

# Marie-Sar

A g e n c i e s   L i m i t e d

*"Celebrating indigenous textile craftsmanship"*



## COMPANY PROFILE

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**Company Name:** Marie-Sar Agencies Limited  
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## **BACK GROUND**

### **Our Story**

Sara Katebalirwe founded Marie-Sar, then a garment designing concern, in 1985. Competition from imported garments and materials rendered this unsustainable and in 2000, Sara identified the then unexplored niche of bark cloth, an indigenous fabric, locally made in Uganda.

Starting with only 2 products, and working alone, the company now has 17 full-time production workers and more than 70 home-working artisans; a range of more than 50 products; employing various surface design techniques and is a member of WFTO.

Bark cloth is processed from '**Ficus Nantalensis**' fig tree species locally called *Mutuba*. Using ancient, traditional and cultural processes that pre-date weaving, cloth production constitutes of harvesting (bark removal and tree protection); processing (beating with wooden mallets and stretching); and sun-drying. Mutuba trees are indigenous and can be harvested annually for up to 40 years, yielding up to 200 sq. m of cloth individually. The cloth comes in different qualities, gauges, sizes shades of brown (cream brown to dark rusty brown) depending on tree species, time of harvesting, workmanship and exposure to sunlight. Uganda's bark cloth was proclaimed by UNESCO (2005) as "**a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage of humanity.**" [www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/00139](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/00139) This honor and recognition of indigenous textile production skills of Ugandan craftsmen raised the profile of bark cloth.

### **Unique Innovation**

Bark cloth is multi-layered and naturally fragile, with a weak linear structure and prone to stretching, tearing, abrasion and peeling; and a short life-span if put to continuous use in its original state. Raffia couching is a new technique, applied by closely interspacing raffia cords (**raffia cord couching**); combining surface design and color addition to the fabric, giving it stability and a protective layer in tone-on-tone or vibrant shades. This design technique is peculiar to MSA products. Printing and hand stitching provide protection but cord couching has proven so far to give products the longest life-span (6-8 years). Furthermore barkbeads, bark cuttings and bark twisted cord have been developed and are made out of small, left over bark cloth bits, fully utilizing the cloth.

## **Our Values & Mission**

### **Values:**

- Responsibility towards environment and society through ethical production and adherence to WFTO fair trade principles
- Capacity building along the supply chain
- Creation of employment opportunities
- Delivery of high quality products

### **Mission:**

To realize business growth through commitment to revitalize the supply value chain; generate alternative employment; develop new technologies and raw material applications; build and upgrade skills and capacity; while being accountable to our stakeholders in the distribution channel and environmental management

## ***Activities***

### **Our Artisans**

Artisans Marie-Sar works with are mostly without formal academic qualifications or skills and are left out of employment. Further more, women in rural settings do not have access to land. These women are also care-givers and in most instances cannot work full-time or away from home. These are given opportunity of acquiring skills to engage in income generating activities and contribute to household incomes. These opportunities are availed to them in their usual environment. They make up the more than 70 home-working artisans engaged by Marie-Sar, performing the delicate hand stitching and raffia cord twisting that is peculiar to Marie-Sar products.

### **The Farmers**

MSA has embarked on a raw material assurance program with regard to bark cloth and raffia. This involves getting farmers on board in a program that includes planting of selected mutuba (bark cloth) trees species as well as raffia palms, training in good tree management practices and appropriate drying and storing methods and systems, and raising environmental awareness among the farmers. By securing contracts with farmers who will prove dedicated to improving their quality and quantity, future supplies of raw materials whose demand is growing by the day, is assured. While creating rural employment opportunities, this process could be expanded further to generate alternative incomes through carbon credits sales, and tourist attraction to the bark cloth harvest.

### **Social Impact**

Social impact of training program is five fold; alternative income generation, better land utilization, skills acquisition, raising of awareness about environmental issues and resulting mobilizing of participants.

Bark cloth tree cultivation is part of traditional agro forestry systems in Uganda. Tree management techniques and processing are traditional and cultural activities; which when upgraded create alternative incomes and benefits, such as cultural tourism and carbon credits. Mutuba trees are inter-planted in banana and coffee plantations and farmers use land already under cultivation but previously underutilized. No extra costs are then incurred by farmers as cuttings required for planting are readily available in the community. Additionally, the training contributes to documentation and strengthening of cultural and traditional institutions surrounding bark cloth.

Artisans in rural settings do not have access to land and are engaged in subsistence work, although they perform more than 80% of the farming activities. These are equipped with skills that enable them construct half-products, utilizing materials found in their environment, thus contributing to household incomes. Training and associated activities have mobilized participants into cooperative and other organizations, for advocacy and other purposes.

### ***Products***

Trendy ‘**mutuba**’ bark cloth gifts and home accessories by Marie-Sar are brought to market through processes that incorporate farmer training in tree planting and artisan skills building; to protect the heritage and generate alternative rural incomes. Innovatively raffia couched for a longer life-span, products are functional, aesthetic and exclusive.

### **Capacity and price**

The company employs 18 full time production and auxiliary staff and more than 90 part-time staff. Workshop space is 100sq meters.

Average monthly production is 250 medium size bags (21x 18 cm) with hand printed/stitched embroidery.

Our production capacity thus varies form product to product, and our lead time is 60-90 days

Our price range is USD 0.50 – 38.00, for details please refer to pricing sheet.

### **Shipping and Documentation**

The most favored shipping for bark cloth products is by courier. It takes 5-10 days for shipment to get to final destination, and can be tracked.




Documents provided include but are not limited to the following:

1. Waybills
2. Certificate of origin
3. Phytosanitary certificate
4. Commercial invoice
5. Packing list

**PRODUCT INFORMATION SHEET**

Name of Business / Organisation : Marie-Sar Agencies Ltd  
 Name of Contact Person : Sara Katebalirwe  
 Country : Uganda  
 Date : September 2012

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	Product Pictures	Product Code	Product Name	Size (LxWxH) all units in cm	Description	Weight (kg) per Unit	Producer's ex-works price (Euro) - per piece	Materials used	Capacity per month
	<b>Bags, Totes, Purses</b>								
1		MB 047L	Becky Clutch Purse	29 x 19	Raffia couched bark cloth purse, light padding, cotton lined, single pocket, zipper closure. Black binding trim	0,1	4,52	Bark cloth, sponge, cotton, foam, nylon zipper	1.400
		MB 016K	Joy Tote	35 x 35	Raffia couched bark cloth tote, cotton lined, cotton base and back; zipper inner pocket & outer pocket. Leather and buckle strap trimming, magnetic button closure. 2 - 80 x 2.5cm handles	0,25	11,50	Bark cloth, sponge, cotton, nylon zipper, metallic buckle, nylon webbing strap	1.200
1		MB 059	Meira bag	33 x 25.5	Raffia couched bark cloth bag, cotton lined, light padding, cotton backing; zipper inner pocket. Outer pocket with velcro closure. Magnetic button top closure. 124 x 2cm nylon webbing strap	0,17	7,80	Bark cloth, sponge, cotton, foam, raffia cord, nylon webbing strap	1.200







Marie Sais

Bath cloth

Taschen