



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

**CONTRIBUTORS TO FASHION DESIGNERS SUCCESS:
A CASE STUDY OF TOP FASHION DESIGNERS IN KENYA**

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Submitted in fulfillment of the

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26th July, 2015

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been submitted by any other researcher to the best of my knowledge.

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Date: _____

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the fashion designers on a journey to realizing commercial success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This M A thesis and its dissertation has been realized because of the support from a number of people and institutions; the University of Nairobi for awarding me a scholarship and hence the opportunity to pursue further studies in my first love and passion, Design. My parents for encouraging me throughout my studies and offering substitute financial support whenever needed, Dr. Lilac Osanjo who nudged me towards a more focused study, Mrs. F. Odundo, my supervisor whose strict guidance I have valued and appreciate, the fashion designers who created time from their busy schedules to be interviewed providing much needed insight to the study, my family, friends and all the people who gave me invaluable information and advice that helped in the study and who gave me support during the tougher times. I am forever grateful.

ABSTRACT

The fashion design industry is a multibillion dollar industry in many industrialized countries such as the USA, India, and China, France, Italy and many more, which translates to other benefits for the country's economy and for the designers in the industry. However, this amount of revenue collection from fashion in Kenya is yet to be achieved. The Kenyan fashion design industry faces numerous challenges. The industry has several players, and there is always a crop of talented fashion designers coming up, however, only a few fashion designers are successful. There is very little information on what constitutes success factors for fashion designers in Kenya. This MA research and its dissertation looked at how to realize the potential of the fashion design industry in Kenya through exploring the factors crucial to fashion designers success and evaluate how fashion designers in Kenya could effectively use these factors to succeed. The study adopted a qualitative approach in the form of case studies of four top fashion designers in Kenya, which involved semi-structured interviews with the designers to explore their knowledge and experiences supported by secondary research such as media reports and success factors of international fashion designers. Internal forces; expertise, available resources and financial resources, and external forces; economic, political, technological and ecological factors were found to affect how successful a fashion designer becomes. This was corroborated by the four fashion designers studied who agreed these forces did affect their businesses, but with years of experience had found ways and strategies to work with or around these factors to achieve some level of success. It was found that amongst the biggest hindrance to the success of fashion designers in Kenya was lack of practical technical skills, lack of patience to work for other veteran fashion designers to gain experience and lack of business management skills.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACTIF	AFRICAN COTTON & TEXTILE INDUSTRIES FEDERATION
AFADK	ASSOCIATION OF FASHION DESIGNERS OF KENYA
AWEP	AFRICAN WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM
BEP	BREAK EVEN POINT
CAD/CAM	COMPUTER AIDED DESIGN/ COMPUTER AIDED MANUFACTURING
CSIRO	COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATION
CSR	CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
EPZ	EXPORT PROCESSING ZONE
FAFA	FESTIVAL FOR AFRICAN FASHION AND ART
FGD	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
FUQ	FOLLOW UP QUESTION
KEBS	KENYA BUREAU OF STANDARDS
KTB	KENYA TOURISM BOARD
KICOMI	KISUMU COTTON MILLS
LPO	LOCAL PURCHASE ORDER

MSF	MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES
NHIF	NATIONAL HOSPITAL INSURANCE FUND
NSSF	NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY FUND
PAYE	PAY AS YOU EARN (TAX)
QC	QUALITY CONTROL
VAT	VALUE ADDED TAX

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1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fashion is a design discipline that has been experienced by everyone at one point in their life, seeing as it touches on one of the basic human needs, clothing. Decisions made by fashion designers of trendsetting fashion brands based in the fashion capitals trickle down through the media and sales channels, affecting even the far most removed entities that do not practice fashion design, but are unknowingly influenced by fashion seasonal trends like color, cut and prints.

Fashion design is the applied art dedicated to clothing and lifestyle accessories created within the cultural and social influences of a specific time. Fashion products last within seasons; a season is defined as either autumn/winter or spring/summer. Although tailors and dressmakers were no doubt responsible for many innovations before, and the textile industry certainly led many trends, the history of fashion design is normally taken to date from 1858 in the 19th Century, when the English-born Charles Frederick Worth opened the first true haute couture house in Paris. Charles Frederick Worth was the first person to sew their label into the garments that they created. Only clothing created after 1858 can be considered as fashion design. Since then the professional fashion designer has become a progressively more dominant figure, despite the origins of many fashions in street fashion. The four major current fashion capitals are acknowledged to be Milan, New York City, Paris, and London. Fashion weeks are held in these cities, where designers exhibit their new clothing collections to audiences, and which are all

headquarters to the greatest fashion companies and are renowned for their major influence on global fashion.¹

Kenyan fashion has developed as a result of outside influences from the West and the East. Trade at the Kenyan coast with traders from Asian countries saw indigenous Kenyans influenced by Islam, which affected the way of dressing to reflect the Muslim fashion spotting kanzus, hijabs, buibuis, etc. In the hinterland of Kenya, fashion was being influenced by the Christian religion which was being spread by British missionaries. This means that Kenyan fashion after the turn of the 20th century did not have a chance to develop systematically over time into a holistic and nationalistic fashion identity. Currently, Kenyan fashion is heavily influenced by fashion trends from westernized countries in Europe and America. The other strong influence, especially of the female fashion, is from West African countries spotting boubous made from Kitenge fabric.

The Kenyan fashion design industry faces numerous challenges. The industry has several players, and there is always a crop of talented fashion designers coming up, however, only a few fashion designers are successful. There exists a number of established and upcoming fashion design houses that deal in made to fit garments for men, women and children, bridal attire and accessories; mainly women's handbags and jewellery. Among these design houses are Kikoromeo, John Kaveke, Rialto fashions, Occasions and Days, Kondakis, Jahmhuri Wear, Urban Funk and many more. However, only a few of the players are successful.

Fashion design is a multibillion dollar industry in many industrialized countries; the UK fashion industry was valued at £1.6 billion in 2008², which translates to other benefits for the country's

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/fashion>

economy and for the designers in the industry. However, this amount of revenue collection from fashion design in Kenya is yet to be achieved.

Empirical research shows that the impediments to fashion design globally are;

1. Lack of finances
2. High production costs
3. Lack of availability of customized fabrics
4. Lack of access to the market and exposure
5. Lack of support to emerging fashion designers
6. Ineffective educational curriculum
7. Restrictive government policies

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors crucial to fashion designers success and evaluate how fashion designers in Kenya can effectively use these factors to succeed. The study adopts a qualitative approach in the form of case studies of 4 top fashion designers in Kenya. This will involve semi-structured interviews with the designers to explore their knowledge and experiences supported by secondary research such as media reports and success factors of international fashion designers.

² Dr Neri Karra. December 2008 The UK Designer Fashion Economy Value relationships- identifying barriers and creating opportunities for business growth

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are 3 dimensions of success within fashion design; how the designers' creativity is perceived, public profile awareness and how much sales and profits the designer generates³. Most Kenyan fashion designers achieve success through creative acclaim and communication perception. However, most do not achieve commercial acclaim. The Kenyan fashion design industry faces numerous challenges. The industry has several players, and there is always a crop of talented fashion designers coming up, however, only a few fashion designers achieve commercial success. There is very little information on what constitutes success factors for fashion designers in Kenya. Fashion design is a multibillion dollar industry in many industrialized countries; the UK fashion industry was valued at £1.6 billion in 2008⁴, which translates to other benefits for the country's economy and for the designers in the industry. However, this amount of revenue collection from fashion design in Kenya is yet to be achieved. Achieving commercial success in the fashion design industry is possible. In 2013 the fashion industry churned out more than 20 fashion designers or owners of fashion brands into the Forbes billionaires list. Fashion designers like Giorgio Armani and Tory Burch were among those on the list.⁵ Only just last year in early 2014, fashion designer Michael Kors became a billionaire.⁶

³ Alejandra Caro. Alessandra Basso. May 2014, *Commercialising Creativity — Creating a Success Model for British Fashion Designers* Report commissioned by the British Fashion Council in collaboration with London Business School and in partnership with Land Securities.

⁴ Dr Neri Karra. December 2008 The UK Designer Fashion Economy Value relationships- identifying barriers and creating opportunities for business growth

⁵ <http://www.stylelist.com/read/20-richest-billionaires-fashion-who-made-forbess-list/> The 20+ Richest Billionaires in Fashion: Who Made Forbes's List

⁶ <http://www.businessinsider.com/michael-kors-became-a-billionaire-today-2014-2>

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research was to establish factors that contribute to the success of top fashion designers in Kenya.

The specific objectives were;

1. To investigate the practices undertaken by top fashion designers in Kenya in their operations.
2. To establish which of the practices undertaken contributes to top fashion designers in Kenya becoming successful.
3. Propose what could be done to develop more successful fashion designers in Kenya.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What practices were undertaken by top fashion designers in Kenya in their operations?
2. Which of the practices undertaken contributed to the success of top fashion designers in Kenya?
3. What can be done to develop more successful fashion designers in Kenya?

1.5 JUSTIFICATION

The fashion design industry is a multibillion dollar industry in many industrialized countries; according to The Value of the UK Fashion Industry report that was commissioned by the British Fashion Council in 2014, the UK fashion industry employs almost 800,000 people and makes £26 billion annually. This is up from what it was valued at; £1.6 billion in 2008⁷, which translates to other benefits for the country's economy and for the designers in the industry. However, this amount of revenue collection from fashion in Kenya is yet to be achieved.

According to the 2012 Forbes World's Billionaires list, out of the 425 people that made it on the list, 123 are in the Fashion and Retail industry. The Fashion and Retail industry ranked 7th on the top 10 industries producing US Billionaires and 2nd on the top 10 industries producing billionaires worldwide⁸. Several fashion designers have already made it to become billionaires early in the year 2014 like Michael Kors⁹.

Considering most of the firms practicing fashion design are small and micro enterprises¹⁰, identifying possible contributors to the success of fashion designers will enable them to be more competitive in the Kenyan and international markets, which will bring recognition to their brands and increase exports. This will increase their potential and revenues, enabling them grow into bigger firms and in the process create job opportunities and bring in revenue for the nation at large. In a country where more than half of the estimated 31.3million population is poor and 7.5

⁷Dr Neri Karra. December 2008 The UK Designer Fashion Economy Value relationships- identifying barriers and creating opportunities for business growth

⁸ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erincarlyle/2012/03/13/how-americas-wealthiest-get-rich/>

⁹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/michael-kors-became-a-billionaire-today-2014-2>

¹⁰ Edited by Dorothy McCormick, Joseph A. Kuzilwa and Tegegne Gebre-Egeziabherprises. Financial Services and the Performance of Micro and Small-Scale Clothing Enterprises in Kenya by Rosemary Atieno. 2009 INDUSTRIALISING AFRICA IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION, Challenges to Clothing and Footwear.

million people live in extreme poverty¹¹, realizing the potential of the fashion design industry is a great avenue to improve the citizen's living standard by creating jobs throughout the industry's chain, from raw material supply to the finished goods.

This MA research looked at how to realize the potential of the fashion design industry in Kenya through identifying practices of top four successful fashion designers in Kenya.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

There is no official record stating comprehensively how many top fashion designers are in Kenya, however, based on the researcher's knowledge of the industry, names suggested in Kenya fashion focus group discussions and the Ipsos Synovate Poll on Fashion and Lifestyle, there are approximately 11 top fashion designers recognised in Kenya based on public awareness and admiration. These are;

1. Fundi Frank
2. Enkarasha
3. Lucy Rao
4. Ann McCreath
5. John Kaveke
6. Sylvia Owori
7. Monica Kanari
8. Moo Cow
9. Patricia Mbela

¹¹ www.ruralpovertyportal.org, 11th March 2008

10. Peggy Onyango

11. Deepa Dosaja

Out of the 11, at the time of data collection, Enkarasha had gone out of business and shut down, Sylvia Owori relocated to Uganda, and the researcher was not able to make contact with Fundi Frank and Moo Cow. The researcher was therefore to carry out case studies of seven top fashion designers in Kenya; however, three designers even though interested in being part of the research, were non-committal towards scheduling interview dates. To avoid running out of time the researcher concentrated on only the four designers who committed and set interview dates within the set time allocated to data collection which led to replacing of some of the designers initially selected, and delays in the amount of time taken to carry out the interviews.

Due to some sensitive data collected during the fashion designers interviews, and the researcher not being able to get a non biased research assistant in time, the researcher had to type out the interview transcripts which took too long and led to a delay in the work schedule. Part of the data already typed out in the Peggy Onyango interview transcript was lost during transfer which required the researcher to type it out again which led to even further delays in the work schedule.

There is a lack of figures indicating exactly how much fashion designers in Kenya contribute to the GDP of the country and how much top designer's turnover is compared to international fashion designers. Fashion designers in the industry are not forthcoming with how much money they make. There is also no central recognized body that carries out to rank fashion designers in Kenya as opposed to international fashion institutes in America or the UK.

1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fashion design is a multibillion dollar industry in many countries worldwide. The number of billionaires created from fashion design industry based businesses globally is increasing every year. This is an indication that it is possible for a fashion design business to be successful with obvious benefits of this success to their countries' economies and industry players.

Factors that determine the commercial success or failure of fashion designers fall into two categories; external forces and internal forces. External forces tend to be out of a fashion designer's control while internal forces can be influenced by the designer. How a fashion designer works with and around these factors will determine how successful they become.

Shown below is the conceptual framework;

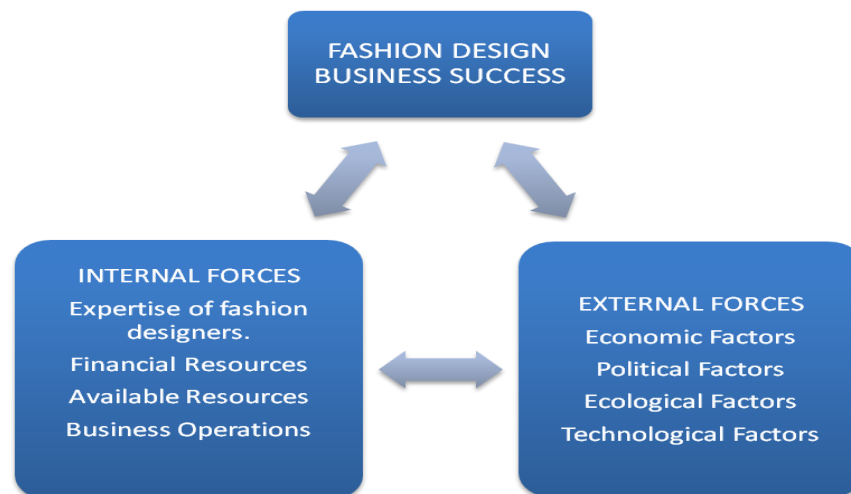


Figure 1 *Conceptual framework*

1.8 SCOPE

This research was carried out in Nairobi due to its proximity to the researcher and the major fashion designers in the fashion design industry, which is much more developed than in the other towns in the country and the availability of information on the subject.

The researcher concentrated on the four top fashion designers in Kenya who committed and set interview dates within the set time allocated to data collection, and carried out cases studies to identify what makes them successful. Although it might not be every designer's objective to achieve global commercial success, this M. A research and its dissertation focuses on the challenges and best practice for fashion designers who wish to achieve commercial success.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Design is a planning process. It produces the best solutions based on the stated business objectives and the information and resources available. It uses a methodical procedure to ensure that solutions are well thought out and all the known criteria for success are considered. Design does not leave business success to chance.¹² But are fashion designers working methodologically to achieve success?

2.1 DEFINING SUCCESS

¹³There are three dimensions of success within fashion design;

1. Creative acclaim; this is how the designer's creativity is perceived
2. Communication perception; public profile awareness
3. Commercial acclaim; how much sales and profits the designer generates

Whilst the industry has a clear appreciation of creativity, this tends not to be seen as success unless it is connected to commercial success. For the purposes of this study, the researcher defines success as commercial acclaim.

2.2 SUCCESS FACTORS IN DESIGN

The factors that determine the success or failure of fashion designers fall into two categories; external forces and internal forces.

¹² Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

¹³ Alejandra Caro. Alessandra Basso. May 2014, *Commercialising Creativity — Creating a Success Model for British Fashion Designers* Report commissioned by the British Fashion Council in collaboration with London Business School and in partnership with Land Securities.

2.2.1 EXTERNAL FORCES

External forces which contribute to the success of designers include:

- Economic factors
- Political factors
- Ecological factors
- Technological factors

2.2.1.1 Economic factors

The state of the economy has a profound effect upon any business within the community.¹⁴ When the economy is depressed there is a corresponding downturn in business and consumer demand, particularly in the luxury end of the market. Some designers respond to a downturn in demand by exploring alternatives in the market place such as ready-to-wear lines, accessories ranges, or cosmetic products.

Designers have to show restraint when times are hard and they can be extravagant if the economy is booming. For example, during World War II when resources were scarce, clothing design was very functional. A closer fitting silhouette and shorter hemline required less fabric. Women were joining the work force in great numbers therefore clothing design had to be

¹⁴ <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick, Suttle. The Macro Environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry by Demand Media, September 2013.

appropriate. The 1980s, however, were a time of big business and lots of money. Clothing of the time reflected this with power dressing big shoulder pads, sharp lines and bright strong colors all symbolized success and strength.¹⁵

2.2.1.2 Political factors

Domestic legalization and foreign policy may impact upon the designer.

A change of government can mean an attitude change and re-allocation of funding. Governments that value the protection of the local industry impose tariffs on imported goods and provide financial assistance to manufacturers and researchers. With government assistance, the Commonwealth Scientific Investigation and Research Organization (CSIRO) developed a machine washable wool, Sportwool Pro, and Cool Wool, which have all given designers new textile products with which to work in Australia. A favorable political climate can enhance and strengthen the industry and offer designers a greater sense of security in attempting to address more challenging markets.¹⁶

Relationships between countries can affect exports, imports and production rates. If governments impose sanctions on another country, trade between companies is affected. This could ultimately affect the supply of raw materials or the export trade.

¹⁵ <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick, Suttle. The Macro Environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry by Demand Media, September 2013.

¹⁶ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

2.2.1.3 Ecological factors

There has been an increasing demand by consumers for environmentally friendly products. Fashion designers need to be aware of these demands and respond to them. Products such as recycled clothing, recycled PET, environmentally friendly fibers, dyeing techniques and the like can all influence the image the designer wishes to portray. The anti-fur lobby is a prime example of an ecological influence on designers.¹⁷

2.2.1.4 Technological factors

With all areas of fiber, yarn and fabric production, finishing techniques and manufacturing developing rapidly, designers must keep up-to-date and be aware of how these advances affect their products. Increasingly, computer technology is being used in all design fields. Computer technology enables designers to visualize ideas, make changes, create variations and store the final designs. In addition, computers may also provide applications which the designer can utilize in the presentation of their work; word processing for business correspondence, spreadsheets for accounts and databases for organizing and storing records.¹⁸

The success of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been used as a tool for marketing, keeping in touch with consumers and a method of advertising and introducing new collections, sales and demonstrating their label.¹⁹

¹⁷ <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick, Suttle. The Macro Environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry by Demand Media, September 2013.

¹⁸ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

¹⁹ Mary Ruppert-Stroescu. May 2009, Technology and Creativity: Fashion Design in the 21st Century.

In the apparel industry computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacture (CAM) can contribute to the speed at which a designer and manufacturer can get their products into the market place. The CAD system allows for pattern development, grading and cutting layout simulation. The CAM system provides computer links between the design system and cutting system. Multiple layers of fabric may be cut after the computer program has positioned the pattern pieces in the most cost-effective, space saving way.

Information on the processes involved in manufacturing a garment can be itemized on a database. Costing of a new garment can be completed on a spreadsheet before final decisions are made whether to put it into production or not. What the garment will take to produce and the cost is able to be calculated.

Investing in new technology can be financially demanding. However, savings in other areas of time, wages and materials may be considerable enough to warrant the initial investment. Often this investment is essential to keep pace with other companies so that they are not left behind.²⁰

The internet has made a worldwide success easily available to any fashion designer. This enables the designer to remain aware of overseas trends and if they desire, to have their own web site which showcases their design to overseas markets. They may also develop online shopping facilities for their products. This makes them a part of the global network that allows for expansion to suit their needs. Stimulated shopping malls allow the consumer to select textile products from a boutique, give details of size and color and even 'try on' a range of garments together.²¹

²⁰ Mary Ruppert-Stroescu. May 2009, Technology and Creativity: Fashion Design in the 21st Century.

²¹Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

2.2.2 INTERNAL FORCES

Internal forces which contribute to the success or failure of designers include:

- Expertise
- Financial resources
- Available facilities

2.2.2.1 Expertise

Designers usually possess an innate ability for creative design or a sense of ‘what people want’.

Designers must possess expertise covering a diverse range of areas such as: specialized knowledge and skills in textiles, production methods and costing, marketing, business management and human resource management. It is not always possible for designers to possess all the expertise to ensure success. They will therefore need to have access to others who can provide this expertise.

The expertise of the designer may be in one of the areas of textile engineering, such as fiber technology, fabric structures or targeting a special group through market research and producing the type of products for that particular market. Other areas may be more artistic in nature such as textiles design with emphasis on creating furnishings, costumes or everyday wear.

As the fashion design industry is so competitive, designers need to keep up-to-date with trends, innovations and technology by reading trade journals, fashion magazines, and newspapers. In addition, completion of additional courses to add to their qualifications and expertise can be

helpful. The skills that the designer lacks may be found in the people they work with. For example, many designers can draw and explain the designs that will be successful but need a team to develop the concept to the prototype and final product.²²

No matter what field of fashion chosen by the designer, they need to set goals and work towards them to be successful. This is just as important if they are working for a company or working for themselves.

2.2.2.2 Financial resources

To start a business, a large injection of capital is needed so that the business can function whilst establishing its name. These costs may include: wages, rent, materials, manufacturing costs and marketing costs. In addition to production costs that need to be taken into consideration, there may be the cost of: superannuation, worker's compensation and holiday pay, cost of updating equipment and training costs. Often creative people are not very good at business, so will need to work with a business partner or employ a business manager who will take care of the administrative side of the company.

With the costs involved in the production, consideration must be given to the fact that there is a time delay from the initial outlay of materials to profit on the product. The shorter the time it takes from production to sale, the better the cash flow. Designers who manufacture off-shore have a longer timeline than those who manufacture in their countries²³.

²² <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick, Suttle. The Macro Environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry by Demand Media, September 2013.

²³ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

The Break Even Point (BEP) is the point at which the cost of development, manufacture and promotion is met. No profit is made until all these costs are met. The total cost of all directly related expenses should be divided between the numbers of units sold. Small production runs incur more costs per unit than large production runs as the costs are spread over a larger number of products. By spreading the cost over many units the product will be priced more competitively. However, if the demand for the product had been overestimated and the product does not sell, the production costs will not be covered.

A good understanding of the anticipated product life cycle is important in deciding the number of units produced and the price at which they can be sold. A product that will be a short term trend needs to be as expensive as the market can tolerate to gain a return for the investment before the market collapses. A product that is less likely to be affected by trends can be priced as cheaply as the company can tolerate and still return a profit to attract consumer loyalty and a larger market share.

2.2.2.3 Available facilities

The facilities available to a designer are crucial to their success. An important factor in the success of any designer is having reliable sources of all the materials and services that are required to produce their designs. A designer may need to deal with a wide variety of businesses in order to obtain the necessary services.²⁴ This may include fabrics and yarn manufacturers, and wholesale suppliers of trims and fastenings. Suppliers need to be reliable, and have a quick response time. Australian designers often have the difficulty in finding reliable sources, as much

²⁴ <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick, Suttle. The Macro Environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry by Demand Media, September 2013.

of the materials used are imported. Subsequently they are affected by delays in transportation, movements in the dollar or industrial disputes. As a result, many designers need to have alternative sources to safeguard against the problems which may occur. This is not always possible for small business concerns which do not have the capital to outlay if problems occur. Very large companies are not able to invest in sophisticated technology equipment. Smaller companies often rely on the use of contractors such as patternmakers, cutters and textile printers or dyers who may work for a number of manufacturers.

To minimize the costs of production many designers are increasingly having their products made up overseas in countries where labor is cheaper. This is partially the case when detailed processes such as embroidery are involved.

With technology and computerization making machinery more efficient, there are fewer employees and decisions need to be made regarding the necessity for facilities owned by the designer or whether it is more efficient to contract out manufacturing.

Design is a strategic tool used to gain market advantage by companies operating at an international level. Their products, their branding, their promotion and their business premises are all designed to maximize customer acceptance of the goods and services they have to offer and to optimize the day to day operation of their business. The benefits of design are also available to national and local businesses. The process can always be tailored to the resources available.

2.3 DESIGN EDUCATION

Design education has become a major growth area in both secondary and tertiary education. The education of designers requires teachers and lecturers with knowledge in the many subject areas that designers must study as well as experienced designers in the respective design disciplines who are able to pass on the specifics of professional practice. Design educators may have qualifications in a design discipline or in one of the subjects that make up the curriculum. They may additionally have qualifications in teaching.²⁵

Design education is the teaching of theory and application in the design of products, services and environments. It encompasses various disciplines of design, such as graphic design, user interface design, web design, packaging design, industrial design, fashion design, information design, interior design, sustainable design, trans-generational design, and universal design.²⁶ Design education as it stands today has been greatly influenced by the Bauhaus (Bauhaus meaning "house for building"). Most consider it to be the first formal design school.²⁷

In the early days of industrial design, design work was primarily focused upon physical products. Today, however, designers work on organizational structure and social problems, on interaction, service, and experience design. Many problems involve complex social and political issues. As a result, designers have become applied behavioral scientists, but they are woefully undereducated for the task. Designers often fail to understand the complexity of the issues and the depth of knowledge already known. They claim that fresh eyes can produce novel solutions, but then they

²⁵ Faerm Steven. December 2012, Towards a Future Pedagogy: The Evolution of Fashion Design Education, Parsons the New School for Design, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 23.

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design_education

²⁷ http://www.core77.com/forj/summary_edu.html History of Design Education by Martin Teasdale

wonder why these solutions are seldom implemented, or if implemented, why they fail. Fresh eyes can indeed produce insightful results, but the eyes must also be educated and knowledgeable. Designers often lack the requisite understanding. Design schools do not train students about these complex issues, about the interlocking complexities of human and social behavior, about the behavioral sciences, technology, and business. There is little or no training in science, the scientific method, and experimental design.²⁸The old skills of drawing and sketching, forming and molding must be supplemented and in many cases, replaced, by skills in programming, interaction, and human cognition. Rapid prototyping and user testing are required, which also means some knowledge of the social and behavior sciences, of statistics, and of experimental design.

Europe and the United States have seen a shift in design education influenced by ethical issues, philosophy, innovative technology and a regard for the environment and different cultures. The history of design learning has changed throughout different design movements, up to the recent progressive shift into interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and trans-disciplinary design education, which requires collaboration and communication between design fields. The challenge for European and American institutions still lies in structuring their design programs to cater to their differing students' needs, regional economic systems and government support and emerging trends and design professions.

²⁸ http://www.core77.com/blog/columns/why_design_education_must_change_17993.asp Why Design Education Must Change by Don Norman

2.3.1 FASHION DESIGN EDUCATION

Fashion designers develop clothing, accessories, footwear and other items of personal apparel. They study the design and construction of clothing, its historical development and styles and the techniques and processes available for its manufacture. They rely heavily on illustration skills and the making of samples to communicate their designs.²⁹

Fashion design curriculum is typically framed by the core studio courses of fashion design and garment construction that are taught throughout the undergraduate levels; these are supported by required liberal studies and discipline-related subjects such as digital design, textiles, drawing, business, knitwear, and other courses that support students' individual goals. Semester-abroad programs allow students to engage in other forms of design pedagogy and foreign fashion industries. The capstone experience of the undergraduate education is the development of a graduate portfolio and fashion collection that showcases the student's abilities and launches them into the industry. Most graduates enter the industry immediately following graduation and secure positions as Assistant Designers. For some of these professionals, graduate studies in such areas as business, fashion history, and fashion design are undertaken in order to advance professionally or to enter a related area of greater interest.³⁰

Due to the rapid and volatile changes occurring in the industry, the future role of fashion designers will require the ability to perform deeper levels of research in order to support design proposals. Fashion designers will be expected to engage with previously unrelated practices to create innovative fashion design, contextualize the work, and improve industry systems. Academia is considering how to prepare graduates for this accelerated and highly unpredictable

²⁹ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

³⁰ Faerm Steven. December 2012, Towards a Future Pedagogy: The Evolution of Fashion Design Education, Parsons the New School for Design, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 23.

professional landscape by reimagining the future of fashion design education. Educators will increasingly focus on developing students' conceptual skills and design processes within curricula that provide greater interdisciplinary opportunities. While this approach is being lauded by many, others—particularly those in the fashion design industry—stress the need for a balanced education that incorporates the development of conceptual thinking and practical “hands on” skills.³¹

2.4 THE FASHION DESIGN ENVIRONMENT IN KENYA

The fashion design industry in Kenya is mainly classified under clothing/garment manufacturing. The garments produced fall into three main categories; Haute couture, Ready-to-wear and Mass market. Despite globalization, some portions of the clothing production industry in Kenya remain primarily local. This is especially so in places where local styles and local needs create a market for goods that are not internationally traded. Small firms and self-employed tailors are the most numerous. These are estimated to constitute over ninety-nine percent of the firms (McCormick et al., 2007). They make school uniforms, choir robes, African and Western men’s and women’s wear and various other items. They typically employ one or two people, although in urban areas some may have ten or even more. Their markets are mainly individuals, but there are variations. Some produce for institutions like schools, churches and hospitals.

The design houses practicing in Kenya make haute couture garments, concentrating more on the made-to-measure than the high fashion aspect, with some designers selling directly from their

³¹ Faerm Steven. December 2012, Towards a Future Pedagogy: The Evolution of Fashion Design Education, Parsons the New School for Design, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 23.

workshops³² and most designers working from home; "The problem is many designers in Kenya don't have the money to open stores. So a lot of the garments are in people's houses..."³³ There are only a few designers who have managed to open up shops while a group of designers have got together and opened a store under a collective label³⁴ where they retail their ready to wear garments. Other manufacturers of made-to-measure clothing are the juakali tailors who offer cheaper services than the designers to make made-to-measure garments for individual clients. Most of these tailors have training in tailoring but not in fashion design and do not necessarily design the clothes they make. Most of the time, they copy designs from magazines and already existing designs³⁵. The EPZ companies are the major manufacturers of mass market garments which are for export. The designs made by EPZ garment factories are dictated by their clients who are in the export markets, mostly in Europe and America.

As such, the entities that determine fashion design in Kenya are the fashion design firms. These firms design men's, women's and children's wear. The main fashion design products are African/ culturally inspired designs and wedding/ ceremonial designs. There however exist a small number of fashion designers who make different fashion products from recycled materials, graffiti inspired designs and hip hop inspired designs. Most designers and juakali tailors will produce uniforms en mass for companies to get extra income.

³² <http://newsbbc.co.uk/2/hi/8387> Kenyan Fashion Kenyans start to embrace daring fashion By Kevin Mwachiro BBC News, Nairobi

³³ http://www.afrol.com/News2001/ken008_fashion_week.html Launching Kenya's first ever fashion week By Katy Salmon

³⁴ <http://newsbbc.co.uk/2/hi/8387> Kenyan Fashion Kenyans start to embrace daring fashion By Kevin Mwachiro BBC News, Nairobi

³⁵ Edited by Dorothy McCormick, Joseph A. Kuzilwa and Tegegne Gebre-Egeziabherprises. Financial Services and the Performance of Micro and Small-Scale Clothing Enterprises in Kenya by Rosemary Atieno. 2009 INDUSTRIALISING AFRICA IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION, Challenges to Clothing and Footwear.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This was mainly a qualitative research that utilized case study design. Information on World, African and Kenyan fashion design industries were collected and analyzed and case studies were carried out to explore the factors crucial to fashion designers success and evaluate how fashion designers in Kenya can effectively use these factors to succeed.

3.2 TARGET POPULATION

The actual number of fashion designers in Nairobi is not documented however, there are numerous fashion designers known to the researcher in Nairobi. Respondents were selected from top fashion designers based in Nairobi who have high levels of recognition both locally and internationally for their work, frequent participation in international fashion events and expertise in the fashion design industry in Kenya.

3.3 SAMPLE SELECTION

The researcher used non-probability purposive sampling where top fashion designers were selected for being a source of rich information for in-depth analysis related to success in fashion design. The researcher picked a small homogeneous sample size with similar characteristics; practicing fashion designers who are perceived to be successful. Out of the available seven top

fashion designers in Kenya, four were interviewed by the researcher; Deepa Dosaja, Monica Kanari, Peggy Onyango and Ann McCreath. This was because most designers, even though interested to be part of the research, were non-committal to schedule interview dates. To avoid running out of time the researcher maintained only four designers who committed and set interview dates within the set time allocated to data collection.

Initial respondents who were not interviewed included Patricia Mbela who moved to Mombasa hence falling out of the scope of the study, Lucy Rao and John Kaveke who were not available to be interviewed within allocated time.

3.3.1 ANN MCCREATH



Figure 2 *Fashion designer Ann McCreath (Photo courtesy of www.fafa.org)*

Scottish-born designer Ann McCreath is the founder and chairman of FAFA. She has worked as a designer in Italy and Spain; she worked on aid in Angola, Kenya and Zimbabwe with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Traditional arts and crafts then inspired her to move from aid to fair trade as a long term solution to poverty. Her Kenyan contemporary fashion label, Kikoromeo, works

with a wide variety of rural and urban communities. Kikoromeo style involves a lot of hand-crafting and hand-painting, to create unique individual items. Fashion house Kikoromeo was set up in 1996 in Nairobi.³⁶

Many of the textiles are hand-painted by Sudanese fine artist El Tayeb Daw el Bait. Kikoromeo believes in fair trade and works with local artisans to promote community development through economic empowerment. It also works in support of Africa's heritage by actively promoting traditional skills and crafts in their production process. Kikoromeo works closely with Le Collane di Betta, using their jewelry to enhance the clothing. Kikoromeo's Ann McCreath is the founder of the Festival for African Fashion and Arts, FAFA, which is an annual event that was founded in 2008 after the post election violence in Kenya. FAFA showcases fashion design collections and musicians from all over Africa to promote peace. Some of the 'peace patches' made by communities during FAFA events are used by Kikoromeo to enhance their garments and accessories.

³⁶ <http://www.bellanaija.com/2010/05/04/kikoromeo-ethical-fashion-from-kenya-with-love/> Amanda, Etuk. May 2010, KikoRomeo: "Ethical Fashion from Kenya with Love"

3.3.2 MONICA KANARI



Figure 3 *Fashion designer Monica Kanari (Photo courtesy of Emma Nzioka³⁷)*

Monica Kanari started designing officially, at age 27; with her home as her workshop. Gradually, she opened a shop at Nairobi’s South B Shopping Centre, which served her for close to ten years. Recently, she moved to Hurlingham. The genesis of her designing is her mother, a gifted dressmaker. Since Monica studied fine art in school, she helped her mother sketch the designs. At the university (Egerton, in Njoro) Monica studied Agriculture and Home Economics and later worked as a stockbroker for six years, before calling it quits to concentrate on fashion. Even then, she drew sketches and designed clothes for friends.

When she presented her designs at the SIFA festivals in 1994, she made it to the finals. In 1995, she represented Kenya in South Africa at a fashion fair, and won. “The response was overwhelming — it challenged me to take my designing more seriously.” Later, when she got

³⁷<http://mobile.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/MONICA-KANARI-Designer-focus/-/1950774/2085730/-/format/xhtml/-/100pud3/-/index.html> Wambui Kibue, November 23 2013, MONICA KANARI: Designer focus

married, her husband constantly encouraged her and even helped her draft a resignation letter in 1999 from the company she worked for. Her focus is outfits for special occasions like weddings. After Monica set up her business, she did a short course with a designer in Australia and learnt more about fabrics.

Apart from SIFA awards, Monica has also showcased her collection at the REDDS fashion awards and the Festival for African Fashion and Art (FAFA). She still studies designing online, because there's always something new to learn. Currently Monica works on ordered items and wants to increase the company's productivity and start working on a defined line. She mainly designs wedding garments.

3.3.3 PEGGY ONYANGO



Figure 4 *Fashion designer Peggy Onyango (Photo courtesy of AFADK³⁸)*

³⁸<http://www.afadk.co.ke/board.html>

Influenced by her mother who was a seamstress, Peggy Onyango started crocheting at the age of 9. Little did she know that it would develop into fashion, she later decided to take a full fashion and design diploma course at Woodgrove College. Right now, Peggy does a lot of Bridal gowns and evening (African) wear which are adorned with crochet and this is her signature. Peggy has also undertaken a course specifically for taking measurements for enhanced figure flattery at Kalawni International in Bangkok. Peggy has participated in several fashion shows and events including the Kenya fashion week 2000 – 2004, the African Fashion Fair in 2009 amongst others and is one of the founders and board members of the Association of Fashion Designers of Kenya, AFADK.

3.3.4 DEEPA DOSAJA



Figure 5 *Fashion designer Deepa Dosaja*³⁹

Deepa Dosaja was born in Nairobi, Kenya. In 1977 her family relocated to Montreal, Canada, where she was to spend her childhood. It is whilst growing up in Montreal that Deepa realized

³⁹<http://www.deepadosaja.com/the-designer-2/>

her creative instincts. On completing high school Deepa enrolled into La Salle College, Montreal from where she received a Diploma in Fashion Design. During this period Deepa also worked at a small exclusive boutique Filly and Colt. This opportunity proved invaluable to her for the knowledge gained in various aspects of fashion.

In the early 1990's Deepa relocated back to Kenya with an eye to launching her Fashion career. At the time the Fashion scene in Kenya was slowly ebbing into a reality. Her first assignment was Merchandising Manager of Hardcore Clothing Company a highly successful manufacturer and retailer.

Deepa ventured into her own business in 1994 and primarily engaged in Haute Couture for a client base that was growing in numbers. The year 2000 saw the creation of her distinct label and flagship company Vabene Couture. Since inception the company has had a gradual expansion and employs twenty full-time staff, who are a core asset in the company's vision for further growth. In 2013 the company re-branded, a result of which saw the introduction of the Deepa Dosaja label and the opening of her Flagship Boutique located at the stylish and up market 14 Riverside, Nairobi.

With a view to further enhance its brand profile; in 2013 Deepa Dosaja joined the AWEP African Women's Entrepreneurship Program. Deepa was also the 2013 winner of Africa's Most Influential Women in Business and Government – Industries sector. Deepa Dosaja has played an influential role in shaping the Kenyan fashion landscape – and its image.

Deepa has abundant recognition from numerous sources including; Winner in the Industries Sector, Most Influential Woman (MIW) Kenya in 2013, amongst participating in numerous

fashion shows like Festival of African Fashion and Art (FAFA) Nairobi, Kenya 2010 and 2012, London Festival for African Fashion & Art 2013, galas and showcasing in Toronto Boutiques.

3.4 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The researcher used both primary and secondary sources to collect and record data. The research methods utilized were:

- Case studies
- Interview protocol
- Focus groups
- Archival research; published and unpublished material and electronic media
- Voice recording

3.4.1 CASE STUDIES

The researcher carried out case studies of 4 top fashion designers in Kenya. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors crucial to fashion designers success and evaluate how fashion designers in Kenya could effectively use these factors to succeed. Out of the top designers currently in the fashion industry, the researcher carried out studies of Deepa Dosaja, Ann McCreath, Monica Kanari and Peggy Onyango. These designers were selected based on empirical research that recognized their high level of recognition locally and internationally,

participation in international fashion events, expertise in the fashion design industry in Kenya and their availability within the researcher's scope and time limitations.

