



*Kingsford Yawson with his apprentices in Wassa Atobiase, Wassa East District of Ghana, in June 2018  
(Photo Credit: WAGES)*

## **CHAMPIONING GENDER EQUALITY**

*A Case Study on Kingsford Yawson*

**By Ernest Kansouba – March 2018**

*Kingsford Yawson is a farmer, a tailor and a champion for gender equality. After attending a WAGES training on entrepreneurship, he saved his business from collapse after adopting improved business practices. More importantly, after learning about gender roles and equality at the training, he took initiative to learn to sew women's clothing, hire female apprentices to train, and, support women's participation in community meetings. He is a role model and inspiration to all in his community, given his pursuit of dressmaking, a trade traditionally for women.*

## His goal:

Kingsford Yawson, is a tailor from Wassa Atobiase, a community in the Wassa East District, located in the Western Region of Ghana. He was just over 22 years old when he started Kings Fashion, with no formal higher education and only one year of practical experience in sewing. Kingsford is a self-taught tailor who started his journey as a tailor by sewing clothes for his friends, family and himself, while working on his farm at the same time. He used his earnings from his farm to buy machines for his tailoring business. He knew that running his business would not be easy because in his community, tailoring is often seen as a woman's trade. To add to that, he was not an expert in this field.

Yet, his goal was to build the top brand in his community and its surrounding villages. He therefore had to work extremely hard in order to achieve this – changing mindsets but also providing his talent as a self-taught tailor. One strategy he used was to leave his shop and go to individual homes to market his business. With time, his dedication and hard work paid off and he was able to establish and sustain his business. He developed a strong customer base and a good level of output.

Though his business was thriving, he had his fair share of struggles and setbacks. Some of these challenges included lack of record-keeping, lack of branding, poor marketing strategies and weak customer relations. At one point, his business almost collapsed, and it received heavy criticism from his family and friends. He was filled with self-doubt and discouragement, but he did not give up.

## The intervention and the change:

*“As a man, I thought that I can only sew men’s clothing. I thought that men sewed men’s clothes and women sewed women’s clothes, because that is the norm in the community. After undergoing the WAGES’ training, I immediately realized that isn’t true and that I can also sew women’s clothes!” – Kingsford Yawson, owner of King’s Fashion*

Kingsford had the opportunity to participate in the entrepreneurship training for tailors and dressmakers, held by the West African Governance and Economic Sustainability in Extractive Areas (WAGES) project. The project is a joint initiative of the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI). The training was held

under the WAGES project's economic development component and sought to equip young entrepreneurs with financial management skills that would ensure their sustainability and competitiveness in the local markets.

Kingsford is certain that the training had a significant impact on his work and his life; before the training, he only sewed men's clothing but after the training, he chose to undergo a six-week training from a female friend, to learn how to sew women's

clothing. Before attending the WAGES training, he had three male apprentices, but he now boasts of six female apprentices, an outcome he attributes to WAGES.

Kingsford's improved financial management practices kept his business alive. He previously only kept records of measurements, but now, he makes sure to keep records

*"You do not have to start out as an expert in order to be a successful entrepreneur. You just have to work hard, be dedicated and believe that you can do it." – Kingsford Yawson*

of all transactions. As well, he used to burn unwanted materials in an open space, but after the WAGES training on environmental sustainability, he learned the harmful effects of that practice and instead, he started to recycle these materials, using them to train his apprentices and to make pillow covers. While he is yet to make direct economic gains from these pillow covers, as of now, he uses them as gifts for customers. This strategy has played a significant role in improving customer relations and boosting his business. Kingsford says that it is his dream to add floral decoration services to his business in the future.

### **Beyond his business:**

Kingsford is a unit committee member in the Atobiase Electoral Area. He now pays special attention to the women and youth in the community when scheduling community activities. Initially, meetings were held on Tuesdays which is market day – a day when women go to the market to buy and sell products – and so women used to miss out on community activities. After learning about the importance of women's participation in decision-making, he worked with the assembly member of the area, and together, they moved the meeting day to Fridays so that more women could participate in these meetings. Kingsford hopes to attend more trainings from WAGES so that he can train more women, since many are unable to pursue higher education, and will therefore definitely see economic benefits from undergoing skills training.

The WAGES project aims to break the vicious circle in which local communities, especially women and youth, are excluded from the benefits of mining investments. Through WAGES, **World University Service of Canada (WUSC)** and the **Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI)**, work in three regions of Burkina Faso, Ghana and Guinea impacted by extractive industries. The project works to empower local communities, and specifically integrate women and youth, to participate fully in local governance, economic opportunities and the sustainable development of these areas. The project collaborates with local and national governments, select mining companies, as well as small and medium-sized businesses and civil society organizations to attain those objectives. Global Affairs Canada funds the implementation of WAGES from 2016 until 2022. For more information on the project follow this link: <https://resources.wusc.ca/project/wages>