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sustainable environment, education & development

3-Month Interim Report
Project Stitch Sainte Luce: Phase IV

October – December 2017



Prepared for the
The Leopardess Foundation

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SEED Madagascar

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1. Project Summary

Project Stitch Sainte Luce (hereafter Stitch) aims to increase women's incomes, social standing and economic resilience through developing embroidery as a sustainable livelihood opportunity in Sainte Luce. Sainte Luce is a rural fishing village where women have few livelihood opportunities, due to cultural traditions, lack of education and the isolated location of the village. Most women are reliant on the marginal fishing income of a husband or father. Stitch seeks to empower women by enabling them to generate their own income through embroidery, allowing them to invest in their children's futures and help lift the community out of chronic poverty.

Since 2012, Stitch has trained 21 women in embroidery, who now run the officially registered Stitch Embroidery Cooperative that produces high quality, embroidered products for the tourist market. The purpose of Phase IV is to expand, strengthen and increase the independence of this Cooperative, positioning it to continue without external donor support by project end. Overcoming donor reliance is essential for the sustainability of the Stitch enterprise, thus resulting in true empowerment for the embroiderers who will have full autonomy over and responsibility for their business. Phase IV also aims to increase the number of families profiting from the socio-economic benefits of Stitch, whilst ensuring the business is continually run in a fair and effective manner that meets the best interests of all its embroiderers.



Women of the Stitch Cooperative hard at work in the studio

2. Activity Detail

Outcome 1: Expanding the Cooperative

The main focus in these opening months of Phase IV has centred on the preparations for expanding the Cooperative to over 80 members, by providing current informal associate embroiderers with an opportunity to join the Stitch Embroidery Cooperatives as official members. A series of meetings were conducted between project staff, the Stitch Cooperative and the associates to negotiate and establish the terms of the expansion. During these discussions, details such as age limits, equipment provision, entry fees and representation for new members were considered by the three parties, alongside defining new roles, responsibilities and training commitments for current embroiderers. Despite differences of opinion between the parties in several areas, an agreement was eventually found on all points and the terms for expanding the Cooperative have been accepted by both current and prospective members. Throughout

these meetings, local project staff were effective in ensuring discussions were open and receptive to the viewpoints of all women, whilst also being productive and leading towards a compromise.

All embroiderers and prospective new members have now agreed to the Terms of Expansion, with the official registration and welcome event provisionally set for the 26th January 2018. Aware that December can be an expensive month, several forward-thinking associates had already paid a contribution of their 20,000 Ariary¹ joining fee to the Cooperative before Christmas, demonstrating their commitment to becoming members of Stitch.



Meetings with the Stitch Cooperative to discuss and work through the terms of the expansion

Outcome 2: Strengthening the Cooperative through Skills Training

English teaching

Bespoke English language teaching within the Cooperative as part of Stitch has been ongoing throughout 2017, in collaboration with and guided by SEED's English department. Teaching has been conducted by our local Project Assistant, Paula, who is based in the studio in Sainte Luce for a majority of the time and thus has been able to deliver regular and consistent lessons to the embroiderers. Lesson plans specific to Project Stitch have been provided by the English department, along with bi-annual assessments of students' abilities conducted by SEED's English Coordinator. Moreover, the English department continue to provide regular teacher training and support to Paula, with an international English teaching volunteer delivering an additional teaching session for the embroiderers once per month.

At the start of Phase IV in October, voluntary re-assessments were done with the embroiderers to assess ability, improvement and motivation to learn. Using these assessments, alongside the Project Assistants' knowledge of the group and in consultation with the embroiderers, five students – Guerceline, Rosline, Pelagine, Esterline and Olga – were selected to be the focus of English teaching going forwards and receive more intensive lessons. Thrice weekly lessons with these embroiderers have now begun, supported by additional one-on-one practice sessions. An open English session for all embroiderers will also be held once a month from January 2017 to enable other women to improve their language skills.