3.4.2 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate four recognized fashion designers in Kenya to determine;

- a. Their bio data; education background, how long they've been practicing fashion design, etc
- b. Their work information; scale of business- number of machines and workers, etc
- c. Their opinion on the challenges faced by fashion designers in Kenya and possible solutions
- d. What practices they believed make a fashion designer successful

3.4.3 FOCUS GROUPS

The researcher attended the Kenya fashion focus group comprised of emerging and established fashion designers, stylists, fashion photographers, manufacturers, textile designers and fashion bloggers conducted by Kikoromeo fashion house, to investigate the challenges they faced in the industry and their perception of what a successful fashion designer was. The issues arising from the focus group were used to guide the semi-structured interviews held with the selected top

fashion designers in Kenya and draw conclusions, summaries and recommendations together with other collected data.

3.4.4 ARCHIVAL RESEARCH; PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Secondary research such as media reports, articles, scholarly papers and success factors of international fashion designers were used by the researcher to collaborate data collected from semi-structured interviews of top fashion designers in Kenya and the focus group.

3.4.5 VOICE RECORDING

The researcher recorded respondents during the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The recordings were later typed out into transcripts that were then used in data organization and presentation.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 CASE STUDIES

3.5.1.1 Monica Kanari

3.5.1.1.1 Bio Data

This participant has been working as a fashion designer for 14 years full time and 3-4 years as part-time/ hobby; very informal. The respondent has a degree in agriculture and home economics which is not related to fashion design, however, has done training with a fashion designer in Australia, a short 6 month course and other business related trainings, not directly related to fashion.

3.5.1.1.2 Work Information

The respondent has been operating a medium sized workshop in Hurlingham, Nairobi, with a total of 14 employees; 3 design assistants, 8 production workshop staff and 3 support staff with the participant being the fashion designer for her fashion label. She has a total of 14 machines i.e. 10 industrial machines and 4 steamers. The respondent has no technology used in production, no CAD or pattern drafting technology but has a computer system for tracking customer orders.

3.5.1.1.3 Expertise of Fashion Designers

The respondent normally employs Kenyan fashion designers, with either a diploma or a degree in fashion; however, the participant felt that fashion designers from Kenyan universities were not ready for the market. As the respondent said, “All the fashion design colleges, institutes and schools are pretty young, they are not well developed and they are not run by people who have been in the industry so the theory that they learn is very basic and cannot even compete internationally with what people do outside”. Consequently, the respondent prefers to first

employ on internship the fashion designers, train them and then select the ones she feels are compatible, quick learners and have adapted well to the business.

Compared to the education offered in the other parts of the world, the respondent feels that fashion design education in Kenya is “terrible”, with no depth and very theory oriented. In the interviewee’s article in the Business Daily, she was quoted saying that students from the young colleges in Kenya come out saying that they are fashion designers, however, they cannot make a complete collection i.e. if one did a course in fashion design, it was a must that they could be able to do 2 full collections by the time they were done where 14 garments make for one full collection (Business Daily, 21-2-2013).

Additionally, the respondent had a view that majority of student fashion designers in Kenya were taught only dress making then given the title of a ‘fashion designer’. The dress making had minimal practical lessons with the student designer limited to making 3 garments (1 dress, 1 gown and 1 avant-garde) after a three year course, which according to her was a total waste of time. Almost all, about 90%, of such designers ended up with a tailoring business in the market since they lacked the necessary prerequisite knowledge and experience required to be a top fashion designer.

As a result, the respondent believes that for a fashion designer to succeed, one needs an understanding of the human figure, what fabrics would work for what type of design, how to draw properly, cut properly and thereafter to stitch in a good finish and good fitting that results to a good product. The participant insisted that the African body type was unique and therefore required a very specialized design. To maintain and enhance high levels of expertise and skills as a fashion designer, in-house training was essential to the employed designers. The participant

ensured that she was challenged by different things which included working with different fabrics, being involved in what was being done, trying new ideas and being inspired from reading different magazines to improve and maintain high levels of her expertise.

3.5.1.1.4 Success Factors

According to the respondent some of the challenges faced by fashion designers in Kenya include;

- Lack of availability of skilled workers which is the greatest hindrance,
- Lack of availability of good, affordable raw materials,
- And generally very high production and setup costs.

To avoid high cost of production, the participant postulated bulk orders of fabrics, mass typesetting and mass production were considered cost cutters making it cheap compared to custom made. However, her products being custom made garments, mass production was not an option in her business unless she started producing ready to wear garments. Successful fashion designers in her opinion have consistency on being committed to one's word and delivery on the promise on time. To ensure this, she has had a computer software system custom made, which they use to help track customer orders from start to finish.

3.5.1.1.5 Economic Factors

The participant affirmed that the state of the Kenyan economy affected her business. According to her, Kenyans consider clothing as a luxury item; the respondent observed that the trend of

buying clothes depended on the economic environment. However, the participant has had to counter effects of economic slumps on her business through marketing. She has also managed to maintain her major source of income to be weddings which keeps her going throughout the year. The respondent also outsources her services to corporate companies during low economic times, producing uniforms, etc. Globally, she feels that the world economy has no significant effects on her business.

3.5.1.1.6 Political Factors

The respondent posited that she could not tell whether political events such as elections and government changes affected her business. However, she pointed out that if political factors like violence during an election affected her business, it was not unique to hers but rather to any other business in the industry and the country. She further noted that government policies in Kenya were not tailor made to increase success level in fashion businesses, for instance; incidents such as import of cheap, low quality school uniform were encouraged in previous regimes which affected the local fashion industry. Currently the government has introduced directives to enhance local procurement first, hence supporting the local industries.

3.5.1.1.7 Ecological Factors

To be environmental friendly, the participant stated that she recycled their materials in cases of mass productions; however, she does this minimally since most of her clients require custom made products and not ready to wear. As part of social consciousness, the participant is involved

in charity work where children make patchwork out of waste textile fabrics from her workshop, among other activities. It is worth noting that since the participant does lots of weddings, majority of her clients are not ready for recycled gowns thus resulting to custom made gowns.

In Kenya there are regulations that give the standards for end products in fashion design. The participant however, believes that most of these regulations are not keenly observed due to lack of expertise in the regulatory board; Kenya Bureau of Standards, KEBS. Most importers and producers of fashion goods take advantage of the lack of law reinforcement to import or produce substandard products in mass. On her part the respondent insisted on high standard custom made products. Since her business market is locally placed, issues such as standard regulations on export markets and sustainable product purchase are not a major challenge in her business.

3.5.1.1.8 Technological Factors

The only technology the participant uses in the workshop is a computer application system for tracking client's orders, payments and schedules for fittings which was custom made for her fashion house, Occasions and Days. According to the participant, technology could only be used in mass production where standardization was required to have a successful business and not custom made where client's opinion and designer's creativity were more important rather than standardization.

The participant believed that success in fashion business was limited when one did not have systems in place to run the business and not necessarily technology, especially in the third world economy. She emphasized business success depended on the end product, designer's market and the community group or groups a designer was working with. Maasai women do not use

technology to produce their collars, they use a system put in place; “Chinese have never been able to do Maasai collars because it is labor intensive, although somebody will go to Maasai market and want to buy that collar for Ksh. 1500 never mind the Maasai woman has made it for like 3 weeks”. She posited that research should be done by fashion designers especially in Kenya to bring up technology that would enhance systems in place and not necessarily standardization. She noted that international designers such as Vivienne Westwood come to Kenya and work a lot with Maasai community groups, to use Maasai indigenous products and style to enhance their design products which fetched a lot of money internationally.

3.5.1.1.9 Financial Resources

The participant took over the business from the mother. The major source of financial resource she used on setting up the business came from a professional award: Smirnoff, where she was awarded money as a prize. To ensure cash flow in the business, the participant believed that one had to target their market properly, manage and keep business well, price products properly based on one’s market, and costs of overheads, brand oneself appropriately. Financial restraints could be reduced through management of costs. To ensure that product life cycle and product distribution influence positive performance, the participant produced on order (custom made), and ensures consistency through trial and error (taking risk and hoping the clients liked the product). As a result a designer should decide one’s market, package right, brand themselves and they would be successful.

3.5.1.1.10 Available Resources

The participant sources for her materials from local suppliers who are reliable although the material is limited in variety. The participant's major challenge was that the suppliers did not make special orders. Since she was in the custom made business, she had been able to control this by either maintaining stock, or giving clients sample options of what was available in the market to avoid struggling to get fabrics.

The infrastructure in Kenya was not a challenge in her business as there were things that affected her but she worked around them, for example, they had put in an inverter in the workshop so that they wouldn't have power outages and in issues of transport, she made sure she had a driver at her disposal to be able to deliver what was needed in time. She didn't think there was anything that the government could do for designers to make them successful, "I don't think it is driven by government or what the government can do for you. It is the opportunities that you see and that you seize for yourself". She however believed there were things which if the government did, fashion designers would have more success in business like; manage electricity costs to make it affordable, create go downs for Kenyan designers to come and setup their workshops where they could produce for local market but not only limit such zones for the EPZ for exports only and grow the cotton industry back; create incentives for people to do cotton farming. The participant also felt it would be greatly beneficial to Kenyan fashion designers if the government created a window that would allow designers to import machinery on waived duty or substituted rates. She also felt that a designers' emporium that helped designers do a collection and exhibited for the designers would be beneficial.

3.5.1.1.11 Competitors

The participant felt that the cost of production was high because the cost of raw materials was high, i.e. we do not produce any of our materials in Kenya, and the suppliers have to import them. She was appalled that in Kenya we even have to import raw yarn to make our fabric. Compared to most of her competitors in the custom made business, they were on the same playing field however, it depended on the location of the business and type of business; since she has set up a registered company she attracts a lot of duties such as VAT and NSSF for her employees, resulting in the end product of her business attracting higher prices due to such costs. However, such costs are not covered by her competitors who are tailors in open market areas such as Kenyatta Market and in town making their products and production costs lower, and also enabling these tailors to make cheap knock offs of the designer's products. To control cost of production and maintain a client base, the participant made her products on order, ensured that her products were of good standards and branded her business.

3.5.1.1.12 Business Operations

The participant worked with assistant designers who assisted in the running of the business but she is the head designer in her business; basically overseeing main events such as fashion shows. She felt that it was challenging to run her own operations but it had been very hard hiring young fashion designers since they quoted high wages/salaries. Majority of such young designers believed that they could start their own fashion business and operate them without experience. An advantage of operating one's own business was that the owner had control in overseeing business operations. Management skills such as marketing, strategic planning, forecasting and accounting of cash flows were what the participant felt she needed to run her business

successfully. A sense of quality control was another important business skill that she felt a fashion designer needed to possess and needed to communicate to their team, in order to get the product they want.

As a demerit, owner control could hinder business growth. Therefore for proper growth, the participant felt that management skills should be shared through business partnership (where one's ideas and expertise were incorporated besides financial resources) and outsourcing services. She however noted that the major challenge was sustainable market share that would provide finances to pay for such services.

Having a marketing strategy was an important factor in running a successful business; this participant has used social media, Facebook, to do wedding promotions, and events like Samantha's Bridal Fair, FAFA and the African Fashion Fair. The participant however feels that even though these events are good to participate in, once the fashion designer has developed a high level of brand recognition, they can scale back and decide on the way forward to avoid burning out, and select which shows best suit their brand. Corporate events were also another avenue that the participant used to market her products and services earlier in the business. She however felt that fashion designers should be paid as other performers such as musicians were paid. Despite the fact that designers used lots of funds to prepare garments for corporate fashion shows, they were not paid; instead they were expected to sell their products on the event which was not possible.

The major challenge in marketing was that for corporate and most other fashion events, direct sales were not possible. Appearances in the media like fashion magazines kept the fashion designer known but some media promoters did not co-ordinate with fashion designers to give out

the best shot of the product (outfit) in terms of the sales it would generate for the designer instead selecting the outfits based on how artistic they would look, which did not necessarily result in sales. As a result of this the participant posited that other avenues designers could use to be successful in fashion business included branding of their products especially if the fashion designer did ready to wear products. For custom made products, work through word of mouth, since the participant confirmed this had worked very well for her brand; most people who went to her were referred by someone else. Also, the participant used a website that popped up when people searched for African designers, Kenyan designers or Kenyan bridals on the internet.

3.5.1.2 Ann McCreath

3.5.1.2.1 Bio Data

This participant has been a fashion designer in Kenya since 1996. Before she came to Kenya, she had been working in Europe, between Italy and Spain, for 5 years as a fashion designer. While studying in Rome she did a bit of tailoring for fashion houses. She has a general arts degree specializing in Italian African history and history of art, and then she did a fashion diploma from Koefia in Rome, which is a couture school where she learnt to make patterns on the mannequin.



Figure 6, Figure 7 *Garments by Ann McCreath (source www.fafa.org)*

3.5.1.2.2 Work Information

Her official offices are at the Life Ministry Centre, with the retail shop being at Yaya Centre. She has a workshop in Kawangware but she preferred to work on her designs in her house since it was quiet, while she did the cutting of patterns at the back of the shop. The participant thought that her business was small scale with a turnover rate of about Ksh. 24 million a year. At the time of the interview, the participant had 14 employees, 2 in the office, 3 in the shop, a workshop manager, his assistant, about 3 tailors on machines and 2 in finishing, 1 on stock control and a tailor in the shop for alterations. She has hired casuals and interns when the need arose while in some years she has employed up to 3 designers.

She had a sewing machine at the shop with 5 straight stitch machines at the workshop. She had a twin needle machine and an over lock machine. She used to have a button holler but it was stolen therefore she had been using a domestic machine for button holes while planning to acquire another button holler. She does not use CAD in production but uses Photoshop for presentation on corporate jobs, she also does a lot on excel. She had designed their own software system to take care of production needs but some glitches were experienced, thus regretting not getting a readymade program. She did a little bit of everything depending on the cash flow that included menswear, women's wear and a little of children's wear. She normally makes samples in-house and sub contracts a factory for big scale production.

3.5.1.2.3 Expertise of Fashion Designers

Mostly, the participant preferred employing Kenyan designers who had studied abroad. She alluded to the fact that training colleges in Kenya were not good enough, i.e. no comprehensive training was observed. She posited that majority of fashion designers from Kenya needed a lot of on the job training; the training is not up to top international fashion brands level, "The pattern cutting is not good enough unless they've googled it." She also preferred to hire East African designers who she said have a high level of skills since most of them tend to study abroad, especially in Italy, as their fashion schools are even worse than Kenyan fashion schools. As most fashion designers preferred to work for only 1 year then leave to open their own fashion businesses, she felt that she would rather hire a designer with a high level of skills since they would contribute much more to her business than one with a low level of skills, this she also applied to the interns she hired.

The main problem the participant had with Kenyan colleges was that those teaching had been through the same system and a lot did not have international work experience. She believed that definitely education is the problem; it is a hindrance to a company like hers because she needs to employ well qualified individuals to help the company grow but if what she was getting was just not up to international standards, she would rather just do it by herself, which meant she wouldn't have enough time. She believed that there's a huge opportunity for the existing Kenyan colleges to improve what they offer.

The participant felt that in Kenya fashion designers should actually be called fashion entrepreneurs. This she felt is because fashion designers in Kenya have to run a business, not just be creative, and this requires a high skills set and have very good technical skills. To succeed and maintain success, the participant believed that mentoring and constantly teaching her team was critical. Personal training was also essential to succeed, short courses training in fashion or entrepreneurship was one way the participant suggested; she has attended short courses particularly on finance training and how to be a corporate business. She also felt that training in entrepreneurship such as attending an executive MBA was important, however, time was a challenge therefore she preferred short courses training.

3.5.1.2.4 Success Factors

As she had discussed earlier, lack of trained personnel is one of the challenges the participant faced and limitations in manufacturing where one needed large volumes to be able to outsource. The main problem she had was distribution of the product; this she felt was because if her goods didn't get to the market, nobody could buy them. And if there was no demand in the market, it

would not work to produce just for the sake of it, “you need to know how you are going to sell something before you produce it.” She also felt there was a lack of a strong retail network in Kenya since even retail shops such as supermarkets sell only cheap clothes. Finance for production was another challenge she faced though it was not a major problem since she could borrow the money with a concrete order, technology, especially on graphic design; fashion designers were not well trained and lack of consistency and efficiency in delivery of quality textiles; majority of the textile manufactures were men she therefore felt that they had a disconnect with the fashion designers who were mostly female. The other challenge was players in the industry not willing to share their data, and there being no statistics available on the internet. “I’m trying currently to look at different ways of doing retail, I’m looking online and for the UK you can get all that information immediately, which means you can do a proper business plan. Locally you can’t get that information at all.” In that light the participant commissioned with Ipsos Synovate to carry out a survey of the Kenyan fashion industry.

In her opinion, to be successful in the international market a fashion designer had to be highly trained, very good in concept development and interpretation and have good drawing skills. To be a successful designer locally, one needed strong technical skills particularly in pattern cutting. Public relations and marketing were also important factors for success. Networking according to this participant was critical since it gets one the exposure without paying for it. How one trained their team and fostered team building was also important. The participant posited that one had to have a lot of passion and drive and know that it was not going to be easy, “You just have to get on with it because I don’t think there’s an easy ride in fashion”.

3.5.1.2.5 Economic Factors

The participant postulated that the state of the Kenyan economy affected her business; she felt there was not enough money in circulation currently and with a lot of her clients being business owners; they were affected by the cash crunch and not spending as much. The economy was affected by other factors such as elections and terrorist attacks; having a shop in a mall, after such events there were no clients. Majority of her customers were expatriates who were affected by the 2012 elections where most of them saved for a trip outside Kenya in the fear of another outbreak of post election violence hence were not spending money before, during and just after the elections. She also noted that changes in the world economy affected her business but this was dependent on what exactly changed; factors such as the world economic slump when tourist numbers dropped and droughts affected the cash flows, affecting her customers, thus affecting her business. To counter the effect of economic slumps on her business, diversification of markets was her key measure. She believed that focus on corporate products like uniforms, furnishings or promotional items and establishment of her business in London, which she could also use for marketing, were her future focus.

3.5.1.2.6 Political Factors

Political factors such as elections affected the purchasing power of her customers; post-election violence and pre-election factors made majority of her clients to spend hardly any money on clothes since many of them were planning for foreign trips. Terrorism, a factor that was politically motivated, also brought about foreign travelling sanctions thus reducing the number of

tourists visiting Kenya; this affected her business since less tourist numbers affected the businesses of her clients, making them spend less. The policies on corruption affected fashion business; since the government did not enforce them, cheap and sub-standard fashion products found in the market affected buying power. The recent VAT bill that placed duty on tourism increased the cost of travelling into Kenya hence, affected the inflow of tourists into the country. It also affected registered businesses since the participant prices had to go up to factor in the cost of VAT on previously exempted or lower taxed raw material, increase in labor costs and operation costs. The new Immigration bill that was tabled in parliament where an expatriate can only stay for 2 years was another policy that would influence the number of foreigners willing to stay within the country and affect the vibrancy of its markets, “I understand what they are trying to do and that’s good but I think it’s going to backfire on the economy. Because those people spend money, Kenyans will buy land, the foreigners like that would actually spend money in retail.”

3.5.1.2.7 Ecological Factors

The participant confirmed that the vast majority of Kenyan fashion is ethical and sustainable however, most Kenyan fashion businesses do not benefit from this as they do not use their sustainable practices as a marketing strategy as opposed to fashion brands in the west. She felt that because the west had a lot of experience with mass manufacturing in Asia, they tended to be very concerned about environmental and social factors like sweat shops, mistreatment of workers, etc but such conditions were not common in Kenya. She postulated that it is important for fashion designers from Africa to get involved in world debates on sustainability to also get

recognition themselves and to have a voice. She felt that it was unethical for the world market to exclude African designers but at the same time African designers were supposed to champion their own causes. She concluded that it was time African fashion designers interpret what ethical fashion means to them and what the important issues for them are. She postulated that the west doesn't know African fashion designers exist and they are never going to champion their causes unless African designers speak up. For her, it had become very important to have a voice and use it.

The major concern of regulation that would affect her business once she diversified into the London market included being sold fabrics without well known compositions and regulation on washing instructions and composition labels which could cause products to be taken off the shelf in the Europe and US markets.

3.5.1.2.8 Technological Factors

The participant used excel for calculating “number crunching” financial records, e-mails for information sharing, Dropbox and Whatsapp to send pictures of fabrics, etc to clients as well as to staff. She has a database of patterns and designs loaded up. The participant felt that it was important for designers to incorporate new technology, not necessarily each new technology but certain ones that were critical. Financial programs such as excel which she used for keeping her accounts was critical. The participant posited that in terms of design, one could still do it old school (without any technology) in Kenya, however, it would just be a question of time before we are obsolete and therefore it would be better for designers to adopt technology in their businesses.

3.5.1.2.9 Financial Resources

The participant got her initial capital from some kind of inheritance, and then she sold shares of her company to potential shareholders who were clients and friends to raise capital. She still has these shareholders to date. She has also raised capital from banks; through an overdraft account and through getting financing against an LPO. Venture capitalists was another way she has raised capital however, this didn't work in the long run; she was skeptical due to differences of markets and recognized that as Michael Joseph⁴⁰ said, Kenya is a peculiar market, it doesn't behave according to the norms of many other markets. And so getting her money from outside and heeding outside advice may or may not work.

The participant stressed that cash is king, "Sell in cash". For continuous cash flow the participant's view was that selling in cash was important, ensuring that there was always cash in the business. She has had control of finances by buying fabrics only on clients' orders, ensuring that cash from credit-card sells were paid within 2-3 days, and ensuring that postdated cheques were not encouraged. She ensured that she negotiated credit terms with her suppliers on periods of payment thus building trust and controlling when and how much money the company pays out. To ensure that product life cycle and distribution enhanced her business performance; the participant has her products not in storage but in the retail shop. She also ensured that her products were sold within 1-2 months, thereafter; the products that had overstayed on the shelf were to be sold through sales.

⁴⁰ Former CEO of Safaricom

3.5.1.2.10 Available Resources

Most of the participant's suppliers did their deliveries on time, although she had some problems with manufacturers as they preferred high volume orders to small volume orders. Small scale workshops however tended not to be reliable; they made poor deliveries especially when they had other orders. Professional manufacturing outfits were more reliable and professional in their dealings. This affected the success of her business since if she was delivering to a 3rd party and the delivery was delayed then they started questioning her reliability. This the participant countered by vetting her manufacturers, if they did not make a delivery on time repeatedly, she stopped placing orders with them.

The participant felt that infrastructure especially roads in Kenya were a problem since they affected the cost of doing business. She however believed that electricity and water supply were sufficient enough compared to other countries. This according to the participant affected the price on the product she made. Technology was important for a successful business but was too expensive to have for small scale fashion designers. The participant believed that if the EPZ allowed small holder businesses to access technology such as automatic pattern grading with CAD, set up by Koreans for the EPZ training centre in a government initiative, or access to some kind of government technology centre that offered specific pieces of equipment like button hollers, beading and textiles printing to small scale fashion designers which the participant felt none of the businesses were big enough to reliably afford, they would really greatly benefit from it.

3.5.1.2.11 Competitors

The participant could not rate the cost of production since she had not compared it to other places nor had she ever produced elsewhere, but her manufacturers posited that energy costs are very high and the labor costs are high. She felt that the main factor affecting her cost of production was the cost of fabrics, other factors like consistency in quality and efficiency made the cost of labor to be higher but did not affect her profit margins as much as expensive fabric. For example, she doesn't use Vlisco fabrics to make garments for retailing at her shop as they are very expensive and eat into her margins, instead; she only uses Vlisco fabrics specifically for garments placed on order where she will achieve her profit margins. She posited that in London and West Africa, where her competitors are based, these fabrics are cheaper. She is therefore considering manufacturing in these places then importing the finished garments into Kenya, which might be cheaper for her business. To cut on cost of production, the participant also outsources production of one off mass garments like shirts to factories instead of making them individually which makes it cheaper.

3.5.1.2.12 Business Operations

The participant is the managing director and chief executive officer of her fashion label Kikoromeo; she does the running of the business by herself. This is a challenge since she felt it was difficult to oversee the business and design simultaneously; pattern cutting was more mathematical hence not a problem but designing needed her to concentrate. She posits that for her it is important to have someone doing finance and she has become quite knowledgeable at financial planning with experience. She also believed that if a fashion designer got someone who understands their market it would add a lot of value to their business. The challenge of hiring

professionals is their salaries; does the designer have enough money to pay for the professionals they want?

The participant felt that fashion designers required general management skills to run a successful business like; human resource management, finance and marketing, “but with fashion, hype is important so marketing/ PR is critical.” The participant does a lot of PR through interviews and networking, she feels that she is a natural at networking therefore she found marketing not challenging in her business. She posited that fashion is a very visual industry and one needs to have good photos as people need to be able to see the product. A fashion designer needs to tell the story of their brand and photos show the quality and professionalism of one’s business. From this she had managed to dress Lupita’s mother and her business has gained international recognition.

3.5.1.3 Peggy Onyango

3.5.1.3.1 Bio Data

This participant has been in the fashion design business for 10 years, initially she had treated it as a hobby while waiting for other opportunities. She has a higher diploma in fashion design from Wood Groove College which has since closed and a higher diploma course from Callaway International fashion school in Bangkok. She has had the opportunity to train in mentorship programmes and at the time of this interview she was undertaking one at Wilson Fashion Institute which is an affiliate of Pretoria University in South Africa.

3.5.1.3.2 Work Information

Her business is small scale with a retail shop situated at South B shopping centre; this was also where her workshop was. She mainly makes custom made garments for weddings and special occasions. She also does mass production of uniforms and other items for corporate companies. The participant had 8 employees of which 5 were stitchers, 2 did finishing and when needed also did beading and accessories and 1 assistant.

3.5.1.3.3 Expertise of Fashion Designers

The participant did not employ Kenyan fashion designers, however, she admitted to having some interns who were majorly university students at fourth year level or so. She posited that majority of them were not practical skills oriented instead they had lots of theory, she felt that theory oriented fashion designers were disadvantaged since they had to embark on practical aspects of design thus affecting performance. The designer postulated that education in Kenya gave fashion designers general knowledge. Designers abroad were so practical that even the sales of their gowns could fetch up to Ksh. 2 million per day, “If somebody is selling 5 gowns that you can see going and it is packed. And it is Ksh. 560 000; it is Ksh. 500 000 how much is that? How much money is that? So, even if you remove costs and what, it will still come to Ksh. 100 000 and something in a day per gown.”

The participant felt that pattern making should be included in the fashion design curriculum since it was easier for starter fashion designers to look for someone to do pattern making for them and train them. She believed that entrepreneurship was important since majority of owners of fashion design business were not well trained on matters like book keeping, cash flows among other

business management aspects. According to the respondent, student designers in colleges were able to carry out research and get their mood boards done since each student was expected to build on a story of a garment before it graced the catwalk. However the garment was not as eye catching as the beautiful story behind it. She felt that designer students in Kenya were supposed to be given attachment in fashion houses abroad since such businesses gave practical aspects based on real life research and not only on theory learnt. The respondent felt that constant training would help fashion design businesses to be abreast with what was happening in the market and learn what was new.

3.5.1.3.4 Success Factors

The major challenge the participant had was lack of a workforce and especially tailors. She felt that majority of the tailors lacked specialized attention on garment finishing. She however had addressed this challenge by training her tailors to finish her products to meet the standards of her clients. Training, proper organization and set up of a workshop according to this participant were the ways that a fashion designer had to take in order to be successful. Being a master cutter and being persistent of one's pattern were also some practices she had adopted to make her business successful.

3.5.1.3.5 Economic Factors

This respondent felt that the Kenyan economy was not good enough however, she had diversified on the products that she made putting more attention on wedding gowns and clothes

for special occasions. She however felt that the economy affected her business especially when she had to import fabrics. Such factors as inflation and the world economic crisis affected her business. The economy also influenced the purchasing power of her clients where they only made outfits for special occasions sparing majority of their finances for basic needs like school fees and house rent. To counter this, the respondent had to compromise on quality of fabric while increasing creativity and innovativeness of the designs on the outfits.

3.5.1.3.6 Political Factors

Change in government after elections affected the respondents business a lot since it caused a halt in projects that were already underway, since they came with changes in personalities in the government offices. Also her associates and clients affiliated with the government suddenly had low purchasing power. Peggy argues that majority of clients would become financially cautious, thus majority did not spend on fashion until there was political stability after an election. The introduction of the Ministry of Arts and Culture was a milestone for fashion designers since by the time of interview; the respondent felt that personalities in music, fashion and arts were recognized by the government. ACTIF were in the process to start a centre of excellence with colleges and universities that offer fashion and arts to help students acquire knowledge on entrepreneurship like preparing business plans and the whole package.

On policy, the participant argued there were no policies that govern fashion design in Kenya. She felt that quality brands such as Mali ya Abdala were being printed in counterfeit in some areas in Kenya. She also saw quality of such brands in Dubai showing that most designers were not aware of regulations put by government to protect their creativity. Peggy believed that most of

the Kenyan clients were stereotype therefore never preferred products made locally. This was because most of fashion designers in earlier years of the days of KICOMI and the likes made quality products for exports while cheap quality was left for the Kenyan market; this was a business strategy since foreign countries had stereotyped Africa as a lower end market. However, she felt that if local designers could come together and promote what was made in Kenya, it would be easy for local clients to believe and buy Kenya.

3.5.1.3.7 Ecological Factors

This participant argued that the environment where one conducted their business mattered because it ensured sustainability of the business. According to her sanitation matters, business location and even awareness in terms of eco-fashion were important for fashion designer to sell both locally and internationally. Corporate social responsibility, CSR was perceived as how to sustain one's image on the environment and not giving back to the community in most Kenyan fashion businesses. Peggy felt that most fashion designers were not aware of the avenues that they could do CSR activities and majority of them did not come together to organize such events. Peggy was not aware of the regulations and policies that influenced ecological factors in Kenya. She also posited that she faced no challenges when it came to sustainable issues from clients.

3.5.1.3.8 Technological Factors

The respondent did not apply any technology in her business at the time of this interview. One of the reasons she gave for this not happening was that she feared piracy where people were prone

to copying designs displayed on social media and the internet. She however acknowledged that technology was very important in many ways; firstly, social media such as posting one's designs in Facebook sold the product faster and advertised the business. Secondly, it authenticated the business since many potential clients wanted to identify with business image and style. And thirdly, copying brought about by technology sold the creativity and idealist style of a designer. The participant felt that copying was good for a fashion designer because it made majority of them to be well versed with emerging trends in fashion design, quoting Coco Chanel who said "There is no fashion without copying, there isn't that which comes that has never been seen." The participant noted that it's just tweaking a little bit what has been there, and as a designer is copied, it forces them to think and innovate even more. The participant postulated that it is not important to incorporate all the new technology in the market however it was important for one to have 1-2 types of technology. This was so because without technology one would be deemed irrelevant hence run out of business.

3.5.1.3.9 Financial Resources

At the beginning of her business, the participant ventured on everything thus spent most of her finances specializing on nothing. Most of this time, she did her business as a hobby depending on it to provide the basic needs like food. But with time experience taught her to put her money where her mouth was forcing her to specialize. Although at first Peggy thought that capital was a major challenge in starting a business, experience taught her that business sustainability was more important. According to her, majority of fashion designer had the capital for startup but

sustainability became a problem since there was no commitment in terms of developing a story for one's business.

Knowledge diversification was another major challenge during her business startup. Many were the times she lost major clients because she was a sole proprietor. She also lacked experience on financial management and she felt that most designers took loans without clear cut policies on their own recovery procedure. As a result many businesses were auctioned. To counter this, the participant started a mentorship program that enabled her to employ more staff and therefore ensured more income. Training in financial management was crucial, therefore through observations and seminars she learned how to improve her business and make it sustainable. The participant was also able to get financing from bank overdrafts, loans against LPOs, loans from family members and soft loans from other fashion designers who she is close with.

3.5.1.3.10 Available Resources

The participant argued that there were no reliable fabric suppliers; however, she had found a way to convince her clients to be flexible and work with the theme colors that were available especially for weddings. This sometimes affected her business since some clients were very particular on the fabric and color that they preferred as such she lost some clients. Development of groups was one way she postulated that could improve the situation since they could order fabric in bulk like from China or even share on what they had in stock. She also suggested that if designers got together they could apply for government funding through the youth and women's funds. As a business entrepreneur, the participant had been able to overcome the challenge of unreliable suppliers and sources through maintaining a personal savings or borrowing from

family to get other suppliers to deliver materials. This ensured that her products were delivered on time; the business was successful and did not have bad publicity.

The participant argued that it is important for fashion designers and suppliers be consolidated in particular streets or situated in a particular place in town to make facilitation of acquiring goods and services easier. She also felt that fashion designers could not afford to have shops in shopping malls since they were expensive and with conditions like high rents and goodwill out of reach. She suggested that the government could work with mall owners to subsidize rates for Kenyan fashion designers to afford them retail space in shopping malls, which would increase their sales.

3.5.1.3.11 Competitors

The cost of doing business was quite high due to the high cost of production. This was so since most of the participants production was custom made hence smaller numbers. However, when she was given contracts that involved mass production, the cost of production was lower, therefore, to control cost of production, she has ensured on getting contracts that involved mass production. At the same time she has been outsourcing services to people with previous experience in mass production to partake on the contracts. According to her, monopoly in fabric supply had also contributed on the high cost of production. She had suggested that if fashion designers could also venture into large production of fabrics or import in mass, this would help reduce the cost of doing business.

The major competition she faced was from cheaper tailors who were ready to copy her designs and make the same outfit on a cheaper price. Such tailors were capable of using all the crook and

shoddy ways to ensure that they got a top designer's design then replicate it the lowest cost possible. Another source of competition was the fashion houses with more recognized brands that could afford to charge more prices than she could for similar products.

3.5.1.3.12 Business Operations

This fashion designer was the sole operator of her business, although she was in the process of involving her assistant more in the running of the business at the time of the interview. This was one of her major disadvantage since majority of the clients preferred dealing with her one on one and some went away when she was not around, which was bad for her business success. Most of the time she had the challenge of hiring professionals since majority of them were always ready to steal from the business and also learn the business for selfish gain, when you settle down with them, they leave your business and leave you hanging. She however admitted that it was important to have mid-level management that could supervise the workshop and who could manage finishing of garments and work directly with the clients.

The respondent also posited that it was important for a designer to have entrepreneurial skills; techniques such as book keeping and a bit of business knowledge especially accounts. If possible she suggested that a partnership would be useful. Putting systems in place was another way she suggested that designers were supposed to adopt. The respondent recognized that some of the world's top fashion designers had delegated roles and responsibility to ensure smooth running and success of their businesses.

In her shop, she had mannequins that she used to display her ready to wear garments, which she recently launched, to attract clients. Most of her marketing was done through word of mouth.

Other sources like the media also did advertise her through reality shows like the wedding show that had made people adopt her designer gowns that she had done for clients. According to the fashion designer, the major challenge of word of mouth was that majority of the time wrong information was relayed, especially when she gave some clients reduction in price due to social and environmental factors like being an orphan. Most of such times she had many clients who came with distorted information that could jeopardize her business success. As a result, she thought that one needed to understand who their clientele were, and what their margins were to avoid getting pressured into doing jobs that would not bring profit to the business, no matter the pressure from clients. She also posited that it was helpful to have other avenues of marketing. She emphasized on the use of social media such the Facebook and a webpage. However, she preferred one beginning with a Facebook account then after establishing a clientele, she then advised opening of a webpage.

3.5.1.4 Deepa Dosaja

3.5.1.4.1 Bio Data

The respondent has been a fashion designer for the last 23 years and has a diploma in fashion design from Le Sal College in Montreal.



Figure 8, Figure 9 *Garments by Deepa Dosaja*⁴¹⁴²

3.5.1.4.2 Work Information

She operates her business on Riverside Lane where she had a workshop, while she had a retail shop on 14th Riverside. The fashion designer had a total of 15 employees full time but employed casuals from time to time. She used Duke Machines. She specialized in women's garments but was getting into men's wear.

3.5.1.4.3 Expertise of Fashion Designers

The fashion designer had not been employing Kenyan fashion designers because most of them had disappointed her in drafting; the quality of drafting had been sub-standard. She had tried hiring fashion designers from some colleges and universities and they had not been able to

⁴¹http://ghettomeetsfashion.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/289682_247563658611128_383164_o.jpg?w=453&h=680

⁴²<http://www.capitalfm.co.ke/lifestyle/files/2012/11/DSC1215-untitled1.jpg>

deliver in the areas of drafting, fitting and knowing the silhouette of a person. She believed that education had a positive impact in fashion business however; she preferred persons with no education in design then trained them to her specifications. She posited that fashion design education offered in other parts of the world was better compared to in Kenyan because it was more practical and concerned with fitting which was a major concern for her clients.

The participant stated that for a fashion designer to be successful, they had to know how to fit their clients, brand their business through knowing their market and their tastes, making one to learn clients' preference and tastes thus enhancing business performance. Fashion designers also needed to have a consistent style, and not change it with every show. The participant maintained and enhanced her skills in fashion design through always learning new techniques by reading the latest design books like pattern making books. She also retrieved information from online websites. She hasn't gone for trainings but has specialized on self-education from the internet and from studying other fashion designers collections; she found especially from the international couturiers Dolce and Gabbana, she could get a good sense of what good finish should really be.

3.5.1.4.4 Success Factors

The major challenge that fashion designers faced in Kenya according to this participant was that Kenyans did not wear local designs. However, she thought having a clientele of people who loved one's brand and having a good following of people who loved one's brand would make a designer successful in Kenya. This could be achieved by the designer being true to their style and not always copying what others were doing in the market. Being consistent and building one's

brand made clients stick by one's product. She also used experts by inviting them to her business to train her team; for instance she brought a pattern master from India the previous year who really assisted her.

3.5.1.4.5 Economical Factors

The Kenyan economy did not affect her business but the world economy had an effect on the import of fabrics. The prices according to the participant go up by 20-30% overnight and the suppliers would say take it or leave it. However this did not affect her business since her clientele were mostly international (80-90%). She understood her target market and therefore was very careful the form of advertisement she used. The participant felt that her clientele's purchasing powers were not affected by the economy.

3.5.1.4.6 Political Factors

Political factors such as elections have interfered with the participants business; she had to close her shops early in some instances to allow her workers to go home early as it was unsafe at night and work half day with workers coming late, thus she could not work at full capacity. However, since her clients were international they were not affected. Some of the weaknesses on policies that affected her business included taxes such as import duties which are very high. The recently introduced VAT bill had really affected the cost of doing her business since things that were tax exempt no longer were. She also stated that it was very expensive to have casual laborers since

as a registered employer she had to pay NSSF and NHIF. She felt that Kenya could be one of the fashion capitals but Kenyans did not want to wear Kenyan labels.

3.5.1.4.7 Ecological Factors

According to the fashion designer, insisting on using natural fabrics was her way of ensuring the environment was safe. Socially, she ensured that her workers were comfortable; their working environment has good lighting, comfortable chairs and a beautiful studio. She also ensured fair wages and fair working hours. She ensured that her clients knew her well and as such were aware that she does not run a sweat shop.

3.5.1.4.8 Technological Factors

The participant was a strong supporter of use of technology in enhancing business success. She felt technology was important especially for those designers looking to export. Technology such as CAD/CAM was necessary though she felt that custom made products did not do well with technology. She felt that her spirituality would not allow her to employ use of technology because such laborers as master cutters would lose their jobs. Her opinion on technology was that it was ok in mass production. However, computer technology was good especially the use of Photoshop and Illustrator design software especially those for printing although majority of designers preferred using hand sketching and the traditional ways of designing.

3.5.1.4.9 Financial Factors

The participant started small where she did most of the stitching by herself. Her major financial restraint was caused by credit given to her clients and to solve this problem, she began being strict on credit. She felt that standards were to be set in a business to ensure clients bought products in cash. She also had a problem of distribution of her products; as a result she ensured that she held sales after every 2-3 months to get rid of old stock. The fashion designer also ensured that she produced new designs every week and this ensured that her clientele were able to receive and bought her product that she posted to them. This ensured that the business had enough cash flow to run day to day activities thus making her business successful.

