



Boneca de Ataúro

Stitching Their Way to Success

How a Women's Craft Cooperative Achieved 9% Growth in 1 Year

MDF supported Boneca de Ataúro to open its own retail shop in Dili, purchase new sewing machines and develop the skills and capacity of the cooperative members on product development and business management. These activities have improved the quality of their products, production and sales.



The Company

The Boneca group was formed in 2007 by Ester Camponobo, a Swiss artist, along with four artisans from Ataúro island. Boneca commercially produces and sells traditional dolls made by local residents.

In 2009 Boneca expanded to include two other female artisan groups in Ataúro, and formed the Boneca de Ataúro cooperative.

The cooperative worked by giving the members a daily wage and dividing the profit equally between all cooperative members at the end of the year. The group started with basic sewing equipment and limited knowledge of sewing. However, with hard work and determination, they learned fast and were able to secure orders continuously.

In 2012, Boneca began supplying dolls to *Things and Stories*, the largest curator and retailer of handcraft products in Timor-Leste. Customers responded well to Boneca products and by 2015, Boneca had become Things and Stories' biggest supplier.



The Context

Timor-Leste has a wealth of traditional handcraft products such as textiles, carvings and ceramics. One of the most iconic of these traditional crafts is *tais*, a hand-woven fabric. Traditionally, these crafts have been produced by women. Since Independence, identifying markets and retailing products has been particularly challenging¹.

Barriers include lack of access to regular affordable materials, inconsistent quality of design and market information for new product development, lack of access to finance for raw materials and production, limited marketing of the products and lack of experience and knowledge for importing².

¹ (Alola Foundation and Oxfam)Traditional Crafts of Timor Leste: A Marketing Overview

² (Asia Foundation March, 2017) Tais Industry Research and Recommendations



The Challenge

Local producers often lack commercial marketing knowledge and struggle with pricing and restricted language abilities. This often prevents them from effectively communicating with potential customers.

Additionally, households in Ataúro only receive electricity at night, meaning that Boneca's artisans had to work very late. This negatively affected the workers' lives and restricted their other social and family activities.



The Solution

In July 2015, MDF signed a partnership agreement with Things and Stories to expand their outlets in Dili, as well as to provide technical support and equipment to select supplier groups. Things and Stories identified Boneca as one of the three supplier groups to receive assistance from MDF. Boneca had basic and broken sewing equipment so MDF agreed to share the costs of purchasing 31 new sewing machines.

To ensure the women could make use of all potential working hours and work during the day, MDF also helped Boneca to purchase a generator.

In early 2016, Boneca decided to strike out on their own and work towards building their own brand identity, separate from Things and Stories. MDF agreed to sign a separate partnership with Boneca with activities focused on increasing their capacity to manage production (from inception to sales) and making them more self-reliant.

As part of this, MDF supported Boneca in setting up their own retail store in Dili and helped to train their artisans in a variety of skills including language training, business management, product development and marketing.

Finally, in order to break down the cooperative's long-term vision into actionable items, MDF organised a workshop to discuss the cooperative's future and how it could reach its business objectives.



Additional
**\$15,000
USD**
in 2017



Cooperative's profit
increased by
\$4,600 USD



Total additional income
\$1,190 USD
for **50** cooperative members

The Results

By opening their store, Boneca earned an additional \$15,000 USD in 2017.

Compared to the previous year, the cooperative's profit increased by \$4,600 USD, representing growth of approximately 9%.

Fifty cooperative members benefitted from a total additional income of \$1,190 USD.

Boneca's presence in Dili also increased the cooperative's access to new markets, such as cultural festivals including Taste of Timor and other government craft fairs.

Through the initial support of sewing machinery, artisans were able to reduce the time they spent stitching by hand. Since Boneca was not maintaining records before the intervention with MDF, time and effort saved could not be calculated. However, some artisans said the machinery allowed them to save one-third of the time that it took them to sew by hand.

The generator also meant that they could work during the day, which had a significant impact on their work-life balance and inclusion.

Before the financial management training, the artisans rarely analysed their finances, however, now they maintain the stock and sales figures on software and conduct a monthly analysis of their cash flow.

With daily practice, all Boneca artisans have learned new skills and as a result, Boneca now has a more diverse product offering.