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# From Market Stand to Mainstream

Businesswomen Who Change the Fabric of Kenya's Handcrafted Textile Sector





# The Jua Kali Women's Textile Project

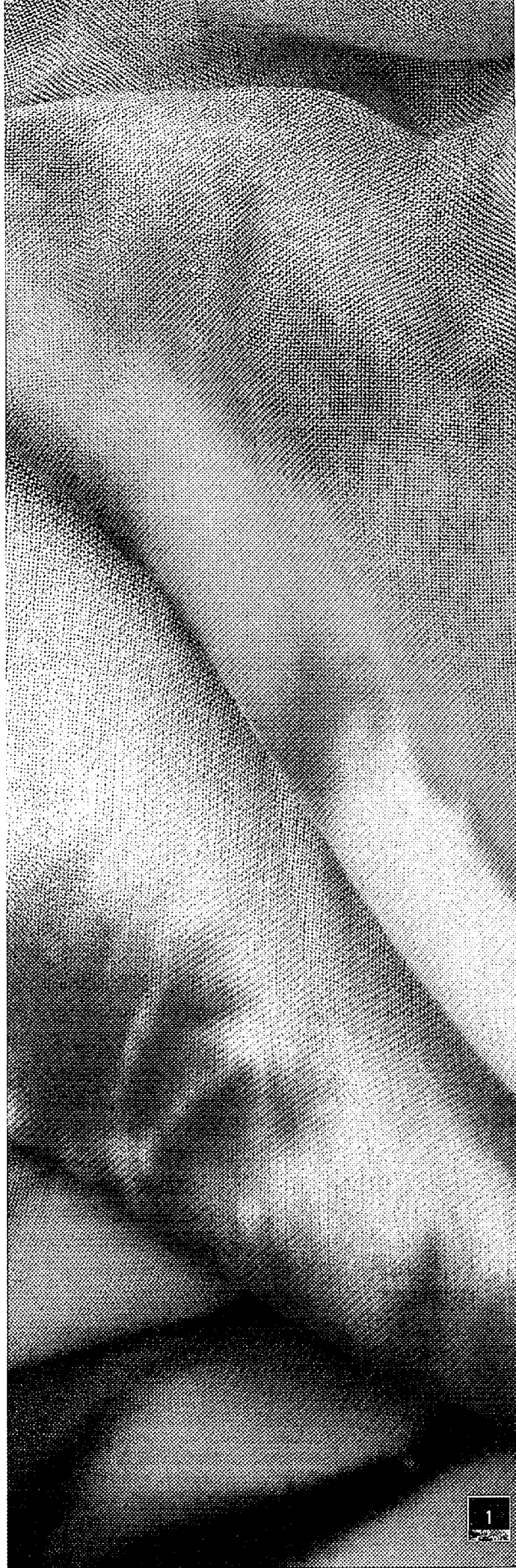
What started – almost a decade ago – as an effort to help 25 Nairobi craftswomen and outdoor market operators become the owners of profitable small textile businesses has grown into a technical and managerial training programme which has benefited thousands of Kenyan women. It has also led to a similar undertaking launched in 1995 in the United Republic of Tanzania and has largely inspired an assistance project for the textile industry in a third East African country, Uganda.

The informal sector of the Kenyan economy – known as Jua Kali (Swahili for “hot sun”) in reference to the outdoor markets where most Kenyan small retail businesses operate – is the only source of income for a large part of the country's population. Furthermore, the largest number of the people earning their living in this sector are women who produce and sell textiles and related products.

To accelerate job creation and reduce import dependence, the Government of Kenya invested massively in the textile industry during the first two decades of the country's independence, gained in 1963. The results failed to meet expectations due to inefficiencies often associated with state-run industrial development campaigns. A more market-oriented policy adopted in the late 1980s brought into sharper focus the potential of cottage industries as a source of steady income for many Kenyans, particularly women, in both urban and rural areas.