3.5.1.4.10 Available Resources

All her suppliers were reliable. However, electricity was not reliable since she used a generator frequently in her manufacturing workshop. This was costing her business huge expenses. The water supply in her business was not frequent either because buildings were coming up in the area. The participant posited that if public transport was improved then her workers could work overtime since security would be enhanced. This would ensure that products such as wedding dresses were delivered on time. If electricity was improved so that power fluctuations were avoided, then she could avoid buying damaged appliances caused by the fluctuations like iron steamers and light bulbs all the time thus reducing business costs and ensuring business success.

3.5.1.4.11 Competitors

The cost of production in Kenya was 3-4 times higher compared to other countries such as Bangladesh, china, India and Sri-Lanka and it affected her business since the cost of the product was affected by VAT, NSSF, PAYE and other duties such as import duty. This made the price of her products to be high. However, she had put measures to ensure success by shopping only once a week to reduce cost and as said earlier, she had also ventured into mass production. Though expensive, with controls, it had ensured her business success.

3.5.1.4.12 Business Operations

The fashion designer runs business operations with others; she has a head of production and sales people while she was the head of design. It was difficult for her to only concentrate on designing since a lot of her clientele wanted to see her personally, therefore she scheduled time at the boutique on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays to meet her clients face to face. She also preferred designing by herself since this she argued added a personal touch to her new collections that improved business. She however did not do the stitching thus making it difficult to ensure standardization. She therefore did a lot of fittings so that different body sizes would have a perfect fit.

The participant had a major challenge on quality control, QC, “I have hired QC people who haven’t seem to have an idea what QC is, you know when I would be sitting there and I’ve had 3 or 4 since last year tried out who would look at the seam and it would be crooked and they wouldn’t see it.” She also had a big challenge in hiring pattern cutters, her tailors could not cut patterns thus she resulted to training them and doing it herself. She also postulated that it was important to have business management skills to ensure success.

She did her marketing through word of mouth where clients advertised her business; however, most of her clients were not ready to disclose their designers which caused a challenge at times. A good network of clients was what made her business successful. She was also contemplating to reactivate her Twitter and Facebook accounts and use them for marketing her products. She argued that a network of designers such as a designers' emporium that exhibited fashion designers' products was important for success of fashion businesses. She however acknowledged that such practices were not in Kenya. She felt that one's business was supposed to be strategically placed in order to ensure that road traffic did not interfere with customers accessing the retail shop hence affecting sales. This would also ensure that deliveries from her shop were done in time.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS MODELS

These will be used to explain the existence of patterns by highlighting recurring flows in the data collected. Grounded theory analysis, cross tabulation and case studies will be used to identify recurring areas of study in success factors of fashion designers in Africa and internationally and emerging success factors practiced by the 4 top fashion designers in Kenya, and in data presentation.

4.2 DATA INTERPRETATION

4.3 EXTERNAL FORCES

4.3.1 ECONOMIC FACTORS

All the four cases on study agreed that the economy whether local or world, affected their business operations in one way or another. This seemed to reflect what the report on factors that determine success or failure of fashion designers⁴³ and that of the macro environmental factors affecting clothing industry,⁴⁴ both reports argued that the state of the economy affected the business positively when there is an economic boom and negatively when there was an economic slump. However, being top fashion designers in Kenya, they all had found effective ways of countering these effects.

⁴³ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

⁴⁴<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick, Suttle. The Macro Environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry by Demand Media, September 2013

The economy affected the purchasing power of consumers of their products. Generally majority of their buyers were spending Ksh. 5000 and below as shown by the poll carried out by Ipsos Synovate on fashion trends in Kenya:



Figure 10 *Adopted from the Ipsos Synovate report on fashion and lifestyle July 2013*

According to this report majority of Kenyans; 68% were spending Ksh. 5000 per month on clothing. This meant that all the four cases on study had to develop strategies for them to stay afloat and successful. Majority of them diversified to mass production of corporate products, compromised on fabric quality while putting creativity on board and marketing through social media were adopted.

This concurred with the report written by Lisa Witepski⁴⁵ in which David Tlale stated⁴⁶, "This industry is about the survival of the fittest. It's evolved over the past 20 years: there was a time

⁴⁵ Going out of business is coming into fashion <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-01-23-going-out-of-business-is-coming-into-fashion> (accessed 04/02/2013)

⁴⁶ A renowned and successful South African fashion designer

when people used to be willing to spend thousands on couture, but they now consider their purchases more carefully. That's forced many designers into ready-to-wear; we've had to create diffusion lines serving different markets.” However, in her article⁴⁷ Carol Odero, a fashion critic and editor of Kenya’s Lifestyle magazine Drum posited that virtually all the fashion designers in Kenya were not well established compared to their international counterparts. They were not well marketed in the media internationally and most importantly locally as shown by the Ipsos Synovate report on fashion and lifestyle⁴⁸ that Kenyans awareness on fashion designers in Kenya below;

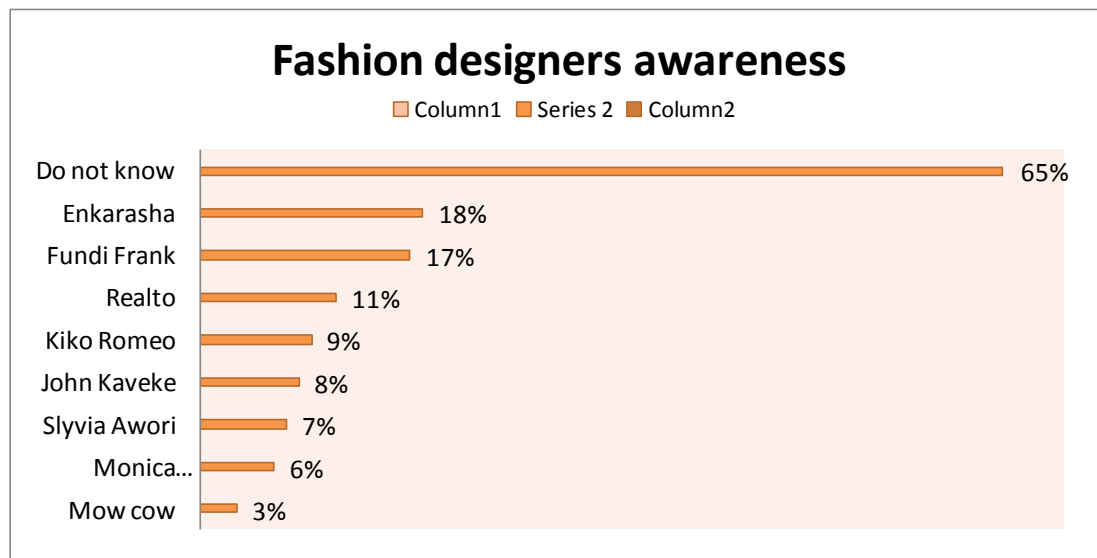


Figure 11 *Adopted from Ipsos Synovate report on fashion and lifestyle*

From the bar chart it is noted that some of the fashion designers on study were recognized, i.e. Kikoromeo, 8%; and Monica Kanari, 6%. But majority of the population 65% were not aware of

⁴⁷Why Lupita will not be wearing made-in-Kenya any time soon <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/Why-Lupita-will-not-be-wearing-made-in-Kenya-any-time-soon/-/1950774/2151426/-/format/xhtml1/-/iyfxb9/-/index.html> (accessed 04/02/2014)

⁴⁸Ipsos Synovate Poll, 2nd July 2013, Fashion & Lifestyle

any fashion designers and do not admire any, a factor that all Kenyan fashion designers should take into account while marketing.

4.3.2 POLITICAL FACTORS

All the four fashion designers agreed that political climate was an important factor that influenced business success. Elections, insecurity in the country and sanctions by governments to countries were some of the factors that they mentioned; this was emphasized by the report on factors that determines success or failure of fashion designers⁴⁹. This ultimately affected their businesses so adversely such that there was a slow down on purchase power. However, majority focused on custom made products that were not influenced by political climate. Some focused on exports since the purchasing power of clientele from international platforms were never really affected by political factors such as insecurity.

Government policies and legislation on fashion design was also a major political factor that influenced their business success. Policies on import and export affected their business success since the tariff and taxes were so high. According to the article written by Jaana Jättyri⁵⁰ Global Briefing: Could Africa be the Next Frontier for Fashion Retail?⁵¹, the high tariffs on import affected the prices of importing fabrics which was very high and out of reach for many designers. Exporting prices were high due to the levies that the government imposed which have really affected profit margins for business. However, all the cases on study acknowledged that the government had developed policies on culture and arts that had really helped in business

⁴⁹Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

⁵⁰ The founder of trend forecasting agency Trendstop.com

⁵¹<http://www.businessoffashion.com/2012/05/global-briefing-could-africa-be-the-next-frontier-for-fashion-retail.html> Jaana Jättyri. 31 May 2012, Global Briefing | Could Africa be the Next Frontier for Fashion Retail?

improvement. “This combined with a high rate of tourism and a rapidly growing demand for international retail brands makes Kenya and other African countries an ideal environment in which to bring our store experience”. As stated by cases 2 and 4 on this study.

4.3.3 ECOLOGICAL FACTORS

Environmentally friendly products have been the main focus of all the four cases on study. All the cases used natural fabric such as silk and cotton. All of them observed favorable working conditions and most of their workers had standard comfortable working places as observed during interviewing sections. Majority of the cases on study were very careful to ensure that the working environment during mass productions were comfortable hence workers were not exposed to sweat shop type of environment observed in China and other countries with mass production industries. All the cases experienced high prices when they imported fabrics; a similar case reported in looking for solutions in the fabric industry.⁵² According to the report, Mark Gooding posited that importing was one way to ensure exclusivity but the cost factor could be too great for small business. “It was expensive for businesses to go to Europe or Hong Kong to source smaller volumes of fabric, but this is the only way if you want to stand out”. He also argued that the biggest challenge to the industry as a whole is the government-imposed duties on fabric imports.⁵³ All of the cases on study observed product quality control and as a result their

⁵²http://www.ifashion.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3568:looking-for-solutions-in-the-fabric-industry&catid=78&Itemid=114 Jennifer Searle, 20th June 2011, Looking for Solutions in the Fabric Industry (accessed 24/06/2011)

⁵³http://www.ifashion.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3568:looking-for-solutions-in-the-fabric-industry&catid=78&Itemid=114 Jennifer Searle, 20th June 2011, Looking for Solutions in the Fabric Industry (accessed 24/06/2011)

products were considered to be of high value, thus bought at the prices quoted. Therefore, fabric price was not an impediment on their business success.

4.3.4 TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS

Although all the four cases on study admitted that it was important to apply technology in their businesses, none of the four cases was using technology such as CAD/CAM among other technologies during mass production. However, all the four studies used computer packages such as excel, Quick Books and others to balance their accounts and also keep client's records of orders, visits and purchases a fact supported by report on factors that determine success and failure of fashion designers which stated that 'computers could also provide applications which the designer could utilize in the presentation of their work; word processing for business correspondence, spreadsheets for accounts and databases for organizing and storing records'.⁵⁴

Computer technology such as CAD and CAM was not necessary for their utility during pattern design since they were all dealing with custom made products. Although such technologies could improve on the speed at which a designer and manufacturer can get their products into the market place; where CAD system allows for pattern development, grading and cutting layout simulation and CAM system provides computer links between the design system and cutting system the most cost-effective, space saving way,⁵⁵ the cases felt an it was unethical for them to stop employment and use technology.

⁵⁴ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

⁵⁵ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

In addition, most designers they hired were not well trained on computer technological use in design as such could not apply CAD/CAM systems in their designing. This phenomenon was confirmed by Maiyo et al who reported on the following;

Weak areas	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inadequate practical skills	48	89
Lack of essential learning facilities	45	83
Poor CAD/CAM experience	40	74
In adequate industrial exposure	34	63
Lack of specialization	39	72
Old technology	32	59

Table 1 Adopted from the Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (2012)⁵⁶

A majority (74%) of the student participant observed on lack of hands-on experiences on CAD/CAM technology and 59% reported irrelevant knowledge of old technology being taught in design curriculum in Kenyan universities and colleges. As such, all four fashion designers insisted on putting in place systems that would enable smooth running of the business in the day to day running and in the event of their absence.

⁵⁶Maiyo C. Rael; Abong’o A. Susan, and 2Tuigon’g R. David, 2002, Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, An Analysis of the Fashion and Apparel Industry Perception on Kenyan University Undergraduate Fashion and Apparel Design Curriculum in Skill Training for the Industry

However, a significant amount of student participant felt that fashion illustration, pattern cutting (drafting and freehand pattern cutting), and garment construction should be covered in the curriculum as illustrated in the pie chart below:

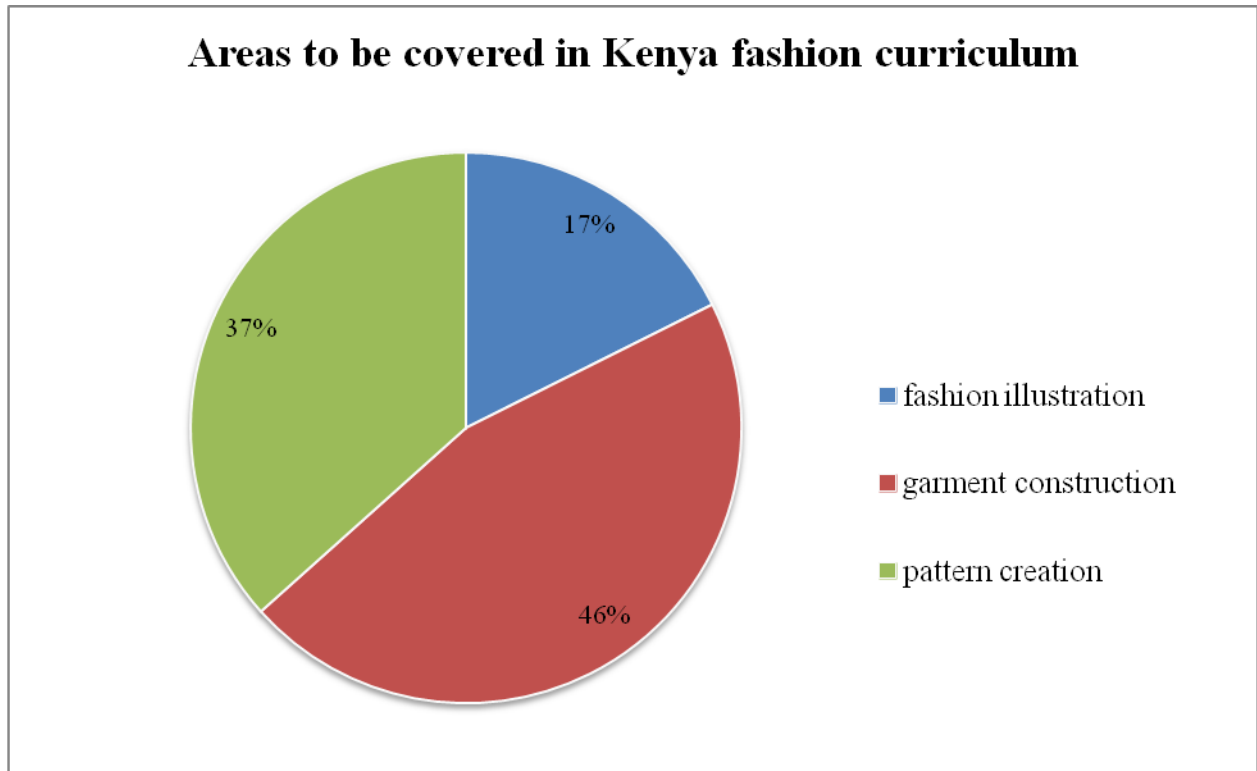


Figure 12 *Adopted from the Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (2012)*⁵⁷

This report confirms what the cases on study suggested since they felt that most of the graduate fashion designers from colleges were not well trained in these areas. At the same time, all the cases on study had custom made business and as a result, they used most of these skills; pattern cutting and garment construction, to make a name in their business and be top fashion designers.

⁵⁷Maiyo C. Rael; Abong’o A. Susan, and 2Tuigon’g R. David, 2002, Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, An Analysis of the Fashion and Apparel Industry Perception on Kenyan University Undergraduate Fashion and Apparel Design Curriculum in Skill Training for the Industry

They had ensured that they employed fashion designers from other countries and especially trained in colleges abroad a phenomenon postulated by Maiyo et al⁵⁸

4.4 INTERNAL FORCES

From the study, all the four fashion designers agreed that internal forces such as expertise, financial resources and available resources were crucial in their business operations and eventually the success of the business.

4.4.1 EXPERTISE OF FASHION DESIGNERS

Expertise training was observed in two ways: first, it was demonstrated in the education acquired by the four cases. With exception of Monica Kanari who had a different degree, the other three studies had a degree, diploma or higher diploma in fashion design. It was however clear that all had to go through trainings by seminars or short courses. Second, all the four designers acknowledged that training workers to bring out their in-depth abilities was important in business success.

This concurred with Demand Media on their study on the environmental factors affecting clothing industry, who stated that “Designers usually possess an innate ability for creative design or a sense of ‘what people want.’”⁵⁹ The report also stated that designers were required to possess

⁵⁸ Maiyo C. Rael; Abong’o A. Susan, and 2Tuigon’g R. David, 2002, Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, An Analysis of the Fashion and Apparel Industry Perception on Kenyan University Undergraduate Fashion and Apparel Design Curriculum in Skill Training for the Industry

⁵⁹<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick Suttle, Demand Media. The Macro environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry

a range of expertise such as specialized skills in textile design, production methods and costing, marketing, business management and human resources. Some of the specialized skills in design that the cases emphasized included; pattern making, fabric cutting and final product fitting and finishing. This was important since most of them trained their employees on these skills thus making their businesses successful.

Staying relevant on the latest trends in the market was a key component for all the four cases on study. All the four cases in the study insisted on staying relevant through personal training or self-education. This was observed by all through reading magazines, newspapers, technical journals and design books to keep up with new trends in technology and innovations. This assisted them to be hands on in transferring their skills to their employees, who needed constant practical training. This emphasis was observed by the journal of emerging trends in educational curriculum and policy studies,⁶⁰ who posit that new computer technology was important in curriculum training. However, from the report, among the trained graduate, lack of specialization accounted for 74%, inadequate industrial exposure, 63% and old technology use 59%, thus the importance of on the job training.

The report further discussed that there was inadequate practical skills (about 89%)⁶¹, in the curriculum training acquired by fashion designer that graduated from local market;

⁶⁰Maiyo C. Rael; Abong'o A. Susan, and 2Tuigon'g R. David, 2002, Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, An Analysis of the Fashion and Apparel Industry Perception on Kenyan University Undergraduate Fashion and Apparel Design Curriculum in Skill Training for the Industry

⁶¹ Maiyo C. Rael; Abong'o A. Susan, and 2Tuigon'g R. David, 2002, Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, An Analysis of the Fashion and Apparel Industry Perception on Kenyan University Undergraduate Fashion and Apparel Design Curriculum in Skill Training for the Industry

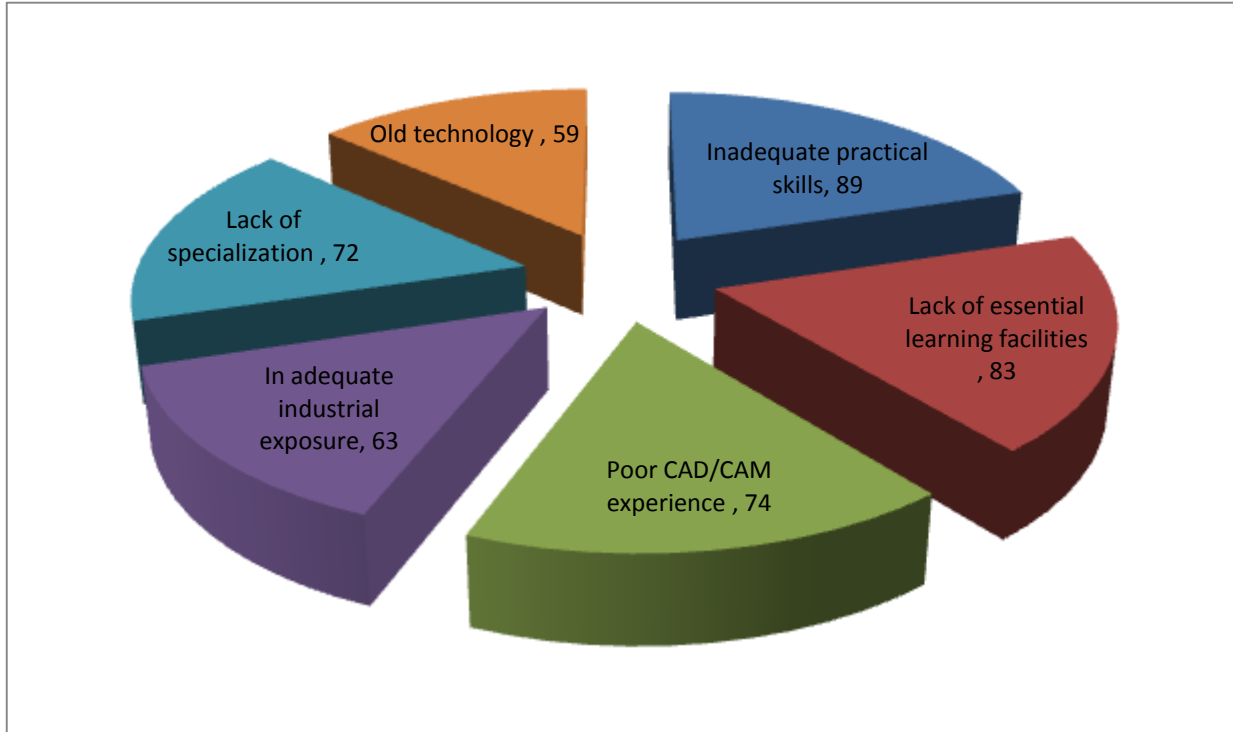


Figure 13 *Students’ opinion of weak areas in Kenyan fashion design education. Adopted from Table 1*

This study established that all cases concurred with this findings such that majority of them never employed local graduates. They alluded to the fact that if they had to employ local designers, then lots of mentorship trainings on hand-on skills was to be required. According to Ann McCreath, ‘many local institutions had to do lots of practical trainings rather than concentrate on theory’, a fact illustrated by the report. However, contrary to the report most of these top designers did not use technology such as CAD or CAM since their business was majorly made to measure or custom made.

4.4.2 FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Fashion design business is capital intensive and requires a large injection of financial resources. This study has established that all the four designers reported to have invested a major amount either through inheritance, savings, winning award money and partnerships. In the article by Jaana Jättyri⁶², some of the factors a fashion designer had to consider included; exploiting opportunities, building local partnerships and building sponsorship opportunities, for a successful enterprise. However, BEP for all of them was a challenge since they had to content with limitations such as employee expertise where majority of available employees lacked quality workmanship, and the understanding of the product life cycle. The report on analysis of fashion and apparel industry⁶³, garment construction training (65%) and pattern creation, drafting and freehand pattern cutting, (52%) were some of the factors that graduate trainees mention as success determinant for BEP.

Business management skills and entrepreneurship in the report accounted for 59% and 65% respectively. As such, student graduates posited it as important in running a business. All four of the cases on study acknowledged that this was their major cause of financial restraint. Some of the cases at first dealt with clients on credit, thereby had to develop mechanisms to ensure that clients bought products on cash. Peggy came out strong emphasizing on specialization, where each designer was to create a niche and perfect it to avoid trial and error which created higher running costs for the business. Some however, had to do mass production once in a while to

⁶²<http://www.businessoffashion.com/2012/05/global-briefing-could-africa-be-the-next-frontier-for-fashion-retail.html> Jaana Jättyri. 31 May 2012, Global Briefing | Could Africa be the Next Frontier for Fashion Retail?

⁶³ Maiyo C. Rael; Abong'o A. Susan, and 2Tuigon'g R. David, 2002, Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies, An Analysis of the Fashion and Apparel Industry Perception on Kenyan University Undergraduate Fashion and Apparel Design Curriculum in Skill Training for the Industry

develop their financial resources. Some of them like Deepa and Anne had resorted to sales and marketing strategies that ensured that their business stayed afloat.

4.4.3 AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Availability of fabrics was reliable for three of the four designers on case study, Peggy had a contrary opinion. Three of them experienced challenges with small fabric suppliers and some with the quality of the fabric. This disputed and concurred with a report on fabric problems that stated that “there are a few fabric suppliers that bring in amazing fabric qualities but only in limited quantities”. Most of the designers disputed the fact that amazing fabric qualities were limited. Instead, they had found ways on how to convince the client to work with what was available. Creativity and experience had helped them to develop a clientele that would appreciate their custom made products.

Infrastructure and especially roads and electricity were their major impediment in business transactions. Business location and premises was another impediment on their business as they felt it influenced their pricing compared to the designers situated on the open air market such as Kenyatta market. This was supported by the report on macro environmental factors affecting clothing industry that stated that ‘The facilities available to a designer are crucial to their success. An important factor in the success of any designer is having reliable sources of all the materials and services that are required to produce their designs. A designer may need to deal with a wide variety of businesses in order to obtain the necessary services.’⁶⁴

⁶⁴ <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/macroenvironmental-factors-affecting-clothing-industry-37254.html> Rick, Suttle. The Macro Environmental Factors Affecting the Clothing Industry by Demand Media, September 2013.

Skilled labor to be used in their business was another challenge that the four cases on study faced. Proper finishing, good pattern makers and pattern cutters were a challenge to all of them yet, all agreed that they were key designer indicators for top and successful designers. As a result, they contracted cheaper labor from those previously in industry that dealt with such technology. This was confirmed in the focus group discussions (FGD) since they posited that it was important for designers to undertake strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, SWOT analysis, to ascertain their internal strengths and weaknesses. Thus the report by the design institute of Australia affirmed that “smaller concerns often rely on the use of contractors such as patternmakers, cutters and textile printers or dyes who may work for a number of manufacturers.”⁶⁵

4.4.4 BUSINESS OPERATIONS

All the cases on study were the head designers of their fashion houses while also running the business operations; however only one of the designers had gone into a partnership or hired top level management for their business, i.e. Ann McCreath who had hired a CEO at one point and even has shareholders in her company. All the designers also felt that it was important to hire mid level managers or assistant designers to oversee the day to day running of the business. They were in agreement that for a fashion business to grow, the fashion designer needed to develop and delegate duties to a team so that they could free up their time to concentrate on the creative side of designing; like developing collections and in networking to bring in more business. All four cases posited that fashion designer in Kenya can not only afford to be creative they also

⁶⁵ Design Institute of Australia. Success by Design, Issue A.P65

need to be entrepreneurs, this was significant to being top designers since entrepreneurship and management skills were essential. Participants in the focus group discussions (FGDs) and the four designers interviewed emphasized that basic management skills like strategic planning, forecasting, marketing, managing cash flows and human resources, etc and quality control contributed to the strengths of top designers. It was also emphasized that student fashion designers cannot get this skills only from training but most importantly from experience, therefore they were encouraged to work and intern with established designers to gain this experience.

It was important for the fashion designers to create a one on one relationship with their clients, since all of them made custom made garments, they therefore scheduled specific days during the week where they would spend time at their workshops or retail stores to meet their clients; for example Deepa meets her clients on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. This ensures that the fashion designer had time to develop collections and concentrate on other business development issues as opposed to constantly give their attention to customers.

Of those surveyed in the Ipsos Synovate lifestyle poll, Fig 4.2, a majority of people in the local market, 68%, did not know of any Kenyan fashion designer, an indication that fashion designers in Kenya need to create more awareness of their brands. Even for the top designers who made it to the poll, the levels of awareness of their brands were very low, with Monica Kanari at 6% and Ann McCreath's Kikoromeo at 9%. Throughout the interviews, focus group discussions and in literature review it was posited that having a marketing strategy and creating a strong brand were important factors in being successful as a fashion designer. However, the marketing strategies of the cases on study came out to be weak. All cases focused mainly on the product where product

quality and design were the only things emphasized. The other Ps of marketing⁶⁶ especially pricing was not keenly observed. This phenomenon has been posited in the Ipsos Synovate lifestyle poll where majority of the participant in that study, 68%, could only spend on average between Ksh. 1000 to 5000 per month. Therefore, designers were encouraged to balance between price (avoid overpricing their products) and quality of product to be top in Kenya and exploit the local market niche.

⁶⁶ The four Ps of marketing; Product (or service), Place, Price, Promotion

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

1. Economic factors

- Fashion designers diversify their markets and products during economic downturns to maintain cash flow, for example, they make corporate uniforms and promotional material or look for new markets outside Nairobi or Kenya.
- Wedding garments seem to weather bad economic slumps since people will always get married.
- The Kenyan market is mostly cushioned from the world economy unless one is dealing in luxury garments or has customers whose businesses rely on foreign markets.
- Fashion designers compromise on raw material used for their products and compensate with creative and innovative designs during harsh economic times to maintain market rate prices, while still attracting and maintaining their customers.

2. Political factors

- There are no policies tailored for fashion designers or the fashion design industry in Kenya. Only fashion designers can champion their cause by influencing the government into passing policies that will positively favor the industry. This can

only be done if designers work together in an association or body that is recognized by the government.

3. Ecological factors

- Most fashion designers in Kenya do not run sweatshops; however, it is important to maintain comfortable working conditions for workers to be able to get expected high quality outputs and to also maintain a good reputation, which in effect, helps maintain clients.
- Some ecological rules exist in Kenya but the regulators are not stringent in enforcing them for fashion designers in Kenya. However, if a Kenyan fashion designer decides to export, they will have to abide by the regulations of the country they are exporting to as the rules are more stringent in the exports markets.
- Most fashion designers in Kenya do not make sustainable products since they deal with made to measure garments, therefore the customer controls what materials to use. Those who do make for ready-to-wear collections or as part of CSR.

4. Technological Factors

- Not all technology needs to be incorporated into a business. This can be costly. A fashion designer can select which technology works for their business model, e.g. Excel for book keeping.

- It is however important for a Kenyan fashion designer to have the basic understanding of fashion design related technology used internationally or be able to outsource if the need arises.
- The most important thing to have is systems tailored to the individual fashion designer's business that ensures the business functions smoothly.

5. Expertise

- The education provided in Kenyan fashion design schools is below standard and too theoretical. It is important for the individual fashion designer to invest in consistent and continuous self education and training.
- Emerging fashion designers in Kenya prefer to start their own fashion businesses immediately after school instead of working for other designers. Experience gained working for established fashion houses is invaluable to emerging fashion designers. This will give them hands on experience in running a fashion business while perfecting their design technical skills.
- Getting skilled labor is among the biggest challenges fashion designers in Kenya face. A fashion designer will have to hire and continuously train and communicate their expectations to their laborers in order to get the kind of product finishing, quality control, etc that they want.
- As opposed to internationally, fashion designers in Kenya are not only creators, they are fashion entrepreneurs. It is almost impossible to hire people to delegate running of the business to or functions like pattern making and drafting.

- In that light, the most important skills a Kenyan fashion designer needs to have are; pattern making, product fitting and finishing, good understanding of the African figure (which does not conform to international standards) and basic management skills. This will enable them to train their laborers and understand how to run successful business.

6. Financial Resources

- Getting capital to start a business in Kenya is not easy. The fashion designers on study raised capital either through saving, getting financing from family either as a loan or inheritance, selling shares of the company to friends and customers and/or winning monetary awards from fashion design competitions.
- A Kenyan fashion designer should not take a loan from banks or other money lending facilities until the business is established.
- By having their business bank with a certain bank over a period of time, a Kenyan fashion designer develops a relationship with that bank making it easier to borrow money through overdrafts or against LPOs of confirmed orders.
- Cash is king. A Kenyan fashion designer should always try to get customers to pay in cash and learn how to negotiate favorable payment terms with suppliers and corporate clients.
- Fashion designers have to learn how to control stocks of material and finished garments to avoid holding too much money in stock. This is done through only

purchasing material for confirmed orders and holding regular sales of merchandise.

- It is important for a fashion designer to learn how to cost and price products to be able to break even and make profit.
- Designers who brand their business from an early start are able to retain loyal customers and attract even more through brand awareness.
- Kenyan fashion designers can get money from the government through funds like the recently launched Uwezo fund for youth and women.

7. Available resources

- Designers should try as much as possible to work with raw materials available in Kenya to avoid keeping too much stock and avoid unnecessary stress and pressure like late deliveries, etc.
- Most fashion designers in Kenya do not have big budgets for marketing, therefore, they need to network and develop public relations strategies that will enable them to get as much free or low cost publicity as possible. This strategy is best used by Ann McCreath who even admits PR comes naturally to her.
- Instead of waiting for all fashion designers in the industry to come together, Kenyan fashion designers who get along well can team up in small numbers to source materials, opportunities and even share experiences, like a support group.

- A fashion designer needs to develop a network of suppliers and manufacturers who can be outsourced to in a moment's notice.
- Since there are no government based fashion design programs in Kenya, a fashion designer needs to be pro active and work closely with organizations like ACTIF to get mentorship or learn of other opportunities available to them.

8. Business operations

- Most fashion designers go into fashion design as a hobby instead of a business. This leads to too much time wasted in the setting up of the business and establishing a brand. It is important to draw up a business plan and create a clear vision for the company from the start
- Designers who have a trusted business partner tend to be more commercially successful but, designers also need to develop basic commercial skills themselves.
- Kenyan fashion designers need to learn how to delegate. This will give the designer time to create designs, network and handle the business operations. It is important to have mid level management to oversee the designer's workshop and production units.
- Fashion designers need to hire people only after a trial period to observe if they fit in the business model and understand the systems in place.
- Develop the brand's identity and support it with a marketing and communications plan. It is important to see PR and media as part of the broader marketing plan. Kenyan fashion designers can utilize the upcoming fashion blogs, lifestyle

magazines and media shows and get endorsements through stylists who have become more influential in the industry.

- Social platforms can be a powerful part of the communications strategy and allow direct dialogue with the customer. Facebook was named as the best social media platform for a fashion designer in Kenya to have. Once they are established on facebook, then they can open a webpage and link them.
- Considering the survey by Ipsos Synovate found that 65% of Kenyans in the survey were not aware of Kenyan fashion brands, there is a lot more awareness to be created by fashion designers. Fashion designers also need to realize that, ‘You don’t begin by a celebrity endorsing your product, you start with the people around you.’

5.2 CONCLUSION

Most fashion designers in Kenya achieve some level of success through creative acclaim and communication perception, even then this level of success is still low as most Kenyans are not aware of fashion designers in Kenya. However, most do not achieve commercial acclaim. This could be in part because fashion designers in Kenya do not divulge their turnover to the public therefore it would be hard to tell, and because three of the four fashion designers in the study felt they had not achieved commercial success, even though they are highly recognized in Kenya. John Kaveke has been out of the fashion scene for about a year plus, to analyze the way forward for his brand. He explains that he had reached a point where he was doing too much of the same thing over and over again. “I needed to press the refresh button. There was so much happening

at the time and it was easy to get caught up.” The other reason, he explains, is that he had successfully built a brand and not quite so much a business. He needed to stop and think about making the brand, John Kaveke, a successful business. “That’s what I am now, I am big name and yet my finances are not at the same level. It was a risk to take off from the industry but at the same time, nothing is without risk.”⁶⁷

Achieving commercial success in the fashion design industry is possible. In 2013 the fashion industry churned out more than 20 fashion designers or owners of fashion brands into the Forbes billionaires list. Fashion designers like Giorgio Armani and Tory Burch were among those on the list.⁶⁸ Only just this year in early 2014, fashion designer Michael Kors became a billionaire.⁶⁹ By observing good business practice and concentrating more on bringing in high turnover as opposed to getting fame and recognition, building strong brands and understanding their markets, developing impeccable technical skills with products that are accepted by their target markets, I believe it is possible for Kenyan fashion designers to achieve commercial success.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Economic factors

- Fashion designers should diversify their products and markets during economic downturns to maintain cash flow, for example, they can make corporate uniforms and promotional material or look for new markets outside Nairobi or Kenya.

⁶⁷ <http://www.tdsblog.com/2014/04/01/john-kaveke-speaks-truthfully-sabbatical-fashion-industry-needs-change-kenya-part/> JOHN KAVEKE SPEAKS TRUTHFULLY ABOUT HIS SABBATICAL, THE FASHION INDUSTRY AND WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IN KENYA (Accessed 3rd April 2014)

⁶⁸ <http://www.stylelist.com/read/20-richest-billionaires-fashion-who-made-forbess-list/> The 20+ Richest Billionaires in Fashion: Who Made Forbes's List

⁶⁹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/michael-kors-became-a-billionaire-today-2014-2>

- The wedding industry is a booming industry since people will always get married, even during economic downturns. Fashion designers can incorporate wedding garments and accessories into their products to ensure a continuous source of income.
- The Kenyan government needs to approach the fashion industry as a separate entity from the textiles industry. This will allow them to investigate challenges and implement solutions that are tailor made to the industry instead of blanket solutions.
- Handling the Kenyan fashion industry as a separate entity will also encourage collection of data specific to the industry. At the moment very little exists with majority of data being on the textiles industry instead.
- Through the Ministry of Sports Culture and the Arts and the Ministry of Industrializations, the government of Kenya should create awareness on the investment opportunities available in the Kenyan fashion industry to both Kenyan and foreign investors.

2. Political factors

- Fashion designers should set up a Kenyan Fashion Council to co-ordinate the Nairobi exhibition scene by establishing and implementing a Nairobi fashion calendar, showcase Kenyan fashion designers and develop Nairobi as a major player in the international fashion arena. The council should also push for policies that will help the Kenyan fashion industry grow, commission researches and surveys to collect data on the Kenyan fashion industry which can be used by investors to get into the business and push for the creation of facilities in

conjunction with international and government organizations that will support Kenyan fashion designers.

- There is a Design Bill currently being developed to be tabled at parliament amongst other things, to form a design institution that will champion design (interior, graphic, fashion, illustration, environmental, etc) issues in Kenya. Fashion designers should be involved in the development of this bill and participate in the proposed Fashion chapter as it will enable them to be a recognized profession by the Kenya government, and will allow for the formation of the above proposed Kenya Fashion Council.

3. Ecological factors

- Most fashion designers in Kenya do not run sweatshops where as China, Bangladesh, India etc, where international brands currently manufacture their products do. Kenyan fashion designers should therefore use this information as a marketing tool to attract investors and these fashion brands like Zara and H&M who want to manufacture their collections in sustainable environments.
- There exists a rich cultural heritage of techniques from cultural crafts of Kenyan tribes that Kenyan fashion designers can utilize to build their brands. Kenyan fashion designers can also employ cultural groups and train them to incorporate these traditional techniques with modern techniques and trends to produce unique products that make their brands stand out.

4. Technological factors

- Kenyan fashion designers should have a basic understanding of fashion related technology or be able to outsource if the need arises.

- Kenyan fashion designers should select which technology works for their business models, e.g. excel for book keeping, to avoid incorporating all technology which can be costly.

5. Expertise

- The Kenyan government should also work practicing fashion designers to review the curricula for fashion design education in Kenya; bringing it up to date and balancing the theory with practical courses.
- All fashion design schools in Kenya should;
 - aim to offer high quality and comprehensive education to their fashion design students to enable them to compete and function at international levels.
 - Improve the practical curricula of fashion design education to balance out the theory; Kenyan student fashion designers should have more studio time with actual training and practical assignments.
 - Update the overall fashion design curricula to bring up to speed outdated information and include recent technology and developments in fashion internationally.
 - Employ practicing fashion designers to teach and carry out workshops with their students.
 - Participate in and seek to have exchange programs with leading fashion schools in the world to give their students exposure.

- Insist on student fashion designers getting internships in fashion design related firms and companies from as early as possible in the course, preferably starting from 1st year.
- Fashion designers should ensure their continued self learning and training both in technical design skills and in business management.

