



Stitching Success: How Wezesha Mama Kaitheri Apparel Centre Transformed Women's Lives in Kirinyaga County

County:	Kirinyaga		
Sector/s:	Gender and economic empowerment, youth	Sub-sector/Theme:	Women's Economic Empowerment, Textile Industry, Skills Development
Keywords: (for search on the online platform)	Wezesha Mama, Kaitheri Apparel, women empowerment, Kirinyaga, textile training, economic independence		
Target Audience:	County governments, NGOs, women's groups, development partners, policymakers		
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Introduction

In Kirinyaga County, rural women face significant economic challenges, including limited access to formal employment and financial independence. The Wezesha Mama Kaitheri Apparel Centre emerged in 2018 as a grassroots initiative to address these barriers by equipping women with tailoring skills and entrepreneurship training. What began as a small group of women with a shared vision has grown into a thriving enterprise, transforming lives and uplifting the community. In Kirinyaga County, where 42% of women rely on subsistence farming for survival (Kirinyaga County Economic Survey, 2022), the Wezesha Mama Kaitheri Apparel Centre emerged in 2018 as a beacon of hope. Founded by the County Government with an initial group of 15 women with a shared vision, the centre addresses systemic barriers like unemployment (27% female unemployment rate in Kirinyaga) and financial exclusion. Today, it stands as a model of how skill-based interventions can catalyze community-wide change.



Implementation of the practice

1. Needs Assessment & Mobilization:

- A baseline survey identified tailoring as a viable skill for women in Kaitheri due to demand for school uniforms and affordable clothing.
- Local leaders and NGOs facilitated the formation of the group, securing initial funding for sewing machines and materials.

2. Skills Training & Capacity Building:

- Women received six months of intensive training in tailoring, design, and quality control.
- Partnerships with the County Government and NGOs provided additional courses in financial literacy, business management, and digital marketing.

3. Establishment of the Apparel Centre:

- A communal workspace was set up, equipped with 10 sewing machines which later expanded to 25. The building was built by the County Government of Kirinyaga
- The group registered as a self-help group and later as a cooperative, enhancing structured management and access to grants and loans.

4. Market Linkages & Growth:

- The centre secured contracts to supply school uniforms to local institutions.
- Participation in trade fairs and online platforms (e.g., Facebook Marketplace) expanded their customer base.
- The center is currently contracted to produce and supply assorted items to various departments of the County Government of Kirinyaga. These include; uniforms production for the ECDE Centers, hospital linen, gowns, curtains, sheers, overalls and dustcoats as well as ceremonial uniforms for enforcement officers. The County Government has not yet started selling the products to members of the public.

The factory produces approximately 500 items every month including: School uniforms for all E.C.D.E centers in the County, hospital garments, i.e. scrubs, hospital linen, theatre gowns, patients' uniforms, bedsheets, green towels, mackintosh covers, masks, hospital curtains, pillowcases, dust coats for the department of environment staff uniforms for County Government enforcement officers. All public health facilities benefit from this initiative.



Figure 1: women tailoring at the Kaitheri apparel centre



The materials for production are bought by the Kirinyaga County Government, i.e. the department that needs the items. For example, the department of education will buy the materials for ECDE uniforms and health department will buy materials for hospital garments. The apparel center also offers opportunities for internships and training to aspiring tailors, including the youth.

Results of the practice

The impact of the Wezesha Mama Kaitheri Apparel Centre goes beyond income generation. The initiative has:

- ✓ **Reduced Poverty** – Many of the women were previously dependent on subsistence farming or informal jobs. Now, they earn a steady income, enabling them to support their families.
- ✓ **Improved Education** – With increased earnings, mothers can afford school fees, books, and uniforms for their children, breaking the cycle of poverty.
- ✓ **Boosted Confidence & Leadership** – Women who once hesitated to speak in public now lead meetings, negotiate with suppliers, and mentor new members.
- ✓ **Fostered Community Growth** – The centre has become a hub for women's empowerment, offering financial literacy workshops, health talks, and savings groups.



2Figure 2: H.E Ann Waiguru issuing uniforms made by women at the Kaitheri apparel center to ECDE learners

Lessons learnt

1. **Community Ownership is Key:** Involving women in leadership roles ensured long-term sustainability.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships Work:** Collaboration with the county government and NGOs accelerated growth.
3. **Adaptability Drives Success:** Transitioning from manual record-keeping to digital tools improved efficiency. Digital marketing increased sales by 40% in 6 months.
4. **Male Engagement is Vital:** Involving husbands in sensitization reduced resistance to women's work.

Recommendations

- **Increase access to financing:** To further expand the impact of the Kaitheri Apparel Centre, increasing the financial capacity of centre is essential. By securing additional funding and



resources, the initiative can scale its operations, reach more women across the county, and enhance its support services. This investment will enable the center to offer more comprehensive training programs, improve infrastructure, and increase production capacity.

- **Expand training and capacity building:** Investing in advanced training and capacity-building programs will provide women with additional skills and knowledge, enhancing their employability and entrepreneurial potential. Offering specialized workshops in areas such as advanced tailoring techniques, business management, and digital literacy can empower women to take on more significant roles and explore new opportunities.
- **Strengthening partnerships:** Collaborating with local businesses, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions can provide additional support and resources. Building partnerships can help create a network of support for the center, including mentorship programs, job placement assistance, and access to new markets.
- **Enhance childcare support:** Expanding the daycare services to accommodate more children and offering extended hours could further support working mothers. Investing in high-quality childcare facilities ensures that more women can participate in the workforce without worrying about their children's care, thereby promoting greater inclusion and work-life balance.
- **Monitor and evaluate impact:** Implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework will help assess the effectiveness of the center's programs and identify areas for improvement. Regular feedback from participants and stakeholders will guide adjustments and ensure that the initiative continues to meet the needs of the community effectively.
- **Promote awareness and advocacy:** Increasing awareness of the initiative and advocating for support at the county and regional levels can attract additional resources and support. Highlighting success stories and the positive impact on women and the community can garner more interest and investment in the project.

Further reading:

1. Kirinyaga.go.ke
2. Video Documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYbloglw7AM>



Pictorial

