



Chrisbek's...

Chris Ezeokoli is a young, self-taught leather products designer and manufacturer with a growing reputation for quality leather products featuring a unique stitch. Having invested in his own stamping machine, Chris is now producing under his new brand 'Chrisbek's'. GEMS1 caught up with Chris at his outlet in Mushin, Lagos.

"I first met GEMS1 during 2010 when I was a self-employed artisan making wallets and ladies' purses on Wey Street in the open air. I was selling wallets then for NGN 250/each (\$1.67); thanks to GEMS1 linkages, they now sell for a minimum of NGN 5,000 (\$34)", says Chris.

"GEMS1 introduced my wallet product to a Finished Leather Goods (FLG) brand owner in Ibadan. They liked it and gave me a trial order which was quickly followed by more orders, and for considerably more money than I was selling them for on the street. With business confidence from this, I chased and got some orders from other brands.

Relationships with brand owners are important for self-employed and small enterprise leather artisans hoping to expand their businesses. Many brands have upper income customers who pay more for better quality and unique designs. Most street customers have low incomes so you can only sell for low prices.

After participating in a leather product innovation skills training supported by GEMS1, I started to diversify into other products including briefcases, tablet covers, belts and ladies shoes. The training was helpful with difficult production aspects: for example, I learnt how to attach pockets to briefcases as well as edge polishing. More such innovation training would be good and I would be happy to pay for it.

I also benefited from GEMS1 support to the recent Abuja trade show: I sold all the stock I had taken there while I made several good business connections. After the show I started to make ladies handbags which are now in demand. My customers include brand owners and private buyers who want unique designs.

My sales today have increased ten times from NGN 100,000/month (\$667) when I had my first brand owner orders. Margins are good. I have bought 3 industrial sewing machines, a stamper and a small generator, and rent this new outlet. I employ 3 workers whom I also train. Next plan is to expand further."



CHRIS with a FINISHED OSTRICH LEATHER LADY'S BAG for a PRIVATE ORDER (top), and A TABLET COVER with HIS UNIQUE STITCHING (bottom)

To contact Chris: +234 803 4632497

Produced by GEMS1, the DFID-funded programme supporting the Nigerian Meat and Leather Industry implemented by GRM International Limited