

# NIPSA Support for Ruvuma Project - Final Report

## Ruvuma Artisan Support and Training Centre (RASTC)



The Ruvuma Artisan Support and Training Centre is located in Songea, the main town of the province of Ruvuma in the south of Tanzania. This is in the Southern Highlands zone of Tanzania, not far from the border with Malawi, and a remote area of considerable deprivation. There are a number of other small towns in the area, but the nearest large centre is Iringa, approximately 8 hours drive away.

The aim of the project is to improve the income generation of artisans in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. This is to be delivered through locally employed staff operating a centre within the project area, targeting the supply of high quality sewing machines, tools, machinery and skill training to the target groups. These target groups consist primarily of women and people in rural areas.

Following a Field Trip in 2017, it was decided that Songea was a suitable location for the project. By May 2018 the project was established as a joint venture by Tools For Solidarity and SIDO Ruvuma (Small Industries Development Organisation) with the financial support of NIPSA (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance). A mechanic, Mr. Matagolo, was employed and spent three months training at our existing centre in Mwanza, in the north of Tanzania. The training covered:

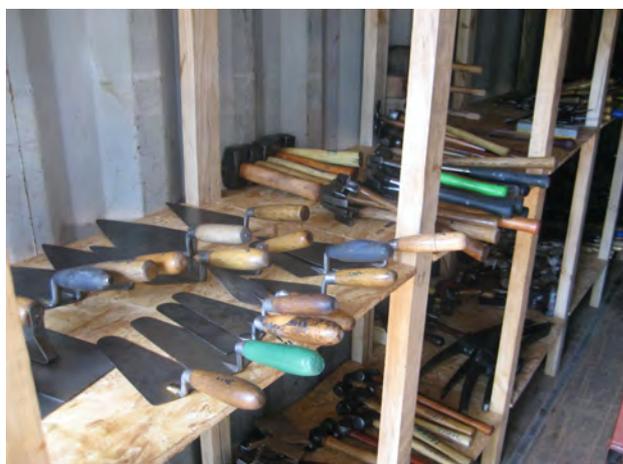
1. Technical aspects such as sewing machine refurbishment, treadle design and fabrication issues
2. Project marketing and methodologies to attract the projects target groups

### 3. Organisation and delivery of training programmes

The training was completed and he arrived back in Songea at the end of July in time to receive the container of sewing machines and tools sent by TFS, using the funding provided by NIPSA. The official opening of the project took place in September 2018 and has been operating successfully since then.

### Visit to RASTC

In June 2019, three members of Tools for Solidarity visited Songea and the surrounding area to assess the progress of the centre, and to discuss options for the future, beyond the initial two year Pilot phase. We were able see that the shipping container has been converted to essentially a shop front for the tools, enabling local artisans to purchase top quality equipment at very reasonable prices. The income from sales goes to ensure that the project as a whole will be sustainable financially, beyond the two year period of direct support from Belfast. It also enables the project to supply sewing machines free to a number of people with disabilities in the area. Targets have been set for the number of tools and sewing machines to be sold during the Pilot phase, and the number of sewing machines to be supplied for free.



We found that the project is in a sound financial state, and is meeting targets for the supply and sale of sewing machines, but that sales of hand-tools has been rather low. The reasons for this were discussed, and included the fact that Mr. Matagolo has a background in sewing machines rather than hand-tools.

## Treadle production

The project requires 160 treadles for sewing machines across the two years. TFS sent 30 treadles in the container, with 50 to be produced locally in the first year and 80 during the second year. A local fabricator is hired to produce the treadles as required. The visit found that the initial treadle production suffered from a number of defects, and some of the original ones supplied to artisans needed to be replaced. However the quality of production has improved considerably, and we were able to talk to the fabricator and to inspect recently made models which were adequate. We drew their attention to the TFS document on Treadle Quality Control which helps to standardise the quality.



## Field visits

Several days of the trip were spent on field visits to villages and farmsteads where tailors have been supplied with sewing machines. Some of these were in remote areas without electricity supply. We also visited Mbinga, a local commercial centre with a large number of professional tailors, some of whom have purchased sewing machines from RASTC. Apart from some issues with the early treadles, there was a high level of satisfaction with the machines and training supplied. It was very gratifying to see the machines in daily use, and to hear accounts of the difference it had made for them to have reliable equipment, as those available to purchase locally are generally of very poor quality. The picture below shows Joyce, a disabled tailor in a very poor region, who had received one of the free machines. She described it as being ‘like a second God to me’, and had been able to set up a successful dress-making business.



We also visited the neighbouring Njombe region. The initial plan for the Pilot had been to work in both Ruvuma and Njombe, but this had not happened, due to the difficulty of transporting machines and tools between the centres, around a 4 hour drive across the mountains. We spent some time in discussion with SIDO officials in both Songea and Ruvuma around possible options for future provision in the two areas.

## Future developments

The Pilot has highlighted several areas that we need to consider within plans for future development of the project.

1. The demand for zigzag sewing machines appears to be quite high - this is important in the income that could be generated within the project
2. The demand for tools and machinery appears to be higher within Njombe region than Songea
3. The distances between Njombe and Songea are high making allocation of resources within each area more challenging
4. The demand for sewing machines seems to fit the supply provided. However there is a demand in Njombe not being served and this may be the case for other areas in Ruvuma furthest away from Songea town
5. While communication is reasonably good, strategic development of the project has been left to Mr. Matogolo with possible assistance from the Business Development Offices. It seems that SIDO have problems recruiting technical officers
6. Tool sales have been slow. This is not totally unexpected as Matogolo has no experience and the SIDO technical officer has helped with this (she has now left and has not been replaced)
7. Feedback on demand for certain items has been received from the project. It indicates that the prices that the project charge are very reasonable with the possibility for a further increase if needed

Tools for Solidarity are now developing full proposals for the project beyond the end of the two year Pilot phase. The aim from the beginning has been for TFS to operate a tools centre in the Southern Highlands region. The finances required to operate the centre and provide training would have been difficult if not impossible to run without subsidy from TFS. The only option to make this feasible is to link it in with sewing machines to make the project financially sustainable.

It makes sense to target and place the tools element of the project where it can be most effective. This would mean opening another centre in Njombe with all the additional costs that this incurs. The centre in Songea would then focus solely on refurbishing sewing machines. Sewing machines would then be transferred to Njombe where they would be sold and tools sent from Njombe to Songea on a reciprocal basis. This will require co-operation between the regions and an agreement regarding joint incomes for the centres so that the cost of both centres are covered. An investigation should be carried out to run a small support programme for PWD within the project area.

A budget for this two-centre proposal has been drawn up, and we are currently starting the search for funding to make it a reality. The intention is that there will be a smooth transition from the pilot phase to the extended project at the end of the current project in June 2020.