



The company describes itself as an "African-European family Business". Mixing African and European qualities, BARK CLOTH Uganda Ltd. has extended the range of bark cloth's possible uses by applying various processes, and adding different materials to achieve a range of cloths to suit diverse customers. "Toro", "Buganda", "Ankole" and "Kimote Royal" are just some of various grades of classic bark cloth, named in honour of Ugandan kingdoms and tribes.

When it is washed in fabric conditioner and lined with silk, it becomes "BARKTEX bark 'n' silk"; "fireproofed" is good for furniture and interior design; treated with teflon, Barktex becomes "stainless"; and with a coating of natural latex it is the toughest Barktex of all, water-proof and tear-proof.

The African-European family business, which started in 1999, is a productive one for all involved. The company's annual output of bark cloth is currently around 30,000 m<sup>2</sup>, and this is expected to rise to 120,000 m<sup>2</sup> by 2008. Now Bark Cloth Uganda is also benefiting from GTZ support through a Public Private Partnership. To find out more, we spoke to Oliver Heintze, the man behind the venture.

To qualify for PPP support from GTZ, a private company has to offer something useful for the development of the country. How did Bark Cloth Uganda qualify?

In Uganda, Bark Cloth Ltd. is about organic farming, fair trade and capacity building. There are many different areas where our company is helping the communities involved. Above all, we give training to local women's groups. The women learn how to make the cloth itself, and they learn to make a much higher quality than is often produced - with smaller holes in the texture. They also make products from the material, such as hats and stationery articles. But a bit different to the kind you find behind the National Theatre. I can confidently say, we produce the best bark cloth in Uganda, because of the quality of our training.

Are these products only available in Germany?

No. The products are available in Uganda too. This side of the business is just starting, but we have already supplied our stationery for use at a conference of organic coffee producers which was held at Munyonyo.

Who uses bark cloth in Germany?

It isn't just Germany. Last week, we were visited at a trade fair in Nuremberg by people from other European countries as well. There is a lot of interest from designers and artists, furniture and fashion labels, product developers and interior architects. In Europe, bark cloth is a lifestyle subject. But it is still new. When a thing is new, maybe people show interest, but it takes time before it is really implemented.

But we are very hopeful that this will change now. It was just announced at the trade fair that our bark cloth has won the "IF Materials Award". This is given by the Industrial Forum, and it is quite a significant award. We only found out a few days ago, and we are still very proud about it.

What are your plans for the future?

We are looking forward to June, when a textile designer will be visiting Uganda to do some work as a consultant with Bark Cloth Ltd. The main thing she will do for us is to develop a new line of colours. Until now, we have only been able to use subdued, warm colours for dyeing bark cloth. Soon we will be able to offer brighter colours too, like brilliant blue, and even white. Another thing coming up is that we will be travelling to Rwanda to train people there. They used to make bark cloth as well, but now, apart from one old man, it has become a lost art.



### In Interview

Oliver Heintz.

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