant toll on Swaziland's economy, hindering foreign direct investment and leaving many dependent on remittances and support from South Africa. Approximately 69% of the population lives below the poverty line; 40% of the total population remains unemployed and 80% rely on subsistence agriculture for their basic economic and social needs.

Gone Rural is a grassroots business organization playing a vital role in reversing these trends. The organization is providing renewed hope for rural women by providing training and skills development and creating sustainable jobs in craft production. Their educational and social initiatives are focused on increasing the life expectancy of women, who are the primary victims of HIV/AIDS in the region.

### What Is Gone Rural?



Established in 1992 to develop the potential of rural women in Swaziland, Africa, Gone Rural manages / facilitates the production of unique handicrafts using traditional Swazi skills and locally available, sustainable natural materials. With over a decade of successful trading in both its domestic and export markets and strong advances in product quality and innovation, Gone Rural now seeks to scale-up its operations to drive revenue growth and increase employment and income within Swaziland's rural communities.

Central to the commitment of empowering rural Swazi women is the belief that through a strong and robust business, Gone Rural can continue to provide sustainable jobs, training, and renewed hope to its rural Swazi producers and their communities.

At the same time, to expand its development impact and provide a platform for excellence in both business operations and social development, Gone Rural has registering as a Section-21 Non-Profit Company, "Gone Rural BoMake." Gone Rural BoMake runs separately from the business operations of Gone Rural PL with the sole purpose of implementing targeted social programs to improve the quality of life of Gone Rural's women, their extended families and other dependents in their communities.

Gone Rural purchases lutindzi grass from the women, dyes and sells it back to them, then uses its knowledge of modern trends and markets for home décor to define what final products would be most marketable. Gone Rural trains the artisans in the latest trends in handicraft production and only purchases merchandise from them that meets the highest quality standards. In this way, the organization is able to offer their buyers high-grade products and excellent service.

## IFC's Involvement

Through the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Grassroots Business Initiative (GBI), Gone Rural is currently assisting the artisans in the following areas:

- **Sales and Marketing:** as 98 percent of the organization's products are exported, IFC provides funding for Gone Rural's participation in trade shows, which are a critical part of their marketing efforts.
- **Capacity Building:** grant funding was provided to purchase a new trailer to transport raw materials and finished products, and hire an additional manager to free up the current manager's time to focus on export marketing.
- **Working Capital:** funding has been provided to pay artisans upon delivery of their products to Gone Rural, rather than waiting until their customers receive and pay for the goods.
- **Business Planning:** technical assistance is provided for Gone Rural's business processes, including business plan development, manufacturing and dying, accounting and MIS systems, and staffing requirements.

## Results To-Date

# artisans engaged	660 (100% are women)
Average annual revenue earned by women	\$254
% of women in which Gone Rural is single source of income	71%
% income spent on food, school fees and household expenses	60%
# indirect beneficiaries	5464 (more than ½ are children)

Despite difficult and often crippling economic, social, and health circumstances in their community, Gone Rural PL has been able to maintain consistent revenues and gross margins and build a platform for future sales growth and export market expansion.

Gone Rural has become one of Swaziland's top 5 producers of handmade products and is considered among the country's most successful handicraft businesses. For the past five years, Gone Rural has won the Gold Medal for Best Stand at the SARCD (South Africa's leading gift, toy & décor trade exhibition) trade show in Johannesburg and have also won a capacity building award at the 2005 Pan- African Women Invent and Innovate (PAWII) competition in Ghana.