IT skills review

¹ Equivalent to roughly £4.46 GBP or 5.92 CHF (*XE Currency Converter, 16.01.18*). Half of this joining fee can be paid over time after their first products have been sold.

Project staff designed and held an open IT skills session for all embroiderers to review and practice basic computer skills previously taught in previous phases of the project. This session covered basic functions such as powering on/off a laptop, mouse and keyboard controls, opening and saving a Word document, and typing. Although levels of literacy varied among the women, several students were able to complete all tasks with relative confidence and demonstrated a promising level of knowledge. Going forward, future IT sessions will build on these basic skills and an IT curriculum developed to address the needs and current ability levels of the embroiderers.



IT skills review session being delivered by Sylvestre, SEED's Rural Livelihoods Coordinator

Business skills session

In order to design training sessions which are relevant and beneficial to the Stitch Cooperative, Project staff held a consultation meeting with the embroiderers to discuss areas which could be improved and topics in which further training would be beneficial. Stemming from this discussion, a review workshop was planned and held with the ladies on commissions; specifically focusing on taking orders for commissions from customer in the studio. The participatory workshop, which was open to all embroiderers, not only served as an opportunity to review the key aspects when taking commissions but also encouraged the ladies to engage with current problems and collectively find solutions to improve the commission-taking process. Following the workshop, the Cooperative were proactive in printing new Commissions forms for recording customers' details and designs when products are ordered in the studio.

3. Sales and Markets

National Sales

Nationally, a total of 12,752,000 MGA (3,777 CHF) has been generated by sales of Stitch products since October.² This has predominantly been through sales in the Stitch Studio in Sainte Luce, with considerable support seen from visiting guests from the nearby eco-hotel, Manafiafy Lodge.

International Sales

Internationally, a total of £3770 GBP (5,010 CHF) has been generated since October, predominantly through an exciting new retail agreement with Verein für Betreutes Wohnen, an artisanal crafts shop in Liechtenstein. In November, they made their first order of Stitch products, totalling £2254. Other UK sales

² All sales figures converted on XE currency converter, 16.01.2018

events include The Big Textile Show in Leicester, generating £443, and the Norwich Christmas Market, bringing in £414.



A selection of Stitch purses on sale in the UK

4. Next Steps

Outcome 1: Expansion of the Cooperative

The welcome and registration event in January will mark the official enrolment of associates as members of the Stitch Cooperative. It is currently expected that around 60-70 associates will join in January, taking overall membership of the Cooperative to around 80-90 members. Training of the new members will then commence, conducted by nominated embroiderers from the current 21 members. These trainers will be supported by project staff through 10 Training of the Trainer sessions, which will run alongside the new member training and focus on effective planning and delivery of training sessions. Topics, delivery and schedule of new member training will be run and led by the current embroiderers. The ongoing process of incorporating new members into the Cooperative will be closely monitored by project staff through meetings and monitoring to ensure it is as smooth as possible, and that any issues that arise are resolved fairly and effectively in the long term.

Outcome 2: Strengthening the Cooperative through Skills Training

With the arrival of the International Project Specialist in January, a full schedule of regular Business, IT and Communications skills training will commence. The Specialist will complete further assessments and use existing resources to deliver flexible, targeted and participatory training workshops and curriculums, taking care to ensure sessions are effective in increasing the overall skills and autonomy within the Cooperative. Moreover, the Specialist will also work with the embroiderers to design internal monitoring systems which will allow for effective tracking of progress and on-going identification of training needs.

Outcome 3: Consolidating a Sustainable Business through Expanding Domestic Markets

The arrival of the Project Specialist will also enable a greater focus to be placed on market research into feasible and sustainable domestic retail outlets for Stitch products. Project staff will initially work with the Cooperative to identify and reach out to potentially viable opportunities that target tourist and volunteer-tourist markets, aiming to arrange trial and pilot sales before ultimately establishing sustainable routes to market. In addition, work will also begin on starting to re-design and build up Stitch as a brand, with project staff assisting the Cooperative to design and produce marketing and promotional materials.