

ZULU HANDICRAFT

An Incentive to Economic Development in KwaZulu

Etienne du Pisani

Weaving, pottery, wood carving and working of iron were traditional crafts in KwaZulu. The manufacture and use of these household utensils was declining however, partly due to Western influence exerted by the missionary churches. Fortunately the churches later realized the importance of reviving these skills, especially those employed in basket making. With this in mind the different church bodies met during 1972/3 and cooperated to establish the Vukani Association for the control and marketing of Zulu handicraft.

The Vukani Association comprises 40 home craft groups, derived from all denominations; present membership being approximately 1000, the majority of which are women. The work of the Association is coordinated by its officials who are in turn elected by the member-producers, and controls the marketing of articles through a central distribution depot in Eshowe. During 1977 more than R70 000 was paid out to members and approximately 35 percent of these articles were sold overseas. It is evident



that the revival of traditional handicraft is in fact lucrative and 800 families in KwaZulu enjoy additional income through their membership of Vukani.

There are two main techniques in basket work, woven and sewn, each of which has several varieties. Certain containers are made with a very tight weave for the purpose of storing liquids such as beer. The materials used in the manufacture of baskets are a variety of grasses, reeds and palm leaves. The leaves and roots of certain plants such as the *isizimane* root (*Euclea natalensis*) and chemicals are employed as dyes. Designs in the weaving are geometrical and decorative.

The temporary display at the Museum included a variety of household utensils such as baskets, mats, grain bins and beer strainers. This exhibition has given us the opportunity to appreciate the creative ability of the Zulu and has been an educational experience.

Vukani products will be on sale shortly in the Museum foyer.

Gedruk en uitgegee deur die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein.