



# USAID | WEST AFRICA

## SUCCESS STORY

# Cotton Textiles in the Tradition of Kings

## A artisan from Benin introduces traditional weaving to the West

**From rags to riches: the region's shining star goes global after trainings funded by USAID WACIP**



Photo: Aid To Artisans

*Constant Adonon comes from a long family tradition of weaving for the court of the king.*

*Sundance Adirondacks...  
Cushioned, colorful, for those who take relaxation seriously*



Photo: Sundance Catalog

*Adonon's pillows featured on the back of the Spring 2010 Sundance Catalog.*

It isn't easy for Africa's artisans to break ahead of the pack. Small quantities, irregular quality control and stagnant designs stop them from reaching upscale markets. But when passion, talent, and enterprise come together, as they have for Constant Adonon, the creativity of African design makes a universal splash.

Constant Adonon grew up learning his father's trade, weaving, an art which has been passed down from the court of the Dahomey King Agonglo in the late 1700s in Benin. Committed to this art, Adonon created the Association for the Enhancement and Promotion of Traditional Weaving of Abomey (AVPTTA) to give new meaning to this noble work.

As part of its support to the cotton sector, the US Government, through USAID's West Africa Cotton Improvement Program (WACIP) and the US-based nongovernmental organization, Aid to Artisans, supports efforts to add value in locally produced cotton. In 2007, such support enabled export-ready artisans in West Africa to create innovative products, drawing on traditional forms and motifs to meet the preferences and requirements of international markets. Participating in the three-year program, Adonon received trainings in business management and marketing, including the organization of craft exhibitions and product design and development.

"Before the training, my product line was limited to the repertoire of the royal court because my ancestors wove the shrouds and traditional clothes for the King. I repeated the patterns on tablecloths and other decorative items for the home", said Adonon. "But the life of a well-woven cloth is 20 years! To attract clients, we need exciting new products. My business is built on creating demand through innovation and satisfying customers who are more and more demanding every day".

Sundance Catalog was impressed by Constant's creations which displayed at the 2008 and 2009 New York International Gift Fairs. Sundance introduced his colorful line of hand-woven pillows in their 2009 summer catalog and website. That went so well that they ordered 100 more cushion and pillow covers with fresh designs. One of his Abomey-inspired cushions adorns a classic Adirondack chair on the back cover of their Spring 2010 catalog.

Constant is ecstatic. He has earned over \$57,000 dollars and expanded his market to France, Burkina, Ghana, Benin and Mali as well as the United States. In the last three years (2008-10), ATA held trainings for an average of 1,100 C-4 artisans a year enabling them to create quality products through cleaner and healthier production processes, and achieve over \$690,000 sales at regional and international trade fairs.