

BabyMo Europe

<http://www.babymo.eu/>

Exclusive yarns, fashion accessories and interior design throws

metaLAB owns and runs BabyMo Europe. We work with [Momento's of Africa](#)² as European distributor for their luxury, hand made products - from the finest quality angora kid goat fibres. Momento's have a factory on the edges of the airport in Port Elizabeth.

Some of the people behind BabyMo



It all started from a small self-help project run in the 1980's by British expert weaver Lin Smith at the Port Elizabeth technical college (Pencen). But when funding dried up in the early 1990's the programme was forced to shut down, leaving its graduates and trainers with good skills but no outlet for their products.

Lin saw this as an opportunity and, with Pencen trainers Beauty Samana and Thandiwe Ngidi, set up a specialist tapestry curio shop at Port Elizabeth Airport with a scraped-together R4 000 (about £350). This self-help tapestry weaving scheme was introduced to assist unemployed people, often with scant education, to earn an income. With extended families, common throughout Africa, one income can support a surprisingly large number of people.

Success led to a rapid expansion requiring new premises with the airport giving the company an old hangar to use. As production increased, Momento's had a ready supply of skilled labour - former employees and graduates of the Pencen programme, all trained by Lin. In 1998 output was increased, with new merchandise - scarves, capes, ponchos, shawls, pullovers, hats and berets - being brought into production.

Whilst Momento's of Africa is a commercial company, with a profit motive, it has a second purpose: to make sure the benefits of tourism to their country filter directly to those previously disadvantaged members of our community who are prepared to grasp opportunity. With all its international success, Momento's of Africa remains a very South African company, committed to the country's future.

69% of its shares are black owned and it was named one of South Africa's top 300 black economic empowerment companies at both the 2004 and 2005 Impumelelo Awards. Their staff is made up **almost entirely of black people, most of them previously unemployed, and a fair number disabled.** They

2. <http://www.momentos.co.za/>

also actively encourage its staff to acquire new skills, spending about 16% of their income on training courses.

LIN SMITH is the founder of Momento's of Africa. A graduate in both artistic and technical textile design, she has managed - to date - to have converted centuries old houses, run a farm and have 3 children - all in England. When, with her family she moved to South Africa in 1981, she re-entered her chosen discipline managing tapestry and rug weaving plants, and creating new designs. Whilst still very much hands on, the increasing number of employees at the company has enabled her to spend more time in creation - of new products and outlets.

BEAUTY SIMANA was one of the original members, having been a weaving instructor despite having lost an arm in an accident years ago. She supports a large extended family, as well as her 4 children. Beauty says she has little time for other interests, but likes cooking.

One of the happiest occasions in the early Momento's days was when the original three could start to employ their fellow workers retrenched from the Pencen project. First of these was **PEGGY JANUARY**, who rejoined her peers and later was promoted to being a member. At work Peggy is responsible for continuity in production and for the house-keeping, to look after the growing number of weavers and brushers. At home, where she has three children, she is an avid church-goer.

The third of the original members **THANDWIE (Thandi) MGIDI** is married with three children. Originally a weaver, she assists manager Pinky Ngxili. Her special duties include all the documentation for training - a large job in such a labour intensive industry. Her outside activities include the usual school support, she finds time to market vegetables in her home area, and is an enthusiastic member of her church choir.

PINKY NGXILI. Coming as a schoolboy trainee, he put himself through college, qualified as an electrician, and then elected to work full-time at Momento's. He learnt dyeing from Lin, and progressed as the company grew; today he is responsible for all factory operations as well as playing a full part in the overall management of both companies. When not working he is an enthusiastic soccer supporter.