**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

*“The African Art Centre is a non-profit company which preserves and mentors the development of arts, craft and design; showcasing local creative talent to stimulate sustainable social and economic upliftment.”*

***Vision -*** To create an enabling environment for the sustainable development, promotion and preservation of African arts and crafts with special focus on KwaZulu-Natal.

The African Art Centre contributes to the development, promotion and appreciation of visual arts and crafts by:

* providing creative and business skills development and mentoring for targeted crafters and artists
* actively discovering, encouraging and nurturing works of creativity, originality and of the highest quality
* providing an outlet for the exhibition and retail of artists’ and crafters’ work
* preserving cultural heritage

The African Art Centre was initiated in 1959 by the Natal Region of the South African Institute for Race Relations. Against the backdrop of apartheid and racial marginalization the African Art Centre played an important role as:

* A medium of communication in a divided society
* Bringing together people with common interests
* Public showcase of African artists and crafters

There are approximately 300 artists and crafters who benefit from the Centre, many of whom come from disadvantaged communities with limited or no infrastructure. Ninety percent are women.

The African Art Centre recognizes and addresses:

* The problems of unemployment
* The socio-economic consequences of South Africa’s history
* The need for all people to have the opportunity to work and earn a living
* The intrinsic value of human dignity achieved through being able to work
* The need to kindle and stimulate self-motivation through acquired skills
* The need for development to be linked as directly as possible to economically sustaining personal effort
* The need to encourage creativity and innovation in the pursuit of sustainable growth and development
* The cultural and creative industries as a driver and enabler of economic development and social development
* The multi-layered value chain in the creative economy as the “symbiotic relationship between the cultural activities and their commercial applications in which the investment in one has benefits for the other and likewise a decline in one area will have a concomitant effect on the other.” (Avril Joffe)

**PROGRAMMES**

The overall objective of the programmes implemented by the Centre is to provide a sustainable economic support for artists and crafters.

There are 4 parts to the artistic programme –

1. Artist development

* This is made of up of creative and business training and mentorship to local artists and crafters who are financially disadvantaged or do not have access to training within the arts and crafts sector. This is aimed at building the confidence and ability of the artists and crafters to manage their art as a business.
* The Artist of the Year award is an initative which provides an artist with a monthly stipend, for a period of one year, to enable and encourage artistic experimentation and new work.

1. Growing the Creative Economy

The Centre’s retail and wholesale outlet has provided substantial income to approximately 300 crafters across KwaZulu-Natal. Close attention will be given to making the services of AAC effective and viable at every level.

1. Product development

* In order to remain relevant and competitve it is important that crafters produce products that are cutting edge and unique, products that can bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary. The centre has pursued a partnership with the Durban University of Technology’s Design and Jewellery Department and Interior Decorating department directed towards collaborative works which will reflect this need.
* The centre aims to facilitate opportunities for artists and crafters to develop their creative skills by attending national and international workshops when available, and raise funds for their travel and freight costs where necessary.

1. Exhibitions

* The showcase element of the centre is crucial for the success of an artist. It is important that the centre continues to produce and showcase high quality artworks as this will in turn attract the right buyers.
* The centre will continue to facilitate opportunities for artists and crafters to showcase their artworks nationally and internationally in the form of residencies, fairs and conventional exhibitions. The centre will raise funds for their travel and freight costs where necessary.