6. Financial resources

- Fashion designers should understand the available sources of funding and financing. External business support can maximize the chances of getting the investment the fashion business needs as well as ensuring that this investment comes with the right structure and conditions for the business' needs.

7. Available resources

- Fashion designers should form support groups with two or three other Kenyan fashion designers that they get along with where they can offer each other soft loans, source for materials together or even form an investment group (chama or SACCO) and apply for government funds being offered to youth and women's groups.
- Fashion designers should form mentorship programs where established fashion designers can mentor emerging fashion designers.
- The Kenyan government should set up a fashion design hub that offers at subsidized rates; space for designers to set up workshops and retail shops, a communal manufacturing unit with hard to find technology and machinery like beading, grading, embroidery, fabric printing, pattern grading, etc.

8. Business operations

- Fashion designers in Kenya should identify and decide on which kind of success they want to achieve; is it commercial success, creative acclaim or public profile awareness. Then develop a long-term strategy and business plan based on that.
- They should also identify clearly the designer's point of view to develop a strong brand identity and treat their fashion design as a business and not a hobby.
- Fashion designers should invest in a sales team and hire an assistant who is a marketer to assist in marketing the brand. The 'art of sales' is key. Invest in expert salespeople, engage customers and get market feedback. Utilize social media facebook as a marketing tool and a way of getting direct customer feedback.
- Fashion designers should diversify markets to other regions of Kenya. Unfortunately too many fashion designers in Kenya neglect the potential markets outside of Nairobi, especially now with devolution of central government creating potential clients.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Questions Guide for Top Fashion Designers in Kenya

CATEGORY	QUESTIONS
Bio data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How long have you been working as a fashion designer? – What is your education background?
Work information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Where do you operate – How would you describe the scale of your business? – Number of employees and machinery/technology in use? – What products do you produce and how do you produce them?
Expertise of fashion Designers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do you normally employ Kenyan fashion designers? – What level of education do they normally have? – How do you feel they perform on their jobs as fashion designers? – Do you feel their education impacts their performance of the job? – What is your opinion of the education offered to fashion designers in Kenya? – How would you compare fashion design education in Kenya to the fashion education offered in other parts of the world? – Do you feel education plays a part in the level of success of a fashion designer?

-
- What areas of expertise does a fashion designer need to have to succeed?
 - How do you maintain and enhance high levels of expertise and skills as a fashion designer?

Success Factors

- What challenges do fashion designers in Kenya face?
- What, in your opinion, makes a fashion designer successful?
- What aspects and practices do you observe to ensure your business stays successful?

Economic Factors

- How is the state of the Kenyan economy and does that affect your business?
- Do changes in the world economy affect your business?
- Does the economy affect the purchasing power of your customers?
- What measures do you put in place to counter the effects of the economy on your business?

Political Factors

- How do political events like the elections and change in government affect your business?
- What are the strengths and weakness of the policies currently in place in Kenya, which can increase the level of success in fashion businesses?
- Which policies currently in place hinder fashion business in Kenya?

Ecological Factors

- Sustainability, environmental and social conscious design is on the rise worldwide. How do you incorporate this into your business?
- Do you ever face challenges resulting from customers insisting on only purchasing sustainable products?
- Are there any regulations on ecological factors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in) that affect your business?

Technological Factors

- Which technology/technologies do you use in your business?
- How does using this technology contribute to your business success?
- Is it important or necessary for a fashion designer to incorporate each new technology into their business to be successful?

Financial Resources

- What financial challenges did you face when starting up and how did you overcome them?
- How do you address the issue of financial restraints in the day to day running of your business?
- What avenues then, can a fashion designer utilize to ensure continuous cash flow in the business?
- How does your product life cycle and product distribution affect the performance of your product?

Available Resources

- Are your sources/suppliers of material and services reliable?
-

-
- Does this affect the success of your products?
 - How can the situation be improved?
 - How do you overcome issues arising from unreliable sources/suppliers to maintain success?
 - What is the situation of infrastructure; transportation, electricity, etc in Kenya?
 - How does this state of infrastructure affect your business?
 - Which facilities/infrastructure, which if were made available in Kenya, or improved would make you more successful?
 - How would you rate the cost of production in Kenya?

Competitors

- Does it (cost of production) affect the success of your business compared to your competitors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in)?
- What measures do you put in place to ensure that your production costs are controlled beyond surpassing a certain point to be able to compete in the market?
- Does mass production help control production costs?

Business operations

- Do you run the operations of your business by yourself or do you hire people to manage the operations, while you concentrate on designing? And how does this affect your business's success?
 - What are/ would be the pros and cons of you handling all business
-

operations by yourself?

- Are there any challenges in hiring professionals to oversee the operations of your business like overall business managing, costing, marketing, accounting, etc?
 - Is it important for a fashion designer to have business management skills?
 - What management skills does a designer require for their fashion business to be successful?
 - How do you market your business?
 - Are there any challenges you face in marketing your business?
 - What marketing avenues/channels do you feel are important to the success of a fashion business?
-

Appendix B: Kenya Fashion Focus Group Discussion Guide

SESSION 1: 29-01-2014

FACILITATOR: ANN MCCREATH

TOPIC: A FASHION INDUSTRY STAGNANT IN TURNOVER

1. Review of Carol Adero's article (why Lupita won't wear African soon)
2. Online presence of Kenyan fashion businesses; how many among those present have websites?
3. Group work to discuss positives and negatives of Kenyan fashion industry
4. Group work to discuss SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the Kenyan fashion industry in general

SESSION 3: 12-02-2014

FACILITATOR: SILVIA TONUI

TOPIC: A FASHION INDUSTRY STAGNANT IN TURNOVER – SWOT ANALYSIS

1. Continuation of SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the Kenyan fashion industry;
 - a. Digital presence
 - b. Distribution
 - c. Market access

SESSION 4: 26-02-2014

FACILITATOR: SILVIA TONUUI

TOPIC: A FASHION INDUSTRY STAGNANT IN TURNOVER – MARKETING

1. Marketing
2. SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the fashion events organized and held in Kenya

SESSION 5: 26-02-2014

FACILITATOR: SILVIA TONUUI

TOPIC: A FASHION INDUSTRY STAGNANT IN TURNOVER – FINANCING

1. Investment companies available to the Kenyan fashion industry businesses

SESSION 6: 12-03-2014

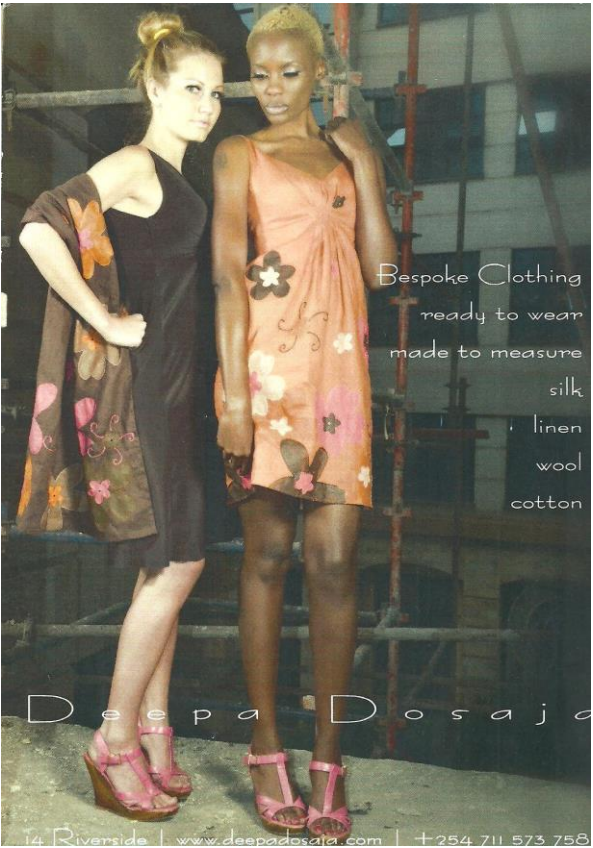
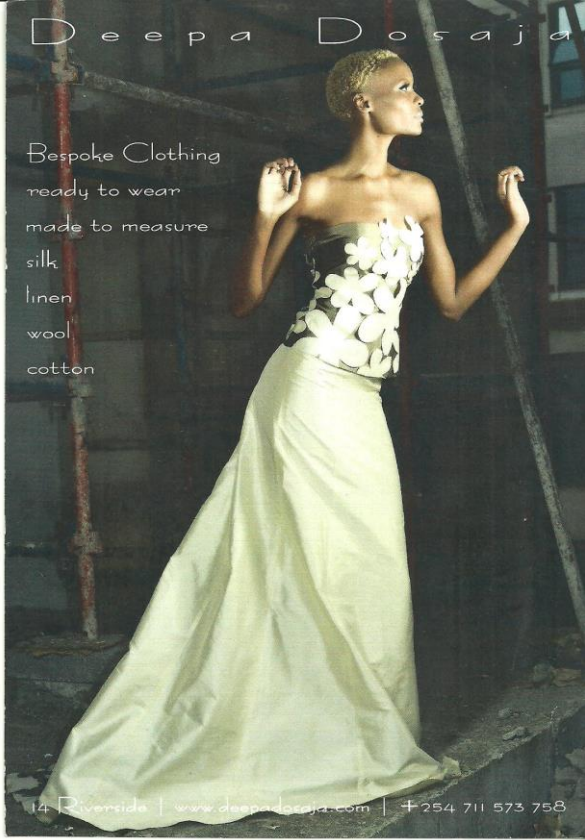
FACILITATOR: SILVIA TONUUI/ DIANA OPOTI

TOPIC: A FASHION INDUSTRY STAGNANT IN TURNOVER – FASHION
CALENDAR

1. Assumptions to be made about the Kenyan fashion industry when creating a fashion calendar

2. What do we need to get people (in Kenya) into the habit of buying clothes made in Kenya?
3. Developing a fashion collection

Appendix C: Deepa Dosaja Fliers (for marketing)

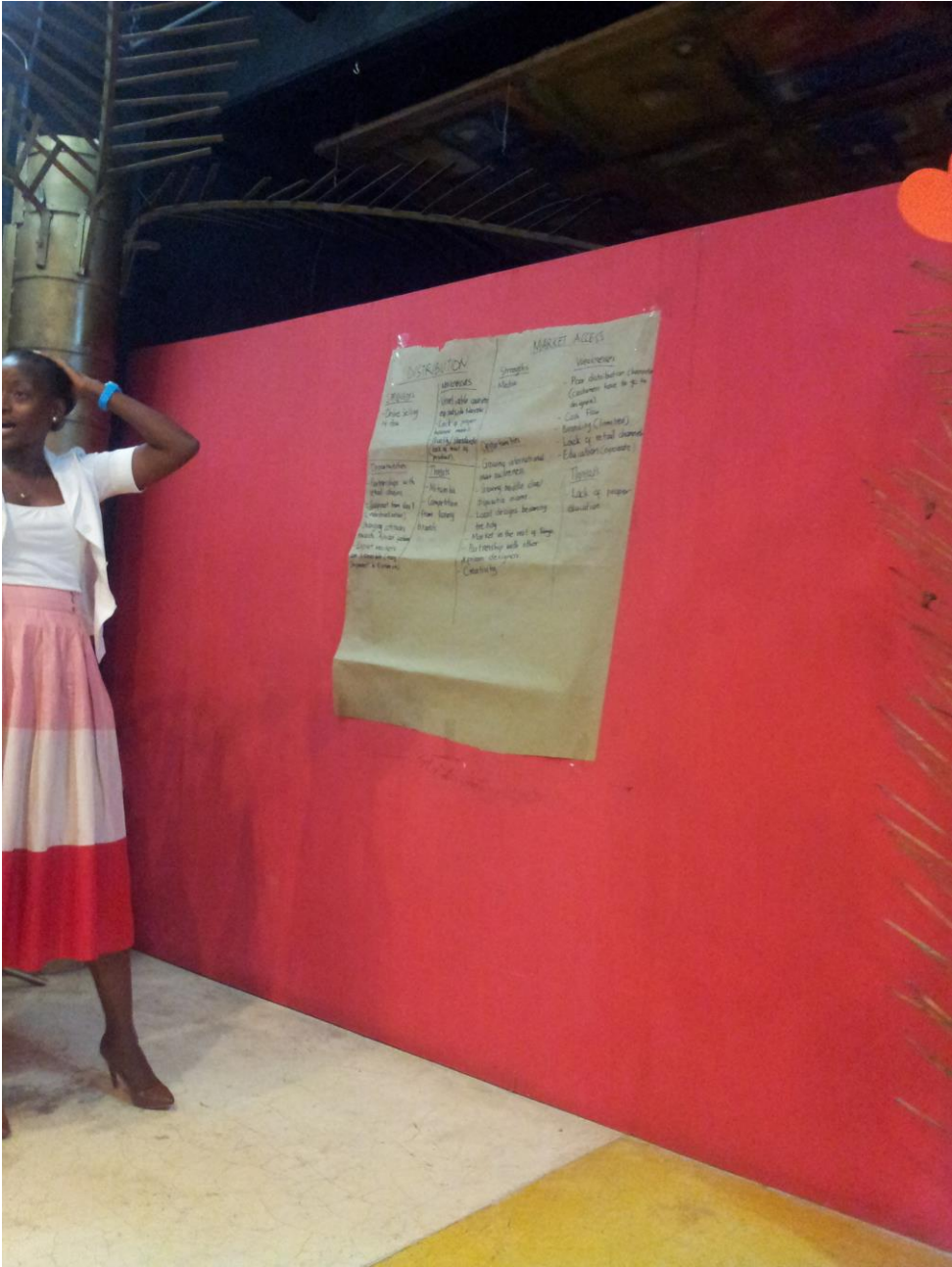


Appendix D: Photo of Ann McCreath at her home studio during the interview



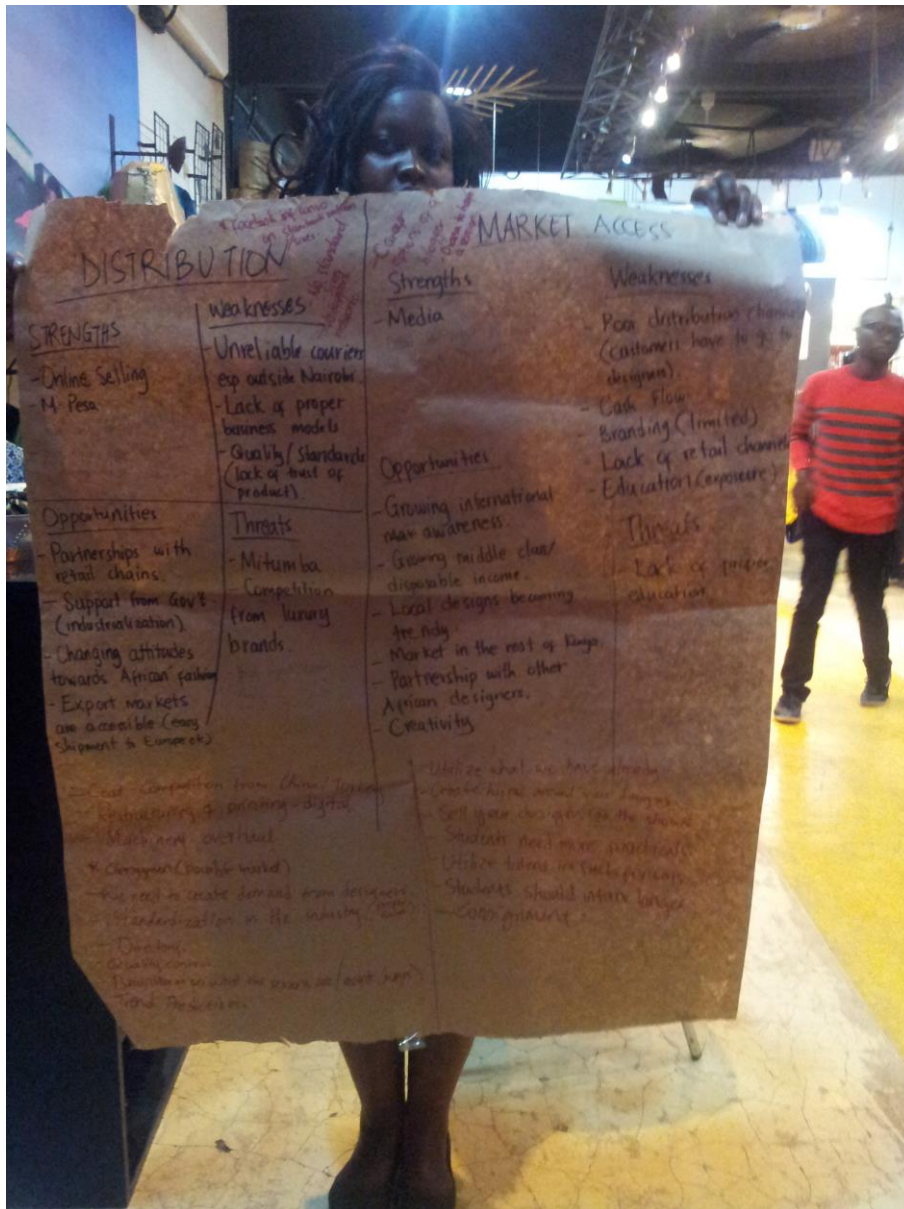
Appendix E: Facilitator at one of the Kenya Fashion Focus Group

Discussions



Appendix F: Participants during Kenya Fashion Focus Group

Discussions



Appendix G: Transcript of Semi-structured Interview with Monica Kanari held on 24-2-2014 at Occasions and Days showroom in Hurlingham Shopping Centre, 1st floor

Bio data

Q: How long have you been working as a fashion designer?

A: Full time: 14 years. Part time/hobby (very informally): 3-4 years.

Q: What is your education background?

A: Not related to fashion degree in Agriculture and home economics.

FUQ: Any other education apart from that, in terms of let's say fashion after you started practicing?

Q: Done training with a fashion designer in Australia, a short 6 month course and other business related trainings but not directly related to fashion.

Work information

Q: Where do you operate? How would you describe the scale of your business?

A: In the Hurlingham showroom. Medium sized workshop.

Q: Number of employees and machinery/ technology in use?

A: 3 design assistants, 8 production workshop staff, 3 support staff and herself as fashion designer.

10 Industrial machines, 4 steamers and no technology used in production, no CAD or pattern drafting technology.

Q: What products do you produce and how do you produce them?

Everything is custom made; individual clothes, wedding attire and bridal parties, and corporate uniforms and promotional clothes and items.

Expertise of fashion Designers

Q: Do you normally employ Kenyan fashion designers?

A: Yes.

Q: What level of education do they normally have?

A: Some have a diploma and some have a degree in fashion.

Q: How do you feel they perform on their jobs as fashion designers?

A: Does not employ the fashion designers directly, they first have to do an internship with her; she trains them, then selects the ones who are compatible, quick learners and have adapted well to the business. This is because she feels fashion designers are not ready for the market.

Q: Do you feel their education impacts their performance of the job?

A: Maybe the question should be; are fashion designers in Kenya qualified for the job that they perform?

Fashion designers trained in Kenya are not qualified for the job they perform. That's why I take interns, I train them then I work with them. All the fashion colleges/institutes/schools are pretty young, they are not well developed and they are not run by people who have been in the industry so the theory that they learn is very basic and cannot even compete internationally with what people do outside.

Q: What is your opinion of the education offered to fashion designers in Kenya?

A: It is terrible. And I have told them as much.

FUQ: Are they picking your suggestions and making changes?

A: Yea, the changes that they need to make; is an overhaul of the system. Like for example, all design students very few can draw; then you are not a designer. So the reason that you should be a designer is because you can illustrate, you can draw. If you can't be artistic then you cannot even be artistic clothes wise, so we start about it the wrong way, we still have the mentality that you are a drop out, so fashion is where you fall back. And yet now, it seems to be glamorous and it seems to be very attractive and yet people are not well equipped for it.

Q: How would you compare fashion design education in Kenya to the fashion education offered in other parts of the world?

A: Ours is not deep. It is very theory oriented. I did an article on Business Daily (Friday 21-2-2013), and we said that all the colleges are so young so people come out and say they are fashion designers yet they cannot make a complete collection. If you do a course in fashion, you must be

able to do 2 collections by the time you are done, full collections. Full collection means you have done 14 garments for 1 collection; it's a minimum of 14 garments. So there's no college that does that.

FUQ: What about Evelyn College?

A: If they make a collection, it's just 3 items.

FUQ: Any more on the comparison?

A: 1st a collection is not good then, the drawings skills are not there, then the design skills are not enhanced. They are taught to be dress makers. So basically here, people are taught to be dress makers and then they are given the title of a fashion designer when they are done. And even the dress making is so minimal because they don't have enough practice on dress making itself. Even the dress making, they will make one item or two items. They'll be told to make 1 dress, 1 gown and 1 avant-garde. Now, 3 garments after a 3 year course is a total waste of time in my opinion.

It is a sour topic.

Q: Do you feel education plays a part in the level of success of a fashion designer?

Completely; and then at the same time, because they are so unwilling to work under a designer, they want to quickly make their own name, they do not give themselves a chance to grow and learn the industry. So they struggle. They struggle for a long while before they make it. And then they end up doing a tailoring business, not a fashion design business. Which is what we have; we have a lot of tailoring businesses in town. Actually, I think everyone if not all 90 % of what there is in the market is a tailoring business

Q: What areas of expertise does a fashion designer need to have to succeed?

A: That's a very broad question. There's a lot you need to know. People like to play down fashion design. Think of it this way, when you walk into a doctor's office you expect that you will give your symptoms and they'll provide a solution for you and you'll walk away knowing what the solution is. The same thing, somebody comes to you and tells you, "I'm getting married" and they expect that you are going to understand, you look at my figure, you know what I can wear, what I can't wear and they expect for you to produce something that will then give them the end result they are looking for.

But, somehow people play it down and say just because you are a fashion designer you are just making an outfit, which is not true. You need to be able to understand the human figure, very important. You need to understand what fabrics will work for what type of design, very, very important. Then you need to understand how to draft properly, how to cut properly and then after that you need to be able to stitch in a good finish; stitch well, finish well, and before that you need to be able to do a good fitting. So, once all that is done then you will have a good finished product. But if you don't have a good foundation of it, then you can't. People come and say they want to compare themselves with the designers who have been in the industry for years, how many clothes have we done before we've figured out the human bodies? We've done very many, we have goofed, we have learnt what works and what doesn't, so by the time now somebody comes I can tell immediately this will work for her or it will not work on her.

FUQ: So the way I've been hearing a lot, people say for example like the fitting, you know that standardized fit, in Europe, America it might work because of the body type but in Africa you come you have to make it work for your customer...

A: Our hips are big, we have a bum, we have a pot, then we have a small waist, then we have a big bust. Mzungus are straight so fitting them is easy, very easy. Chinese have no bums, it's easy but you come to the miro, the miro is special, very special figure. But, it's also a good thing but you see, for us now that has worked for me because I now know what works and what won't work and I know which cut will suit somebody, so I will not spend 3 hours doing something that I know this is what will work and it's done!

Q: How do you maintain and enhance high levels of expertise and skills as a fashion designer?

A: It's training. Training, training, training, training.

FUQ: the way you said you go for professional based training and that kind of thing?

A: No, we do our own training in-house for my people. We make sure people know and practice and practice. And then, you come in, you don't start by doing a gown for me, no, you will start at the basic doing curtains and things like that, and then you will progress into a more detailed garment. So there is a system of training and developing my staff so that at the end of the day, I'm guaranteed that that person I can give them raw silk and they will not mess it up, I can give them chiffon and they will not mess it up.

FUQ: But now for yourself, forgetting the designers you hire, what do you do then to keep on making your skill grow and your expertise grow?

A: I think over the years, you are always being challenged to do different things and work with different fabrics, so because I'm really involved in what it is that I do I'm always doing new things, trying out new things and of course I keep myself inspired with different magazines, magazine trends and things like that, so that has been how I grow and how I improve. But it's

more the challenges of working with different shapes and figures and designs and you can imagine every client has a different need, so as many clients as we have we have done something different. It's rare that you say 2 people will get the same thing. So we have had the opportunity to do a wide variety of stuff and that has helped us grow, improve, and even for myself to challenge myself more.

Success Factors

Q: What challenges do fashion designers in Kenya face?

A: One of the main ones is skilled workers; that's the greatest hindrance, then also availability of good raw materials, affordable raw materials and then generally production and setup costs are pretty high.

FUQ: everyone says the cost of production is very high. Is there a way to avoid that?

A: The only way you'll manage to pull down your costs is if work with cheap labor and if you also work in a setup where you, you see like for example, most of us work with a tailor who maybe 1 tailor cuts and the other does the full stitching. But when you say you to say a factory, one guy does sleeves only, one guy does collars, so the production at the end of the day 30 people are working on one garment so it's very cheap and it's very quick and it's finished quickly. But when you have 1 person finishing, one person will do 2 garments in a day, so that means, on what you are paying him, your cost for production are much higher. So the only way you can reduce the cost of that, is if you go into a factory setting. That mass type of setting is only good to do if you already have a ready existing outlet or market. It is not good for custom

made. You see like I make custom made so I cannot do mass production on custom made. And in any case, custom made is never supposed to be cheap, because it is made for you. When people get that understanding then they will appreciate that really this dress is mine, it fits me only and it's unique to my shape.

But you go to somewhere, and remember if you go and buy a shirt now in Woolworths, there are 100,000 pieces of the same in one size, another 100000 pieces of the same in another size and then that's one color, then there're 5 colors. So the production costs when ordering the fabric can even come to ksh100 a piece. To put it together is about ksh. 500 a unit so when it's sold for ksh 1500 and somebody comes and tells me, "Monica I want this shirt", there is no way I can start to produce it at even 3000 shillings. It has to be 4500 shillings. So that's how production works, when it's looking at mass, you've ordered your fabric in bulk, you've produced in bulk, you have standardized your sizes and then somebody will come and tell me Monica it fits me here, here, but here it's flaring, so even then, it will not fit them completely. So those are the challenges of mass production. Mass production versus custom made will always be cheap.

Q: What, in your opinion, makes a fashion designer successful?

A: Consistency, consistency and being different in the sense that, do what you say, deliver what you promise; that's where most designers come in because every time you hear fundis, fundis even people call them fundis. It will never be ready! She mentions a song where the singer even says his fundi is a con, because people never deliver what they say they will. So for us I know our greatest strength and my serious commitment is to be on time. If I tell you come on Tuesday at lunch time, I will be ready on Tuesday at lunch time. If I'm not ready on Tuesday at lunch

time, on Monday evening, you'll know not to come. I will tell you, please don't come at lunch time, come at 4 o'clock. So that has been my serious commitment; to deliver on time.

So it's delivery and consistency.

Q: What aspects and practices do you observe to ensure your business stays successful?

A: We put a system in place to help us track our orders from start to finish.

FUQ: so basically for you, you've actually put in systems, so in case you are not here, there's someone who knows I should have done this, and that and that...

Economical Factors

Q: How is the state of the Kenyan economy and does that affect your business?

A: It always depends on what's going on. I mean, on an election year it affects us just like any other industry, so we are not unique to any economic factors. When the environment is conducive, we are also happy, when things are tight we are the ones who suffer most because clothing is a luxury item, so you will do your basic; you will do your milk and bread, you will not necessarily make that expensive dress you were going to do. So, when it comes to that, clothes are considered a luxury item, so when it comes to tightening the belt, that is the first thing to go.

Q: Do changes in the world economy affect your business?

A: No. What will really affect us is our national situation. Our national situation, what is really happening globally, we might feel it, but it will not be immediate.

Q: Does the economy affect the purchasing power of your customers?

A: As explained in first economical point. Clothes are considered luxury items.

Q: What measures do you put in place to counter the effects of the economy on your business?

A: Well, it's very hard to say to put measures in place because what we do is we just try to keep marketing. The good thing is that our other main income earner is weddings, so weddings are all year round, so if we keep the weddings going, we'll still be okay. We'll still stay afloat; because even when we had the clashes during post election violence we still had weddings. If you have set a date, whether clashes come or not, you can't cancel. Some cancelled but not all. Because of that, the other part of our business is weddings, so we keep trying to market and support that side of things so that also keeps us going round the year. Then we also do corporate so that those are the other things that help us when we are low.

Political Factors

Q: How do political events like the elections and change in government affect your business?

A: That's very hard to tell. Can't tell and can't see a difference.

Q: What are the strengths and weakness of the policies currently in place in Kenya, which can increase the level of success in fashion businesses?

A: Policies are not tailor made to suit us and then again it is our own fault, nobody will lobby for us if we don't lobby for ourselves.

Q: Which policies currently in place hinder fashion business in Kenya?

A: For example, the way the government has said that all procurement will be done locally first, that's something that supports the industry. So, the way we are going, it should be positive. In the past yes there were some, I hear people import school uniforms, it shouldn't be. It should be locally sourced.

Ecological Factors

Q: Sustainability, environmental and social conscious design is on the rise worldwide. How do you incorporate this into your business?

A: When it comes to weddings you can't really think about that. That works if you are doing ready to wear. If you are doing custom made it can't really work because people aren't going to come and tell you to I want to be eco friendly or whatever and she has come with her own material. There's none of that. So it's only what practices that we can have as a fashion house that will then become eco friendly, we recycle our materials, we do something, we give them away to charity, we have children who make patchwork and things like that now those are the things that we can do as a fashion house but not necessarily when it comes to custom we can't really.

The things that are in our control, that we can practice. But if somebody has their own material, bridesmaids want new dresses, new fabrics, nobody wants to say I am wearing recycled, custom made whatever. They don't even want to recycle gowns.

Q: Do you ever face challenges resulting from customers insisting on only purchasing sustainable products?

A: They've never asked that. But by the fact that our business is very open, they know where our production is. There isn't a challenge at the moment.

Q: Are there any regulations on ecological factors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in) that affect your business?

A: Because I don't do exports, those are not faced. The minute I would start to do export and start to do ready to wear then I know I would face a lot of things, depending on the market that I am going into, because all of them have different standards of what they want; the types of fabrics, the dyes used and things like that, so especially if you are working with local dyes, there are dyes that are not accepted for export so those would then affect us.

FUQ: but in Kenya we don't have such laws?

A: In Kenya the laws are not reinforced, even the importation we take anything, for example, the school shirts for kids they get worn out on the bust near the armpits, we wore shirts in school, what would happen is that they would grow small it would never get worn out at the bust. These days it does because we are getting anything!

FUQ: is Kenya Bureau of standards involved in such regulations?

A: They are involved but I don't think they have the expertise. Or if they do, they are not keen. Like I keep saying, if you are not the end user, you don't really care. Think of it this way, a traffic police can hold you there at a roundabout for the whole day, but he doesn't really care, he's going to walk home, not driving anywhere. But if he was driving, he would consider the drivers' situation. We have very lopsided way of doing things, like I was even telling somebody; you bring people who never drive to control traffic.

Technological Factors

Q: Which technology/technologies do you use in your business?

A: If I go into mass production, I will source that. It doesn't make sense for custom made since nothing is standard between two custom clients.

Has a computer application system used for tracking customers orders, payments and schedules for fitting which was written custom made for Occasions and days.

Q: How does using this technology contribute to your business success?

A: It depends on what your product is. If you do ready to wear, you must use technology.

Q: Is it important or necessary for a fashion designer to incorporate each new technology into their business to be successful?

A: Not necessarily. There is systems, and there is technology. Sometimes somebody will think technology is having computerized machines, is having computerized cutting systems and things like that but, it could be as simple as you go work with women, and you tell them we are making this bag, a bag for this ??,you cut them a template and then you say all you do is lay this template here, trace around it, cut it, put it together. That is a system, it's not computerized but it helps maintain consistency. So I don't think you are limited to technology to be successful, but you are limited to be successful if you do not have systems in place. Especially in our world, third world, you'll go to the Maasai market and you will see nice bags. They are not necessarily the same size but they are generally the same size, they will still have a market, that doesn't mean they will be less successful. You go to people who work with women groups and community groups and they

are making these sunglasses beaded thing. They are not the same. The beads are not the same. But generally she's been given a ka stick, you put your thread from here, you put this loop here, you thread it and then you kuja you funga here. They generally look the same; there is a system in place. So it all depends on your end product and your market and the community group or the group you are working with. It would be a waste of time if you go into Umaasai and you give them electrical beading things for something they've done 300 years without. Although, the Chinese have never been able to do the Maasai collar, because it is labor intensive! And yet somebody will go into the Maasai market and want to buy that thing for ksh 1500, never mind the mama has made it for like 3 weeks. So, if we can help them find a more efficient way of producing it, then now that was where the technology would enhance what it is that we are doing. But again, that would mean that you go study them, study the way they do it and come up with something that helps them enhance what they do. We never consider those people as fashion designers but if you ask me, those are fashion designers. I mean they make some really beautiful ornaments.

That's where designers from outside beat us, for example, Vivienne Westwood works a lot with Maasai community groups.

Financial Resources

Q: What financial challenges did you face when starting up and how did you overcome them?

A: Luck because the mother had a tailoring business and she took over the business. Also, she won a professional award; Smirnoff, and won prize money which helped setup.

Q: How do you address the issue of financial restraints in the day to day running of your business?

A: Manage costs by keeping it simple and manage sales to always stay afloat. Don't start up with rent which is too high. Once consistent turnover is achieved

Q: What avenues then, can a fashion designer utilize to ensure continuous cash flow in the business?

A: Target your market properly. Wedding is all year round, corporate (target small restaurants etc, and deliver on time) then individual customers. Manage it and keep it well. Price properly based on your market and costs and package yourself appropriately. Systems for costing depend on overheads; factor in overheads as you decide pricing.

You see over the years, you could have stayed in certain places but in the new year council license went up by 50%, power bills are going up by a certain %ge then the postal. So everything has gone up so you have to factor those things in as you put in your pricing. You have to sort of calculate it and then come up with a figure that even makes sense to eventually because if it doesn't you'll find I've done so many garments but I'm not making money.

Q: How does your product life cycle and product distribution affect the performance of your product?

A: Produces on order only so does not have products that are kept in stock.

Until you've learnt what is working and what is not, it's a risk because I'm hoping that you will like this dress and in this color and in this fabric. Then you see a lot of the times we are at a disadvantaged place in the sense that if I walk into Woolworths, Woolworths is a tested industry,

they have branded themselves, they have packaged themselves, it's South African. So people will walk in there mindlessly and say I need a shirt and they go buy a shirt and you go. But then now you are saying oh my name is Monica Kanari, I'm making this shirt, come and like them. Until somebody comes in and actually likes first the presentation they are not already sold. So you have to work harder to sell your garment before if you put yourself on the same platform with Woolworths. They are already are selling, they are selling first in South Africa. Us now we are starting from zero, trying to convince this market. So it's a greater challenge; you will find that designers get successful when they are successful out of the country, then they come back and launch in the country.

FUQ: Has that worked for anyone?

A: Yes, for Kikoromeo. She is much bigger outside than she is in here then now people are like 'oh! I'm wearing Kikoromeo!' but it's only because we are lucky she is here but we don't see her as much until when someone comes from outside and says, oh I saw this in this and this international magazine. What a shame.

We need to work on the industry ourselves so that it helps us, it support us. But if not, then we just go the same route, go and export, we create a demand out there and yours will be demanded here. Like now Milles le Collene the Rwandese lady, I mean it's simple but it's nothing out of this world. But because she is a foreigner coming into the market then she is more appealing to the Kenyans than local designers. But because she has branded, placed herself at the junction, then she is more attractive to the people with the buying power. It's all packaging. So, you must decide who your market is, package right and you will be successful.

So for me custom made it's a bit different for us our most important thing is be consistent.

Available Resources

Q: Are your sources/suppliers of material and services reliable?

A: I do local, so yes they are.

Q: Does this affect the success of your products?

A: Yes. Because it is a limited variety, but it is okay.

Q: How can the situation be improved?

A: On occasion that I need to have my own supply of fabrics, the challenge is either you have that then you hold your own stock.

FUQ: Because if you want something and they don't have it in stock that is it? They don't make special orders?

A: Yes, it's not like they will consider me and bring me what I want. Mine is custom so I will never be needing more than a roll of anything. So sometimes when you specialize, sometimes it's good to have your own raw materials in control so you can always deliver on time.

Q: How do you overcome issues arising from unreliable sources/suppliers to maintain success?

A: Either you maintain stock or like for me I'll give you options of samples of what is available in the market, to avoid struggling to get the fabric.

Q: What is the situation of infrastructure; transportation, electricity, etc in Kenya?

A: Well, they are things that affect us but I feel you just have to work around them. We've put in an inverter so that we don't have power outages; if we have we have an option. If it's an issue of

transport, you make sure you have a driver at your disposal so that you are able to deliver what you need on time. So you work around it. For me I feel those are not things that affect success that much.

Q: How does this state of infrastructure affect your business?

A: No.

Q: Which facilities/infrastructure, which if were made available in Kenya, or improved would make you more successful?

A: I don't think there's anything that say government say can do for designers to make us successful. I don't think it is driven by government or what the government can do for you. It is the opportunities that you see and that you seize for yourself. If electricity was managed, if they said we are creating go downs here for the designers to come and setup their workshops where they can do for local market then yes. Those sort of things yes but not where they'll say they are there but they do them for the epz so you can only export, you can't do them for the local market.

Grow cotton industry back. Create incentives for people to do cotton farming, then yes. A production zone where the go downs are cheap, cheap setups, the electricity is more affordable and things like that, that could work.

It would be nice if they said they've created a window that will allow designers to import machines on waived duty or substituted rates.

Competitors

Q: How would you rate the cost of production in Kenya?

A: It's high because the cost of raw material is high. We don't produce any of our fabrics locally and even if we do our own cotton is very... Actually we don't use any local material, we import raw yarn to make our fabrics!

Q: Does it (cost of production) affect the success of your business compared to your competitors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in)?

A: Mostly all of us are on the same playing field. But I think now if you compare custom for custom, then it depends on location. If you compare a tailor in Kenyatta market with a tailor in town and if you look at us, their overall costs are very low, they are not paying VAT I'm paying VAT, I'm paying NSSF and all that, so we are not on the same playing field. But because you set yourself as a limited company, you attract a lot of duties which then does not put you in a comfortable playing/balanced/competitive place between the person in the industry.

FUQ: so you consider tailors competition?

A: They are also making clothes that we are making. But their dress will be 200 bob, my dress will be 10000 bob. So someone will come in here and say but in Nyayo market it's 2000 bob? People compare because they are clothes. So make sure that you provide a product which people will look at and say, yes this is different. It justifies the price.

Q: What measures do you put in place to ensure that your production costs are controlled beyond surpassing a certain point to be able to compete in the market?

A: We are lucky at this point that we are only doing custom made because we only buy what we need but when it comes to doing ready to wear, it will be a challenge, we will have to figure it

out, to standardize, so there'll be a great learning curve at that moment and I expect that it will be more expensive until we figure it out. So for anyone doing ready to wear they've either learnt it or they are still in the process of learning it. If you do like four types of garments in four different colors, the Blacks will go more, the ones with Orange maybe 2, the ones with Green maybe 1, I mean so these are thing you'll have to figure and learn as you go along. There are standards out there but standards out there do not follow our local buying habits. The same way you'll find, only in Kenya do we have a sachet of Blue Band or a sachet of Omo if you go to any other place they are in big boxes. Nobody buys in small quantities. So our buying habits are a great challenge.

Q: Does mass production help control production costs?

A: Not with custom made.

Business operations

Q: Do you run the operations of your business by yourself or do you hire people to manage the operations, while you concentrate on designing? And how does this affect your business's success?

A: I have people who assist me. I have assistants, but when it's a fashion show, yes I will be there, for the purpose of that description, yes I am the head designer.

FUQ: Basically you'd say overseeing main events?

A: ...and day to day running.

It is a bit of a challenge because it takes a lot of your time but the unfortunate thing is that it's been very hard to find designers who are willing to be employed by other designers. Everybody wants to go off and start their own line.

FUQ: Why do you feel that is like that?

