

WORLD FOOTWEAR

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**Roger Vivier treasures
go on show**

**Sourcing: Canadian
start-up reveals all**

**Leather Innovation gives
shoe firms reassurance**

Last year, UNIDO chose Tanzania as the place to try out and test a new e-learning training programme to help footwear producers develop their technical skills. Now the programme has been expanded and updated and is available to help build up new generations of footwear artisans in all parts of the world. The footwear industry in Tanzania, meanwhile, has been given a new lease of life.



Participants at the inaugural UNIDO footwear pattern engineering e-learning course in Mwanza, Tanzania.

CREDIT: UNIDO

e-learning lends new life to Tanzanian shoe sector

Hope emerged of a much brighter future for the footwear industry in Tanzania last year after UNIDO (the United Nations Industrial Development Organization) and the Leather Association of Tanzania joined forces with a local education provider to run a new course on footwear pattern engineering, with e-learning the key to its success.

In all, an initial intake of 17 young people completed the initial course at the Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology (DIT) in the city of Mwanza in northern Tanzania. In conjunction with hands-on, practical training, much of the information available to participants on the day came from a web portal that UNIDO set up in April 2014 to provide widespread access to reports, research and other work carried out by its leather panel over the last 40 years. UNIDO has made it clear it believes the information from its portal will work best in conjunction with practical training.

Remote learning

Ivan Kral from UNIDO's Agro-Industries Technology Unit says this method will help provide opportunities to students from more remote regions who do not always have access to training in conventional institutions. He adds: "With the help of new technology such as digital imaging, we are able to improve and increase learning efficiency and help achieve technology transfer, which is one of our priorities."

The reference to remote regions resonates with Dr Albert Mmari, head of the DIT Mwanza campus. "Tanzania is a big country," he says, "and the people who work in leather and footwear here are spread out. At the same time, we only have one institution like this one. The new technology means we can reach everyone now and our footwear people, no matter where they are, can learn more about making shoes and develop their production."

Injection of confidence

With the injection of confidence generated by the UNIDO course, the Tanzanian footwear industry went on to set up a pavilion at the Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair to allow its footwear producers to display their designs, boosting orders, Dr Mmari says, by between 20% and 30%. "The e-learning made a difference," he insists. "Many of our people were already making shoes, but without the technical knowledge they have now. The course made an instant, positive impact on the quality of their production."

Further good news for the Tanzanian footwear sector is that the ministry of industry and trade has set up a loan programme for small- and medium- enterprises to encourage entrepreneurs to develop their businesses. Dr Mmari insists that this will allow some of the participants in the Mwanza training programme to go on to supply shoes not just to the domestic market, but to customers overseas as well.

Examples include Sterco, from the Arusha region in the north of the country, and Shah Industry from Moshi in the Kilimanjaro region in the north-east, which the head of campus says are already exporting their products to the US under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which aims specifically to help eligible countries in sub-Saharan Africa to develop trade with the US and improve their economies by granting quota- and duty-free entry to the US market of exports for qualifying products and materials.


Course expansion

UNIDO is equally pleased with the way its footwear e-learning initiative in Tanzania has worked out, saying this February that it has followed up on the success of the

Mwanza programme by making new lessons and tests available as part of a now expanded online footwear pattern engineering course and updated all the lessons that were already included.

It points to the cost-effectiveness of training a new generation of footwear manufacturers in this way, making high-quality information and technical assistance accessible to "all users, without limitations". The successful launch of the programme with DIT Mwanza last year means the material is "tried and tested", according to Ivan Kral, and can now be rolled out as part of self-learning or classroom-based training programmes everywhere.

This, he says, will "open doors to millions who, by virtue of their remote location, limited time or resources, security issues or other constraints, would be unable to follow conventional learning programmes".

Mr Kral also points to the programme's ability to inspire innovation. He says: "UNIDO is closely associated with innovation; its interventions are about the practical application of innovation." In the context of being able to use modern communications technology to offer best-in-class training in shoe design and production to talented footwear professionals anywhere in the world, there are strong grounds for hope that this initiative can revitalise the footwear industry in other developing economies, just as it appears to have done in Tanzania. 

UNIDO insists the e-learning course works best in conjunction with practical training.

CREDIT: UNIDO

