

Mona Matthews...

Mona Matthews is a leather products company based in Lagos. Founded in 2002 by designer, CEO and fashion opinion leader, Abimbola Azeh (popularly known as 'Mona'), the company produces hand-made shoes with matching bags for women as well as high quality leather footwear for men. GEMS1 meets Mona at her Gallery in St. Anthony's Village.



"GEMS1 has helped my business to make sense. It has given me direction and I know my competitive advantages", says Mona.

"I've learnt the value of smart networking with other Finished Leather Goods (FLG) brand owners through GEMS1. Events that do not eat into your precious business time such as the breakfast/lunch meetings of our Lagos brand owner's umbrella (Leather Fashion Designers Association) inform us on government policy or lack of it affecting our industry and businesses.

Developing a solid understanding of the whole industry value chain has been important for me – where I fit and opportunities and linkages. I did not previously know that Nigeria has the best skins in the world and that I can buy high quality finished leather directly from our export tanneries. GEMS1 has linked me with these tanneries as well as other suppliers which have reduced my production costs.

Association networking provides me with access to a team of colleagues to share ideas and fashion trends and other industry information as well as discussions on business challenges and solutions.

We learnt how an international fashion event is professionally designed and managed through participation in the MTN fashion week in Lagos which GEMS1 supported: this has inspired me to partner with another brand colleague on a 3-city fashion exhibition.

I have also benefited from exposure and linkages at the Abuja trade shows as well as the product innovation training. I am about to launch another brand to serve the middle income market: for this, GEMS1 is linking me with producers in the east for products supply.

The more shoes and bags I and other brand owners sell the more employment we create. I contract my production work to around 10 high quality leather artisans that completed the GEMS1 innovation training. If my business grows, so do theirs, and they will need more workers too.

I am really hopeful for a very bright industry future. I mean why can't we start exporting more shoes from Nigeria? Why not one million pairs annually?"



For more, visit: www.monamatthews.com

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