

ANBESA & EXODUS-E.C.S.

*Present*

**KECHENE WOMEN'S  
POTTERY COOPERATIVE**

ADDIS ABABA

ETHIOPIA

## KECHENE WOMEN'S POTTERY COOPERATIVE



Located in the surrounding area of Addis Ababa, the Kechene Women's Pottery Cooperative is an independent organisation consisting entirely of women working for the last 15 years on the creation of artistic, traditional and functional pottery products. Established in 1991 through the support of the ILO (International Labour Organization), they received further assistance in 1993, from the UNDP (United Nations' Development Programs), ultimately becoming in 1993-94, an independent cooperative consisting exclusively of women.

Some pots in drying process; on the upper side, the clay stones, the raw material.

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**The main objective of the cooperative is to generate an adequate income for the associates and their families. Traditionally women in Ethiopia have been the custodians of the ancient methods of ceramics used to make artistic and functional items inspired by the Jewish-Christian tradition rooted in this African area. As a result, the objects created through these techniques eventually embody the richness of the historical, cultural and traditional heritage of the country and its people.**

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**At present, the cooperative consists of about 30 women, each having her own assigned duty within the productive chain. 80% of the income generated are equally distributed among the associates, while the remaining 20% is used to maintain the costs of the centre.**

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**Among the products there are traditional coffee-sets and tea-sets (including pots, cups and small plates), candle holders, incense burners, lamps, bowls of various forms and dimensions, sculptures of flowers and animals (lions, monkeys, frogs, etc.), frames, jewellery cases, icons, small sculptures.**

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**Working the pottery is a fascinating craft, but is also very demanding physically, such as the collection of the raw material, which needs to be picked up directly from the river's shingle-bed. Once dried, the clay needs to be pulverized with a big wooden pestle.**

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The clay powder is then kneaded with water and moulded into various shapes and dimensions. A few days later, when the clay is finally dried and after it has been engraved (if necessary), the products are finally baked. The ovens are very rudimentary, often consisting of merely a hole in the ground, where the objects are placed and then covered with dried dung, this latter functioning as combustible.

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**This is one of the Cooperative's ovens, fuelled with the dried dung which can be bought in the capital at the cost of about 2 cents of a euro for piece.**

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**These potters have a peculiar technique of conferring a black finish to the pottery, which usually is originally red. The objects are greased before being put in the oven, and after the baking they are left chilling under a mound of dried eucalyptus leaves. Once cold, they come out of the ashes black-coloured. Finally they are cleaned up.**

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**If desired, the items can be painted in the traditional colours of the Ethiopian flag: red, gold and green.**

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**Inside the building housing the laboratory, there is the Cooperative's shop, obviously self-run and headed by a member of the collective. A huge range of the Cooperative's products are exposed in the shop.**

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**The Kechene Cooperative is a tangible example of the Ethiopian women's will to unite in order to build a better future. It is a living testimony of love for the arts, culture and traditions. It embodies the joy to construct a future for the youth through the use of simple dust.**