



Dining for Women

Program Fact Sheet

PROGRAM: Rwanda Knits

WEBSITE: <http://www.rwandaknits.org/>

MISSION: RWANDA KNITS provides hand-operated, American-made knitting machines, technical, and business training to low-income Rwandan women. The program enables them to increase their incomes through economically sustainable knitting cooperatives, through which they produce garments for their domestic market and export markets.

WHY WE LOVE THIS PROGRAM: *Rwanda Knits has created the first women owned income producing cooperatives in Rwanda. With our help, 29 women's knitting cooperatives will become independent businesses and the women who own them will be economically self-sufficient.*

COUNTRY AT-A-GLANCE: Rwanda

- ❖ **Full name:** Republic of Rwanda
- ❖ **Capital:** Kigali
- ❖ **Geographic size:** 10,161 sq. miles; slightly smaller than Maryland
- ❖ **Population:** 10,186,063 (July 2008 est.)
- ❖ **Median age:** 18.7 years; male 18.5 years; female 18.9 years
- ❖ **Average life expectancy:** 49.76%
- ❖ **Fertility rate:** 5.31 born/woman
- ❖ **Major languages:** Kinyarwanda, French, English, Swahili
- ❖ **Major religions:** Christianity, indigenous beliefs
- ❖ **Main exports:** Coffee, tea, hides, tin ore
- ❖ **Internet use** is very limited; 3% of Rwandans had access to the Internet (2007 est.)
- ❖ **GNI per capita:** US \$320 (World Bank, 2007)
- ❖ **History:** In 1959, three years before independence from Belgium, the majority ethnic group, the Hutus, overthrew the ruling Tutsi king. Over the next several years, thousands of Tutsis were killed, and some 150,000 driven into exile in neighboring countries. The children of these exiles later formed a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and began a civil war in 1990. The war, along with several political and economic upheavals, exacerbated ethnic tensions, culminating in April 1994 in the genocide of roughly 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The Tutsi rebels defeated the Hutu regime and ended the killing in July 1994, but approximately 2 million Hutu refugees – many fearing Tutsi retribution – fled to neighboring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire. Since then, most of the refugees have returned to Rwanda, but several thousand remained in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC; the former Zaire) and formed an extremist insurgency bent on retaking Rwanda, much as the RPF tried in 1990. Despite substantial international assistance and political reforms – including Rwanda's first local elections in March 1999 and its first post-genocide presidential and legislative elections in August and September



2003 - the country continues to struggle to boost investment and agricultural output, and ethnic reconciliation is complicated by the real and perceived Tutsi political dominance. Kigali's increasing centralization and intolerance of dissent, the nagging Hutu extremist insurgency across the border, and Rwandan involvement in two wars in recent years in the neighboring DRC continue to hinder Rwanda's efforts to escape its bloody legacy. (CIA THE WORLD FACTBOOK)

While the country is currently at peace, Rwandans continue to struggle with the legacy of genocide. National reconciliation is a long-term endeavor that has the commitment of the Government and the support of the international community.

- ❖ **Economy:** Rwanda is a poor rural country with about 90% of the population engaged in agriculture. It is the most densely populated country in Africa and is landlocked with few natural resources and minimal industry. Primary foreign exchange earners are coffee and tea. The 1994 genocide decimated Rwanda's fragile economic base, severely impoverished the population, particularly women, and eroded the country's ability to attract private and external investment. However, Rwanda has made substantial progress in stabilizing and rehabilitating its economy to pre-1994 levels, although poverty levels are higher now. GDP has rebounded and inflation has been curbed. However, recent indications are that trends in world markets and rising prices will likely result in higher levels of inflation than observed in the past.

Despite Rwanda's fertile ecosystem, food production often does not keep pace with population growth, requiring food imports. Rwanda continues to receive substantial aid money and obtained IMF-World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative debt relief in March 2005. Rwanda also received Millennium Challenge Account Threshold status in 2006. The government is working to reduce poverty by improving education, infrastructure, and foreign and domestic investment and pursuing market-oriented reforms, although energy shortages, instability in neighboring states, and lack of adequate transportation linkages to other countries continue to handicap growth.