Once the development of the handicraft sector became a top policy priority, the Government of Kenya requested the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to assist in upgrading the skills of Jua Kali women producing and selling textiles. Started in 1991 with funds provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the “Jua Kali Women's Textile Project” grew rapidly to include continuous skill-development services provided at the Kenya Textile Training Institute in Nairobi and the Kimathi Institute of Technology in Nyeri.

Detail of tie-dye scarf by Elizabeth Muthoni Kanyoro (*front cover*).  
*Opposite page*: Ester M. Kariliki wearing a new outfit of her own design  
at the Tuesday Masai Market in Nairobi.





## Basic Business Skills for Dressmakers

Assisting the handicraft sector in Kenya was seen by UNIDO as an effective way of expanding income-earning opportunities for women and thereby promoting both economic development and social equity. The key to fulfilling this objective was an adequate diffusion of basic business skills and practices which would help thousands of small-time producers and merchants join the economic mainstream.

Since 1991, the Organization's training services have turned some 1,300 of Kenya's kitchen-table dressmakers into full-time businesswomen. "The project trains them in all aspects of the type of business they are in," says John-Peter Moll of UNIDO's Agro-Industries Branch. "These women come to us and we train them in product development and market appraisal as well as in bookkeeping and business planning." The core training has a duration of six months and includes classroom work as well as application support through consultancy services. Shorter courses (from one week to two months) are more specialized and deal with technical subjects – such as tie-dyeing or equipment maintenance – or business management topics. In recent years, a training-of-trainers programme has greatly contributed to a faster dissemination of the project's impact. All training is scheduled and conducted in ways which accommodate the occupational and housekeeping responsibilities of the trainees.

The project's early achievements elicited additional support. The Canadian International Development Agency provided the funds for the purchase of advanced garment-making equipment needed when the project was expanded to include Nyeri. Then, in 1995, a substantial contribution from the

