



These single mothers, who blamed themselves for not being able to get stable jobs, work in the bag workshop and are able to smile again for the first time in a long while.

GRASSROOTS AMBASSADOR >>> Japanese Individuals Contributing Worldwide

# African Print for Women's Self-Reliance

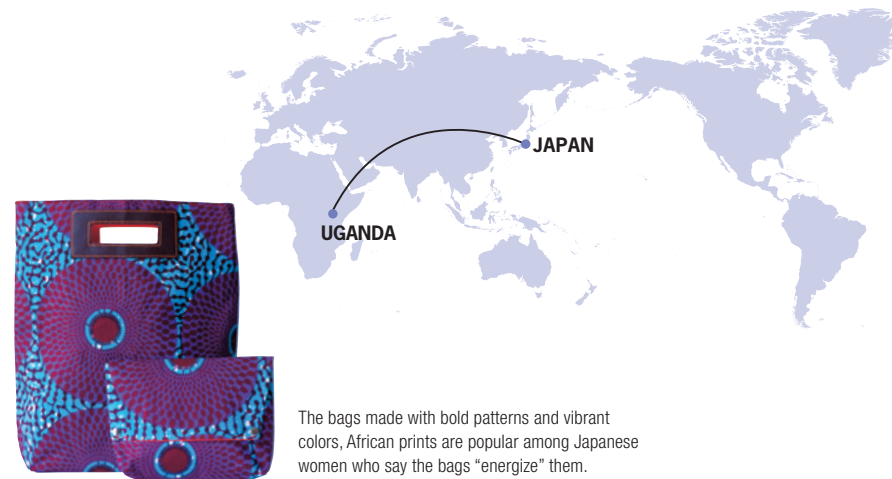
Japanese woman establishes bag workshop in Uganda's capital, Kampala, to support both unemployed single mothers who are unable to send their children to school, and impoverished former child soldiers who lack dreams for a better future

Arranged within a newly opened store in a prime location in Tokyo are bags of vibrant colors and rich patterns and they give off tremendous energy when held. Chizu Nakamoto, a resident of Uganda, launched a project to solve social issues through sustainable business, with the primary goal of preventing people from being forced into conflict.

You may ask yourself, what does

the business of selling bags and peace-building have in common? Nakamoto says, "In Africa, where living conditions are severe, there are many young people who are dissatisfied with society and are easily attracted to joining armed groups. But, I believe if they lived under different conditions, they might not have to make such a decision. For this reason, I thought in order to create peace, I must create jobs."

When Nakamoto was stationed in Uganda as an NGO staff member, she directly saw the light and dark sides of the country for herself. Even when there is no employment, many people gathered their wisdom to build their own businesses and live their lives vigorously. She was impressed by their positive outlook on life and the fact that they believed, from the bottom of their hearts, that tomorrow would be a better day than today.



The bags made with bold patterns and vibrant colors, African prints are popular among Japanese women who say the bags "energize" them.

On the other hand, in Uganda, life is very difficult and challenging for many single mothers living in urban areas, and they often cannot afford to educate their children. From among these women, Nakamoto met one person who was just making enough cash to get by, running her own small business through trial and error. For Nakamoto, this encounter was a turning point and became a chance for her to realize what she had been pondering in her mind until that time.

"I thought to myself, 'With this person, I just might be able to launch a new business.' With my own pocket money, I sent her to school to learn sewing, and from that point, we started the bag workshop."

Nakamoto, who was always a lover of fashion, was fascinated by the charm of the vibrantly colorful African print fabrics, having seen

them by chance while visiting Kampala's city marketplace with a friend. As she was excitedly choosing fabrics with her friend, she became convinced that if she crafted bags using these fabrics, this could surely become a business in Japan.

Japanese consumers love and give high praise to the bags and travel goods that are crafted with a sophisticated design and made with high quality and functionality. In a mere four years, the business has grown to the point where they have established direct management stores in Tokyo. As for the management, Nakamoto endeavors to keep relationships on a level plain, without creating a hierarchical relationship between herself and her staff. "I respect the women's skills, and they alone are responsible for their sewing and work arrangements. I try to express



Nakamoto says nothing when it comes to the allocation and procedures of work on the job site. This is because she respects the women as professionals.



**Chizu Nakamoto**

In graduate school, she mainly studied conflict and peace-building in the sub-Saharan Africa region. After graduation, she got a job at a major bank, but in 2011 left the bank to work for an African agricultural support NGO. In 2014, she launched her bag workshop while working at the NGO office in Uganda and the following year she established RICCI EVERYDAY, a bag manufacturing and sales company in Japan. This was followed by her creation of a local company in Uganda in 2016.

my gratitude in words, no matter what they do."

She has also put in place social security systems that help single mothers, such as interest-free education loans and subsidies for medical expenses. "I think we can develop a strong relationship of trust by providing a wide range of support, not just the relationship of paying salaries for their work." Improving the living conditions of single mothers and supporting the education of the next generation will reduce the numbers of young people who have no future dreams.

"Setting up a successful brand is not the end. We want to expand the creation of sustainable support in countries beyond Uganda." Nakamoto continues her journey toward the realization of a society in which women are proud and young people have dreams, believing that tomorrow will be better than today, and the day after tomorrow will be better than tomorrow. ✳