A: Everybody wants to start off their own line. They do not want to work under somebody else.

FUQ: could it be a factor of payment?

A: People want to start their own thing. They say I would rather be building mine than work under another designer yet most of the growing fashion houses, international one, always employ designers to work under them. So that's one of the greatest challenges in this market.

FUQ: So if you were to get a designer who was willing to work under you, would you be willing to employ them?

A: And why not? That's the point.

FUQ: But how much would you pay them?

A: Without you having jelled, without you having proven yourself, there is no way you can come and start saying I'm a designer I want to be paid equivalent to what you are being paid. Because of who I am, I am bringing in a certain income. Because of who I am and how long I have been in the industry people will just hear my name and they are willing to accept. Now you are a fresh designer and yet you want to command the same returns that I do and yet if you are standing there on your own you will not. So, they must understand it's just the same way; you go into a law firm, you start at a certain level and you grow until you become a partner. But for some reason people think it's not the same. But why is it that lawyers do it? You do your pupillage, you

finish, you do your bar exam, you are appointed, you don't go and start your own law firm; you work under a lawyer, you are paid peanuts and then you grow, you grow, you prove yourself and then you say, haiya I want to be a partner. And you become a partner. But for some strange reason, people see it differently because it is a creative industry. You have to prove yourself. Even though somebody is a young designer it doesn't mean everything they create I will like. I will change, but people don't see it like that.

FUQ: so if you were to employ a designer to help you run your business, what would be their responsibilities?

A: You can't bring in somebody and say be in charge. They have a different style, a style that probably doesn't work for you, a style that doesn't work for your clientele. It depends on what your clientele is. So over the years, I have had very many young designers who have stayed on and we have worked together. And they go off and they start their own businesses and they have been successful. But they have put in time, they have put in 5 years, they have put in 7 years. But the minute these new ones come in and think I want to be co designer and you are straight from school because you can draw, it doesn't work like that. You must do your time.

FUQ: can you give me an example of someone who has worked under you and gone off to open a successful fashion business?

A: Agnes Ngaruya, Linet Namuluma, Wambui Kibue (fashion writer), Naomi Wambugu. Those are the ones who have pu in a lot of time with me.

Q: What are/ would be the pros and cons of you handling all business operations by yourself?

A: The challenges: Usually it is about being able to spread yourself out and that is all about finding good help. That's it.

Pros: you have control, but that control can be limiting, so I don't see it as an advantage, I see it as a growth process that eventually you must be able to release it to others otherwise you will be forever stuck. You will be like a doctor; if it's not the doctor people don't go and see him. Infact it's taken awhile for people to get there. When you say is Monica in? If she is not in they will not talk to somebody else. It is really tough, that's why I'm saying it can't really be a plus. So when you are running everything by yourself if you don't release it to those people so always people will come looking for you which means you are a prisoner.

Q: Are there any challenges in hiring professionals to oversee the operations of your business like overall business managing, costing, marketing, accounting, etc?

A: I mean you are everything, you are marketing, you are strategy, you are the planning, you are forecast, you do everything. But until you are commanding a certain size of a market you can't afford to do that. If you have a great market share, then you are okay, I mean look at any bank; a bank is able to have al those people in all those departments because they can afford it. A fashion house unless you are commanding a lot, you cannot do the same thing.

FUQ: even if it's outsourcing it?

A: Unless you have a market for it, you will not be able to sustain it. The people who have started; oh I have a board and I have this and this and this, within no time you hear that board does not exist anymore because you cannot unless they are doing it on a voluntary basis. You can't be able to afford that. But the minute you have production and you have a big market share, you can.

FUQ: In Kenya, is it possible to have that market share?

A: I believe it is. You just need to be doing the right thing.

FUQ: so for do you feel you are headed towards that?

A: I hope one day. If I do ready to wear and I do it right it should be possible.

FUQ: so to achieve market share definitely you have to do ready to wear?

A: You have a good production zone where you have numbers cause that's where the challenge comes in. you can't have a good distribution if you are doing a limited number of things. Increase your production, increase your market share, and increase your revenue therefore you need those things that support that sort of a system.

Q: Is it important for a fashion designer to have business management skills?

A: Yes.

FUQ: Have you trained for in business management?

A: No. You learn on the job.

FUQ: do you think it is important to get professional training like go for an MBA?

A: It's not necessary. Google!

FUQ: Google is your best friend?

A: No, what I mean is, even if you don't know you have friends in the industry who do those sorts of things. You learn, and you consult. So I don't believe you have to be an expert in everything but if it is a great weakness, then get a partner who is that strength. Partner with

somebody who will be that partner, that advisory person. Even if it will cost you something, it is important.

Q: What management skills does a designer require for their fashion business to be successful?

A: The most important; basic accounting skills. If you don't know whether you are making money, you don't know whether you are coming or going. You must be able to say I'm standing, I'm making, I'm on minus, and why I'm on whatever.

That's number one. Number 2 then now you can say plan. You don't need to have a degree in planning or business administration, plan. And then prepare. I think for a lot of us we just roll, we go but because we don't plan, we can't forecast, we can't foresee problems, they find us smack in our face so then we are in a crisis consistently. I mean for me when I started that is how my business was. I was constantly in a crisis, constantly. "Oh my God Susan, Esther has walked in?! Her dress is it ready? Which is her dress? So, even a stranger can walk in sit on the computer there, look at the system, and ask you what's your name? Type it in and get all details of fitting, etc. so that system in place helps you. So if you have a system in place you can track your orders, you can know where you are at any one time. But before that we were manual. If there is a power outage, we revert to manuals for measurements, but payments are stored on the computer.

FUQ: Do you normally have planning meetings?

A: Every day in the morning

FUQ: what kind of preparations do you put in place as a manager?

A: A manager is first of all to forecast your week, and see what o we need to prepare what do we need to buy, what haven't we done? And because we know cutting takes longer than the stitching so we need to know who needs to be cut which needs to be done when?

So first it's the shopping, and then it's the cutting, then the stitching, then the fitting and then the finishing.

FUQ: Any other business skill as a fashion designer you should have?

A: You should have some sense of quality control, because if you know the standard that you are looking for, then you are able to get your team to give you the product that you want. If you don't know what it is supposed to look like, there's no way you can make them produce what you want. So a lot of the years you spend training your people to understand that this is a good sleeve, this is a good jacket, this is a good buttonhole and you'll see like now unfortunately, a lot of these things, people come to me and tell me my fundi didn't do this, and didn't do that and they are so upset. I tell them, your value system is not the same. You come from different circumstances; you are expecting him to have your value system where it is not something you have taught him, it is not inborn. The fundi will not care because they will not wear it. So for example if they stitch a zip badly and it ends up rubbing and irritating my skin, I put it on their skin so that they can feel and understand how uncomfortable it is. It would never occur to the fundi at all, but it's in those things you tell him, I want a nice, straight hem and over the years they have learnt to see what I appreciate, they know I will not accept anything less. It's all about training and exposing people to what you expect. The guy who makes gowns will now wash their hand before touching the gowns. You build your values into them and over years, they will

get it. Don't be in a hurry; that's where we go wrong. Find the strengths of your fundis/team and give them work based on the areas of their strengths and expertise.

If I was in a factory setting I would demand, we are all machinists, but then you see the skill there is much less; all I want is a straight stitch, so in two days, he has perfected doing the collar because he has done 500 collars. And that's why you find it's cheaper to produce mass than it is to produce ready to wear, because this guy will make maybe 1 collar in 5 days, the other one has done 500 collars in 3 days. It will be perfect. So a lot of us are very impatient, we get a new fundi and we want him to do a gown. I don't care who you are, where you say you came from, you will start with this, then you will do this then when I see you can do, I will try you this and if you fail you are back. Then I'll say forget everything you know; like when my students come, interns I say forget everything you know in school, we are starting; this is chiffon, this is satin, this is bridal satin, this is silk, like that. It's slow but it's guaranteed.

Q: How do you market your business?

A: We have done Facebook, we used to do Samantha. We did a wedding promo thing on Facebook, Samantha's bridal fair. Actually the past last 2 years I've been a little bit lazy. I have not been active; I have not marketed actively because I've been trying to change my business. And I think until the end of this year I will not do much else until I am doing what it is that I wanted to do, which is the ready to wear. But we have done the Samantha's, etc to promote ourselves. African fashion fair and FAFA; the usual promos. They are good to do but then after awhile, once you've made a name I think you can sit back a little bit and reinvent and decide what it is you want to do. You can overdo yourself in those events, because the truth is that what you are doing when you are taking part in those things you are really becoming a trendsetter, you

are not really going to sell. People come to see, oh, what are they doing? Haiya, let's do this. So if you keep doing it, as a means to sell, then you find that you are drying out and dying out very quickly. But if it is a way to just keep yourself known in the market, then, it is a good thing to do. Know why you want to do those things, and then do them to meet that goal and nothing, anything else is an extra.

Usually people say, oh come, you will have an opportunity to sale; there'll be 500 potential customers. I know. I usually say there's nothing like that, people are not coming to buy, they are coming for entertainment. So if you are paying nameless, you might as well pay me. I have done many fashion shows, at night when people are drinking and eating that's not where you get your customers from, forget it. Designers have to speak the same language, don't accept that from corporate events, just tell them to pay you like they are paying Nameless, kwisha.

FUQ: So corporate events organizers don't pay fashion designers to participate?

A: They will not pay you, they will not. They say come, all these people we are bringing for you, si they are potential businesses? I have refused, I said no. no, no, no, no! Because they don't buy! We have done them, many years; people say oh very nice, very nice, they clap for you, they applaud, there are pictures in the newspaper, it ends on Monday! When the event was on Saturday, it has ended! And there is nothing. You, you have spent money, you've made clothes, and you have been there the whole night, if you sold anything, 1 or 2. Si they are giving you a venue, an avenue to sale? So I decided fashions shows, ah-ah, no more. And you see what's happened with almost all the established designers, nobody wants that nonsense; you've made clothes and then you are stuck with them and they are in model sizes, who is a model size? They don't buy as much. So after you've done 1, 2, 3, 4, aii, next time somebody call you, you are like

no thanks! And people think fashion designers are feeling good. But if nameless is showing up, half a million! I'm not asking for half a million, give me 200 thousand and I'll come! I'll perform for you also.

FUQ: infact when I'd see for example, you at corporate events I'd think wow, you are doing well!

A: No, they have bargained. They have forced you to come and they've said look, how much are the models, how much are... they've paid everything else, so they say you come and bring the clothes. Then you say, I have to do this to make a name, that's the price. So you do it to get in people's faces, people remember you, to get a press picture which you can't really pay for, but not to make sales.

FUQ: and of course as you say, once you've built a name these events become redundant.

A: Although, not to say that you shouldn't do it but choose, you pick and say we'll do this because.. like these days I do not want to hear Samantha.

FUQ: There were no sales from Samantha?

A: There are but mostly what we did is now we created trends, so you find your pictures all over the place, the Samantha magazine, everything you've done. So now I used to work hard to make complicated dresses so that they are hard to duplicate, we go to the market, watu wanafungua Samantha, hii, ati utengeneze hii. Then they come here and it was being sold for 12 thousand and in the market it is for 3 thousand. What are you talking about? So, it's okay to set trends, that I would do happily. So I'm happy to do the Samanthas where it concerns clothes we've already

done and they say these were done by Monica Kanari, I don't mind, but now do a collection for us and come and show us...

FUQ: We've been discussing this in the Fashion focus group at Kikoromeo, especially like last there was such a mess in the industry; the fashion weeks were so many, some being held on the same day, and what we were saying is, a fashion designer first you pay to be in that event and you are paying prime price and after that you don't sell. So we should be having buyers at these events. And I was wondering, do we even have buyers in Kenya? Like Nakumatt, Tusksys, do they buy from fashion designers?

A: They should. But you see, you already have to have set systems in place and then proven your production. If Nakumatt tells you we want this shirt and we want them for how many shops, we have 50, we need a minimum of 500 per branch, that is 25000 pieces and we need them in 3 weeks, you will just run away, you don't even want to talk, you don't want to hear that story. So why will Nakumatt come? We are not ready to get buyers.

FUQ: But when will we be ready?

A: Only when we work together

FUQ: Will we ever work together? How do we start to work together?

A: We are too secretive; we don't tell each other things, we always want to out win the other. But if we were to get to a place where, if for example the one that was created by Sally, AFAD has also created division among us, so 1st they told us, oh you, you haven't trained professionally? You, you can't be in it. So we already (dismissed them). Because we said, look, we've been in the industry so long, I think we have proven ourselves, find a way to incorporate

us into the industry! So you see, that doesn't work, I mean it is not helping you grow. Like now they had said, there are honorary designers, when we told them we wanted to be those honorary designers, I think the name sounded too good, they said no, no, no. and we did not join. Then AFAD created its own thing, African fashion Fair its own thing, FAFA its own. We've tried to work together with FAFA a lot so now, when AFAD is doing something, they won't tell the two of us because kinda we have this thing going on. So, by the end of the day, oh men! So you find designers remove themselves from all these things, and they say me let me just do my thing, bottom line is money I am looking for I don't need to be in any team, any committee, any anything, so what does happen, overall the industry falls down.

You have a big event at Kempinski (Hotel) called Kenyan fashion week has no established designers, it's a total flop. Because the person who is organizing it doesn't want to invite this one, because I don't know what? We were like, how can they have Kenya fashion week without key designers. So then now when you go with your African fashion fair, we need money, guys just look at you like please guys, you are like 10 million of you. Why should we sponsor you?

FUQ: Well in that meeting (Fashion focus group at Kikoromeo) we were saying it would be good if we had a committee of sorts, we come up with a Calendar for the fashion industry in Kenya. And I thought it was a good idea. And I don't know if we can work together but, we can start from there.

A: That is an excellent idea. We must at least in the least just have a calendar. And you see what it does if the calendar is there, you decide. And now you are not deciding to take part in something because of something, you are deciding because with my budget and what I'm doing, I can do this event, I can do that event.

FUQ: And you can plan for it years ahead

A: Exactly; which is how it's supposed to be.

Q: Are there any challenges you face in marketing your business?

A: For example when you do fashion shows that there is no direct sales, so it can be a bit tricky.

FUQ: I have seen your products in True Love. Does that generate sales? Do you pay to be there?

A: You don't pay, but I haven't seen somebody calling me, oh Monica I saw this in the True Love. It just keeps you known. For some of this things, you decide why you do them. And then again, they also put what they want to put; they don't put what they think, you see if I could put what I wanted, I know that I'd be able to get the attraction back, but the stylist who's doing it is picking what will be a nice picture not necessarily what will be a nice selling item. So, the reason it's being put has nothing to do with you as a designer.

FUQ: they come and select?

A: No, they just say they are doing this shoot and we are looking for African outfits, give us what you have. It's always today, the shoot is today. You just end up giving what you have not because you have thought about what it is they are doing, no projections, it's pata potea. It may create a demand, it may not. So really designers need to have their own, because then the purpose for it is to market you and to sell your products.

Q: What marketing avenues/channels do you feel are important to the success of a fashion business?

A: One thing I have known is that branding works, I don't know, like now maybe people like Kikoromeo would tell us but when you have your bags, people have your bags going around giving gifts, I think that one works well and that's something even I am looking to do because it has impact. So branding is branding your items and giving away stuff, I think that one works. But since it's not something I'm still in the custom, it's not something I have done, and it is things I am looking to do because I want to create an impact on the market. So again, I have no expertise in that as far as sales are concerned, mine is mostly word of mouth; this mama we did her a mother of the bride outfit, she brings another mama who wants another outfit, like that. This one we did her wedding, she brings her sister, a fellow bride, her cousin, like that. So ours works very well on word of mouth. Most of the people who come have been referred by somebody else, actually, have more often than not been referred by somebody else.

There've been a few who have sort us on the internet, googled and said, African designer, or Kenyan designer or Kenyan bridal, and we come up and they look at our pictures and they say, ah! So our website has done that.

We've also done a thing of an article on 7 mistakes brides make in choosing their wedding gown. That brought a lot of interest. So people would read it, you subscribe to it, you get one mistake every week, every week and then at the end....we did it on our website and I think on facebook. So that one created awareness, but then you found Kenyans are very idle, even if you are not a bride unajibu, then you ask me questions and you are not a bride, ah! So half the time you would spend a lot of time on admin; being nice and polite to somebody who you know won't buy, like; I like your ideas, when I get a man, I will come.

Appendix H: Transcript of Semi-structured Interview with Peggy Onyango held on 02-3-2014 at her home

Bio data

Q: How long have you been working as a fashion designer?

A: As a fashion designer, you know why I really have to think, I have never done anything other than fashion. But when I began I really didn't know what I was doing. I really didn't know am I really in fashion or not in fashion, was it a hobby or was it something I was just doing. Was it making business sense I think I was there, one foot was in and another was out hoping that if something good comes, then I will go. But nothing came up so let me say 10 years.

Q: What is your education background?

A: High school then a higher diploma at wood groove which has since closed then a higher diploma course in a school in Bangkok called Callaway international, a fashion school.

FUQ: any other fashion training?

A: Yes, from time to time I have had the opportunity of going through a lot of mentorship programmes. Currently I'm doing one in SA which is about to end hopefully this month.

FUQ: which one is that?

A: F. Wilson Fashion Institute which is an affiliate of Pretoria University.

FUQ: So it's online?

A: No, I go, like now I've put everything together, tomorrow morning I'm leaving. This will be the final one. But I think for me, since Bangkok then there was Dubai and now SA, it's been a complete eye opener. Fashion is fashion but I think whoever introduced it here in all our fashion schools I don't know whether because I didn't go to fashion at the university, I don't know if at the university a fashion designer is taught; a fashion designer is an entrepreneur and they are taught that they are business people, the whole aspect, merchandising, everything. I find that lacking here. When somebody gets out of school that's why everyone, each and every one of us, unless they are well to do and even the well to do, if you look at the ones who've made it, the Sue Muraya, the building was the mothers' even Sally where she was first was the mothers building. So the people who do not have that kind of background, we all have the same kind of story, we started working from our backyard or from the bedroom or in this one room like a sitting room and the machine is there and then when you start you start with either this cut or something and you will start with your friend and with your family who will not be able to pay you so much. And this is where the route now begins. So for you to really pull up your head out of that water, and swim and float out it becomes very difficult. So unless somebody really has the opportunity of travelling, just to see that this is fashion, I used to go to my designer friend he since left now he is relocated, he is in Jordan headed to Brazil, business is down in the UAE, I am a fashion designer who is trained, who has a diploma, I don't drive and I'm seeing a tailor coming to drive, his tailors drive to work! And I looked at everything and at the arrangement of the workshop and all, caz here when you go to school you are trained to do everything, you will do your patterns, you will do your shopping, you are doing everything, you are doing your marketing, by the way when you begin you cannot afford a tailor so because you are taught to stitch, now sit and stitch. I started by stitching, to remove me out of a machine and for me to

have a tailor and then I see them stitching, in school I was told you pin and tuck, it stuck there. No, I will not accept it. And that is mistake number one, you can't be everything, because what happens; yes I can stitch, yes I can shop, yes I can sit on the machine and do, yes I would do my patterns but what is your production and at what cost. By the time you've done all this with this sun now, if I had to go and shop and walk round and get the right fabric then I come back then I make the pattern then that is done then I'm with the client taking measurements then I sit and stitch, I will take 2 days to do an outfit. And at the end even if I was charging Ksh 10,000 labor it's not worth it, it cannot sustain me. So we really have to separate. So when I used to see what these people do, within like the fashion house, there has to be the designer because you are the brainstorm behind everything, if at all you have to stitch then do a sample if you really think that your tailors are not capable do a sample. And once they've gotten the sample please come out of the machine and brainstorm again, and because you are the thinking tank, keep producing, let your ideas be seen. And within this workshop, other than the designer there has to be the master cutter; this is somebody who translates your design just by looking at it they already know, which pattern am I going to use, which block and how do I cut this, and now to the seamstress or the tailor now. Do not expect your tailor to know also how to cut. They don't have to but they have to know how to really stitch and do it neatly. So it is arranged in such a way that the designer their time is with the client because he did not have a ready to wear line per se, but their time is with the client; sketches, sketches and displays somewhere. When the master cutter comes they know exactly which table to go to, and then just flip through. The measurements are there, the design is right there, straight to the table of cutting, making patterns and cutting. Then now the master cutter and the seamstress or the tailor they are now together, they actually work together unless there's something specifically they don't understand they will ask the designer

but if they understand then the two of them have to work together because they'll be told this is how I cut join this piece to this, then they will just join and....

FUQ: But then does this mean you train them or are these people available in Kenya?

A: They are, but not, they are the tailors. That's why now here, there's a miss because there are tailors who could cut who I would actually they are master cutters but not many of them, not so many of them are there.

FUQ: so would probably have to get someone and then train them

A: Yes, and then train them because a master cutter for me I think otherwise we have perfect tailors who would stitch and who would do, perfect. Sometimes it may be wrong but you look at the stitches and the top stitches and you are okay, what were they really joining? It's been joined so well and so neat but if only the pattern was right this would have been an amazing piece! So that is a missing link. I have even visited, I have one of my clients she works near, I can't remember but she is Ghanaian but a citizen of the US, so she knew Kofi and she connected me to Kofi Ansah and kept on insisting and I went to Ghana and visited Kofi and we sat the whole day! His office I think admired it and said okay, this is fashion and Kofi had like the same story and had a whole story but because he was trained in the UK and Kofi said he worked for 21 years so when he went back to Ghana he said he was going back to resign and only deal with textiles but he said he was so embarrassed when he got back to his native home and find people wearing night dresses during the day in the streets and he was like no, I cannot leave people are wearing evening clothes during the day he's like my goodness I have to be back I have to train. So he is in his workshop, he also has a very organized workshop, that is the same way where you find tailors already know, Kofi has a ready to wear line, where the tailors they come and they have

like these baskets for me they look like these ones for moving house, very nice with the lid, so there's what is supposed to be stitched that goes, if anything is supposed to be repaired or work that is not finished it is well labeled. So what happens when somebody walks in they already know. They walk straight, even at my friends place in Dubai they would walk straight unless there is something special, you walk straight to something you are supposed to do. And they know it and work begins, it's like an office, yea, but here is different; fundi nani sijui amekuja? Sasa leo, nataka ukate hii, unaona hapa vile nimechora hivi na hivi, and so you are relying on them thinking that the way umechora they will understand. No, we need pattern makers, we really really, really, do.

Where I am currently doing my mentorship program, the designer has yet another designer and he also has history of the way he trained, so basically he's the master cutter, I think this time round, I don't know if I'm going to film the studio, if you see work that is done, the studio is quite huge and they do gowns and gowns and wedding gowns and evening stuff, and of course SA is different from here most of their gowns go for, I think their cheapest is maybe 250 thousand 300, they can go up to 500, 600 thousand, but the people who stitch are 3, I don't know what to call them because I don't want to look down on women, because here (Kenya) it's men who stitch, they are 3 ladies. But the details and the detailing of what they can do! They specialize in corsetry which I also did and if you look at the details, the designer is the master cutter he has to make sure that his patterns are right before they go to production and so he has days that he has to be seen, because he has to do his own patterns. I think that is his strength and works with the brother who sometimes can oversee when he is busy with a client but he has days when he sees clients, he doesn't see clients everyday caz otherwise he will not have time to do his patterns. But the amazing thing is, that in the stitching room he has 4 machines; there's 1 in

one room, 2 in another, those are 3 and then where he makes his patterns just at the back there's one. He sits in it when the worst comes to worst or when he has to do a sample or something; you know those ladies sometime would say oh no, this won't work. So he practically sits on the machine to say this is it. So he makes sure he does, but he has 4 machines. Okay, there's the school and there's the studio. But in the school I see students come with (their own machines) because they don't stitch everyday and the work that these 4 people can do for me it's amazing, the input, right now I have 4 tailors but still when there's work, I still call in more, the 4 still let me down. So I'm wondering, I'm still in the process of working out, now as I go as I finish we are going to work more on the actual production how to make the turnaround, how do you work in such a way that you know if I have this, how do I cost it to make it be cost effective, how does it make business sense.

Work information

Q: Where do you operate? How would you describe the scale of your business?

A: I have a shop where I operate from in South B shopping centre. Small scale because when I talk large scale, unless I have a ready to wear line where, you know, I do uniforms but I don't produce it when that happens then I outsource.

FUQ: Not medium scale?

A: Okay, how small is small? If you asked me, what I'm doing now I would really say it is small scale. Otherwise the people who are really still beginning are under, those ones are not there. They are not small scale, they are not medium scale, they are really not there. That's start up.

Okay, let me say medium. I am really not that small, let me say medium.

Q: Number of employees and machinery/ technology in use?

A: Like now I have 8 that is the total number.

FUQ: Maybe you can break down for me in terms of stitches, assistants, etc.

A: I just have 1 assistant then I have 2 girls who do the finishing and if I have accessories, the beading. The rest are the stitchers (5).

Q: What products do you produce and how do you produce them?

A: Made to measure, custom.

FUQ: you also do wedding

A: Yes, made to measure that's custom made. I'm actually starting now a ready to wear line I don't know how it will pick up, I've seen that the little, little things I've done that are so popular now that I'm out there in a shop, any time I do something, 1 or 2, very simple, I've started with simple dress but the response is amazing. You find that every week we have to sell something. Like now what I moved in the shop with I don't have, I have nothing. I have started now again.

FUQ: so your workshop the one you have in South B how is it? Is it like it has a display, kind of like a retail space or a normal workshop?

A: It is a normal workshop where customers will come and sit but then I have mannequins and that's what I use now to display and then people are like oh, whose is this? And because it's not really a fitted something it's a semi fit, somebody who flips in can fit in it.

Expertise of fashion Designers

Q: Do you normally employ Kenyan fashion designers?

A: No, I have never employed Kenyan fashion designers. I don't know of any who can be employed. I've had, like I take interns from KU but each and every one of them are always looking forward to either start their own business, most of them more often than not is to start their own business. So I do not know if there are really Kenyan fashion designers trained, who are looking for employment in our workshop that are otherwise they consider us small.

Like my assistant, is a girl I train her, someone who was interested in fashion but could not afford to go formally to school. So when it started it was just like, but she was very sharp; even when I go like the mentorship programmes that I do, when I come I think she is the beneficiary, sometimes I tell my people God, Viviane is benefiting everything! Because this is something to fall back to but they are not interested and the interest needs to be there. And I can tell you like even when we have like the last time we had a fashion show with the Israelis, when the Israelites were here, I wasn't in and the measurements Viviane took for people even my friends I'm sorry to say, the ones I left and I told them; please when people are taking measurements tell Viviane to take my measurements, when she went I think now they bullied her and she took measurements for everyone because my measurements are perfect so they used her and you know, it wasn't wrong. When Viviane had already picked up what I was doing now I employed her. Because I know she knows what I know and she can do what I do.

FUQ: that's interesting when you say fashion designers want to start their own labels as opposed to being employed since that's seems to be the sentiment with a lot of other designers

A: Personally I have never even gotten any who has come and they are trained and they want to be employed. Even the interns the ones they ask a lot of questions, they want to sit at the workshop, they want to see exactly what is done because they want to start their own. And then starting their own becomes a hitch again and they disappear somewhere.

Q: What level of education do they normally have?

A: University

FUQ: So at that time have they cleared university?

A: They are just about; they are in their 4th year or so. Actually by that they are going into their 4th year some are in the 4th year, just about to clear.

Q: How do you feel they perform on their jobs as fashion designers?

A: They are more theory than practical. This work is more and especially I think fashion is fashion, but if we have to really look at where you are practicing it, if you go to Rome you do as the Romans do, I think if you are here, you had better be more practical than theory, so if you have a lot of theory and nothing practical it doesn't really work to your advantage.

Q: Do you feel their education impacts their performance of the job?

Q: What is your opinion of the education offered to fashion designers in Kenya?

A: I would be unfair to say zero but I believe it's somewhere, the general knowledge, I mean now that I've actually gone out there and seen proper fashion, I'm telling you sometimes I text my friends I'm like, "this guy today I tell you if he was in Kenya I mean the girls I've seen, the sales, 2 million!"

FUQ: Per day?!

A: If somebody is selling 5 gowns that you can see going and it is packed. And it is 560,000, it 500,000 how much is that? How much money is that? So, even if you remove costs and what, it will still come to 100 and something in a day; yea.

FUQ: so which areas do you feel fashion in Kenya could improve on?

A: For fashion design, I don't know, pattern making should be included, should be part of a fashion designer's even if for some reason they think they wouldn't do it, you see once you go out there, I do a lot of patterns for me it's really easy so if somebody trains them to do patterns, you don't have to be the one doing patterns it will be easy to train somebody else and let them do it on your behalf, that is lacking.

I don't know if entrepreneurship is also part of it because you really must know because if all you have to think of is business, and we have to think like business people, then we must leave with at least an ABC of even book keeping, yea. If you are leaving out there and you know you are going I'm going to do my business even if somebody is going to employ you, you are going to practically maybe in a fashion house so if you left there with no pattern making skills and this person is going to rely on you, you know he as the designer they expect you to be the one to know the design. So if you cannot, if you are leaving as a designer to go to Kenyatta market to look for somebody to help you it beats the purpose.

Q: How would you compare fashion design education in Kenya to the fashion education offered in other parts of the world?

A: I don't know what percentage to give us but I attended some fashion event for some school and the students are able to research and their mood boards, and they can do all that and before the garment comes to the catwalk, the story behind it is so beautiful, I mean you wait with your mouth and eyes open to see this garment with such a beautiful story and then it comes out and your heart sinks. Why do you tell such a beautiful story on nothing? You've done your research it's beautiful but the execution is not there; the choice of fabric zero, everything about it, zero. So this fashion was only in pen and paper, fashion is not pen and paper it's practical. I didn't watch Project Runway (the international one) and I saw the last one this time, the person who won did not know how to sketch, every time they did something it's a lady who didn't know but she had it practically so her sketches I understand every time she tried she was frustrated she cried most of the times because she couldn't but what she could do that the judges could see practically was wow. So she won, but the people who could write and do a beautiful story, fashion can not only be in paper, it has to be I think there has to be something for the eye to see, however simple. You see other designers making it somebody is on the catwalk and they've done simple stuff and people see and it is wow, until it is seen there. When you are still writing, not many people would understand, when they are still listening to your story about your collection, they may not understand until they see it practically, so when they see it they relate with it and say ok, this could be it.

FUQ: so basically what you are saying, there is a disjoint between the theory and translating it into the practical so that it can be seen and is executed perfectly

A: Yes

So, I don't know, maybe our colleges and people who are starting up the fashion colleges they also need to either go to school or they need to it's just like because even that school, it is like business for them, it's a business startup so you find people like even the interns that I take they know they are going into being business so they ask; how do you do this, how do you go about this? So they need also to research and if possible just see what happens, I don't think that happens, here is I have money, I can pay for premises I can lift my phone and call Esther you did fashion, can you take this? Yes, I think I can teach that, can you do this? Then that's it. Once you've been trained, they have their program once their program is out, they don't care what you do after that program. Whether the world or the industry out there can absorb you, that is none of their business, it is the next intake. So I think that kind of research for people who have a fashion institution they should do it and there should also be like an exchange if possible an exchange program when somebody is still within the school. Even attachments if possible, send them for attachments out there so that they can benefit.

Q: Do you feel education plays a part in the level of success of a fashion designer?

A: Yes it does, it does. Because yes it's practical, but sometimes information would also help; you may not know how to do patterns but I'm sure because you know the guidelines of the dos and don'ts, your education will at least help you, I mean you wouldn't just do certain things. People without education have done horrible things in fashion that if only they were educated and trained and had a bit of knowledge they wouldn't have started, they wouldn't have made such kind of startups. So for me education is important. I know they say artists are born but even if you are born an artist, there has to be a bit of polishing.

Q: What areas of expertise does a fashion designer need to have to succeed?

A: Pattern making, business, merchandising; it all has to relate.

Q: How do you maintain and enhance high levels of expertise and skills as a fashion designer?

A: I think it's from time to time I didn't stop from my Woodvale training. Like this business is from April it picks up and is very busy, so I've always made it like a point, I have to and now I don't know, maybe when I go to SA something else will come up or I will be linked up to another designer, I have kept on, I'm on my toes, I have learnt I'm always learning and learning and learning because fashion is always new, if I stayed where I was that okay I was trained then I think maybe I would have been completely stuck but I think you have to consistently train I think it's like law, lawyers they say the Kenyan law changes so if you find lawyers who are practicing for them to renew your certificate there's some course that you have to go for every year I don't know whether it's a week so for you to keep practicing you have to keep training.

FUQ: true, which exists in every area of life

A: Yes, they say practice makes perfect. Even I in just singing, I could have been given this angelic voice and I could sing but if you fail to sing for one year you just can't open your mouth and hack it.

FUQ: true, in fact if you look at people who are great at what they do, they practice a lot, in fact the greater they are, the more they practice

A: The more they practice, look at the people who run, how come they practice? Much as we know this one will get the Gold, going out there for Gold, look at what they do; they wake up others wake up at 4 am and it is every day.

Success Factors

Q: What challenges do fashion designers in Kenya face?

A: Of course the workforce.

FUQ: there is a lack of it or?

A: There's a lack of it. I don't know whether to say there's a lack of it or like because like now you may find somebody who has a beautiful workshop, they have work to do but no tailors. Not that tailors are not there, they are out there somewhere but I don't know why the disconnect and I think there's one area that also we lack in; wanting to do, not that I'm out of it, me being one of them I've always anyone even like the people I mentor anybody I tell them please specialize, because when you do, you will not have this problem of tailor what and if you don't when you are getting in people to work for you which is what I do now, get to know their strengths. You can't be an expert in doing jackets and wedding dresses and chiffon, so that your work can be set in such a way that you have your tailor in their area of strength then that would be perfect, that is you are doing everything. Otherwise specialize because when I say for example I only specialize in casual outfits or these loose fit, I will tailor make my finishing so that everybody who joins Peggy, yea, they know this is Peggy's finishing even one of the employees can train them, because they already know. But if today Peggy will make a beautiful evening chiffon and this guy is already trained and this is what they know, then the following day Peggy comes with raincoats and they want to start trying again, and so it's like you are in business but you are always trying out something new. It's good to try something new within your strength, within what you do. I think it makes work a little bit easier but a jack of all trades within is a little challenging.

Q: What, in your opinion, makes a fashion designer successful?

A: For me number 1 Esther, training has to be there and for them to be trained business mind I think you know like also has to be there. A proper organization and set up of a workshop has to be there this also contributes to the success of a fashion designer. To also have a well trained staff either from out there or from within you, you are able to train them, that also would also contribute to the success.

Q: What aspects and practices do you observe to ensure your business stays successful?

A: Like I've said before, I've always trained and retrained and retrained. And I also think I am like I am my own master cutter. I have challenges just like any other person, today this good tailor then tomorrow they will want to let you down but I have stuck to my pattern making that anyone else would come and I would tell them just join my pieces, join this, join this, at no point have I completely relied on a tailor that I did this wow design and I cannot be able to repeat it because the tailor who knew how to do it went or left. No, no, I have a pattern if it is something that I have to do I will go back to it. If it is something new and challenging I'm still in a position to make, so that for me has been a big plus.

FUQ: anything else?

A: I think also to have the assistant, to be able to, the kind of assistant I already got another one who I still want to take through the same process, train them and if possible employ them. The fact that I have employed somebody I have trained myself has also you know contributed to the success, I have seen a lot more stability in having such kind of a person and it has made my work now a little easier I mean when I travel, it's with such ease, of course there are challenges but as a person now you know I think I'm more relaxed.

Economical Factors

Q: How is the state of the Kenyan economy and does that affect your business?

A: Well, the state of the Kenyan economy now, as we all know, is not that good but I think since I deviated and went into more wedding and special clothes it hasn't affected me that much as I would say, what has affected me is not even the state of the economy as such because when somebody is getting married they are getting married whether the country going are getting married and they want to wed what has actually affected is the imports really where somebody would think okay I want to import rather than tailor make but with that line, with the line for wedding and doing something special and different you know, other than the simple, simple things of the line that I am saying I want to start you know, that I am waiting the response.

FUQ: So it doesn't affect you that much?

A: Not that much.

Q: Do changes in the world economy affect your business?

A: Yes. Because you see like now, there's really like when you talk about the wedding outfits the fabric is not there, you have to import these fabrics. With the economy like now if you look at the world economy, if things would go up then again that now, it kind of you casts the line because I know what I do, I know my clientele, I know what they can afford, and for you to come all of a sudden to say now this is the market rate out there, it becomes a bit of a problem, everything becomes so expensive that it kind of cuts you off.

Q: Does the economy affect the purchasing power of your customers?

A: Yes it does.

FUQ: So that's the Kenyan economy, world economy?

A: I think that is the Kenyan economy because then, what has happened of late, you find people coming to make outfits only because there is this special function. Otherwise just because they want to look smart, they wouldn't consider because I mean that is the last thing somebody wants to think about, the 1st priority will be to take my child to school, to pay my house rent, at least to eat so that I don't go hungry, that is the time somebody would consider do I want a new outfit, yea, but when they have this special function that they must attend and they are told, dress African, and they don't have that, now that's when they are forced. Times have changed so much that gone are the days when somebody would just want to say, "Every month I want to do 2 outfits just to look nice." Not many people do that, not anymore.

FUQ: So does the world economy affect the purchasing power of your customers?

A: Yes it does, they are related, it's the same thing.

Q: What measures do you put in place to counter the effects of the economy on your business?

A: You see like now what I have done for me, because of those like the special outfits for those special occasions, I would rather use fabric that is not of that high quality but make sure that there is a twist of creativity that would still keep you in the business that one now creativity would count otherwise, then I think you will be out, you will be thrown out. Because everybody wants something that is quality but when world, the economy is low or when it's down now my purchasing power has kind of been affected in turnover, then I would still use what I would call

ordinary but balance it with the twist of now the creativity so we are balanced, the fabric may not be that high end but the twist that is in it is what makes it work.

How much do you earn, are you able to earn 50k, how much do you earn, 100, 120, I can't tell you that, this is how much I earn.

FUQ: so even in a year the turnover is not consistent?

A: It's not. In fact me, if you ask me what is your turnover I would not know. I would know, I don't know how I would know, I don't know if it's the fear because I'm looking at my graph, some months are good some months are not so good. Enoch (her son) is an accountant; he keeps my books so I guess if I really wanted to know I would know. Because every month we close, and I'm like what if he tells me we didn't make any money?

FUQ: it's better to know than to not know

A: Bags sell. There is a guy who makes for me clutch bags, he's so good, just out of remnants of fabric, and people buy! I carried some last year when I went to South Africa. It's just that now maybe that was an opportunity in fact there's that Kitenge, that Leso, kwanza the ones for lesos, I sold lesos for 500, no for 1500. And me I just bought it for, kwanza they were those nylon ones that were 170.

Political Factors

Q: How do political events like the elections and change in government affect your business?

A: Change in government, yes you know it depends like once in awhile there are things that we do that are already in the system, sometimes I do uniforms and then there is the portal. When a new person comes it's almost like even with the vetting and the like you are automatically out. You really have to look, people say we are a phone call away from Obama, but you have to look for who knows who until that phone call gets there then you are taken aback. It means that that area of income you really have to go through the vetting and more often than not, it means that a political change, a new government in, with their new people, if you are not in their books, if you are not, it's like poaching, you know you work with somebody and they work very well, a new management is coming a new MD comes and they want to come with a team when that changes just know that that is out. Should you be able to get less you know that would be good luck, there are lots of disadvantages you know that come with it. And even just generally, the people you know that are around you, the connection is not even only on what you get from the government, you may find that you have a big clientele that are heavily connected to the government, when there are political changes, and this guys for some reason again everything around them changes and that you know affects your business.