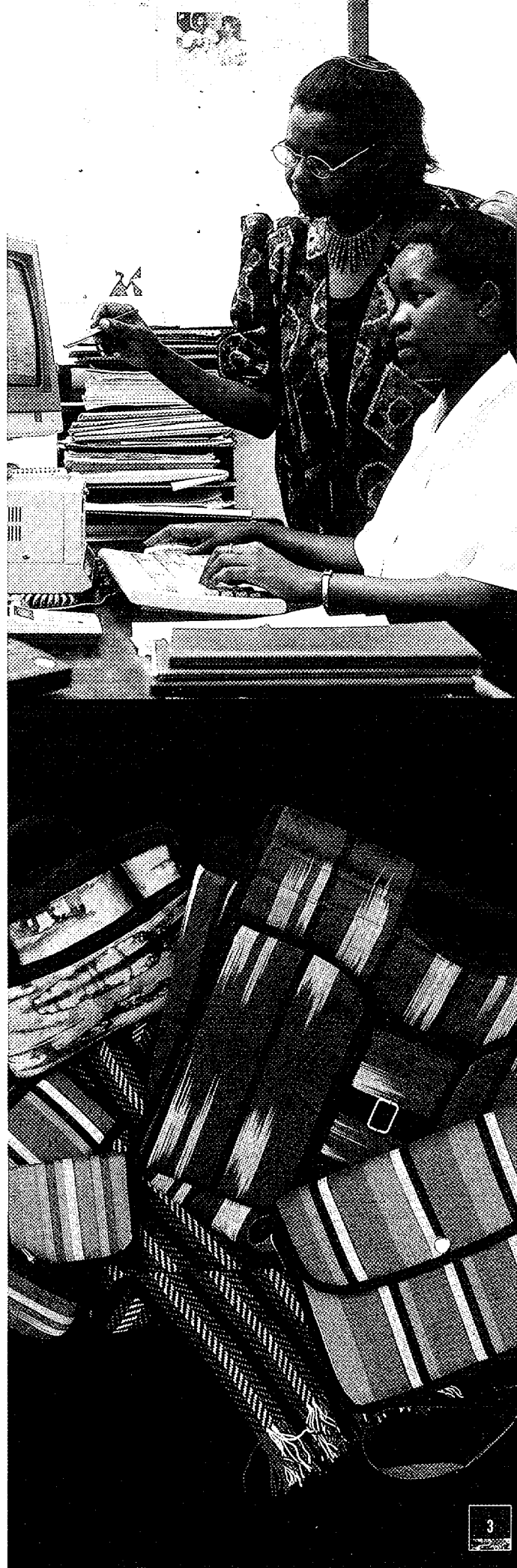


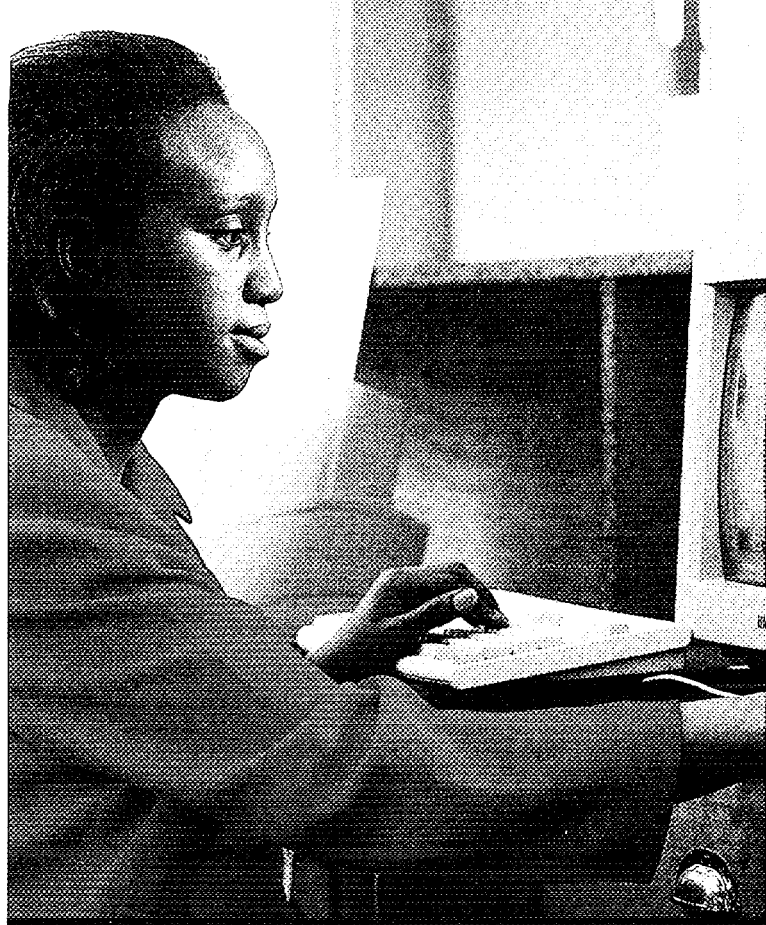
German Government financed all activities carried out in the crucial two-year period preceding the inauguration of a non-governmental organization.

The establishment in Nairobi, in June 1997, of the Enterprise Development Agency (EDA) institutionalized an advanced training capability to ensure the sustainability of the new course charted by the project for the informal sector of Kenya's textile industry. It is also meant to play a regional role and has already proven to be a source of valuable support for UNIDO's projects in Tanzania and Uganda.

The legacy of the project itself goes well beyond Kenya's Jua Kali textile sector. A programme promoting "Women Entrepreneurs for Industrial Growth" has evolved largely out of this pilot project and is being applied by the Organization in a variety of industries and settings.

National project coordinator Joyce W. Assanga (standing) and clerk at EDA headquarters, and new line of accessories developed with project support. *Opposite page:* Classroom and workshop training in technical skills and product development.





