

Benin project turns waste fabric into recycled 'gold'

November 12 2021, by Josué Mehoudenou



Out of piles of fabric all manner of objects take shape—from placemats and rugs to earrings.

Every morning, Amake Yessoufou makes the rounds of the sewing workshops of Ouidah, a small coastal town in the south of Benin, and

collects scraps of fabric used by tailors to make clothes.

In the past, waste fabric clogged up the gutters of Ouidah, but Yessoufou is part of one effort to change that culture and make the most of recycling materials.

When Yessoufou ends her tour, the 28-year-old, who is deaf and mute, joins the "Colour Indigo" workshop, a project transforming waste fabric into decorative objects.

Employing around 30 people, including 10 living with a disability, the project has found a loyal following and even ships some objects overseas.

"I had never imagined that scraps of fabric could be useful. At first, I was amazed and astonished but afterwards, I understood that textile waste is worth gold if it is recycled," says Lucrece Sossou, a local seamstress.

In the workshop, Anne-Marie Afoutoutou leaves her wheelchair at the foot of a pile of scraps of fabric. On a small wooden chair, she braids pieces of laundry sorted by colour.

Over the course of the day, the piles of fabric disappear and all manner of objects take shape, from placemats and rugs to earrings, sold at between seven and 40 euros a piece.



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Colour Indigo transforms waste fabric into decorative objects.



Business manager Nadia Adanle says working with people living with a disability does not affect productivity at the company at all.



The recycled and transformed items sell for around seven to 40 euros a piece.

One "Colour Indigo" client is Marcel Adjanohoun, head of several hotels in Ouidah—a [tourist destination](#) 40 kilometres (25 miles) along the coast from Cotonou, the economic capital.

"These are objects that speak to me a lot, so I use them to decorate my hotel," explained the entrepreneur.

Braiding the pieces of [fabric](#) to make objects has significantly changed the lives of the workers, most of whom use crutches or wheelchairs.

Contrary to what some argue, working with people living with a

disability does not affect the productivity of the company in any way, says Nadia Adanle, the business manager.

Thanks to her work, Afoutoutou can "finally provide for her needs", whereas before, she says, she could "not put anything aside".

"The way society looks at me has changed a lot since I leave the house every morning to go to work," she says, her eyes riveted on the thin braids. "Today, I feel valued."

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