And then again it also affects the purchasing power. People are so cautious like before the new government is stable, no one wants to spend. You know fashion is leisure it's like people take it like it's leisure, so no one would really want to like spend in that way, it's like let me reserve what I have now, for better use or for what they look at as necessities, until everything else is stabilized. And remember by the time they are thinking let's not spend until you know the government is steady, you, you need them to spend for your business to stay afloat so you are hit, that's where you are hard hit. I think I'd even mentioned before that nobody wants to think about

you until they've paid their rent, until their school fees is paid, until you know, that's when somebody can say now let me take a holiday. That's how people sometimes see fashion.

Q: What are the strengths and weakness of the policies currently in place in Kenya, which can increase the level of success in fashion businesses?

A: Do we have any? Okay I know there's a document the new government and also the Kibaki government, I don't know if this government will continue with it but they've realized that art is the way to go and a lot more has come so now, there is a particular ministry even if has not been tailor made, but at least there's an opening and there's a government that has actually realized that you know, art is the future and they've realized something in art. So they've specifically tailored something and even considered you know like the artists, the musicians, the fashion designers which long before was never heard of. So if this works, I believe maybe specifically there's going to be a ministry that would, but already it's there, yes, what are they called?

FUQ: Ministry of arts and culture or something like that?

A: Yes

FUQ: have you felt any changes from it yet?

A: Not yet, I haven't felt any impact that has come. ACTIF has started something with the colleges, with the universities also something to do art, a centre of excellence, it's in the progress and they are looking for funding and I think that that would also be another big thing that designers would because they've also realized that there's a gap and that something was lacking you know. So with this centre of excellence, you will be taken through like the business plan, the entrepreneurship the whole package so that we are not lacking so even if you've done your

education, you've done whatever it is, whatever it takes, the centre of excellence will be there for you, you know, like to clean you up and just to direct you in the right direction.

FUQ: so this will be tailored to fashion designers?

A: Yes, it will be tailored to fashion designers; right from, it's just like the way you know ACTIF cotton and apparel, from farm to fashion.

Q: Which policies currently in place hinder fashion business in Kenya?

A: No, that if this policy was removed, you see where we are if you asked me, I think we are neither here or there's that one I'm saying for culture and arts which we haven't felt but if that one was not there, in those 2 questions I would have rather I would have said we are neither here nor there. There's no policy that you can say this is what is hindering us that if this was removed then business would be better or there's this policy that is in place that is making fashion thrive.

FUQ: so basically we have no policies tailored to fashion designers

A: No, there are no policies tailored to fashion designers because if you look at where people talk of heavy duty on things imported from China, so we can't we don't have the right fabrics, let me tell you it's just that our eyes are blinded to what we have. Whatever we have right here even if I just decided let me go to Thika where people do hand woven, you would do beautiful stuff with that! And you would actually thrive on what you don't have to import, to really thrive in business here. And there are people anyway who maybe would now do like the importation, as a fashion designer you don't really have to rely on imports for you to thrive. You can just go to Mombasa and decide okay, Mali ya Abdala here we come and this is good. And that way you can still be able to turn it into something.

FUQ: what is Mali ya Abdala?

A: It is a Kanga, but now they do lots of African prints but it's just a label that you know the moment you mention Mali ya abdala that is when somebody thinks okay, that is quality. People related it with quality but it's not anymore, I saw Mali ya Abdala in Dubai. I had to look and say eh, he, tena imeandikwa Kanga nzito ya Kenya.

FUQ: they produce it at the coast?

A: They used to produce it at the coast, not even at the coast actually Mali ya Abdala 1st production was in India then in some Thika these factories that are now closed. But because they also faced completion, there were these ones from Tanzania and people love what is cheap so for their lesa to be up there and expensive they were not making money so now they also produced from China. In fact now you find the Mali ya Abdala that Kanga, yes it's bigger, the quality is a little heavier but it runs, it never used to run, yea. Now even them it's cheaper, yes it will be written Mombasa what, what, what, but they produce from China.

FUQ: there is mention of this policy for local sourcing in government, is it still in place?

A: Yes it is still in place, I think I don't know whether they have not gotten the right people in place or they've just not got the right thing for it to kick off

FUQ: so the local sourcing is not working?

A: It's not working. But I think it is not working because of society; we don't believe in what is local, we really have no idea that there are people coming from wherever. Did I tell you like, one time I went to Arusha for a meeting and somebody tells me, oh there is this place with nice fabrics, with chiffons, they have linens even if you have beautiful chiffons now that you are here

and I can't remember the day of the week when usually they restock, you know, that they get their stuff I don't know from Indonesia, and we went, and when we went I don't know how lucky I was, the truck was just offloading from Nairobi. So it's now again the general perception of everyone else, I see it, I see it like there is a client, you know, somebody walks in and you show them fabrics and you tell them this one is from Accra but this one is from town, the one from town even if it is beautiful all they can do is pick it and place in a different whatever because the one from Accra is the one that will be opened out. But even this one, if you realize okay this is now the scenario, and because the other one was not there you decide for me to move this fabric now that all have to come from Accra, oh really, all of a sudden it becomes this beautiful something.

FUQ: but let me ask you, could there be a reason why this perception is there?

A: Because long before, really long before when we had factories like Kikomi even what Kikomi had that was the best was never sold locally, it was exported. What was left for local consumption was that ginger, everything that our factories produced that was for local consumption was the poor quality, they exported the best and left us with poor quality so I think that went on and of course people started travelling and seeing what is out there and then comparing. But times have changed; times have changed that even now here you can get something that is good. I remember one time, Barrack had gone to the US and some of his friends they went and bought suits, those days of I think Raymond, and then the suits were really nice. But when they got back to the room with them and they saw made in Kenya they were running to take them back. But you see they already saw and liked and bought, but they returned just because they saw the label Made in Kenya. But it was that quality (high) that actually it actually was befitting the market otherwise they won't allow it in the market.

FUQ: do you think there is a way we can change that perception?

A: If now our factories are revived, if we could like now these factories that are not working if they could be revived, and then we still categorize, we let everything in the market but we just categorize and say this is cheap, just the same way China is doing; there's grade, there's grade 2, there's grade 3, yes it's local but this is grade 1, this grade 2 so if you want to go for a lower grade, fine if you want to go to a higher grade, fine. But I think that one needs proper, proper education because it's really a wound within that is so deep.

FUQ: but what about designers is there anything we can do to change that? Because I am assuming that affects business in away.

A: It does, it does I think then that's how people now stopped trying so what do I do, there's nothing that I will tell you is local. I don't know if you know a designer called, she's next to Yaya, Kinoti, she is also very pricey, and how is she pricey, she gets hers fabrics from India and Indonesia. She doesn't travel, she doesn't go with you but she's realized this is how to sell. So it is forcing people you know, because I can't be able to start now be the one convincing people that even local is good, let me join the band wagon of it has come from wherever for me to be able to sell and sail through.

FUQ: and what about the hype of made in Kenya, made in Africa?

A: Now, I think it's very unfortunate that the made in Kenya and the made in Africa is thriving out there, it hasn't hit the Kenyan, it hasn't kicked. People out there really like and appreciate. In SA someone told me they watched a documentary of people where they were doing the hand woven Kikoi and they were telling me, please next time when you are coming, please. But a

hand woven Kikoi to a Kenyan, made in Kenya has not started to make sense for the Kenyan. It is making a lot of sense for the designers but to our consumers it's growing very slowly.

FUQ: so there's no campaign we can do to change this perception?

A: Imagine we would, if designers got together. Because really look at what even if Lalesso twisted what she did, she still thrives with it there like made in Kenya

FUQ: they no longer produce in Kenya, do they?

A: No they don't

FUQ: but they still call it made in Kenya?

A: They still call it made in Kenya because I think that is the name that sells. Can you imagine a made in Kenya selling for somebody and putting them on the map. They can't change otherwise and say anything else.

Ecological Factors

Q: Sustainability, environmental and social conscious design is on the rise worldwide. How do you incorporate this into your business?

A: You know what, it's on the rise like for example through ACTIF again, I have gone for the training for ecological, social what they call their CSR and all, even that again hasn't quite hit us, but it is something very good and very good because it is important for people to practice because you never know, for example now, if you do not practice that, for example if I get maybe like an order to the EU if I have no idea what it means about eco fashion and

environmentally friendly what, you are asked and you have no idea, you will not sell, I mean it will not even go anywhere. I don't know how many people went for the training because they stayed here for awhile because they realized, they said, we were shown like documentaries where they used to work in India you know the harsh conditions like those sweatshops and even now even us, like the shop I went I told my friend, if there were health people still visiting, you know they used to do that a long time ago it stopped, your shop will be shut down. She had a toilet I even took photos, I can't even describe it, and you couldn't go in you have a toilet within your room for the tailors imeandikwa usikojoe nje ya choo mjinga wewe. You are closing, usikunye hapa, on the wall. And the floor had kind of come off and I think the tailors would pee and you could not walk in without your nose blocked. And she said I don't care, they are the ones who use it. The smell, the stench, somebody would actually lock you out and if somebody maybe gave you an order even if you did something that was as beautiful as what, if they happen to visit you and saw the spaces where it was produced, zero.

FUQ: yes, because that's your image

A: Yes, it is your image

It is a good thing to do but I think the practice has come because European countries, they sourced a lot in other parts of the world and then they realized that what they used to do and what they were bringing food on their table was actually taking someone else to the grave and so like it wasn't right. Kenyans have not practiced it. Not so many people, like even me, we are in a whole training group with even people from KAM (Kenya Association of Manufacturers) and when everyone was asked, what is CSR you know, it's giving back to society. So for them CSR is not giving back to the society it is your environment.

It has not affected us because not so many of us have got the opportunity where direct somebody wants to with somebody who produces ecologically and the guys are they in Mombasa or Karen the people who do flip flop

FUQ: they re in Karen flip-flop company

A: Yes, you see like now what they do, they are like cleaning the environment so they already saw that and that is already a hit but when you look at us fashion designers, not many of us have thought that way and so not many people are aware so it doesn't quite affect us because no one is actually looking for it.

Q: Do you ever face challenges resulting from customers insisting on only purchasing sustainable products?

A: No but yes I think with the training I would be ready

Q: Are there any regulations on ecological factors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in) that affect your business?

A: No

Technological Factors

Q: Which technology/technologies do you use in your business?

A: None, I am so analog with everything and I am telling you it works to my disadvantage. Because believe you me so many people have said of course at the back of my mind I've thought like any other designer people will copy. When I was in SA I met okay a designer who worked

the same way, beachy couture, she's very good with what she does and she said, how I am going to put my work on Facebook for people to copy, and she fought it for so long until finally she realized it's actually to her advantage. When somebody believes in you and in your product, they don't want somebody else to do it, yea, so it places you on the map. So for her it's to her advantage but she didn't know it is only now that she is taking that advantage. The business that even comes, she's does something, she tries something, she's already taken a photo, guys get ready and people are commenting and people want to see the final product because you are like already, they already have the psyche, which otherwise she didn't believe in.

If you'd asked me one of the disadvantages yes that would be one of the disadvantages in my, the way I work because it is the way to go. Tell me like do this, 3D, because those are the things, because even the ones now who want to do uniforms, I would sketch and I would look for somebody I would call now who was going to translate this because they want it in 3D and everything please put it in a flash disc the rest you will be like what am I doing at the computer/ I am in the fashion industry. Computers are for those employed in offices.

Q: How does using this technology contribute to your business success?

A: Yea, a lot of people have ruled me out; do you have a web page? No, a Facebook page, No. they want something to see, something to look at and that really can tell for sure you are doing something. And you are thinking Facebook they are going to copy, no, of course I remember Coco Chanel said there is no fashion without copying, there isn't that which comes that has never been seen, it's just tweaking a little bit what has been there so it is through copying that you are actually twisting something or seeing something, copying will be there and sometimes by the way as you are copied, when you come up with something and you see someone has

copied it, it makes you think, you want to think again and do something else and I don't know whether it happens with every designer, most of the time when you are doing something like when I am doing something, I struggle and I don't like what I'm doing and I really struggle with it and by the time it comes out and people are telling you it's nice then you see somebody copying it, you are like oh it is that good so then it excites you to want to try something and see if somebody else would copy it

FUQ: as they say, copying is the best form of flattery

A: Yes! It actually makes you feel like you mean?!

FUQ: because a lot of designers say copying is one of their biggest problems but for me I tend to disagree only I don't mention it out loud, but I enjoy being copied

A: Yes, it excites you! It makes you feel flattered. Copying it makes you think! It's satisfying in a way

FUQ: actually it is feedback; it is feedback telling you, you are doing something good.

Q: Is it important or necessary for a fashion designer to incorporate each new technology into their business to be successful?

A: Not each new, but at least new. Do not stay exactly where you are because if you do, you will stay irrelevant. I may say I don't have a website, I don't have a Facebook page, I don't use 3D because it may not affect me now. If I stay like this for another 2-3 years, then it doesn't matter whatever you do, I may be irrelevant. You may not be able to incorporate every new technology that comes but at least out of 3 pick 1, if not all pick 1. I'm sure when they are even 5 you'll pick 2, you wouldn't go without any that would help. It's like you are now telling me, someone says I

can't do computers I am not going to send an email, let me just write a letter and take it to the post office or send a telegram or I can't use a mobile phone I want to stay in land line. Somehow, with the new technology you will have to implement.

For me it is strange, can you let me do the business of clothes, don't keep me with emails. And it bugs you, you keep telling yourself I can't do this, I can't do this until you find yourself now you have to do it.

FUQ: so it's good if you can just learn it move on

A: You don't want to stay irrelevant

Financial Resources

Q: What financial challenges did you face when starting up and how did you overcome them?

A: Like for example the way I started my business I didn't have like a business startup you know like when you are starting a business, yes I had the knowhow, I could do everything, that really worked to my disadvantage because then you realize when you are doing everything it's not really production, it's not really what you call business, and that's how again you are trained to have the skills of what is meant to be a business and bringing in garments putting food on your table now becomes like a hobby because you didn't have now the financial support that you needed. But now with the years that I've done I don't know whether it was the lack of financial support, I think it was ignorance because if you asked me, you can just with 1 machine which everyone has, I believe you buy it when you are in school whatever, you can be able to start up business but there is this mentality that I cannot be able to hire somebody because I will not be

able to pay them. But if you look at, when you start growing, when you come in with the right knowledge and when you are not the one shopping, everywhere, you can create time for this one person, you can at least straight away start with 1 person and you will be able to pay them because they will be working. Why do you have work to do that you cannot even be able to produce because you have gone all round and the day goes and you are tired now you can't sit and stitch. You can imagine start with your shopping but let somebody else work.

I find fashion as one of the businesses that may not need so much capital to start, you would move on. Many are the times I remember retrenchment came and those days I think the only thing we knew was Kenyatta market and people who had taken golden handshake went to Kenyatta and they paid rent for 6 months and they pushed out other, you see they had the money, how come they couldn't last a year? And they had, if it was capital, they had it; hundreds of thousands to spend on the business, because it is something that grows. For me this business of fashion it's like a story to tell it' like a journey, even when it starts it can start small with 1 person and then from 1 it can just grow to 10 it's just that we haven't quite opened our minds so everyone is thinking I do not have the capital.

I remember it was so difficult to get me out of my machine. Of course there was the perfection bit of it I thought I was the perfect one but then I thought if I came out of the machine it would mean now this money I get, I'm going to share it with someone else, if I only get so much and I do and you don't realize that you are not able to do 20 outfits in a month, because already you have your other engagements but if you put somebody there for sure if you have a machine and there's a tailor and with your skills you can do a pattern here and there I don't think you need to go to the bank even to get a loan. We should take loans when we've already seen the direction we are taking. That way then, it works. Taking a loan without direction, yes you will get money

but it will go under and then you will want to take another one and another one and you are not able to repay, your machines auctioned and over. I want to believe that for me, what I have seen within the industry and within the growth however little that I have done, I think loan is necessary for the growth but not for starting up because then when I take a loan I know exactly where I'm going to be putting this money, I have travelled if I go to Bangkok I know exactly where I am going, I know exactly what I'm buying, I'm not going to research and chance where most people when they are asking for money for business startups, then they are okay, if I went here, do you think I will really, they are taking loan to start to chance, then it doesn't work. Because that way when you already know your direction when you get a big order and I don't have the money, that's when I should be looking for the loan because the order is there.

FUQ: and the order will pay for the loan

A: Yes the order is going to pay but to start a business that you know nothing about, don't bother over financial startup. For me I would say it was the lack of knowledge and exposure because there was no one again to tell you, please move out of the machine have this person, do this; you will give this more time and you will be able to make money this way and you will start your growth from this point.

FUQ: like a mentorship?

A: Yes, like a mentorship

FUQ: do we have that now?

A: No we don't. We don't because 1, but I think now we are there. The only thing is just like we've talked of Deepa, nobody knows her, she's making it in the business. So anyone who wants

to start would not think of Deepa. I have gone for other mentorship programmes nobody knows me and nobody knows that other bit of me and so nobody would maybe want to come to me. So everyone is running to Kiko, to kaveke, to Lucy, they are overwhelmed. And they've also had experiences that they don't want to do it again. So people are there but they are not known. None of who really in the industry I think there's somebody to walk you through the ABC and place you somewhere it's just that the exposure is not there and I think we need to get to know who is there but how that is also going to happen Esther I think is a little bit tricky because nobody believes I can do it until they read about me in the newspapers. So as long as there is no story of me in the newspaper, even if you say Peggy can do Men's, no, they will not go. But I believe now there are people, it is not like what it was before. But of course now with the digital world, Google is a friend, you Google anything,

FUQ: but you know Kenya is a unique market in fact we face it in any anything, any industry will tell you Kenya is very unique, we are what Sunny Bindra always says, peculiar Kenyan is very true. We have peculiar habits, so what is in Google might not necessarily work in the ground. For example the way you are saying if I go to Google and I say I want to start a fashion business they'll tell you, you need a seamstress, you need a cutter, you need let's say a space for your machinery and stuff like that but 1, am I going to have money to pay for that space and all that? And even if I do as you say, the peculiarities of our seamstresses and tailors, will I be able to work with one successfully? You know those are the things YOU are telling me that will make a big difference as opposed to me going to Google. Google is the basics, it will tell me the basics but after that, that peculiarity will only come with me working with someone who has experienced it. So that's the difference with Kenya. Even a lot of foreigners will come here and they are like whoa, I didn't expect that. So I think mentorship is very important.

A: I think now from schools, the institutions should have, KU invited me when they were changing their new curriculum and I told them it is their duty to look for designers out there, to look for people out there, it doesn't have to be that big name and then place their students because again, and I gave the example of the same Kiko because Kiko will always be Kiko and I will be me, Rialto will be Rialto, even if it is Monica, name it, the designers Patricia Mbela has that gift of artistry and all and so if every time you send people out and you only send to Kiko, they will come back the same so your institution will be an extension of Kiko somehow. So it's their responsibility to look for who again is out there, whether the students want to or not, force them, then you tell them 3 you are going to Peggy, you are going to Catherine, there's another one called Karim, you will go there,

FUQ: so it should be a mandatory part of the curriculum?

A: Yes. But you see they let them go and look for themselves so once they decide, they find a whole bunch of them at Rialto. But then Lucy says no, at the moment I don't want to take anyone, then they are stranded; now who else, because they don't know.

Q: How do you address the issue of financial restraints in the day to day running of your business?

A: Do I really have that? Please come again.

FUQ: Just for example; you have a big order but you do not have money. It could be something else for some it could be a struggle just to get money for transport to the workshop.

A: That example you have given, it's again the networking that I have between me and fellow designers that at times you run you explain to somebody, you know finances are also very tricky

and if it is something that has come that is abrupt, initially it was something easy you just quote and say I need 50% before of this amount. Actually we would do 70, I need 70% down payment before and then 30% on delivery. Quite a few people work that way there are people who do the 50% so immediately they give you the 50% you cannot be financially constrained you will be able to deliver. But there are people who specifically tell you they will pay you 60 days after delivery and then when they are credible people, that with just the networking I can say even without mentioning names that a few fashion designers, friends who are in the industry and who have done they understand. They know for sure that there is this, just on trust, then if you don't have they will bail you out because they know there is money that is coming in. but there are people who if they are credible even you, you know for sure that is a credible company then you will go that way. But if it is just somebody, Esther has gotten some uniforms somewhere and I don't trust, I will insist, I need 70% down payment. If I don't get I don't do the work. Some would agree on 70, some would give you 50%

And that is also something that would also just in the day to day, there are so many people, I have a store with clothes to the ceiling that either people didn't pick, I am not able to trace the owners because I felt okay fine, this is just fabric and it is 4 thousand I don't want to take 2 thousand and another 2 thousand so you will say, oh I'm okay, I am flexible. It's okay once you bring your own fabric just you know, and so for some reason they brought 3-4 and it's already 15000 or 16000 and they think that it's expensive, imagine others don't mind just dumping the fabric. And they don't come for it, and you call and it is one story after another. You insist, 50% down payment. So that kind of solves what it is, you don't end up piling.

FUQ: it will even help you with breaking even

A: Yes it will make you break even because even if I lose as a person I will not have paid my tailor or my space out of my pocket.

FUQ: and I think that will also make you get the serious clients

A: Yes, it does. And you tell them we do not, someone tells you I do not have money now can I send you, yes send via Mpesa and before you get this Mpesa you are not for sure enough and you keep reminding them; your event is, I have not started, I have not received any down payment so I am not actually starting the work.

Q: What avenues then, can a fashion designer utilize to ensure continuous cash flow in the business?

A: You need from time to time, you see now I don't know what else works. Now that is where a loan, that is where a fashion designer needs financial support either through a financial institution because the business is already there, I assume, you already know what direction it's taking, you may have just fallen short; somebody hasn't paid here or I know when this comes I will be able to balance. But you need this amount of money to work now, I maybe gotten this order and somebody is going to pay me 60 days later and it's something that is good so that is where I actually need financial support. Once or twice I have taken a loan from my bank, from Barclays bank.

FUQ: for you they don't have an issue of giving you a loan? Because so many designers say, "I even had an order, I showed them and they said no".

A: I have taken a loan from Barclays bank.

FUQ: Any other avenues of getting financial support apart from loans, apart from asking family?

A: Yes there's family, of course there's family loan that would get where somebody would get . It is the best loan even that I have taken because when I'm travelling. Why I say it is the best, because I will get my lump sum, whatever I want, and pay without interest. And there's no interest accruing even if you delay.

FUQ: so there are no avenues to getting financing, for example Monica said she won a fashion award and she used the prize money as part of the capital to start. So we don't have that kind here?

A: We don't have that kind of anything, and even if it will come, like now what's happening for designers there's opportunity; things that I didn't see happening are happening now like there was that REDDS competition, you remember, and this is basically for like there was that student category and whatever it is, the money somebody won was to buy a machine, was to help start up a business. But you see, there can only be one winner and how many people would want to start up like businesses? But at the moment there is nothing. I don't know if designers would also get together the way you see there's what and then there is a youth fund, yea, the designers who are youth through the youth fund if they got together then through the youth fund they can get a start up even us there's also the women fund. We could still be women an association of fashion design, so here we are we are these women and in that way we can make use of the funds.

FUQ: my only reservation there is the way designers tend not to work together

A: I think when it comes to money they would because everyone says money, money this, money, money that, I think they would. Because if I look at designers, then we'll be cut off; where else is a designer going to benefit in the youth fund because you see like now what the youth are doing, most of them what I see them with start up business, are farmers they've gone

into like farming, you must be doing business like you are in a group and with people of like mind, so unless designers come in that circle.

FUQ: what about a designer's chama?

A: A designer's chama would be like what now we have what I call AFAD the association?

FUQ: where we do monthly contributions and then people would be able to get money from it, like a designer's sacco

A: Yes like a designers sacco, organized nicely and yes.

FUQ: would that work?

A: Yes, I think it would work

Q: Has there been anything like that in existence?

A: Nothing; when we started the association, we were so you know, for us to get financing and you know the bickering, I gave, so and so didn't give, and I don't know who gave who didn't give. Unless we pick another direction me I don't know.

Q: How does your product life cycle and product distribution affect the performance of your product?

FUQ: for you does that apply?

A: Not really because I have not started ready to wear I am doing custom made. Of course I know if there were people doing ready to wear they would be aware. And somebody, I met a Lebanese designer who told me something very interesting; I love it here! I like Dubai for one

thing, you know for the things that they bring, he does couture, I even followed him to his shop because there was a dress that was so nice I was interested a simple lace, already done with the lace, so I went with him to and he wrote for me a card and directed me where to buy the lace. And the dress was 3400 Dirham. If you do that by 24 the dress is seventy something-sixty something thousand then I said out of this sixty, even the fabric that was put inside is at Diamond Plaza, I touched. So when I went to the shop, his was a Green lace with like Gold, shimmering, so when I went the Green was not there so he said that is why I love this place; 1 client can buy the same thing from me, just changed a little and the design is the same because the fabric is forever different you can't get fabric that is the same! So for him, then I said God, this is what works to our disadvantage it is to his advantage. Because he said, if every time I walk to this shop and get this green lace, and people came and there is green lace, then they would think the dress is not moving but I do it in green and next week it is the red they think it is a different dress it is the same thing in a different color. He said I love it here because you can never get the same thing over and over! So he says the fact that he can be able to get different items works for his advantage. Okay, when he started it was to his disadvantage because he used to feel like whenever people would be oh, I got this last time do you still have this and he says no, here we do special we don't repeat. So people picked it, it will never work to my disadvantage again; if somebody asks I say no, we don't repeat. So you have the same client. And then I looked at, what worked to my advantage then, I had the Esther Ny'ong'os and they would come with people from the office and every time when I am travelling I would tell them. When I arrive even if what I brought they haven't made, they could still take the fabrics and write checks of 60000, 120000, just because it was different. And then I also thought if I brought Blue silk, and then I went and came back with Blue silk and she had bought Blue silk you know she is not going to

buy again. But the moment they see a different one, so you have the same people coming to you there's different because you are bringing different, not knowing you went there and you just couldn't get. So when the guy said it I said ah ha, you have just taught me something.

FUQ: he's cracked that retail problem.

A: Yes, he's cracked that retail problem because that has also been one of our biggest problems especially if somebody needs like it is a big order and then you are like now I cannot be able to get this back and he's even when you get to the office he has a special touch. He doesn't repeat. And at the end of the book huko mwisho he says he may repeat but in a year or so, because and he says even in that year or so the same fabrics usually come back but in that year or so, so then he is sure. But he says when he has like a big order, he has done uniforms for a hotel in Dubai he says that one he goes straight to China, so he's always assured but for just his ready to wear line even him he doesn't want to see the same thing, once it's done, it's over. And he has only 2 designs for the whole year; the same thing, a dress here now has a hole you see the next one it doesn't have, you can't think it is the same thing and then the color changes, and he does that the whole year with different fabrics. Then into the next year, God.

Available Resources

Q: Are your sources/suppliers of material and services reliable?

A: No, they are not. So that is what I just said can work to our advantage now, doesn't matter. Something comes and it is different.

FUQ: but now for example you do weddings and I'm sure brides and bridesmaids are very particular. So maybe you require a certain fabric. So do they normally come and tell you this is what I want or do they come and you tell them this is what I have, you choose from here.

A: This is what I have, choose from here. If we don't have, I have this one stop shop where we can get. But I have realized that now the brides are particular but they are flexible because if this is what is in the market, I have seen where some are even flexible they change their color schemes. Somebody would say okay, I am purple or Blue, like I have somebody who is blue, green and I don't know red so tells you, get me even a blue, green and red chiffon in a variety so they are kind of that sometimes the reality sinks in and they are like okay, if this is what is available and this is what I can be able to get and they cannot the cost again of exporting is expensive so they would be able to like twist and work with what is there. But like for bridesmaids and all, as far as fabric and availability and variety, it's there.

Q: Does this affect the success of your products?

A: Yes, sometimes. The only time Esther it affects is not really, the ones who are totally able but if they can't then of course you lose the order; they will be like if you can't get it then there are people who'll tell you I have time, yea, like somebody who comes to you now and their wedding is in August, if you are not able to get this they would rather and able they say we are going to import.

Q: How can the situation be improved?

A: The situation again by being improved, whether you call it a fashion association or a fashion sacco you know we can be able to really solve this problem. Yes there is importation of fabrics, but China is just here. And then China has its limits; china will tell you, you must buy a roll. Now people shop with international colors in mind or colors of the year you know these are the

colors most likely. As designers if we got together, I may not be able to buy 10 rolls of Red fabric or 10 rolls of Purple but if say we are 10 of us and a roll in China would cost like if it is chiffon a 1000 kenyan shillings, that means for each roll I'm only contributing a 1000 shillings and so with that you can be able to collectively bring in so much variety that can be able to serve because I can't say there's a fabric that is just exclusively me. Look at chiffons, how many people do chiffon; you walk here you get a yellow you walk to the next designer, how many designers do Kanga, how many? Don't we all walk to Memsaab and everyone is buying raw silk and you may find what you are doing with your raw silk and what I am doing with mine is totally different but the fabric is the same. So if we got together I think that in a way can solve part of the problem, it may not fully but part of it by togetherness. These guys who are at Nairobi Textiles, these Kikuyu women who are driving range Rovers, how did they start? That's how they started, sometimes you find them offloading, you can't believe! Those women have made it but not all of them go, I understand they are now in groups there chamas and they are chamas of I wonder why 9, they are in groups they are paired in 9, 9, 9.

FUQ: who started that?

A: They did. I don't know whether the first people who started they they were 9 and didn't take a 10th person and now the rest started; I don't know how the number 9 came. So what happens, if I go out of our group, if it's me going this time, if the ticket to China is 60 K you divide that 60 by 9 and you know exactly what you are going to get and they obtain accommodation for so many days by 9 so you can imagine how much they are producing and their fabrics usually are the same; you walk in here, walk in the next so all they know, we are bringing so many rolls. If for some reason I am bringing less I know exactly what it costs. The shipping would come, you make sure you know per cube, they know all that; how much it costs so they know we have to

jaza this cube for it to be able to be cheap. Instead of 9 of you; if the ticket was 60, 60x9 because everyone is going then the hotel accommodation x the 9 of you and then now you want to go stock and then you can't fill your own container and then you are charged the whole whether full or not you are charged full. So I think what they thought of was good. It's working for them. But here I see people saying oh, you know, I bought this chiffon and then Peggy saw she went and bought, really, if Peggy doesn't buy it somebody else will still buy it and it will still be Green and it will still be available in Memsaab. Somebody else even if they are not designers will still be able to go and buy it. And that would kind of partly solve. And then when somebody these are the available colors and of course we know the colors that would rally work so that we are going to say let's have 10 rolls of these, 10 of these, 20 of these, then when it comes they'd know 2 of Blue or green I would have maybe 20 rolls of different colors but the trip and the whole thing is going to be cheap.

FUQ: so we really need a sacco, chama thing

A: Yes, that chama is very, is key

FUQ: but designers will we work together? What I see is that secrecy you are saying

A: Yes, nobody wants to talk, nobody wants to say anything. I have seen where we have, a fashion catwalk, or we have agreed we are fitting; somebody either wants to go very early, wants to go very late or not fit at all or keep their things in the car as the others fit. But let me tell you it's not just here even in SA it's the same thing; Sungodess, is it Sungodess designers they are not there anymore. They couldn't agree anymore somehow.

FUQ: it was 2 designers

A: Four. And then there is also yet another, they came and it was such a hit and then ...

FUQ: it's sad because I think Sungodess were also doing textiles?

A: Yes, textiles. They went down. I don't know if they are trying to revive, there was something I was reading about them in the internet and I think everybody else was wondering but me now I asked when I was in SA

FUQ: that is sad because they were doing amazing things

A: Yes. Designers you'll get but it is not only us, I mean even in SA even out even internationally

Q: How do you overcome issues arising from unreliable sources/suppliers to maintain success?

A: It is difficult. It is very difficult, I really don't, each situation would be dealt with as it comes. There are times that you lose when let me just give you an example of an unreliable source or maybe like a supplier somebody comes and you've ordered, you've even paid now you want to start following up, when am I getting this, before you realize it you are either conned or if they didn't con you, you already realized either you are losing money or if you get it again you have to think fast and get other ways and means and sometimes it is so difficult that financially again that's where instability comes you are shaken. Because if I knew, let's say I've gotten an order and I know this one is going to be my supplier and they've already told you we are going to give you this, you remember you are also delivering elsewhere and you've promised. You go on an empty promise and if you are not careful you lose that one so you really have to think and act fast. That again is a family loan that can save, that's the only place you will run to. Even if a bank would give you a loan, it's a process also and so you can't just say at least I can cry and go

to my brother in law or my husband or my cousins and say please, his is the situation this is what has happened and you still take it back to family because you can't always say I have and that 1 2, if you also have a good saving, then yes you cross your fingers that I am losing, just go into your saving and take some money from it, it is like your business saving your business; your business saving the face of the same business again.

FUQ: I don't know about other designers but for you, you are able to have savings from the business?

A: Yes

FUQ: what if you are supposed to give a bride a gown and the fabric is nowhere to be seen?

A: That one I've never quite gotten to that point, what I know has happened like where delivery is a problem is promotional items where this people have an event, they are promoting this, their color scheme is this, you can't twist it or change it, it's crazy that's the time you will go nuts because it must happen. You've already been assigned, it's like that one of a bride but really for a bride I think it's different because there's always time and it's just something else. And they give you a short notice, sometimes the supplier is there and somebody promises because you call sometimes I call, I have all their numbers I have even paid them via Mpesa, do you have taffeta that is sky blue, yes, then you call okay, it's there, we are having this event just give us, the sky blue, etc, the sky blue the shade, that has happened to me, is not the correct shade. I've already sent a rider to please go and get, we've done the 1st sample the fitting is tomorrow, we have 6 outfits and I have my samples people are coming to fit, this is not the shade of the sky blue we wanted. Then you want to run to the (supplier) and then you want to prove to them because the event must happen, so you lose, not really lose your profit margins would really not be what they

were because when it comes to that you'll just have to run around and there are people again who would understand. It is only the brides who would not understand but if it is that kind of a function they will realize that say fine let's negotiate; this is not what we want let's settle for this. If you can't get this then give us this. But tell me if it is a bridal gown and it is not what it is, they would leave it right there. Yes, they would leave it and sometimes it is tormenting you don't sleep because what of most I do I don't advertise out there it is word of mouth and what goes wrong, that is what spoils. I mean negative publicity it will move faster than the good one. So you just want to work and make sure it is right. So sometimes it is good to work with samples don't just assume and start. Now there is the internet, technology has changed, with the new technology take photos and send if not, you can drive there or send riders, they are very cheap, 200-300 around this town it is not a lot of money because sometimes cameras also cheat. What you see through the camera and what you see through your eyes are totally different. Especially color. I have seen people ordering clothes, this is what I want. When it finally comes you are like this is not what I ordered, they will tell you yea, it is the one.

Q: What is the situation of infrastructure; transportation, electricity, etc in Kenya?

A: It does, yes it does affect my business because you also work with people like now I'm seeing a situation where whether somebody is good or not like talk of transport, I am not going to hire somebody who is coming from Kayole, I will not be able to afford them because 1, they would tell me that my transport for me to come from where I am and we are making this road now the matatu has to (divert), they charge us this much. So you also look at it, his transport alone in a month is 15000 so you can't pay them 15000 because that means they are not earning. So 15 is transport maybe another 15 so I will pay them 30000 and above, I cannot afford. So with my

location, it will restrict me to try and find people from Kibera who will either walk to work or get that big bus that charges 20 shillings, they can be able to manage, it all goes hand in hand.

Q: How does this state of infrastructure affect your business?

A: If I think of one I will let you know

Q: Which facilities/infrastructure, which if were made available in Kenya, or improved would make you more successful?

A: If you look at in terms of fashion I think we are trying to fit in a society where otherwise nobody quite really thought about us but if I would still take the example of South Africa, there's an area where it is you talk of infrastructure, this is like it's almost like this is a fashion street if you were to look for fashion designers you would find 10, 7, 20, of them here. And this is a street whereby if I want to shop, I don't have to button hole or button Kenyatta market then from Kenyatta market to Westlands then from Westlands you want to go, you want to run across, the people who saw if there was something like that, just look at town, or the way towns are setup, any town, I saw that in Addis Ababa; if you wanted to go to a ministry, if you ask where government offices you will find them almost centered here that if you wanted to do something with the ministry of health you would just walk from here then from here to here, the things like that, they are structured like centrally. If just like in industrial area, if you wanted to do if you know my business is in industrial area I want to go from paint to what to what is more or less here but fashion nobody really thought about what like now if you call it a centre of excellence but if we could have everything like if you went to CBD this is a fashion street or this is

FUQ: like Biashara Street?

A: Yes like Biashara Street which has since completely changed, I think it would make life easier. Or if you would say like the malls, if these malls that were coming up they were structured in such a way that floor 1 can only be taken by fashion designers. So there is always that exposure and knowing what it is they make the completion, do not make me pay a million good will the same way an engineer or the same way Woolworths is going to pay, so let me I am a fashion designer, what I am going to pay there is no good will, this is waived, this is what and that's why I think people fear going into malls that's why many people would say if I have a ready to wear line then I cannot be able to work in this shop then our shops that we have be it South B where I am could only be a workshop my production unit so that whenever I see a mall coming up as a fashion designer I would run there just to get a store. Because you know there's that option.

Competitors

Q: How would you rate the cost of production in Kenya?

A: I think it is quite high.

Q: Does it (cost of production) affect the success of your business compared to your competitors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in)?

A: I think it's high. Why I say it's high is because when you are doing something especially when you are doing them in big units the more the number the cheaper it should be and when you are doing something that is huge generally your workshop would not take it so what would you do the 1st thing I will to a factory. And then these factories also if they don't quite know you

again the price that you will get is so high you will be producing just to save your face or to prove a point that I can actually be able to do it so that you see if next time you can be able to and cut throat because do you know we compete for the same things now, like if somebody wanted to do I remember I did some shirts for AMREF and somebody asked who did this, and within the organization you have your friend and they have their friend so you will find that you 5 fashion designers you have gone for the same thing. So you really want to it doesn't matter I want to do it in such a way that even if I am getting 20 bob or 200 but let it be that I am the one who's done it so I can be able to (brag?) without considering. We haven't gotten to a point where, when we know for sure, sometimes we know but then again we are not free to say let's not go beyond this. Let just whoever wins, wins but this is it. You will agree this is it but once you agreed this is it somebody goes and goes 500 shillings cheaper, so then you wonder how did it/so it is both expensive to produce and it is cut throat.

Q: What measures do you put in place to ensure that your production costs are controlled beyond surpassing a certain point to be able to compete in the market?

Like now what I am doing, I have quite a number. You know I have been in the industry for long and then I outsource, I've realized that there are people who are out there who already do the work and I have there's a girl who worked for tinga tinga before and EPZ when they downsized, now there are people already out there in the market it's just to get that networking. I have quite a bit of people who are out there so that when I get the order if I am given time I don't necessarily have to go to the factories. Because they are like some of them don't have work some are employed in Gikomba I don't know where, like now for shirts I think I have my parts, trousers I have my parts, I have somebody who fixes sleeves, a collar person, the body person, I

even have a cutter who cuts and grades so anytime I have something like last week, 20 shirts in one night.

FUQ: you just outsource to them

A: Yes, I outsource. So when you do that you pay them what the factory pay them because I have done that research I know the rates. So you see the factory is going to pay them this much if you go to them and then again what do they do, they also must earn so they have to charge you a double so that they are able to pay this person and also get something too. But when I source them myself I'm just going to pay them so what the factory was going to charge me I save. By the way and they know each other. I just knew one and they kept referring. The person I was given to do shirts told me with him even in the factories he just fixes collars but even where he worked he knew the person who did the body, and the one who cuts how much does he take, 50 shillings per shirt. By the time they are done, the cost is very reasonable. And they are the ones who would ask mama, na t-shirt uko nayo, niko na wa t-shirt. So it's just you to have the machinery and done.

FUQ: so they come and do at your place?

A: Yes, they come and do at my place, in-house.

Q: Does mass production help control production costs?