BRIEF HISTORY OF RWANDA KNITS:

Prompted by a need to give back, that was instilled in her by her mother, Cari Clement always wanted to help start a women's economic cooperative somewhere in the world. Clement, then president of Bond America, manufacturer of home knitting machines, contacted the USA for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and together offered to donate 60 knitting machines and training to help set up a women's knitting cooperative anywhere in the world. Rwanda was first to reply and the machines were shipped late 2002.

In July 2003, Clement and the USA for UNHCR mission traveled to Rwanda and trained over 100 women to use the machines. Since then, Clement has traveled to and from Rwanda, bringing more knitting machines and meeting with Rwandan women, Congolese refugees and potential Rwandan partners to further development of cooperatives and to plan for new products.

Following receipt of a \$99,000 grant in 2005, Rwanda Knits was officially launched as a US AID program; enabling Clements to purchase over 600 knitting machines and continue expanding the training programs. The machines were divided between seventeen associations, to assist them in the creation of income-producing cooperatives.

By June 2007, 1,500 knitters had received orders for over 2,500 school uniform sweaters and expanded into other products. By early 2008, the original 17 associations had well begun the process of forming 29 knitting cooperatives around the country. This year, a volunteer cooperative specialist, Laura Hanson, facilitated the registration and training of four Primary Cooperatives and Rwanda's first artisan Secondary Cooperative training

program. And, Rwanda Knits became Rwanda Knits, Ltd, the first and only women-owned "Secondary Cooperative" (a large, for-profit business owned entirely by its members) in the country.

The long-term goal of Rwanda Knits is to become an *umbrella* cooperative owned by each of the member groups; responsible for handling all administrative and financial functions. Ultimately, the organization will be funded through an administrative percentage collected from each of the member cooperatives.

COOPERATIVE REGISTRATION PROCESS:

In 2007, the Rwandan government passed a law requiring all associations to create an income-producing entity, a cooperative. Rwanda Knits works with women's groups to help them become knitting cooperatives, known as Primary Cooperative, (PC) which is required by Rwandan law. PC's must write their by-laws and elect their board of directors. The cooperatives must comply with Rwandan law regarding by-law structure, board elections, management and working relations, profits, and product marketing. Rwandan law further requires the District Cooperative Officer (DCO) to conduct the training of groups intending to form cooperatives. With little time and limited training, the DCO's are stretched thin with many cooperatives requesting assistance. The process for registering as a cooperative is daunting; starting at the local level, then district, and lastly the national level.

Rwanda Knits has an invaluable resource in Laura Hanson, the volunteer cooperative specialist willing to donate her time and expertise to facilitate the formation and training of their cooperatives.

WHAT DFW WILL SUPPORT: *Our donations will specifically support the costs associated with cooperative registration and training, as required by the Rwandan government. Volunteer Laura Hanson returns to Rwanda in January 2009 to assist with the licensing process, enabling the 29 cooperatives to function independently. Our support will directly assist these efforts:*

PRIMARY COOPERATIVE TRAINING – One week of training includes:

- Transportation for co-op members that live at a distance from the meeting center
- Overnight accommodations for Laura when training women far from Kigali
- Food for the trainees
- Transportation for Laura to and from the training center
- Photocopying hand-outs, notepads, pencils for attendees

COOPERATIVE UNION TRAINING AND MEETINGS – More costly, however, are the monthly meetings and training sessions the Union must hold during its first year in Kigali. Primary Cooperative leaders must travel to the capital city from various locations throughout the country.

BUSINESS TRAINING - While a Cooperative Union may be registered and initially trained, some of the most important advanced training sessions focus on business and fiscal management, marketing, product development, and human resources. This training is conducted by an organization (IWACU) specializing in cooperative education and recommended by the Rwandan government.

PROGRAM FISCAL EFFICIENCY: Rwanda Knits does not have any paid administrative staff. Cari Clement and Laura Hanson are both volunteers.

DFW HISTORY WITH PROGRAM: New program

SOURCES:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/africa/rwanda/>

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http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1070265.stm

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/RWANDAEXTN/0,,menuPK:368714~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:368651,00.html>

<http://www.rwandaknits.org/about.html>