

into the development business (and make no mistake, “trade, not aid” on the scale of the U.N. is very much a business), Cipriani was in the shoe industry. So he’s a rare mix. On the one hand, he possesses a deep understanding of the fact that poverty’s many problems can be alleviated only through piecemeal change. On the other hand, he gets the rules of the fashion system—great products, consistent high quality, reliable deliveries and realistic production schedules.

Laudi heard about Cipriani at a time when, like so many in an industry that is facing profound change, she was wondering, What next? She summoned him immediately to Max Mara’s headquarters in Reggio Emilia, Italy. “I arrived with my bag stuffed with little samples from the slums,” Cipriani recalls. When Laudi and her team came back with a proposal seen through their fashion eyes, Cipriani was “stunned.” The resulting accessories combine the craft skills of six community groups—each composed of about 100 people—with these people in turn supporting their extended families.

One of these groups is helmed by an American, Erin Brennan Allan, 34, a former assistant to magazine editor Tina Brown. After 9/11, Brennan Allan decided to sell her West Village apartment in New York City and move to Kenya, where she set up Toto Knits, a company that employs disadvantaged African women to knit baby sweaters for export. The commission to fulfill about half of the Max & Co. crochet order “added a zero to anything we had tried before,” Brennan Allan says.

But what would Laudi say if direct competitors like D&G or DKNY wanted to work in Africa? “I would be happy,” she says. “This goes

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—LISA BARRATT, MARULA STUDIOS

beyond brands and commercial values.” Cipriani, who knows well enough that fashion folk are loath to be second in anything, says, “For those looking for their own story in Africa—and we recognize creative people want something that is new for them—there are so many other possibilities.”

However, the realities of the locale are always close at hand. “It needs to be understood this is not Asia,” says Lisa Barratt, an exile

from the conflict in Zimbabwe, who with her Kenyan business partner, Julie Church, directs Marula Studios, the hub where products arriving from diverse communities are finished, checked and dispatched to the outside world. The biggest difference is that fashion’s usual lines of credit don’t work in Kenya. “You cannot say to a villager, ‘I will pay you when I get paid,’” explains Church. “We understand that big fashion houses are never just going to give us the cash up front,” Barratt chimes in. “But we have to say, ‘If you want to do this on credit, this is the price, and if it is cash, it’s this much less.’” Kenyan interest rates are staggeringly high, “so hardly anyone borrows, even to buy a car,” says Church. “Lisa and I had to get our first-ever overdraft for this project.”

Barratt and Church and Brennan Allan have put their other business ventures on hold. All three felt this was a pioneering project worth making sacrifices for. “We knew we had what was needed to get this kick-started,” says Church. “We believe in Africa.”

As does Laudi. Max & Co. will continue working with African collectives “because it is good to see what can be done, what must be done,” she says. As for Akoto, joining the global fashion industry means she can promise her baby a better future.

London Calling

THREE YEARS AGO, CRISTINA CISILINO, 44, based in London, was handling global sourcing for some of fashion’s biggest brands. Increasingly disillusioned by all the gray areas of mass production, she told her partner Gerson Barnett, 38, then working in the newspaper business, that she wanted to relocate to Africa to start an ethical-jewelry business. Amazingly, he and the couple’s young son were game.

Cisilino soon heard from outreach workers about Paul Otieno Asunga, a pin-neat and ramrod-straight African who was living in Kibera, the most notorious Nairobi slum (featured in the movie *The Constant Gardener*), and could make jewelry from just about anything, from old faucets to soda-bottle glass. Cisilino tracked him down and hired him to make the first pieces for her label. Today, Asunga trains and oversees nearly 50 workers and carries business cards that read HEAD OF PRODUCTION, MADE KENYA LIMITED.

Made, Cisilino’s ethical venture, lists among its clients Nicole Farhi; Topshop (including accessories for the Kate Moss collection); and GUAM (Global United Artists Movement) by Crumley, in a collaboration for Urban Outfitters. This season, Peaches Geldof—transatlantic It chick—has contributed a design of a unicorn, which Asunga translated into a hip, outsize pendant.

“My life has changed,” says Asunga. “By seeing different things, meeting these people, I can make better things.” Like all Made work-



Precious pieces Akoto with her baby, top; GUAM by Crumley bead necklace, above left; Peaches Geldof’s unicorn necklace for Made, above right

ers, he receives a fair wage and a hot lunch. “At the beginning, you do think, ‘We’ve got to get them out of the slums,’ and we were looking at accommodation,” says Barnett. “But then reality kicks in. We would go bankrupt very quickly. Just as we source sustainably, we must be sustainable.”

Future plans are that Made Kenya will not expand much beyond its current size and that “instead, we will grow through a network of community-size businesses across Africa, using this as the template,” says Barnett.

From Lamu to Fifth Avenue

MAX OSTERWEIS, 34, A FILMMAKER BASED IN New York City and a regular visitor to Africa, was so horrified by Kenya’s postelection violence last year, he decided to act. “Writing a fat check doesn’t always help in the long term,” he says. “I wanted to create long-term employment and also set an example to show that