A: Of course, I mean just look at an order, 20 shirts in 1 night. My tailor would have done for me maybe 2 shirts, 3 those ones they know so when it is like ready to wear it does, it really does.

FUQ: but only for ready to wear for weddings and custom wear it would not work?

A: No it would not work, for weddings it would not work because these people they were trained to work in the industry. We still haven't gotten people who would work like for example now even if I had an order and I was to go to the factories, any factory here and I got an order of even supplying wedding gowns, there is no factory in Kenya that would handle, they only do t-shirts, trousers, if the shirts; I got an order to do shirts that went to South Africa I went to a factory, Midco that is one of the best but for you to take them out of their comfort zone because the shirt had 3 buttons here, had slits on the sides and had long sleeves and the cuff, I had to take my own patterns and had to do a sample ready but still they charged me said we have not by the time we do the top stitch them they want to do that shirt, the office shirt, long sleeved short sleeved, period with a pocket here, don't take them out of their comfort zone. So anything else, even if you look at the ones who are doing chiffon in Nakuru, where Bedi had started doing something, it is that basic shift dress, that's it; nothing fitted at all now with circular, you want to gather something, no. our factories no.

FUQ: so anything else in terms of competitors

A: Like what they do, if they are threats, what about competitors?

FUQ: anything you face with the competitors in the market like someone mentioned which I had not considered before, the tailors in Uhuru Market, Kenyatta market, they are actually our competition because in terms of copying someone who cannot afford your design will go get it replicated at these tailors for a cheaper price.

A: They don't even go to Kenyatta market, nowadays Nairobi Textiles has everything

FUQ: they even have stitching

A: Even for 10000 shillings they have your gown and there are some people who would buy one or even make one and they want to save so they would rather spend on that one even for a brides maids outfit 9000, now everybody has refused but since I am the one I've just decided kumbe you are making a sample, that is the sample that will go to the tailor, shona kama hii. Tunataka exactly kama hii. There are people it's classified, I think what you need to do you need to know who your client is, there are people who are too proud even to want to go to such places.

Me in terms of competition; I know who is in the market, I know what their product is but sometimes I look at what I do and what they do, and I wonder why would somebody walk here and pay 15000 for labor and would not pay me 5000 for it. For me that is what I am now trying to deal with. What makes from that house not from even an expensive shopping, is it now the name? Because I look at the product, it is the same if not better but then somebody elsewhere will pay 3 times as much.

Business operations

Q: Do you run the operations of your business by yourself or do you hire people to manage the operations, while you concentrate on designing? And how does this affect your business's success?

A: How it affects it we are almost getting there. There was a time it really, really because there were people, repeat clients, you are the owner of the business, you are the contact person even if there is an assistant and you are not always there. So when somebody comes in you would tell them I am not there but my assistant is. Everything is done is ready, I don't sit at the machine yes as much as I do the patterns the girl is able to do like everything. Somebody has come for fitting, they want you to be the same one taking scissors and if you are not there they are not coming and

if you insist that please you are able to convince them, some of them will come and never go back they think oh, Peggy nowadays she feels she is important emeendelea so maybe you don't want to attend to clients. But for our businesses to grow we have to I really think we have to detach our faces from them. How many people buy Valentino and even if it was like Ellie Saab does custom made and there are so many people who even celebrities, they don't see him! They know it's an Ellie Saab. But here they want to see you. So yes it is to my advantage that I am able to travel but when I travel that business suffers. Even while I was away there were people who were sending me texts; when do you come back? So when you come back that's when everything happens. When I am not there even before I get there anyone who fits I think everything is wrong. There was a day I was in the shop but with the tailors so a client walks in they had a wedding this Somali, Somali I don't know what origin so the tailor comes and tells me why don't you talk, I say has she fitted ati she has refused to fit, that is not the style, why is there not a slit, I said recreate the slit only because you can never risk and it was something like an open just an opening without a seam, it can be so high and they are conservative. She could not, so it was me to come and tell her please just try the dress. Those are the things that ready to wear line pick it, wear go with it, don't even bother to Peggy or not Peggy, it fits you just put it on and go. That somebody can send me running just to take scissors just so that they feel nice and me I am busy like putting up a team that can work, that can make work easy so that I am not everything. It sometimes it affects it big time. If you are good client if you respect you already know you were expecting but because you are not there you can even leave everything.

FUQ: I can associate with that because if I go to the salon and my hair dresser is not there I go home. Then he tried to get a hair washer and I resisted for a year until I realized they are trying to change the systems

A: Yes, because they will try to get you somebody who is good because if he was just busy he wouldn't wash but because this is a personal touch and you already used to it like that. So what is happening now, I have lost quite a bit but because I have decided this is what I want to do, it is affecting me now but I have clients in fact I feel so happy when people walk in and they don't even know who I am and they've dealt with Viviane and they are picking their outfits and the same way everybody is saying wow I am saying wow, we don't know each other. And so I am saying it works but before you get there it really, it's tricky.

Q: What are/ would be the pros and cons of you handling all business operations by yourself?

FUQ: you've already mentioned quite a bit of the pros and cons, anything you want to add?

A: That's about it.

Are there any challenges in hiring professionals to oversee the operations of your business like overall business managing, costing, marketing, accounting, etc?

FUQ: that is apart from clients being resistant and reluctant to change of personnel

A: These ones are like they are also learning from your business and stealing from it at the same time. Maintaining them can be also quite a challenge because I've also seen it with tailors, the moment there is somebody there they learn the cost when you think you are now steady that there is somebody who can do this, other they have learnt enough, they are moving on now they want to start a business because they know if I could do this for so and so then I can also be able to do my own. The people who come like manages somebody told me that this is in Dubai; do not employ a fashion designer as your assistant, what you need and we just sat and talked, is a

marketer, yea. Where do you want to go, be the fashion designer? But train somebody to market your product because that's what a fashion designer doesn't know how to do.

FUQ: that makes sense because the fashion designer will leave at some point and take your clients with them

A: Yes because they also want to have their own label. I saw Lucy Rao I laughed when she was saying she doesn't want to take interns this time she says they are overworking her. And some of them make you, you also have to go for a special course to learn to be a CID I laughed I just said, because they go with your stuff, they go with everything that she does she says no she's leaving it, sometimes you want to give it a break. But a person who is marketing, you know they are just marketing they are not interested in fashion, it's just the product to market, how it is done they don't know, marketers are just marketers.

FUQ: that does make sense. So then what about finances, because everyone when I ask them this question they say there is no money to hire these people and I guess it now ties up with designers trying to do everything

A: It is us, just like what I told you, it is the mind that when you want to start a business you want to do everything you don't want to hire a fundi because you are wondering am I getting this money to hire this person but when you actually get somebody to hire who can be able to manage when you are offloaded a bit you will find that you are able to do more that will still bring money to the business that you can actually share with somebody that you can be able to hire. Whoever it is you need somebody, it in your front office in your whatever it is, that somehow is you manager because the way most designers operate it is me, and the next person I am hiring is doing my finishing, hemming and all so I'm the face, and the tailors. And so when

somebody calls me and I am not there I can look and say okay what time am I going to be there then you say no I am not there, come at this and this time because the only other person you want to hire is the tailor.

FUQ: so at least you need some mid-level management

A: Yes, you need some mid-level management, it is important.

Is it important for a fashion designer to have business management skills?

A: Yes, yes, very important.

FUQ: this one I think we already discussed but I will just ask again: What management skills does a designer require for their fashion business to be successful?

A: I said at least however simple, even if it is just a bit of entrepreneurial skills, the abc of like book keeping, the day to day running of a business. Because if you look at it, Lucy Rao is a very successful, even if she is going into farming, look at how she started. I always she is another example that I see, Lucy is not trained in anything to do with fashion so she is doing the business of fashion. So she knew she had the business aspect of it so she was able to. Monica Kanari is another one, trained as a business person she had a little bit of the business knowledge but I think with the backing knowledge of accounts that the husband has because they run the business together,

FUQ: in fact I think with Lucy, she is one of the few designers I have found who is never in the office yet things are running

A: Yes, you don't find her, she is never there.

FUQ: in fact when I find her she is busy doing something and she is telling you I am leaving so you really feel like you need to finish and go

A: And for you to find her seated and just seated and calm, it is very rare. We've met once or twice but it has to be 7 o'clock, 7pm. Now it's like everybody else is gone. And I think that's her. The way we run these businesses, how it works for me because when we talk, designers we talk, Monica will tell you forget about it, it won't work. But it works for her; yes, it's not my face all the time so it works for her. Monica has to be there, she's just organized herself and knows this day, this day and this day I have to see the rest of the days it really has to be in house so I am not seeing clients but she is the face that even travelling, God, it is just a day or 2 and back because that's it, unless now you remove her from it. And that has been me; even if it is ushago and it is a funeral, you almost want to because you are wondering what is going to happen?

But we need systems in place at least, systems in place because that way you know what happens if we die, because dying we are going to die then Peggy O gone, Occasions and Days gone once you are dead, Rialto gone, gone, gone, gone. There's a designer, she is Zambian, she trained here, I don't know what happened she fell sick and then she went to Zambia and it's never managed now it like she's never going to come back, she's been there for I think 9 months or 10 months. That business is run by the tailors and whoever was left there and they are paying rent and still clients are going.

FUQ: really?

A: Yes, she is in Zambia, may not even come back. So you see, I think that's how she started and people were already used to the product so these people just got together and said look here, this lady she was just the face, of course people are like this is Zambian, they get fabrics from within

and say no, she is coming, she's sent fabric she's gone to send more fabric, who told you she's sending more fabric now? Maybe they get Eastleigh or from wherever. Oh, fabric have come, you are running there the designer has sent fabrics.

Q: How do you market your business?

A: As I told you the analog one, for me word of mouth. It's actually just word of mouth. And now it's very strange, I see people who come to me with work I have done, extracted from sijui it is called wedding something from the internet

FUQ: there is a wedding blog

A: Kenya weddings; so anything that I have done is posted there.

FUQ: so you are lucky someone is marketing you

A: Can you imagine! Others come knowing it is me, others come and ask can you do something like this and I have never even bothered to see, okay these Kenyan weddings, who are they? But for me it is word of mouth, it has worked; I will tell you there is no wedding out there at the end of the day someone is calling I am at this wedding, I was given your number bla, blab la or a week later, others it is even 2 years later. It works. Word of mouth I think is another internet out there.

FUQ: especially for a wedding because people are there and they ask

A: And by the time they come to you they know everything, the price, everything.

Q: Are there any challenges you face in marketing your business?

A: Yes because even if it is word of mouth, I don't think it is enough. If I had like you know a Facebook page, it would work better. And word of mouth sometimes, like I've had 2 there's a girl I did her wedding she was brought to me by her pastor and he said this is an orphan and I would like you to do her gown and please, you know this is what it is. And so she has sisters and they are the ones who are going to be I mean we had a long chat. Remember it is word of mouth for me. So how much do I charge this girl for the gown, 20000 and then the girls who are on the lineup because everyone can't afford, I think it was 4000 but the dresses were beautiful, now comes the word of mouth and you agree this is not what I charge, should you get anyone out there this gown is not anything less than 40000. I don't do for bridesmaids at that time my labor is 5000, this was 4000 for everything. So people were coming now I think because they think it's cheap. So the next client I think that week was like are you the one who did Alice's dress? We are coming to see you. Of course they've asked, Alice has given the number, so when they come they ask are you able to do exactly like that I say yes it is 40000, they want to fight; no, you did Alice's for 20000. You know. And that becomes it almost like please do not understand, don't try and fit in the clients you choose them; once you know this is you this is you and if they can't they can't. and it really like that again is another fact that you may find 4-6 in a row who are coming and you are not able to get the business so you really just have to decide; this is me, you take me as I am or leave me. Don't have too many faces on 20000 and 40000, you know. It's like now you didn't have a placement because by the time somebody is coming word of mouth, do not. Even the ones you give discount, just let it be a discount within what you can do but don't try to understand. If it is something you can't take, don't bother and they will always find their placement wherever because it will come to work to your disadvantage.

Q: What marketing avenues/channels do you feel are important to the success of a fashion business?

A: I think a Facebook page will work even more than aaah, I think that's another tool that works more than even a website. Maybe once you start with a Facebook page, once it picks then link it to a webpage but if you really want to get started, if you are looking at e-marketing Facebook would work. It's easier, it's faster because I have seen people who have, I have friends who have webpages, yes it is an email address .co.ke but it is about the email address nothing else. But a Facebook page it is more active, it is more interactive, so when you start from there then you get to the webpage.

FUQ: okay, so I think there is one question in the beginning I didn't ask; machinery, so you can just tell me in terms of machinery what you have

A: I just have like industrial machines, I have 8 industrial machines; the straight stitching those are 5, then I have 1 for embroidery, then I have a locker those are 2 of them and I have a button holer.

I wish you all the best

FUQ: thank you so much

A: Because you realize I think our problems are the same. No one comes with anything special that you've not heard of. They just fall within. So why are we in this cycle?

FUQ: exactly, that is the question I am asking myself. So I am hoping by the time I finish this thesis, I will find an answer or at least a solution to maybe one thing if it is sourcing

A: Please get Deepa. You need to, you need to. I really think for me, even when we were talking and saying we want workshops, we need somebody and I said, before we even go to have a South African fly in, ticket and accommodation, we have Deepa here! Deepa is a success story.

FUQ: but she is quiet

A: Yes, even in her talking, she is very quiet. But because people don't know her she also complains she says she is always left out of events, she never gets to know when things are happening, no one tells her anything, because nobody really gets to hear that she's busy. She's doing her stuff, she's busy.

FUQ: Good to know.

Appendix I: Transcript of Semi-structured Interview with Ann

McCreath held on 12-3-2014 at her home office

Bio data

Q: How long have you been working as a fashion designer?

A: I was working as a fashion designer in Europe before I came here, I did about 5 years in Europe between Italy and Spain, and also when I was studying fashion in Rome I did a bit of tailoring for fashion houses. But working in Kenya, setting up my fashion brand and so on, I started that in 1996.

Q: What is your education background?

A: I have a general arts degree specializing in Italian African history and history of art, and then I have a fashion diploma from Kuefia in Rome, so that was a couture school I did with learning to make patterns on the mannequin.

Work information

Q: Where do you operate? How would you describe the scale of your business?

A: Okay the official office is in Life Ministry Centre, next to Kilimani police station on Jabavu road, P. O. Box 76138, Nairobi 00508. The shop is in Yaya Centre. I have a workshop in Kawangware and usually I work between my house, where I prefer to design because it is quiet and the back of the shop where I usually do my pattern cutting.

We are obviously small, but in terms of turnover I think we are doing about 24 million a year, something like that.

Q: Number of employees and machinery/ technology in use?

A: I always have to count because we have casuals as well; I have 2 in the office, I have 3 in the shop, I have a workshop manager, his assistant, then I have about 3 tailors on machines and 2 in finishing, 1 on stock control and then I also have a fundi in the shop for alterations. I usually do the pattern cutting but I try to get an intern to help and I'm about to get a new intern but yea, otherwise the design and pattern cutting I do by myself. There have been times when I've even employed up to 3 designers between people on the payroll and interns, but I've had to kind of like cut back; you know last year wasn't as good as we would've wanted, so I had to downsize, you know I find it necessary to be flexible.

I have a sewing machine at the shop, then I think I have 5 straight stitch at the workshop, I have a twin needle as well I have an over lock. I used to have a button holer but it was stolen so I'm currently using a domestic machine for button holes, which is not ideal but until I'm able to raise some money that's what I'm doing.

We haven't got anything (technology); no CAD, but we use Photoshop for presentation on corporate jobs, then I want us to get CAD but we don't have it. Yea, so we are using Photoshop and I do a lot on excel. Then we started to design our own software system to take care of production needs but it's got some glitches so I'm regretting that we didn't get a readymade program and adapt it.

Q: What products do you produce and how do you produce them?

A: I do menswear, women's wear and a little bit of children's wear, I used to also do a little bit of beaded belts, sandals and knits and things like that. I've done a bit of everything, it's always dependent on cash flow, whether I'm able to keep them all out there or if I've had to do some and forget others, I usually make samples in-house for big scale production I sub contract a factory, I do a lot of that on corporate jobs and then I alter to fit but then my workshop produces most of my shop garments but what I'm now really trying to push towards again is main production in a factory and the niche production in my workshop.

Expertise of fashion Designers

Q: Do you normally employ Kenyan fashion designers?

A: I've just told you I used to have 3, between interns and others but I haven't been able to recently because of cash. I do when I can, but I usually find the level of training is not as good as I want, so I usually try to find Kenyans who have studied abroad. And currently I'm getting a Tanzanian who's studied in Italy to come as an intern.

Q: What level of education do they normally have?

A: They've all gone to college but the problem is the colleges here are not good enough. Some of them are getting better like Mcensal I think is better but it's still not of a level that I would like. I mean, I would like someone to come out who is really very comprehensively trained, and that's not the case.

Q: How do you feel they perform on their jobs as fashion designers?

A: They are not good enough. The pattern cutting is not good enough unless they've googled it, I just don't find the level of training, the level I would want because but you have to remember I am very ambitious and I'm looking at being a top international brand, not a top local brand. So for me I want the higher end of the students, I don't want the lower end of the students. And if they are all going to colleges that are not really comprehensive in training, it doesn't mean they don't have some skills I can use, they do, but it would be much more cost effective for me to have somebody who can actually do everything rather than, at least everything to a certain level and excel in some things. I find that usually end up have to train, which I don't mind but the problem is that for me actually in some ways I prefer to have East African designers because most of the ones that come to work for me, would come for a short time and then set up their own business. Now if they are coming in with a very high level of skills, and they work for a year, they contribute a lot but if they come in on a low level of skills, they come for a year, I mean, they haven't really contributed much to my business by the time they are leaving to do their own and I feel like with an intern there's no point in having interns unless they are also contributing to your business. It's a two way street you know, I'd rather find someone that's going to stay with me and train them. So the people I find staying are usually the ones that never had a chance to go to fashion college, and are just so happy to have the opportunity, others might be as I say people from upcountry who've got fewer networks in Nairobi, or they might also just be East Africans who've studied abroad because their fashion schools are even worse than the Kenyan ones and have a high level of skills because they've studied in, a lot of them study in Italy actually.

Q: Do you feel their education impacts their performance of the job?

Q: What is your opinion of the education offered to fashion designers in Kenya?

Q: How would you compare fashion design education in Kenya to the fashion education offered in other parts of the world?

A: The main problem I have with the colleges here is that the people that are teaching have been through the same system and a lot of them don't have international work experience. So for a company like mine which is ambitious, I want to have people that know how to do things in to a high international standard. And as I said before, a lot of them would be high local as opposed to high international standards.

Definitely education is the problem. It's not that they are not getting any education, it's just that it could be so much better and it's a hindrance to a company like mine because I mean, I need to be able to employ well qualified individuals to help the company grow but if what I'm getting is just not up to scratch, then I'd rather just do it myself and that means I don't have enough time. So it's a bit of a problem. I mean I think there's a huge opportunity for the existing colleges to improve what they are offering I don't know what they plan to do about that and I know that is something that basically takes time, it doesn't happen overnight, but as a designer, who'd like to employ people, I'm not getting what I need.

Q: Do you feel education plays a part in the level of success of a fashion designer?

A: Of course; the thing is though, I think we call it fashion designer where as in Kenya we are really fashion entrepreneurs. We have to run a business. Now, it depends, if you are a fast fashion company you look at what the consumer trends are, what people have presented on the catwalk, you think oh that's nice, let me copy that, let me copy that and you make it in this color and that color, longer, shorter, whatever. You don't need to be a trained designer; you need to train your eye in terms of being a buyer or a merchandiser and so you can be very successful and

you don't have to be a trained designer. But if you are someone like my company where I'm trying to make a mark, then you need to look at that, you need to have a higher skill set. Because if I was somebody, if I was doing that, all I would do, is I would go to a factory, work with the pattern cutter, tell them what I want, and I've got the design.

Q: What areas of expertise does a fashion designer need to have to succeed?

Q: How do you maintain and enhance high levels of expertise and skills as a fashion designer?

A: Well I just mentor all the time. So I'm just constantly teaching. And the problem is with the tailors, you know, some leave you have to start all over again. And some of them are very poorly trained, as in they are trained to a level for being a machinist on one part of garment in a factory but they are not necessarily trained to actually be able to do a complete job on a garment and give constructive input into how it should be made. So I find my level of sewing is better than any of my fundis. So I must say what I think happens is also I'm very particular about quality where if you are setting up as a designer and you have fewer skills like I do on the technical side like I do, you'll probably be less particular then that's why my brand must be a premium brand because I spend a lot of time making sure the quality is correct; in cut and finish.

For myself I don't, I would like to but there's nowhere here, I can get training, so the thing is whether I would do it in fashion or in entrepreneurship. So in entrepreneurship I've done several short courses particularly on finance training and stuff and that have created corporate-ship. For me what I've come to learn is a fashion designer is someone who designs, is employed as a designer, that's what I a fashion designer is. A fashion entrepreneur is what most of us are here; we have to be business people. So in terms of technical skills, I have been looking in London at what short courses are available and very specific things I would love to learn about, and then I

wouldn't mind doing an MBA, I probably would prefer doing an executive MBA, because I think someone told me before I probably have enough knowledge to do a PhD but the thing is Kenya is very like diploma driven so whether I would be allowed straight into a PhD or whether I'd have to do a masters first, I don't know. When I went to St. Martins one of my former interns was there and was assuming that I was teaching in St. Martins and that is the kind of thing like with my level of experience I would imagine that I would probably be able to teach in quite a few fashion colleges around here.

FUQ: so have you ever considered teaching in Kenya?

A: Yes. But nobody in the fashion colleges has asked me, I have told some people I'd be interested, people have asked me to setup a school, but it's just like I'm not really into this thing of repetition of what other people are doing. I think if I did something I might want to, I have often even discussed with who I could bring in to do short courses. I'm more interested in short courses that people can combine with entrepreneurship because most of us can't just leave our businesses for months on end, so I think that might be a more useful contribution to taking the industry forward.

Success Factors

Q: What challenges do fashion designers in Kenya face?

A: Okay, a lack of trained personnel, there's challenges in production; like manufacturing is not badly off but you need volumes to be able to do that so for me I'll start by saying the main problem is distribution because if your goods don't get to market, nobody can buy them. And if

there's no demand in the market, producing just for the sake of it doesn't work, you need to know how you are gonna sell something before you produce it. So, I find that there's a problem then like we don't have a strong retail network, we do have supermarkets selling clothes but they all sell cheap clothes.

We have the challenge of getting finance to produce on scale. Having said that, in my experience, when you have a concrete order, with an LPO and you have a registered business, it is possible to go to the bank and borrow money. Equally it's also possible to borrow from other interested individuals. So, finance has become less of a problem than it used to be; it is there, it's just less of a problem.

Then there is technology, I'm even finding a lack of designers who've been trained in even Photoshop. So when I had to do the flip flop project (with Bata) we couldn't get people that trained in Photoshop. Like we looked for young designers who could do it, the only ones that could do anything were the ones that had studied internationally and I find that quite weird because actually there're also a lot of graphic designers who are trained but it seems like the fashion designers don't do the graphic design training.

Consistency, efficiency in delivery, like having the right structures actually make it possible to deliver things quickly and effectively, but basically these are not things that don't have a solution, it's just that you have to have a solution and I think outdated machinery makes a difference; cloth, the cloth that you can buy in East Africa, that's East African made tends to be of low quality, Tanzania is much better than Kenya. So it means that you have to buy, imported cloth and imported cloth is quite expensive also because they don't give wholesale prices, they give retail prices. There's a new player in the market, textile loft, which is actually

selling/stocking cloth from Italy at an affordable rate. That for me is making a meaningful difference. But even supply chain from the farmer, I've exported knitwear to Italy, no to Japan in the past and I couldn't get continuous supply of cotton for knitting and recently I was told that they even had like some of the factories that were doing it have also closed. So it sometimes becomes a bit of a struggle to think what you can do next, that will actually have a continuity. What I noticed is the big boys in the game; when I say the big boys, the Arrow men, and the ones that say, will be selling in volume internationally or locally not particularly nice clothing but in volume, they usually tend to be friends with people that maybe are spinning the fiber or making the cloth, so it's much easier for them to get whatever small cotton is available in the market than it is for a smaller scale designer. And I think there is definitely a disconnect in the sense that a lot of the textile manufacturers are men, and it's a male world, and even the representation on KAM is male and a lot of the designers are either female or very feminine men. And I think there's a disconnect in conversation. I don't think the two speak the same language.

Q: What, in your opinion, makes a fashion designer successful?

A: In this market?

FUQ: Yes or even internationally

A: I think it's different; internationally you would be a successful designer when you are highly trained, very good and concepts and interpretation of concepts, have good drawing skills, that would be very important on an international platform, even for getting jobs, being a top designer somewhere all that kind of stuff would be very important. But locally, you need to have strong technical skills. In the west now, you can have strong technical skills or not, some people are not even teaching it they just design everything on CAD, 3D the machine prints out whatever it

prints out, they get the patterns printed out and so you don't really need to know much about the technical side. I think in East Africa, it's quite tricky if you don't have strong technical skills, particularly pattern cutting. If you don't know how to cut you are in a mess because of the fundis here are not good at cutting. And then I think it's very helpful if you speak to your fundi from a position of authority, they will listen to you. If you haven't a clue what you are talking about, it's a problem. And then again remember, that for a lot of designers who are women, they are dealing with old mentality men who are fundis and that in itself, is a problem. Then I think you need to know how to do your PR and marketing, I think the reasons why I'm perceived to be super successful is because of how good I am at PR. Because I'm someone who just naturally does PR all the time; I'm a very good networker and networking if you are an entrepreneur is critical. And I think that's what gets you the exposure without paying for it. You know like if you've got some interesting story to tell, media always needs content, so they are happy to publish if you've got anything to say. And I think also it's also of course about how you train your team, right now I'm in a bit of a challenge because I need to grow and yet a lot of the people I have in my staff are maybe people I have recycled like 3 of them were house helps, one was an askari, one was a gardener and I've taught them the skills from zero but as I get to the next level of business and I've hired people who've now got university training, I often find there's a kind of disconnect, or a snobbery or a shyness from the other side in building a team because some people feel inadequate, others feel like you know, what on earth is this person doing? They don't understand the value that that person maybe adding. Whereas I look at it differently, and I feel if someone is bright and wants to apply themselves just like you are then they can just train themselves to higher things. But there is something like changing the mental attitude and making sure the team members respect each other because I have found on the other hand to be a challenge when I hire

university students as sales staff basically they seem to just be interested in finding a girlfriend or boyfriend and then moving on. They are not really interested in working. That's another challenge I think they say it's generation Y; generation Y does not have what other generations would have thought to be like a work attitude and I find it's difficult to work with them because somebody has to do the hard work, not everybody can sit on their back side, play around on the computer and do stuff, you know you have to engage and I don't know, I certainly have, not all of them, but quite a lot of them and I think that more of them than would have been the case when I started out. But you have to have a lot of passion and drive and you have to know that it's not gonna be easy and you just have to get on with it, because I don't think there's an easy ride in fashion; I haven't seen anyone that I know of visibly excelling, I don't know, I've told you my turnover I don't know if other people have told you? Have people told you?

FUQ: Most people are not willing to tell and they will also try to downplay the amount they are making.

A: That is another problem by the way, people are not willing to share their data, and there are no statistics available on the net. I'm trying currently to look at different ways of doing retail, I'm looking online and for the UK you can get all that information immediately, which means you can do a proper business plan. Locally you can't get that information at all, so we worked with Ipsos to now start doing that and I've just come from another discussion with AFAD to see if they are kind of willing to share data but I don't know, I've tried to get data since the beginning of setting up in the market here and people really are just so cautious to give out anything. I don't understand why, but they are.

FUQ: It could be an African culture issue because Vimal Shah, he was named as a billionaire in Forbes and he went and said I do not know where they got their numbers from, I'm not that rich.

A: By the way, it's Indian as well, the Indians won't share their data but probably in India they do, because they've moved on. So that's another challenge, if you are going to do a successful business model, you need to be able to look at statistics and if there aren't any you are handicapped.

Q: What aspects and practices do you observe to ensure your business stays successful?

A: What I would say is 1st of all I'm always puzzled when people talk about successful, because we don't really define what successful means. So I would say I have been very successful in things of like putting my brand out there, building a brand name, becoming an aspirational brand for people who are professionals aspire to buy my brand, so I've seen that very clearly. But, it's not like I'm making a huge turnover, I'm able to just sit back and relax. So for me, being successful, I always thought that would've been defined in monetary terms at which point I would say I'm not there yet, but if we are defining it in terms of visibility, recognition, things like that then yes, I'm successful.

FUQ: Well for me as you see, there's no data so it would be very hard for me to say someone is successful in Kenya because they are making 100 million or whatever, so what I went with was visibility as you say, recognition in terms of if I ask a random stranger, what are the fashion designers you know in Kenya, the names that come up are consistent. So that's the kind of thing I used to measure success.

A: That makes sense.

Economic Factors

Q: How is the state of the Kenyan economy and does that affect your business?

A: I mean it totally affects it. I am very concerned right now because there's not enough cash in circulation, we are hearing the government is broke; a lot of my clients are business owners and are affected by the cash crunch, it's difficult like I think that's another reason why I'm looking to expand into Europe and into other states in Africa because you can't sit here waiting for things to happen or not happen and the bottom line is that when we have a terrorist attack, if you have a shop in a mall, afterwards you have no clients, like we were down 40% in September after Westgate and I think October might have been down 25% November was also down and finally it took off again. Then, you look at the elections, during the elections from November before the elections, the sales had slumped totally it was a poor Christmas because all the foreigners; when I say foreigners I don't mean wazungu, I mean anybody that's not Kenyan plus wealthy Kenyans, had already planned to leave the country for the elections, so they knew they had to pay for another foreign trip so they were also not spending over Christmas that year so they knew the pre election, oh my goodness I can't spend any money, and then from there you then go into during the election and the post election so any time we have elections now everybody is very worried. So, people look at you having a shop and they think that you doing really well but actually anyone in a shopping mall in those circumstances you know the rents don't go down, they stay the same. So it's actually very difficult. So I would say, economics, politics if I would look at the trajectory from when I started in 1996, I've taken 4 big dips; one was the bomb against the US embassy, one was British Airways pulling out because there were threats, they

found people who were trying to take down a plane, so that was another terrorist thing, and then we had the post election violence and then we had Westgate. So in my time, which interestingly enough translates into basically about once every 4 years and when I first set up the business in Africa, I was told that the Lebanese in West Africa overcharge in places like Sierra Leone and Liberia and stuff but it is because they factor in that they may lose everything every 4 years. So thankfully I didn't lose everything in any of these situations but what did happen was my business went down dramatically and when you are a small business, you don't have cash to just keep you going at those times. So that's why I also like to do corporate business because most of the big corporates carry on spending even during post election violence, they were still continuing but I think right now one of our big concerns is tourism, the government has put no money into brand Kenya and the KTB so tourism is really slumping and that has a huge knock on effect like anybody supplying to the tourism industry, whether you are supplying tents, food, drink, soft furnishings, anything like that you suddenly find you have no work or you are not getting paid on the contracts you've done and that means you are not spending on my shop so I find it really necessary to diversify my markets. Does that answer?

FUQ: Yes it does.

Q: Do changes in the world economy affect your business?

A: Yes, because the world economy when it slumped, you remember the tourist numbers went down dramatically so yes. It depends exactly what, some things wouldn't but that when you are looking at the impact that tourism has on the Kenyan economy because even the horticultural industry which is so vibrant also supplies a lot to the tourism industry and when tourism is down

then that's down another thing I didn't mention that also affects business here is drought; cuz the horticultural industry is so big that when we have drought that also creates a problem.

FUQ: How does it create a problem?

A: Well people have less money because of the farmers and people in the horticulture farming are not earning any money they are also not spending and you have to remember that there's a lot of female farmers, I have lots of clients who are farmers cuz farmers here also have quite a vibrant social life, it's not like farmers in developed countries that are kind of employing nobody on their farm and it could be in the coffee industry, the tea industry, it could be horticulture, stuff like that but drought normally affects productivity which in turn affects money. So it's a very clear connection.

Q: Does the economy affect the purchasing power of your customers?

Q: What measures do you put in place to counter the effects of the economy on your business?

A: Diversification of markets; there's two things; corporate uniforms and then now trying to get into London, because I don't want all my sales to be in the Kenyan market.

FUQ: That's why you had travelled to London?

A: Yup, also my brand will be stronger if I'm also selling in London; I can use it in marketing.

Political Factor

Q: How do political events like the elections and change in government affect your business?

Q: What are the strengths and weakness of the policies currently in place in Kenya, which can increase the level of success in fashion businesses?

A: Those ones would be things to do with the textile industry which I'm not familiar with. Mitumba obviously affects things, but I don't know what the policies are right now, I heard the duty had gone up, corruption also means it will come in cheap anyway, and that has a number of effects because, it's making people buy clothes that are artificially low at price which in turn they expect designers to sell at an artificially low price. Yet they expect us to go to the same fancy parties and wine and dine like that and you know it's just not doable. Policies in general do like VAT ; when they put VAT on tourism it's not good in terms of numbers of tourist coming into this market so that explains the impact on tourism, VAT always affect things if you are registered which I am, since your prices have to change when the VAT is higher or lower.

I think the new immigration bill will also have an impact on Nairobi's market because they are doing this policy of indigenization, this is what is before parliament right now, you are only meant to have two years as a foreigner here, and I don't quite understand that cuz for me Nairobi is like London, New York, it's like a city of the world not just the capital of Kenya, and I think part of the richness, of the vibrancy in the market is due to the fact that there are people from all over the world living here, and I'm pretty sure that that reduction of number of people that come in from elsewhere will affect the vibrancy of the retail market. Plus for example in a business like mine, I'm actually a foreigner still, because although it was proposed that someone like me should have dual nationality, it was meant to be 7 years of residency and then you could get dual nationality, parliament changed that; you have to be born to a Kenyan parent so for me to get nationality I'm still gonna have to give up my British citizenship, apply for a Kenyan once I have Kenyan, you apply for British. But these sorts of things are costly, time consuming and those

sorts of things are a bit disheartening, when you've lived in a country for 22 years and you are still legally not entitled to be considered part of a Kenyan population, although informally you would be. But this thing of not allowing people to stay for more than 2 years can have a major effect on, well there'll just be fewer foreigners here because which foreigner wants to come for a 2 year contract and you've got kids who are going to school and stuff like that, they won't do it. I understand the intention but I don't think it's practical, like minimum you would say 3 years, 3-5 years minimum and also because multinationals are not going to like put someone from Kenya in charge of their corporation in Kenya generally speaking, they'll take a Kenyan, and employ a Kenyan in South Africa as a CEO but they won't employ them locally because of corruption and that kind of stuff. So, I mean I understand what they are trying to do and that's good but I don't think it's going to be, I think it's gonna backfire on the economy. Caz those people spend money, Kenyans will buy land, the foreigners like that would actually spend money in retail.

Q: Which policies currently in place hinder fashion business in Kenya?

Ecological Factors

Q: Sustainability, environmental and social conscious design is on the rise worldwide. How do you incorporate this into your business?

A: I think the only reason we are not benefiting from it, is caz we don't know how to write the key words that confirm that we are sustainable, ethical, and all the rest of it, because the vast majority of Kenyan fashion is ethical, sustainable and so on. It's just we don't use the terminology. And because the west has a lot of experience with mass manufacturing in Asia, they tend to be very concerned about sweat shops, mistreatment of workers and stuff like that.

Now from what I've seen in Kenya, I don't think that is very frequent here, if at all. It's quite unusual. And yet internationally that's what the discussion is all about. So it's just that people don't know about it. But I know it's important for designers from Africa to get involved in this world debates just to also get recognition themselves and have a voice. So I'm actually very for us getting involved in that because I was also thinking you know in ethical fashion I've always thought why I came to do work here in the first place was because of ethical fashion. And yet, I was looking at it and thinking, hang on a minute, you know is this going anywhere, isn't it going anywhere, I'm not managing to take advantage of what I'm really doing as a company and market it accordingly. And then I realized that it's because we don't know the terminology they are using, caz actually we are all doing it. I really think we are and I've just come from the UK and somebody brought up there, I discussed market access; to me it's a very big thing like I don't see that like, African designers are excluded from the world market, that's not ethical. So I'm now looking at how do we want to interpret what ethical fashion means? What does it mean to us? What are the important issues for us, because if we don't talk about it, first of all the west doesn't know we exist and secondly they are never going to champion our causes if we haven't informed them of what they are, so for me it's become very important to have a voice and use it, and so that's why we are taking up that opportunity to speak in London.

Q: Do you ever face challenges resulting from customers insisting on only purchasing sustainable products?

A: No because they perceive mine to be ethical anyway, and no.

Q: Are there any regulations on ecological factors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in) that affect your business?

A: I don't know. I do know in an international market, I definitely will have to have everything correctly labeled and that's actually another thing I hadn't pointed out before; we are often sold fabrics which the person selling us the fabrics doesn't know the composition of the fabric. That's a problem because if you don't have correct washing instructions and composition labels, your product can be taken off the shelf in Europe, and in the US as well. So those are things that are really very important to sort out.

FUQ: But in Kenya there are none that affect you at the moment?

A: I'm not aware of them.

Technological Factors

Q: Which technology/technologies do you use in your business?

FUQ: You've already said you use Photoshop and excel in your business.

A: I personally don't, excel yes.

Q: How does using this technology contribute to your business success?

A: Well I don't know how I would plan anything in my business without excel. It's like real important for like any financial and if you don't use that you have to use something else, for me I know excel and I find it critical for number crunching. It is much more efficient than doing it with a pencil and paper. It also means I can share the information easily by email, I use Dropbox, I use Whatsapp to send pictures of fabrics to clients as well as to staff, I have a database of patterns and designs and I've loaded a lot of that up.

Q: Is it important or necessary for a fashion designer to incorporate each new technology into their business to be successful?

A: I wouldn't say each new technology but I think there are certain technologies that are critical. And I mean something like excel is far from new but you obviously need to have some kind of financial program. I keep my accounts in QuickBooks, and then I use excel for number crunching. But I don't see how you run a business without some kind of financial platform. In terms of design, you can still do it old school here, however, it will just be a question of time before we are obsolete, and then I don't see the point of waiting for that to happen, I would rather try and get on with things.

Financial Resources

Q: What financial challenges did you face when starting up and how did you overcome them?

A: Well you need capital to set up any business and you need equipment and stuff like that, so I was lucky that I had some kind of inheritance I was able to use. In retrospect I should have put it into buying some kind of property, cuz I think I had probably about Ksh 3 million when I started out, not immediately but within say a year or so, and then I sold shares to raise capital. So I basically put together projections with a friend who was good at that and we pitched it to potential share holders who were clients and friends, and that's how I raised capital. Mostly people put in Ksh 150-300 thousand and I still have those people today but I've never been in a position to actually pay them dividends, we've never made enough money to actually pay dividends. So why I'm now spending time focusing on the business, trying to get into new markets and do that is because I really I'm concentrating now on the business. So although I'm

desperate to get a new collection in the shop, for me it's actually more important right now to look at my business model and see how I can improve it. And then I've also raised capital from banks, like I've got an overdraft account I've also before I had an overdraft account I've done what do you call it, when you get an LPO and you go get finance against an LPO, I can't remember what we call it. I also got a venture capital at one point, but that didn't work out well for me.

FUQ: How did that go?