## The Measure of Success

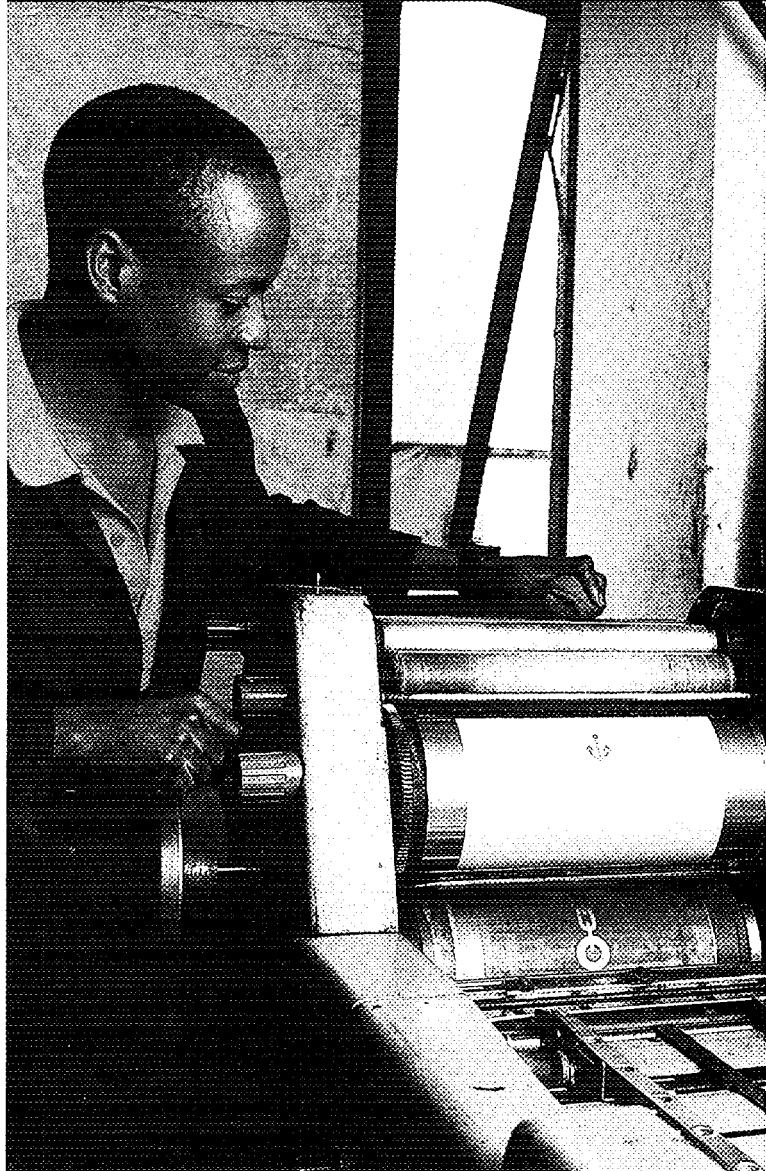
The 25 graduates of the initial "class of '91" were followed by other 1,248 direct beneficiaries of the project's training services. About 10 per cent of these women became trainers themselves and contributed significantly to a multiplier effect estimated at approximately 3,000 indirect beneficiaries.

Of the 700 women who have taken the six-month course, 665 (or 95 per cent) are now business owners and have a regular income which in most cases has more than doubled since they joined the programme.

Direct job creation stands now at 2,242. Additional employment has been generated by some 400 new businesses started by former employees, apprentices or trainees of direct beneficiaries.

Approximately 35 per cent of all project participants have benefited from access to formal credit and over 85 per cent have opened accounts with commercial or savings banks.

Most enterprises show a steady increase in asset value due to growing demand for improved or new products. The entrepreneurs' average net worth has increased by 104 per cent.



Further investment is likely given a most encouraging average return on equity of 31 per cent (12 per cent before training). A widening of the profit margin (currently an average of 62 per cent) also augurs well for capacity expansion.

