

The Project Justine – Train the Trainer e.V.

The Project Justine (TPJ) is a non-profit organization registered in Munich, Germany in 2017. Its mission is to **empower mostly women in West Africa – Benin, Ghana and Senegal** - through vocational training, job creation and the strengthening of local textile and apparel production capacities.

Building on years of collaboration with African craftsmen and textile producers, the association has developed a **holistic “Train the Trainer” approach**. This model enables experienced weavers to **pass on their knowledge to the new generations** within their communities, fostering self-reliance, sustainable income and the professionalization of local craftsmanship.

Since its establishment, **TPJ** has implemented **training and production programs** in cooperation with local institutions and industry experts. **More than a hundred professionals have been trained**. The long-term vision is to establish self-sustaining training and production centers across West Africa, creating dignified employment in the textile sector. These centers combine technical training with essential social support such as **childcare, healthcare, literacy classes and daily meals**.

This holistic approach is fundamental to TPJ’s success. By addressing participants’ real needs and providing a supportive environment, **TPJ ensures genuine empowerment and lasting motivation to learn, work and grow**. Beyond training, TPJ **promotes cultural exchange** between Africa and the rest of the world by connecting African craftsmanship with expertise **“made in Germany”**. This fosters **cross-cultural innovation** and supports the creation of **high-quality, locally made products** for regional and international markets.

With its **proven model** and **strong network of partners**, TPJ stands for community empowerment, sustainable textile production and the development of resilient local economies across West Africa.

University of Education, Winneba

The University of Education, Winneba was chosen as the ideal partner for this project due to its focus on **competency-based education** and **leadership in pedagogical innovation**. Unlike conventional technical institutes, UEW emphasizes **translating theory into practice** and developing market-ready skills for **sustainable livelihoods**. Within this framework, the School of Creative Arts integrates technical proficiency with creative and entrepreneurial training.

This approach prepares participants not only as **skilled weavers** but also as **entrepreneurs, innovators** and **future trainers**. UEW's ecosystem - with equipped studios, expert faculty and an active academic community - provides an enabling environment for trainees to transition into professional practice.

By embedding the initiative within the **Department of Textiles and Fashion Education**, participants gain access to **mentorship** and **peer learning**, reducing risks for independent ventures and enhancing **employability** in Ghana's creative industries.

UEW's involvement also ensures long-term sustainability. The looms and **innovative drafting systems** developed under the project have created a centre of excellence for future training, leaving a lasting institutional legacy. Through integration within a reputable public university, the initiative guarantees ongoing **skill transfer, innovation** and **entrepreneurship** - building a continuous pipeline of **qualified professionals for local and national industries**.

Winneba Weaver

The Winneba Weavers has evolved into a **distinctive brand** that merges **craftsmanship with innovation**. The brand made its debut at one of Europe's largest textile fairs (Munich Fabric Start 2025), where it successfully captivated and impressed a critical professional audience with its contemporary interpretation of traditional weaving heritage. In collaboration with the Department of Textiles and Fashion Education, a dedicated design and research unit was established within the University to explore the cultural and historical dimensions of weaving in Ghana. We were fortunate to find a group of highly motivated students who engaged deeply with the topic, conducting a profound **“deep dive” into the history of Ghanaian weaving traditions**. Their research became a journey of rediscovering identity - proving that research is a process of self-understanding.

As part of this evolution, the collective began **experimenting with digital weaving programs, creating textile designs on the computer and translating them onto the handloom**. This innovative approach not only bridges tradition and technology but also enables the archiving and reproduction of designs, ensuring that creative knowledge can be preserved and expanded for future generations.

The University proved to be the perfect partner in this mission. Due to the effects of colonization, the craft of weaving in the region had reached a certain stagnation. Through this collaboration, the collective succeeded in revitalizing and evolving the practice — developing **a new, authentic design language** that reflects both heritage and contemporary creativity. From this transformation, the Winneba Weavers brand was born — a symbol of innovation grounded in cultural roots. Today, the collective's vision extends beyond its own success: it seeks to inspire and empower the entire community **to reclaim and reimagine their creative traditions**.

Loom Development

Over a focused workshop period, a GlZ expert introduced students and weavers to the **construction of a large 8-pedal handloom** (different to the traditional loom) and provided **initial training** on its use. Within a short time, the group **fully mastered the technique and independently upgraded the loom into a 12-pedal model** - greatly expanding its creative and technical capacity. This innovation enabled the weaving of both **traditional and contemporary patterns**, merging cultural heritage with modern aesthetics. The process demonstrated remarkable ownership, adaptability and technical ingenuity - key values in **sustainable skill development**.

The participants were introduced to **digital weave design tools** and quickly taught themselves how to use them. Following the **imitate-innovate principle**, they explored new creative possibilities - showcasing the University's strength in fostering curious, self-driven and forward-thinking students.

Progressing **from simple striped patterns to complex 3D illusions** and contemporary textile designs, the weavers created fabrics that reflect modern aesthetics infused with cultural heritage and storytelling. Ultimately, the Winneba Weavers embody the essence of transformation: from raw material to refined design, from tradition to technology.

Their work is both **a tribute to Ghana's weaving legacy** and a vision for its creative future - proving that innovation thrives where heritage and education intersect.