A: It didn't go well; I think I'm very skeptical about getting foreign money for this market. It was American money. And I think I've also sensed and also had somebody American working for me and I realized that the market in the US is very different, it's a big market, if you play your cards right, have a good product, work hard, you are going to get money in quickly, whereas in this market you find that there's very many more variables and like I said the terrorism, the politics, all of this sort of things that if you are from a foreign market then you don't really understand and the other thing is having American capital and it may be the same for any other nation by the way, but it means you may get pushed into a direction that you don't feel is the right direction for your business but because the capital is coming from there, you end up going with it. And in retrospect, that's happened with me both times I've dealt with people who were more familiar with the American market. The other thing that happened was the investor got fed up with me, and they wanted to impose somebody as CEO who I felt was incompetent for the job and that's why we ended up coming to grief because I wasn't prepared to have somebody who was basically a website developer be the CEO on a fashion company because I didn't think he had the skills that were necessary. I since then have put in another CEO who is American, Aprelle, but she didn't know enough about this market; so although she had great

ideas it ended up I had to take control again and at also the request of the top financial person she brought in because it was realized that we were spending money too fast and there was no way it was gonna come in fast enough to, yea. So it's that thing I've recognized that as Michael Joseph said that Kenya is a peculiar market, it doesn't behave according to the norms of many other markets. And so getting your money from outside and heading outside advice may or may not work. And I think I've realized that actually I know a lot more about this market than I had accredited myself for.

Q: How do you address the issue of financial restraints in the day to day running of your business?

A: You have to make strategic choices. What I would like to think we are doing but which we aren't always doing is buying when we need something and not 2 or 3 days before we need it, like we sometimes end up going shopping for materials and inputs because we've received an order, but actually everything should be prepared before we make that purchase because there's no use having fabric sitting around doing nothing and you really need the money for something. And I think a lot of designers, I certainly used to go very wrong in the beginning, where I used to every time a supplier would come in with beautiful fabrics I would feel so seduced by the fabric, I would buy it, and actually I didn't need it. So I've learnt the hard way, I've wasted a lot of money like that or just in terms of you know, speed of productions there really is no point in having stores full of fabric and no cash.

FUQ: apart from that, anything else?

A: In terms of technology we just use spreadsheets. And then we have petty cash at the shop, at the workshop, and at the office, that's kind of replenished on a weekly basis, we have credit card

sales so we have to manage carefully when the sale was made and when the money will actually be in the account.

FUQ: How does that work usually for credit card sales?

A: It usually takes 2-3 days for the money to get in and they usually take a commission but if you just assume that it is definitely coming in, you may find they suddenly have problems with their systems and lo and behold the money hasn't come in and you've written cheques for somethings against money that isn't in your account. So we try and make sure that we are writing as we have confirmed the money is in rather than giving post dated cheques. I do sometimes give post dated cheques but we do try and avoid it. But with a supplier that's maybe far away, we do it. We sometimes use M-Pesa for payments as well.

Q: What avenues then, can a fashion designer utilize to ensure continuous cash flow in the business?

A: Cash is king, sell in cash. Selling with cash is the best way to make sure there's always cash in the business, and also having a control, you bank your daily sales and then you withdraw what you need. You don't use directly sales money. Or sometimes we break that rule, but that is how it should be because it makes a very huge difference because you plan your money that way and then not be bullied, like people phone you to get paid all the time and realize that in a big business like Safaricom, you sit on people's money for even 3-4 months or say 3 months because the longer they have the cash, they put it into investments and they are earning interest on it. But that can earn you money. So honestly speaking, take as much cash as possible, and pay as late as possible. That's how you maximize how much cash you have in your hand. But obviously there are other factors; you are gonna annoy many people unless you have credit terms with them, so

negotiating credit terms with your suppliers; I have suppliers for fabrics and even manufacturing, that I have 30 or 60 day credit period with. That also helps. It is intentional on the part of finance although they wouldn't tell you, it is. Because they do that to maximize the amount the cash is in their books for.

Q: How does your product life cycle and product distribution affect the performance of your product?

A: It doesn't really stay in the store; we put it straight into the shop. And I'm afraid I can't give you precise statistics on how long it would take us to sell something. Mostly I think it would probably take us 1-2 months, but sometimes you'll get things left over and then you put them on a sale. But the stock that we would have that would stay longer we would say corporate stock that we've accidentally over produced cuz maybe the size was wrong or it was returned, or something like that and then you have to sit on that stock for even a year or more till the corporate issue a new LPO and needs the thing again. So in corporate you can have it for a lot longer.

Available Resources

Q: Are your sources/suppliers of material and services reliable?

A: Generally yes, they are not always hung up on exact delivery dates, but generally speaking yes, the thing would be with manufacturing, when you have a low volume, they will do high volume orders first sometimes, so that means your delivery may not be as fast as you would like but I think if you are really desperate and make it as part of the conditions of giving them the

order, having said that small scale workshops tend to not be reliable, like I think if they suddenly have another client that walks in and says look I'll give you this, they try and juggle everything and that means that your order gets pushed to the side, because they've now wanted to take another order, but that order has to be done immediately, and so your one is late. That has happened with people that we've had good delivery from, and then all of a sudden you get poor delivery because of something like that. And that is a problem. But in terms of professional manufacturing outfits, usually they do what they say they are going to do. So if the fabric is gonna take 6 weeks to make, like one of the fabrics that I'm using right now, they'll tell you it's 6 weeks and it'll actually be 6 weeks. So they are not just telling you what you want to hear. Whereas the smaller scale workshop will tell you what you want to hear, because they want the business, and they are scared that if they tell you the truth, you will go elsewhere.

Q: Does this affect the success of your products?

A: Yes, because if you are delivering to a 3rd party, they start questioning your reliability cuz you've given your delivery date and then your people you subcontract to haven't respected it. And so the one that looks bad is you because they don't care what you subcontract so long as the quality is right. And then they hold you accountable for the delivery.

Q: How can the situation be improved?

A: I think it's about culture and for me what it means is like when someone's done that then we don't order from you again. I don't know any other way of doing it cuz if you deliver you get more orders if you don't deliver we know you are unreliable so we would only take you as an absolute last resort.

Q: How do you overcome issues arising from unreliable sources/suppliers to maintain success?

A: Just drop them, find others. I mean of course we'd first of all talk to them, explain the problem, blab bla bla, but if it didn't improve, and we would test whether it would improve by giving them a small order not a big order, but if it seemed to be the same problem as before, we would just drop them.

Q: What is the situation of infrastructure; transportation, electricity, etc in Kenya?

A: Not as good as it should be. I don't think it's a disaster, like if we were comparing it to Nigeria at least we have electricity and we don't all have to run on generators. I choose my business location according to the availability to a generator, consistent water supply, and because I'm aware of this problem, if I wasn't aware, I would get stuck cuz I might like come in and rent something assuming that everything is okay and then I move in and find that it is a problem. And obviously if you are in a high level building you want to know that there's a lift that it's maintained at the time and so on.

Q: How does this state of infrastructure affect your business?

A: It's a cost to any business even driving around town, the roads are bad, your car needs more spare parts, it just increases you costs, electricity is high the cost of your garment goes up. So I would say infrastructure is absolutely critical to the development of any industry and I think the government knows that, it's just a question of whether they have the money to fix it.

Q: Which facilities/infrastructure, which if were made available in Kenya, or improved would make you more successful?

A: Technology; for small designers it's too expensive to have grading machines, you know the technology to automatically grading of patterns with CAD and stuff like that. So that kind of

technology was introduced at the EPZ and all of us designers had hoped we'd be able to use it but as far as I'm aware we are still not able to use it, this is several years on. And the Koreans set up a unit to train staff in the EPZs and I have severally phoned them about it, and we still are not able to use it now that would make a significant difference to production for small scale enterprise and it would be a more accurate product at the end of the day which would be easier to retail. Things like specific pieces of equipment caz like I said before some kind of technology like a centre where all small designers could go on and do their button holes or I also didn't talk about printing of course that's a bit of a problem. So just where we could do our own printing, get our button holes done, do our beading, so that we could because none of our businesses are big enough to reliably afford something like that and yet we would really greatly benefit from it.

FUQ: this Korean centre was a government initiative?

A: Yes, for the EPZ training unit.

FUQ: Ah, so they train only people based at the EPZ?

A: Well, they were meant to be opening it to others because we told the lady in charge at the time that it was a need but as I say I've really been on their case but I still haven't been able to use it. And the problem with that means that you really have to do it manually and it's very laborious. It's really, that is the kind of thing that we should be able to do using technology. That's something I've been on it for years because it just means that you could outsource a lot more things and it would be cost effective

Competitors

Q: How would you rate the cost of production in Kenya?

A: I don't really know cuz I haven't compared it to other places, but what I know from the manufacturer, is that they consider it to be very high. They say the energy costs are very high and the labor costs are high. And what I learnt in London, was that labor costs in Africa often tend to be much higher than Asia because Africans have shambas to go back to, so if they lose their job, they have a shamba where as in Asia like Bangladesh and places like that they have no choice, so they can be forced into very low labor salaries, so I think that is very significant difference between that market and ours.

FUQ: And for you?

A: Well you see I don't know cuz I've never produced elsewhere but what I do know in terms of textiles is that if I go to West Africa and buy the fabric myself and land it, it 's probably about half the price if I buy it already landed. But then I need to have the money upfront which has its own costs.

FUQ: but you said you produce some of your garments in your workshop?

A: I produce a lot of them in my workshop but you see you are asking me how it's a cost cuz I don't know because I haven't made them somewhere elsewhere.

FUQ: but for you here in Kenya, do you feel it is okay, it's too high, it's low?

A: You see I don't know because I don't have a comparison, if I had a comparison, if I had been producing in Asia I'd be able to tell you. I know that the factory they stopped doing for Wal-Mart because they couldn't do it at the Wal-Mart prices and run profitably. And I for me, it's more about quality than about them having a cheap I've always been much interested in pushing

the quality product angle and fair trade rather than cheap production. So I'm not in fast fashion, if I were in fast fashion I would answer that question but I'm assuming if H&M have now started manufacturing in the EPZ there must be some cheaper options, because they are all about cheap production and the other thing is that we are expecting China to have an economic crisis but right now the wages in China have gone up significantly or rather the cost of production I think it's to do with international currency regulation on the Chinese currency and the result has been that the prices are now more expensive than they were before. So that is why a lot of fast fashion companies are looking at Africa as an alternative to the Far East.

Q: Does it (cost of production) affect the success of your business compared to your competitors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in)?

A: It does because it's all about profit margin, how much you can mark up and certainly if I'm making a dress using Vlisco which is extremely expensive here, it's expensive worldwide but it's very expensive here so if I'm making a dress using Vlisco I can't mark up properly because my clients will not buy it. So I prefer not to use it unless it is a specific order and I'm guaranteed the retail price because otherwise I will go out of business because I have to make my profit margin. So definitely it affects everything so for me the main thing that I'm particularly concerned about, I don't mind if my labor costs are high if the production is efficient and the quality is good, and it's a niche product, that doesn't really affect things a lot, it affects it a bit. But what will affect things considerably is material inputs because if I can buy Vlisco in London a lot cheaper than I can buy it here, it means that my competitors have an advantage and yes our labor here is cheaper but still you know and west Africa it's still cheaper so it makes more sense for me for certain things for example I'm thinking when I'm using west African fabric, I should actually be

manufacturing in west Africa and exporting from there, so I want to open up my mind a bit as to where I effectively produce.

FUQ: so for you the cost of fabric is the most important?

A: Well it's the thing that makes the most difference on the actual cost of product. But if the material input of what I'm using are totally unique, I can put them into a garment and still get a good return at you see, for me my structure has always been a markup a minimum 100% + VAT for wholesale, and then I have to do the same again for retail caz otherwise most people will give the retail 100% + VAT so if I want everyone to be selling my product at the same price like me, I don't want to be selling cheaper than the people that are stocking me unless the hotel shops, where it doesn't matter. But then to do that, I have to allow the shop 100% markup + VAT. So that's kind of where I'm as at now.

Q: What measures do you put in place to ensure that your production costs are controlled beyond surpassing a certain point to be able to compete in the market?

A: I don't put a threshold; I just put a costing to each and every item then i work backwards, I sometimes work backwards but at times I know how much I want to sell something at and then I take off the markups and then I know what the maximum cost can be, I don't know if that's what you are actually asking? And then if I find that things are gonna be too expensive for me to sell then I have to now go and crunch numbers and look at exactly where I could cut back. And I do, do that, particularly now when I'm really trying to make more of an effort to be on top of the whole business side caz since I had to take control of being CEO again that is in September we really had made a dent in our finances and I really had to get involved in the number crunch. So that's been quite important.

Q: Does mass production help control production costs?

A: Yea, like if I'm making one off shirts, if I've got enough of them I might as well take them to a factory it's gonna be cheaper than doing them individually.

Business operations

Q: Do you run the operations of your business by yourself or do you hire people to manage the operations, while you concentrate on designing? And how does this affect your business's success?

A: What exactly are you covering in operations caz I told you I've got an accountant, I've got someone in sales who's acting like a kind of buying officer, so I'm just trying to understand the question.,

FUQ: yes that you've already answered. So you say you are CEO

A: Yea, I'm MD as well.

FUQ: so what does that entail?

A: Technically its overall responsibility for the business

FUQ: but there's someone who does the running of the business for you?

A: No.

FUQ: so you do the running?

A: Yup

I had someone before, but I had to change it because it was costing too much.

Q: What are/ would be the pros and cons of you handling all business operations by yourself?

A: It's a different type of work, so it's very difficult to do that and design simultaneously. Doing the practical side of pattern cutting and all that stuff is less problematic because that's quite mathematical, but designing really has you let you breathe so that's always a challenge. Obviously if you have more people who are high powered in your team and can contribute to the brainstorming and management, it's fantastic but what happened in our case is that we had too much of that and not enough people, like the sales weren't coming in fast enough so that in itself was now a problem.

FUQ: I think what I mean is, is it better to run the business by yourself or get other people to run it?

A: I think for me it's important to have someone doing finance, I think I've learned the hard way and I'm actually quite knowledgeable at financial planning now, and I think it all depends on who the people are. If someone understands the market you are in it can be a lot of added value and think it's an advantage because you don't want to be doing everything. But at this point it's probably better for me to hire Zaina under me, and I manage because it's better I do the business development and then I get someone else to design underneath me.

Q: Are there any challenges in hiring professionals to oversee the operations of your business like overall business managing, costing, marketing, accounting, etc?

A: Salary; it's like do you have enough money to pay for the professionals you want?

Q: Is it important for a fashion designer to have business management skills?

A: Yes, it's essential.

Q: What management skills does a designer require for their fashion business to be successful?

A: I mean it is general management, it is HR, finance, marketing, it's running a company and it is important. But with fashion, hype is important so marketing /PR is critical.

FUQ: so do they need to get this training or can they learn from experience?

A: Well I haven't had training in it but I obviously have an aptitude for it.

Q: How do you market your business?

A: I do PR, lots of it.

FUQ: what exactly is PR?

A: Public relations; it's like I talk about what I do, do interviews all the time, but I don't actually, I don't pay for it.

FUQ: so apart from PR, anything else?

A: I occasionally pay for ads very unusually and I do huge amounts of networking, I just a natural networker I would say.

Q: Are there any challenges you face in marketing your business?

A: Not really.

Q: What marketing avenues/channels do you feel are important to the success of a fashion business?

A: It's a very visual industry so you need to have good photos; I mean I think everything says everything about the brand. You need to be able to, like the people need to be able to see the product you need to tell a story through your product and the quality of how you tell the story, will be what then makes you look more or else professional. And so I think that's critical, for me the photos are good to go and you need to think of stories also who is gonna wear your brand, cuz celebrity culture is very important and we can't ignore it.

FUQ: what was the impact of you dressing Lupita's mother?

A: I don't know yet, but it was good in London, it opened doors for me.

FUQ: have you done endorsements before or was that the first?

A: I have, but let's face it; Lupita is the first global A-lister that most of us have known. So, it's very different getting someone who is a global A-lister versus someone who is well known in a certain market. Both can have an impact of a different kind but this is the first time I have that kind of level of endorsement. Everybody is talking about her; the whole of London was talking about her, she was on 3/4 front covers while I was there. You know what it is to have her on the Times, and the Independent newspaper, national papers.

FUQ: how do you go about getting her to wear a Kikoromeo?

A: I am old friends with Lupita, I have helped her since she started, so obviously she's going to be willing to discuss things with me, so I asked her and she put me in touch with her stylist I sent stuff with her mom, what the stylist had picked from the photos wasn't what she ended up keeping but she kept some stuff. As far as I'm aware she hasn't worn it yet but will. So, what I've told everyone, in the next gen designer thing, when people want to send stuff to Lupita, I'll

send it, I will organize it, like everyone can make a gift and we send a gift package from Kenya.
But I told everyone I cannot influence whether she wears it or not, it is not my decision.

FUQ: and I can imagine the amount of stuff she is receiving now

A: Yea, people will pay her to wear it because that's part of that business. I mean if you think about it, it will be normal if a Dior or a Prada would pay her to wear something cuz the publicity they get out of it is amazing.

FUQ: ya, like the one for the Oscars, I mean come on! That publicity was amazing!

A: So we should pay her actually.

FUQ: but she's already a face of something

A: Miu miu which is part of the Prada group.

Appendix J: Transcript of Semi-structured Interview with Deepa Dosaja held on 26-3-2014 at her store in 14th Riverside, Ground floor

Bio data

Q: How long have you been working as a fashion designer?

A: Worked as a fashion designer for 23 years

Q: What is your education background?

A: My education background is I have a diploma in fashion design from Montreal, from Le Sal College in Montreal

Work information

A: Where do you operate? How would you describe the scale of your business?

I operate from Riverside Lane, I have my workshop and I have the shop here (14th Riverside). 15 people full time and a lot of people when we have collections

FUQ: like casuals?

A: Yea, casuals

FUQ: and in terms of turnover if you are comfortable saying?

A: No.

Q: Number of employees and machinery/technology in use?

A: Number of employees I told you 15 full time, machinery we use Dukey machines

Q: What products do you produce and how do you produce them?

A: I produce women's garments and we are getting into men's

Expertise of fashion Designers

Q: Do you normally employ Kenyan fashion designers?

A: Not really. What do you mean in what capacity as drafters? I'm very disappointed in the people I've employed because quality of drafting and things are just awful.

Q: What level of education do they normally have?

A: Well, I've hired people from different fashion colleges, I won't name them and from the universities and it seems like they don't have the expertise, not in drafting, not in fitting, not in knowing the silhouette of the person, I'm disappointed.

Q: How do you feel they perform on their jobs as fashion designers?

Q: Do you feel their education impacts their performance of the job?

A: It definitely impacts their performance on the job, I prefer to train people. I find sometimes it's even easier to get somebody who knows nothing and to train them.

Q: What is your opinion of the education offered to fashion designers in Kenya?

A: Yea I think the fashion design education offered in other parts of the world is much better because it's more practical fashion, people want to wear, they want to wear the things you know, and they want the nice fit, fit is the main thing, which is what 's lacking.

Q: How would you compare fashion design education in Kenya to the fashion education offered in other parts of the world?

Q: Do you feel education plays a part in the level of success of a fashion designer?

Q: What areas of expertise does a fashion designer need to have to succeed?

A: I think fit. A fashion designer needs to have fit and in order to succeed, a huge amount of taste, good taste to know what suits your client, to know what is your market. And also I find that designers here they tend to want to change their style every show. What is your style? You have to be able to say oh, this is this brand, this is that.

Q: How do you maintain and enhance high levels of expertise and skills as a fashion designer?

A: I'm always learning new techniques, I try and always have the latest books, the latest design books, I buy lots and lots of design books, pattern making books, online of course these days you can check.

FUQ: So do you go for training anywhere yourself?

A: No, I don't.

FUQ: you just do self education?

A: Yea. You know looking at other designers collections, I find especially the couturists the Dolce and Gabbana you can get a good sense of work finish should really be.

Success Factors

Q: What challenges do fashion designers in Kenya face?

A: I think the challenges that fashion designers face in Kenya is that Kenyans don't want to wear local design.

Q: What, in your opinion, makes a fashion designer successful?

A: Having a clientele of people who love your brand. Having a good following of people who love your brand.

FUQ: But how do you create that?

A: By being true to your style, always stick to your style. Don't look at someone else's collection and say they are so successful let me change mine. Or if someone else uses silk and as I think often happens in Kenya, we all start using silk. Someone uses cotton lets all, because I did start my business with linen, then every designer started using linen. Now I think more and more designers are using silk, you know it's a matter of she's so successful let me go on that market.

Q: What aspects and practices do you observe to ensure your business stays successful?

A: I have experts come, I've now started bringing in experts to help us.

FUQ: oh really, from where?

A: Last year I had a fantastic pattern master from India. Luckily a good friend of mine, he was here sort of helping us a bit.

Economical Factors

Q: How is the state of the Kenyan economy and does that affect your business?

A: I think the state of the Kenya economy is fantastic except for people want to buy imported things. That's a problem.

Q: Do changes in the world economy affect your business?

A: Changes in the world economy do, don't really, they don't actually. It does affect my business in that the price of fabrics is getting really, really high. Really high and it can go up 20-30 percent overnight. Yea, and the supplier will tell you take it or leave it.

FUQ: and this affects China, India?

A: Yea, all of them

FUQ: People don't here of you in Kenya

A: I have a huge base of international clients. About 80%, 90% of my clients are international.

FUQ: so basically what Peggy said that got me to really want to interview you is she felt as opposed to all other Kenyan designers who are famous and well known, you are actually successful. And there's a big difference. And as you can see my topic is success factors for design.

A: Well I think you can go out there, I've been in a lot of press and whatever but it seems people don't really know and I realize that you know you have to target your market. You have to know who is your market. There's no point in being in the newspapers and spending money on advertising if it's not your market. What is your market? It's very important to know.

Q: Does the economy affect the purchasing power of your customers?

A: So economical I don't think that factors into my clientele.

Q: What measures do you put in place to counter the effects of the economy on your business?

Political Factors

Q: How do political events like the elections and change in government affect your business?

A: Yea I have to say the elections really affected us in that we were shut.

FUQ: You had to shut down?

A: Well, in that my workers were scared to stay past 2 o'clock in the afternoon and I didn't blame them and I would let them go and they would come late and then there was fear, a lot of that fear so of course we were not working at full capacity. Right, it was last March, last March was terrible.

FUQ: did it also affect your clients?

A: No, no my clients were, they are international so a lot of them left. A lot of them chose to leave. It does, it affects my business.

Q: What are the strengths and weakness of the policies currently in place in Kenya, which can increase the level of success in fashion businesses?

A: The duties are really, really, really, killing and I can understand why people like Memsaab are expensive. You know, because the duty is high.

FUQ: especially after the VAT bill

A: There was always VAT.

FUQ: yes, but this bill made it even more; things that were exempt now are not

A: Like magazines, we buy a lot of magazines. I think those are the kind of things in my opinion, yea, also the fact that you can't have casual laborers, that's a big hindrance on the fashion industry because that's a huge part of many industries, I think

FUQ: how come you can't have casual laborers?

Q: Because you have to part away with a lot of money; NHHF, NSIF for your employees, you can't have staff that is casual. I think the Kenyan fashion industry can be fantastic, I think it can be part of the fashion capitals, it can be, I Africa,

FUQ: but I don't know why it never gets there

A: Because Kenyans don't want to wear Kenyan labels.

FUQ: will they ever? Why do you think they don't?

A: There is that thing I will be honest with you, there is that thing I mean we do a lot of one of a kind pieces but there so many one of a kind pieces you can do, right, it's that thing of not wanting anyone to know where you get your things and not having the same things as someone else and not having the same fabric as someone else, I mean you said you are a textile designer I design all these stretch silks, those ones, so but I get 20 meters printed and it's so expensive to get 20 meters printed simply because of this reason. And people still don't like it that there are 10 dresses.

FUQ: that makes sense because even for me, if I see someone with something I'm wearing, I will not like it

A: But isn't it about the individual looking completely different? I find that I can have 2 clients wearing the exact same thing and they look completely different in it. Is it just the attitude?

FUQ: yes I think it's the attitude honestly.

A: It's sad but I think the minute we Kenyans are proud of wearing our own stuff, I mean I try and buy as much in Kenya as possible, you know. The minute we are proud of our stuff (FUQ: we would go far) absolutely. And then when we start telling friends I love your top, oh I got it from

FUQ: and in terms of price, do you think the price is out of their reach especially there is the higher end market but the middle, lower class, do you feel it's out of their reach?

A: My pieces are investment pieces. They last for a long time and you know like a working woman she can budget to have one suit. A season or so

FUQ: it would still work?

A: Yes.

Q: Which policies currently in place hinder fashion business in Kenya?

Ecological Factors

Q: Sustainability, environmental and social conscious design is on the rise worldwide. How do you incorporate this into your business?

A: In environmental factors we only use natural fabrics, we refuse to use any polyesters, that's why that woman said to me, I was like oh my God, maybe they ripped me off? Social consciousness we are very aware of our workers, we try not to do overtime and over work, we have a great environment; a beautiful studio for them to work in, good lighting, comfortable chairs, fair hours, fair wages.

Q: Do you ever face challenges resulting from customers insisting on only purchasing sustainable products?

A: My clients know me so well and they know that I would never, I don't run a sweat shop.

Q: Are there any regulations on ecological factors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in) that affect your business?

A: No

FUQ: and internationally, are there any laws since you say most of your customers are from outside Kenya

A: Weather wise?

FUQ: even in terms of let's say legislation, because a lot of ecological factors come from the West, Africa a lot of people don't bother as much

A: Ah, you mean like dyeing and things like that?

FUQ: yes, do you face that at the moment?

A: No

Technological Factors

Q: Which technology/technologies do you use in your business?

A: We use like I said they are handmade garments, well just basically industrial machines, yea.

FUQ: no CAD?CAM?

A: No. CAD/CAM I find will not have a fit like because it's standardized. We do a lot of made to measure, a lot.

Q: How does using this technology contribute to your business success?

Q: Is it important or necessary for a fashion designer to incorporate each new technology into their business to be successful?

A: I think it is necessary for designers to incorporate technology to their business but then it depends what, we want to grow, we want to grow into an export market but I also feel that with these CAD/CAMs it is never going to be as good as custom made. And also it sounds very, very naïve but I'm a spiritual person and how many jobs are we going to take away? And this is a factor that is really affecting me about technology; our bookshops are gone, in the West. We are just like shooting ourselves in the foot. What's gonna happen to the master cutter, are they gone just because we can punch in the measurements and out we churn patterns, blab la bla/ I mean this morning I spent my morning just trying to perfect my block, again we change it every season because the shoulders change, the waist drops you know dropped waist, high waist, so I wonder

what's gonna happen then to all the jobs! Are we gonna just be able to stick in 2 meters of fabric and get out this perfect dress? I'm sure someone is working on this. It scares me.

FUQ: yes they are, 3D printing, it will even render us designers obsolete

A: Absolutely, absolutely, but then this is the thing like when is it going to stop? I mean our population is growing, right, and there's gonna be nothing for anyone. My workshop is very hands on so we do try every toile we do try it on the mannequin then we have people of all sizes try them on, I think it's important, I think it's important to see the movement of the garment. Don't you think like seeing something flat is completely different?

FUQ: it's completely different because for Bata we installed a CAD system, but you see for us we are a mass producer. So certain aspects have to have machining because we are also standardized, so it makes sense, but as you say, it makes you realize it will render you redundant

A: absolutely! There will be one designer who'll probably be paid like crazy who will do all the company work

FUQ: so unless you go now as a designer and you learn all those CAD systems but I mean after awhile you will also burn out and it will also get boring as you said, fashion is physical, it's like sketching, a lot of designers hate having to do it by computer, illustrator because

A: I hate it I have sketch pads everywhere. I'm still like the person at textbook centre who is still buying pencils, paper

FUQ: you know, because it feels natural

A: yea, it really does. Like how do you design your textiles on computer?

FUQ: Photoshop and illustrator, especially for the prints. Just to show the renders, right now we can even show the whole collection but we are using a shoe software. But it's amazing, it's a good thing it's just that as you say..

A: So that's my take on technology.

Financial Resources

Q: What financial challenges did you face when starting up and how did you overcome them?

A: I started very small I used to stitch the clothes myself so I didn't. I would stitch the clothes myself so there was no really and I started very, very slowly.

Q: How do you address the issue of financial restraints in the day to day running of your business?

A: That's difficult because collecting money is a big problem. You know in Kenya as a culture of credit. I find when people say I know her so well and they think that they can just take credit, this is one of my problems, which is why now we are quite strict about that.

Q: What avenues then, can a fashion designer utilize to ensure continuous cash flow in the business?

A: Yea, to not give credit; a fashion designer has to be very strict and say that this is a business and we cannot, I find that this is something that happens in small businesses people start to expect credit. You know you wouldn't go to Nakumatt and ask for credit.

FUQ: you can't even bargain

A: No

Q: How does your product life cycle and product distribution affect the performance of your product?

A: I don't get this one; these are 2 different things, aren't they?

FUQ: they are, but they do affect each other for example for you, you have this store, how long do your garments stay in the store but you said you do custom made. So do you face any challenges of having garments staying too long in the store?

A: Oh yea, then I have sales; I have sales every 3-4 months. I have a sale so I can get rid of old stuff.

FUQ: and in terms of distribution a lot of people say they are struggling with distribution; you have the product but you do not have the channel to sell. For you do you face that kind of thing, the challenge to sell?

A: This is my channel (shop) and we are doing a lot of my clients who have left the country, we are trying to send to them.

FUQ: so for you it works fine?

A: For me it works fine.

FUQ: how do you ensure cash flow for day to day running?

A: Make sales; by ensuring that we sell. We have new things to show clients we have new designs, you know I'm always coming up with new designs every week I have at least a few new designs, every week.

FUQ: so you would say for you, you sell everyday

A: We try to. Yes, it definitely affects the success of my products.

Available Resources

Q: Are your sources/suppliers of material and services reliable?

A: No I don't have any unreliable sources.

Q: Does this affect the success of your products?

Q: How can the situation be improved?

Q: How do you overcome issues arising from unreliable sources/suppliers to maintain success?

Q: What is the situation of infrastructure; transportation, electricity, etc in Kenya?

A: Now I have to tell you I have a huge problem with electricity, my generator is constantly running at my manufacturing place. This is causing me huge problems and we have a huge water problem on Riverside Drive, huge water problems because there are so many new buildings coming up we have no water at the studio and I don't exaggerate, I have to get a water truck every week, every week I get a truck and I run my generator almost every day. So you can see the expense. I try and be eco friendly so for many years I didn't have a generator and this would of course affect my generator because my tailors wouldn't be manufacturing, they wouldn't be working, they would be standing outside waiting, waiting, waiting for the power to come back on. I just had to give in and get a generator. It was just a

Q: How does this state of infrastructure affect your business?

Q: Which facilities/infrastructure, which if were made available in Kenya, or improved would make you more successful?

A: Like a good public transport I think would be very helpful especially for my workers because they, I find it very difficult to ask them to do overtime when they have to, they can't find transport and it's dangerous, you know going home for them is dangerous and the dark and things like this, so I mean overtime is something which is in most companies in the world but here I minimize it, I don't like it.

FUQ: up to what time do they work?

A: Mine, 5. But you know there are times like we are doing a wedding dress that has to be delivered today she's getting married tomorrow then I would like them but I find it very dangerous for them to stay late. I've had assistants leave the shop at 7-7.30pm and get mugged, out here (for this area) yea, this is really bad you can't walk up this way at night, you cannot.

FUQ: apart from affecting your labor, does it affect other operations/

A: Electricity not really, well yes I have to get new iron boxes every month. Because with the power fluctuations elements burn out and because we do bespoke, we have to use also the domestic steam irons and they are constantly going, going, going, we don't even bother fixing them because it's not worth it, you know, the element. So I think that would be better. Well m lights blow. 17 year bulbs blow so now I'm just gonna put in regular ones.

Competitors

Q: How would you rate the cost of production in Kenya?

A: It's high, you can't compare it to china, you can't compare it to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka you cannot to India. It must be 3-4 times I think.

Q: Does it (cost of production) affect the success of your business compared to your competitors in Kenya (or other markets you deal in)?

A: It doesn't affect the success of my business, no.

FUQ: How, how does it not affect your business?

A: Well it does affect in that I pay my people fairly, we pay VAT we pay all the taxes, PAYE, NSSF, duty, so my garments are highly priced.

FUQ: so you feel it cuts you out from a lower segment of clientele?

A: Absolutely

FUQ: You would be interested to sell to that segment of clientele?

A: I would be, I would be but I've also approached various factories here and they are very expensive also to per piece because I actually wanted to do like an off the rack collection that would be much more reasonable but it still works out expensive.

Q: What measures do you put in place to ensure that your production costs are controlled beyond surpassing a certain point to be able to compete in the market?

A: Keep an eye on our stock, to try we shop only once a week, we try to you know, we try to be as economical as possible.

Q: Does mass production help control production costs?

A: I think mass production would help control production costs in that the production costs would be lower in a factory than running your own place.

FUQ: but then as you say the mass producing companies are expensive

A: They do, they charge a lot.

Business operations

Q: Do you run the operations of your business by yourself or do you hire people to manage the operations, while you concentrate on designing? And how does this affect your business's success?

A: Operations I've got a head of production, I have a person who is head of production, I am head of design and then I have sales people and It's a bit difficult me just concentrating on designing because a lot of my clients want to see me personally. So I'm here at the boutique Thursday, Friday and Saturdays so that I can see them face to face. It's very interesting because I'm now trying to design my new collection, I design fabrics too I told you, and you know how labor intensive that is right, and you have to be alone, you have to be quiet, you have to be its proving to get that time to design, you almost feel like going away but then when you are away the business is not there. So it does affect my business success if I am not around I feel, it does.

Q: What are/ would be the pros and cons of you handling all business operations by yourself?

A: I handle all the design and I'm really quite particular about handling all the patterning. I don't just do a sketch and give it to my pattern makers, no. I like to know what, where, I do the initial size 38 pattern then they can grade it. But that is where my control issues come in; I have to do the first.

FUQ: so you can even stitch the sample?

A: Me, well I won't stitch it I can stitch it, but I will have someone stitch it. I do the initial size 38 then they can grade it, then I have no problem, but just to see it, then that is filed as a block and then we go ahead.

FUQ: so I don't know if this affects you, do you face issues of different body sizes that are not within the standardized sizes?

A lot, (FUQ: so you have to adjust?) a lot

A: So I think there is a pro to handling everything if you have the energy and that you will have full control of everything but there is a con in that you will not be able to, it is just impossible for you to expand, you cannot expand. If you can't give up control, you cannot expand, you know we just moved to the boutique in October, now if I was such a control freak, I wouldn't be able to leave that place so you have to be able to give up some responsibilities.

Q: Are there any challenges in hiring professionals to oversee the operations of your business like overall business managing, costing, marketing, accounting, etc?

A: Yea, to make sure that it's followed though to the way you like. Yes I've had a lot of challenges in hiring professionals. The challenges are I have hired QC people who haven't seem to have an idea what QC is, you know when I would be sitting there and I've had 3 or 4 since last

year tried out who would look at the seam and it would be like this (wobbly not straight) and they wouldn't see it. I've had a lot of those challenges, a lot of QC challenges. A lot of with tailors telling me they know how to stitch but they have no idea, pattern cutters, a lot of issues with pattern cutting.

You know one of the 1st questions you asked me about fashion education, when I did fashion school I thought I was going to be sketching beautiful things, someone was going to produce them somewhere but my 1st year was stitching, stitching and I will never forget how frustrating it was, I was making a corset, I'd put in the hooks and the teacher would say undo them it's crooked. You'd spend all night just stitching, that's the practicality of fashion. If you don't know how to stitch, how do you expect to make anything? That is what has been frustrating me about the people I've been hiring is that how can, no one can say to me oh Deepa this is correct if it's not because I know if the stitching, the cutting or something but those are the important things in fashion. So I have a lot of my clients children who want to go into design I tell them first come and stay at the studio and understand what that you 1st draft a pattern, that you first learn drafting, and learn drafting from scratch and then stitching, and then you need it.

I noticed in Kenya people do free hand cutting, it drives me up the wall. We had this conversation with Peggy, it drives me crazy because I'm looking and I'm like so where on earth did you find that curve, oh no it's the perfect I looked at the person I said and I feel so sorry because you have to; fashion is something very technical, this is what people don't understand. I stand with my guys, we are 4 of us in cutting including me, we stand and have huge discussions about one block, and I make everyone stand there and ask what do you think, what do you think, why is this flat, they think I'm crazy but no, unless you get it right, if from the base it's not right, you've had it. And I know so many people one of my close friends she started a fashion

company she used to sketching and she gave it to her tailor and I was like darling, don't do that. It put me off so badly the level of education, my girl, my personal assistant at the studio, is a girl who came to me when she was 15 years old. I refused to hire her because I said I can't hire a child she begged me, she had nowhere to go, she came to me as a cleaning woman. Today she is my head cutter. Today I can call her and say make me a dress I'm going out tonight, cut it or cut for this woman, she's got the best taste, she's got every skill and I told her you've been to design school for 10 years, it's like proper, intense design school. I sent her to English school and at one point she said to me she wants to go to design school I said forget it, I said you are learning your design school here. She was part of our discussion today. I am sorry to say but I got a girl who is supposed to be a cutter but she's doing messenger work because I can't trust her to do anything. And she's been to pattern school or design school for 3 years. It makes sad because I think the amount of money her parents must have spent. But I think you get it on by tones of books, read them, look at the garments, go as much as you can, I took one of my assistants to South Africa for a fashion show and I said to her, go into Prada go into Gucci, look at their clothes, take them, dissect them, see what proper finish, what proper cut is.

But this is the thing about design, I love it, I love it and that's why when my clients kids want to do design, I tell them send them over! Let them spend just 2 or 3 days there and realize what it is about.

That is the main thing that I find is lacking, that I find really sad is that not knowing the technicalities behind a garment.

Yes I've had challenges hiring professionals, a lot of challenges.

Q: Is it important for a fashion designer to have business management skills?

A: Yes it is important for them to have business management skills, to become successful, you have to manage. This is something that I've had a huge challenge with, is getting people to pay. But I am working on it.

FUQ: to pay, how?

A: I find that for me it is such an art that asking people to pay is a problem.

Q: What management skills does a designer require for their fashion business to be successful?

Q: How do you market your business?

A: Word of mouth, just word of mouth

FUQ: I noticed you have a twitter account but it's not been active for awhile. You also have a website, do you use it as a marketing tool?

A: We will activate the twitter account soon. My website, I have also printed these fliers which we've actually not put anywhere, we put them in my friends salon. The twitter and the facebook we are going to reactivate.

FUQ: so for you word of mouth works best?

A: Yea

Q: Are there any challenges you face in marketing your business?

A: I do face one challenge in that a lot of people don't tell each other where they get their clothes. It's a very interesting challenge we face.

FUQ: but how then does the word of mouth work?

A: Okay, a few people I shouldn't say a lot of people.

Q: What marketing avenues/channels do you feel are important to the success of a fashion business?

A: I think like a good network of clients, very important for success of a fashion business.

FUQ: I think the one thing I always wonder, because I do appreciate having a good network of clients but imagine someone who's just left campus, and they need to build that network, how do they go about it?

A: You see one of the things that is lacking in Kenya is the designers emporium like in South Africa. I think Ann tried it, she tried it at Yaya but it hasn't picked up.

FUQ: because that really would solve the issue of distribution because that is a big challenge designers say they face

A: Because the rents are ridiculous

FUQ: yes, so unless you have a place your clients are comfortable to come it becomes tricky for you.

A: That's it. And because of traffic and things like this you have to put yourself in a strategic place. Because traffic, that's actually infrastructure, that has affected my business a lot! People don't want to come, a lot of my clients live on the other side of town or work on the other side of town, Saturday here is ridiculous it's full, full, full because that's the only day there's no traffic. It's affected my clients.

FUQ: so do you deliver to them?

A: Now we've started delivering. Now we deliver to them, now it's like oh my gosh it's becoming bad.

FUQ: Before here where were you based before?

A: Riverside lane, my studio one

FUQ: it was a better location, or this is better?

A: No they are on the same road. So it's the same thing, but the traffic had become really bad since December. But also Westlands roundabout has become too crowded. Well there are more and more cars, I hear we get 5000 cars a month. But that is one thing that has really affected my business.