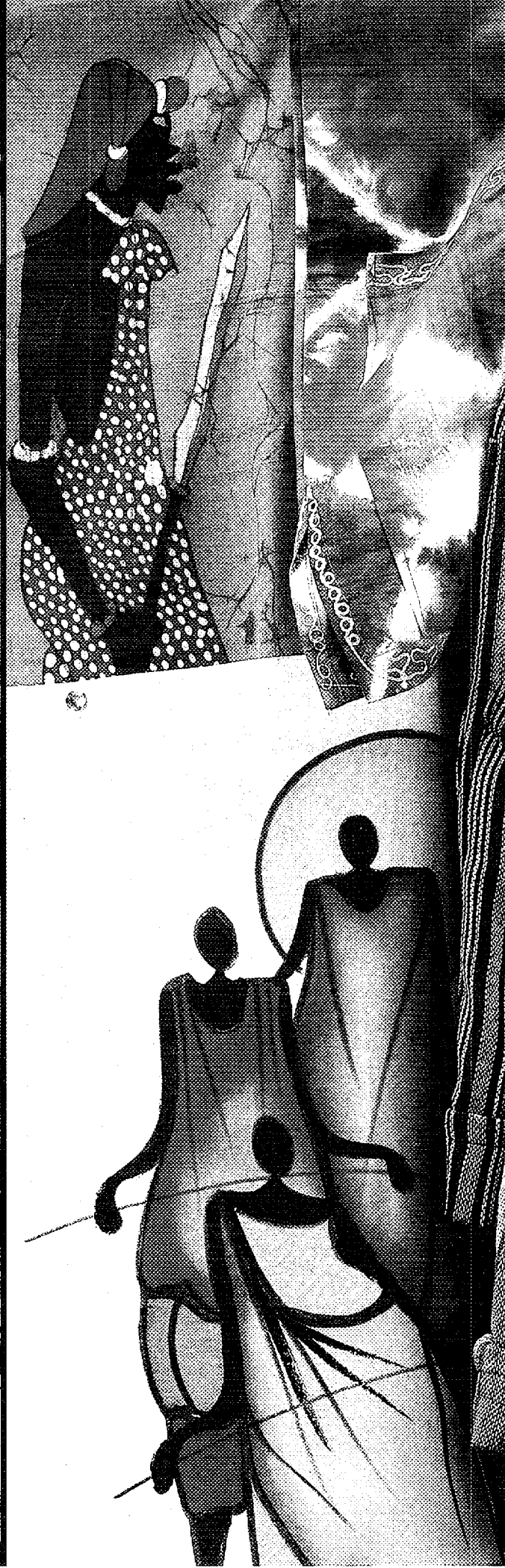
Through participation in marketing missions as well as fairs and exhibitions, most enterprises supported by the project have secured a wider market access. About 30 per cent are already exporting some of their products to other African countries as well as to Europe and North America.

The brightest picture is the bottom line. The average monthly gross revenue has grown by 178 per cent since the business owners completed their training and the average net income per month has increased by a stunning 233 per cent.



Ester Nduta in her Blue Lady boutique in Ongata, a small town in the vicinity of the capital.  
*Opposite page:* Felistas Wambui owns a modern fabric-printing business in downtown Nairobi.





# Investing in Women's Economic Future

If the overall achievement statistics speak for themselves, the individual success stories are equally eloquent in showing that investing in women's economic future can pay off handsomely. The very nature of the project was such that its highlights are brightest when seen as the difference it made in the lives of very real people, lives which it touched and changed in many significant ways.

Catherine Kariuki attended the six-month training programme in 1993. Before she started her business in her native Kingicero, a Nairobi suburb, she used to sell eggs while learning dressmaking. "If it were not for the Jua Kali training," she says, "I could not be where I am now. I am able to look after my parents, sisters, brother and myself. I have become more confident in life. Through the project, I have participated in local and international missions, including trips to Ghana and South Africa." Now her own business takes her "at least once every two months" to South Africa, where she has established a lucrative outlet for her products.

