

Profile: Male Artisan

A Day in the life...

Hello my name is Gethii, I am a 63 year old man born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya. For many years now I have worked as part of the Jua Kali community. I have a workshop down by the roadside while I sell products and I repair items. I work mainly with wood. My father taught me the skills of carpentry and now I am passing them on to my two sons who are my apprentices at the workshop. A regular day in my life follows this pattern...

Before work I wake around 5am and take a shower, which consists of me standing in a tub of water and pouring the water over myself using buckets. I get dressed and sit down to breakfast my wife has prepared for me and the two boys. We usually eat toasted bread, and if we have the money we sometimes have boiled eggs or Mandazi also.

After breakfast me and my two sons leave for work, we catch the matatu to get to the workshop it takes about 20 minutes. We arrive at the workshop around 7am every day and open up. While the boys set up the front to display our items to sell, I gather the tools and the projects we are working on. I work out if we have enough work for the day, and I send out one of the boys if we need to get some more wood. Once we are all set up for the day, I send one of the boys down to Akeyo's Kiosk to buy us each a bowl of hot porridge.

After this break we set to work. One of the boys sits at the front of the shop at all times in case of passing trade. I have usually set him some simple hand carving or painting tasks, masks prove a popular item, especially by tourists. Inside the workshop I set to work showing the other of my sons' skills in carving and whittling. We only have very basic tools in the workshop, but this allow me to create new pieces, such as furniture, baskets, instruments, pool cues, masks and artefacts as well as repairing people's items.

We take a lunch break around 1.30pm for an hour, my wife; Kanika has usually prepared us all something to eat such as Mokimo, mashed potatoes mixed with mashed pea and maize kernels, and fruit. Normally we will also buy some meat from the food kiosk, if trade has been good we can afford roasted meat if not we will share some meat and bone soup between us.

After lunch my two sons swap places and I and my other son continue on the daily work, it may for example be fixing a table for a local family. We work through until 5.30pm when it becomes too dark to work, and we clear up the workshop, tidy away the tools and shut up the workshop.

When we return home after the hard day, we eat take a shower before sitting down to eat the meal Kanika has prepared for us. In the evening I like to relax with my family, we listen to the radio and play music together on the many instruments we own. If we have enough money we may go to the video point to watch a film, or if the foot ball is on I will try to take my sons. On the weekend I meet other members of the jua kali community, other traders and friends down at the local pub for a drink, I usually drink Muratina, a sweet alcoholic drink, brewed from sugar cane, honey and muratina.