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SNAPSHOT

Ethiopian Designer Ready to Fly

USAID supports Ethiopian designer to succeed in international fashion market



Photo: USAID East Africa Trade Hub

Fikirte Addis accepts first prize in the Origin Africa Fiber to Fashion Designer Showcase in Mauritius, March 2011.

“Designer Fikirte Addis is taking the fashion world by storm; her 2013 collection “*Timeless Girl, Modern World*” is shining bright this summer.”

-- Zen Magazine

“This is just the beginning,” says Fikirte. She credits the Trade Hub for the opportunity, training and exposure.

Ethiopian designer Fikirte Addis “feels like she is ready to fly.” A one-time child psychologist with a passion for design, Fikirte took a risk in 2009 by launching her own fashion brand. Since then, she has won the Origin Africa Fiber to Fashion Designer Showcase in Mauritius, has received standing ovations in New York and has joined the ethical fashion scene in Paris. In the words of fashion-focused Zen Magazine, “Designer Fikirte Addis is taking the fashion world by storm; her 2013 collection *Timeless Girl, Modern World* is shining bright this summer.”

The USAID East Africa Trade Hub “discovered” Fikirte in 2010, shortly after she launched her brand that offers a “cultural touch for the modern-day woman.” Fikirte uses local fabrics and traditional Ethiopian weavers. She’s proud of Ethiopian culture and committed to strengthening the skill set of her weavers and providing them with consistent, well-paid work.

Exporting to the United States through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) provides the demand she needs to meet her commitment.

USAID’s East Africa Trade Hub helped Fikirte by connecting her with an experienced AGOA exporter—Wambui Njogu—and sponsoring her for fashion shows hosting U.S. and international buyers. Like Fikirte, Wambui is a savvy business woman who has already adapted her product for an international market— who better to mentor Fikirte?

“Fikirte recognized the potential of the existing ‘old world’ weaving industry in Ethiopia and knew how to produce something sophisticated and special from the authentic traditional fabrics,” said Wambui. “Fikirte’s materials are timeless but the modernity of her garments means they can be appreciated outside of her traditional markets, as summarized by her aptly named current collection, ‘timeless women, modern world’.”

Fikirte credits Wambui with helping her “create story lines and sketches” for her designs and prepare for her first African-wide fashion show – the Trade Hub sponsored Origin Africa Fiber to Fashion Designer Showcase in Mauritius in March 2011.

Fikirte’s first-place finish at the Mauritius event secured her entry to African Fashion Week in New York. New York led to Paris in 2012 and an alliance with Adiat Disu, a spokesperson for African fashion. Fikirte is now featured on Disu’s site adiree.com.

Fikirte also has her own site: yefikirdesign.com, her own Facebook book page <https://www.facebook.com/YefikirDesign> with over 6,000 views of her most recent fashion shoot, and a platform for online shopping. She’s moved from customized pieces to ready-to-wear fashion intended for the global export market.

In 2013 she trained 135 weavers to cut hand-spun Ethiopian cotton for optimal comfort and to add embroidery for maximum fashion. Fikirte, who is tiny, also says she is getting more size conscious. Her pieces no longer only fit the Ethiopian models who walk the runways of New York Fashion Week.

Fikirte credits the Trade Hub for the opportunity, training and exposure. “This is just the beginning,” she says.