Mama Nyambura was one of the initial group of 25 women trained in Nairobi in 1991. She was selected during a visit to the Uhuru Market, where she had been operating a tailoring shop since 1970. Business is much better now, and that may have a lot to do with her new business philosophy: "I do not just make dresses because the other person is making and selling the same. I try to find out whether the design is a moving one and where it would sell most."

Helen Ndiré's bags are a frequent sight in the streets of Nairobi's Buru Buru district.  
*Opposite page:* Catherine Kariuki surrounded by her rich palette of handcrafted textiles.





Elizabeth Mballa is also a “class of ’91” graduate. She used to make school uniforms and had to travel extensively in search of orders. “I was having a hectic time running up and down between Nairobi and Kisumu trying to get orders,” she remembers. Now she has several employees and produces household textiles in patchwork designs which she sells mostly in her Uhuru Market shop. “I concentrate on a product line of soft furnishings,” she says. “I now have a better margin and I am a happier person.”

Dorothy Kagumba was trained at the Nyeri project site and the subsequent performance of her business brought her the Golden Trophy for the most successful woman entrepreneur awarded during the UNIDO-sponsored Africa Industrialization Day celebrations in November 1996.

Susan Ndun’gu is another Nyeri dressmaker who has become a star on the local fashion scene. The vivid designs of her products, which include accessories such as bags and headscarves, enjoy a steadily growing clientele. An attractive woman and a tasteful dresser, she is a living advertisement for her downtown boutique. “It happens often that people come up to me to ask where I buy my clothes,” she says. “And that, of course, is a question I am always glad to answer.”



Young worker in Elizabeth Mballa's Uhuru Market workshop and store, and tie-dye bags created by Nyeri fashion star Susan Ndun'gu (opposite page).



## **Regional Spin-Off: Replays with a New Strategy**

The Jua Kali project has demonstrated the viability of an innovative approach to advancing entrepreneurship among women in industries where they have a high participation rate but disproportionately limited opportunities. The establishment of the Enterprise Development Agency in Nairobi ensured the functioning of a fertile incubator environment beyond the end of donor funding. It also created an institutional field base for UNIDO's efforts to replicate the project elsewhere in the region.

Already in 1995, a similar training programme started in neighbouring Tanzania. Financed by the Government of Switzerland, the three-year project benefited 212 women entrepreneurs in the informal textile sector. About half of them report significant business growth and this expansion has translated into more than 200 jobs. The Artisan Development Agency of Tanzania, located in Dar es Salaam, has the same status and offers the same services as Kenya's EDA.

Following a fact-finding regional mission of the Director-General of UNIDO, Carlos Magariños, in July-August 1998, the Organization has developed a new project to assist Tanzania's textile industry. The project will reflect UNIDO's restructured service packages for a more flexible and efficient marshalling of its resources in the delivery of assistance. It will also apply innovative mechanisms for sustainable job creation. One such mechanism, designed by UNIDO in consultation with local experts and authorities, is the Export-Oriented Apparel Manufacturing Preferential Licensing Programme for Increased Productivity and Employment (EXAMPLE). It is intended to secure stronger support from the host government in pursuit of the closely interlinked objectives of employment growth and a wider market access. Up to eight initial EXAMPLEs – backed by a portfolio of investment project proposals – will be a keystone of UNIDO's new endeavour in Tanzania.

Uganda is another East African country which stands to benefit from the Organization's success in promoting entrepreneurship among women in the textile industry. Work started recently under a large project which will assist both cottage industry operators and small-scale to medium-size production facilities.

A reflection of its conviction that, in Mr. Magariños' words, "Africa is the test of UNIDO's relevance," the Organization is stepping up its efforts on the continent with more effective service packages and a special emphasis on agro-industries and women's advancement through entrepreneurship.

Detail of embroidered dress designed by Mary Onyango, and Susan Onyango modeling in her mother's store.  
*Opposite page:* Enterprise Development Agency staff.



Tie-dye textiles by Mary Warungu.  
Cover: Nairobi designer-entrepreneur Elizabeth Muthoni Kanyoro,  
and tie-dyed and printed scarf by Joyce W. Maina.



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