

Help women potters in West Africa save 85% energy and make a better living



SUPPORTING LOCAL
CAPACITY
DEVELOPMENT

Nearly every small dusty village in northern Burkina Faso is home to one or more small groups of female potters. These hard working women produce the ceramic water jars, the pots to store food and other objects, and the traditional tubular gutters used on flat mud roofed houses. Selling their products is a vital complementary source of income, bringing in cash in the harsh dry season and helping stave off starvation for the family. Pottery is one of the very few economic activities available to women, as they can fit it round collecting water (often over long distances), working in the fields and their daily household chores, working at home.

Wasted energy, wasted effort

Traditionally, pottery is not turned on a potter's wheel, nor fired in a kiln. To make an almost spherical pot, for example, the clay is beaten into shape using a shallow curved indentation in the ground as a mould. Once enough pots are dry, they are placed in a shallow open pit, where thirty or more pots and other objects will be fired together. Dried cow dung, some wood, bark and branches – anything that will burn - is simply piled round and over the pots and set alight. Most of the heat generated escapes to the open air and a gust of wind suddenly changing the temperature in the pit makes the pottery crack or causes unsightly discolouring. This system of firing is a huge waste of energy and effort.



The answer ? Fuel efficient kilns.

The NGO Development Workshop has been working in the arid West African countries bordering the Sahara for over thirty years, mainly training builders to build using mud bricks and vault and domed roofs so that they no longer need to cut down scarce trees for roofs. Several years ago, DW suggested that builders could also build simple mud brick kilns for the women potters. The results exceeded all expectations on a number of levels.

Today over 2 000 women have seen for themselves dramatic improvements in output, quality – and above all in the incomes of those who have access to a kiln.



Some figures.

Using a closed kiln, a load of 150 pots weighing 670 kgs needs about half a cartload of fuel (less than a cubic metre) and the breakage rate is less than 3%. That's a 85% saving in fuel for a 70% increase in saleable output. Why? Because the closed environment in which the firing takes place means there is very little heat loss and no risk of wind causing sudden temperature fluctuations. After the firing the women can recuperate about 7.5 kgs of charcoal, which they either sell or use for their own cooking needs representing a local market value of more than £6 that covers the operational costs.



DW helps women develop new products, using a potter's wheel as well as the new kilns. These include fuel efficient stoves, terracotta floor tiles, egg hatching shelters housing baby chicks, and more besides. Thanks to the better quality of the products, they command a higher price on local markets. A pot that sold before for £1.20 now sells for £1.90.

As a result they are earning significantly more than they have ever done before. The kilns have literally changed their lives and they appreciate that.

How you can help change their lives

DW has a waiting list of groups of women asking for kilns and equipment they need for making tiles and turned pots.

To provide a group of twenty women with a kiln, several potter's wheels and tile making kits and gutter moulds, and to ensure they are properly trained in how to use them efficiently costs £2,000 – or just £100 per woman.

A small investment compared with providing them with a regular income for life and with skills they can pass on to their children.

What to do:

Make a donation to DW UK
Send a cheque made out to

Development Workshop UK:
5 Graces Mews, Camberwell, London SE5 8LF, UK



Women on the market, Pétégole Village, Northern Burkina Faso



Development Workshop UK is a registered charity n° 1149152 and eligible for Gift Aid Find out more

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