

## Sustainable & Ethical Fashion in Africa

Author: Pearl M. Kasirye<sup>1</sup>

---

Interview to Frank Wesley



Photo Credit: Clem Onojehuo | Unsplash

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "sustainable and ethical fashion?"

Do you think of reducing pollution? Or do you think about fair wages and ethical practices?

Regardless of your beliefs, many people have differing opinions on what sustainable fashion actually is.

The term 'sustainability' is rather subjective and its meaning can have different connotations around the world.

To learn more, researchers from The Thinking Watermill Society set out to ask African fashion designers this fundamental question: *what is sustainable and ethical fashion?*

---

<sup>1</sup> Pearl M. Kasirye is a Ugandan author, professional writer and researcher at Pearl Lemon London and The Thinking Watermill Society. She is also a student of Communication & Media Studies at Franklin University Switzerland.



The responses we received were full of deep insight that we just had to publish.

In this article, you'll learn what sustainable and ethical fashion means to some African fashion designers.

You'll also be introduced to some incredible designers who are making a difference in implementing strategies to make their brands sustainable.

## | **What is Sustainable & Ethical Fashion?** |

Recently, sustainability has become a growing concern in the fashion industry. This is an important topic because of the popularity of fast fashion and the negative impact it's had on the environment.

However, people often forget that sustainable fashion is a movement that not only focuses on protecting the environment but also on the socioeconomic impact of fashion.

A simple definition is:

*Sustainable and ethical fashion is an approach towards sourcing, manufacturing, and designing clothes which maximizes the benefits to the fashion industry and society at large, while at the same time minimizing its impact on the environment.*

Remember this part: it maximizes the benefits to the fashion industry and society at large.

In order for fashion to be sustainable, all parties in the manufacturing process should be properly compensated and taken care of. It's not only about saving the planet.

Would you consider a fashion company 'sustainable' if their workers were grossly underpaid and mistreated?

No.

Would you consider a fashion company 'sustainable' if they overpriced their products and produced poor quality clothing?

No.

And that's the point. Sustainable fashion is much broader than people often make it seem.

## | Sustainable Fashion as a Social Enterprise |

In our research, we found African fashion designers who had a passion for sustainability.

One of the fashion designers we interviewed, Frank Wesley, prides himself in building his fashion brand on the concept of a social enterprise.

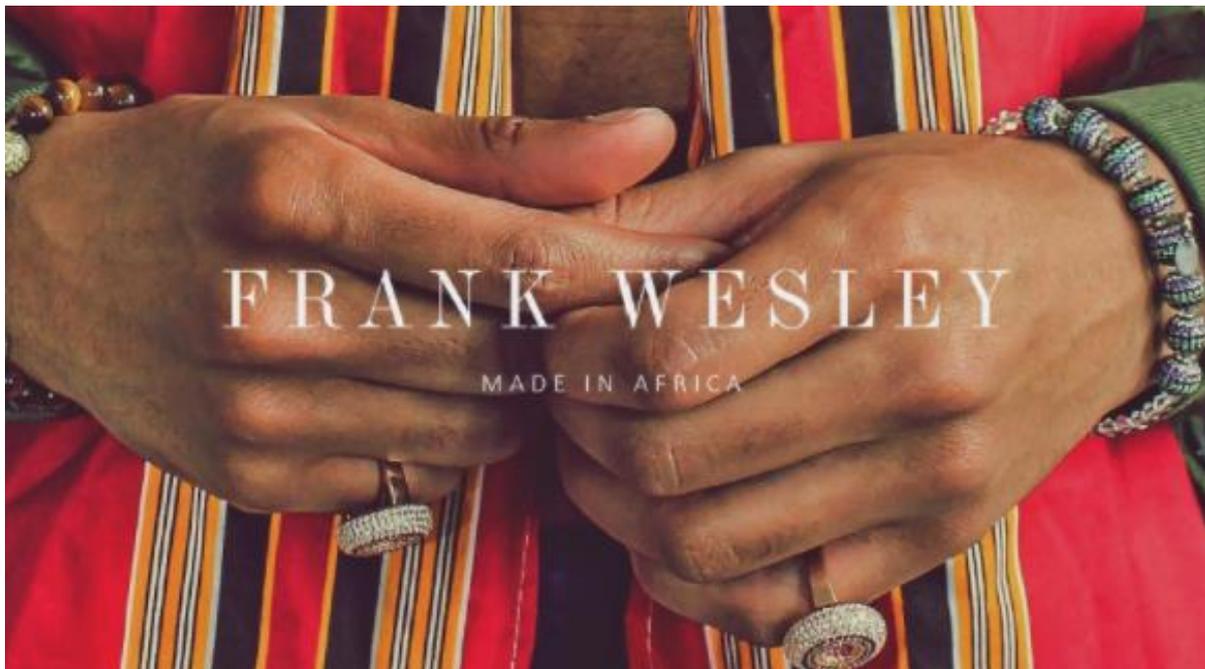


Photo credit: Frank Wesley MIA Lookbook

Frank Wesley is a Ugandan fashion designer based in London, England. His fashion brand, Frank Wesley MIA is a great example of a social enterprise.

Frank Wesley MIA works with small businesses in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to ensure that the brand collaborates with fashion designers across the continent of Africa.

**This approach focuses on social enterprise**, which means that this fashion brand creates financial and employment opportunities for young women and youth.

**The Frank Wesley Social Enterprise does the following:**

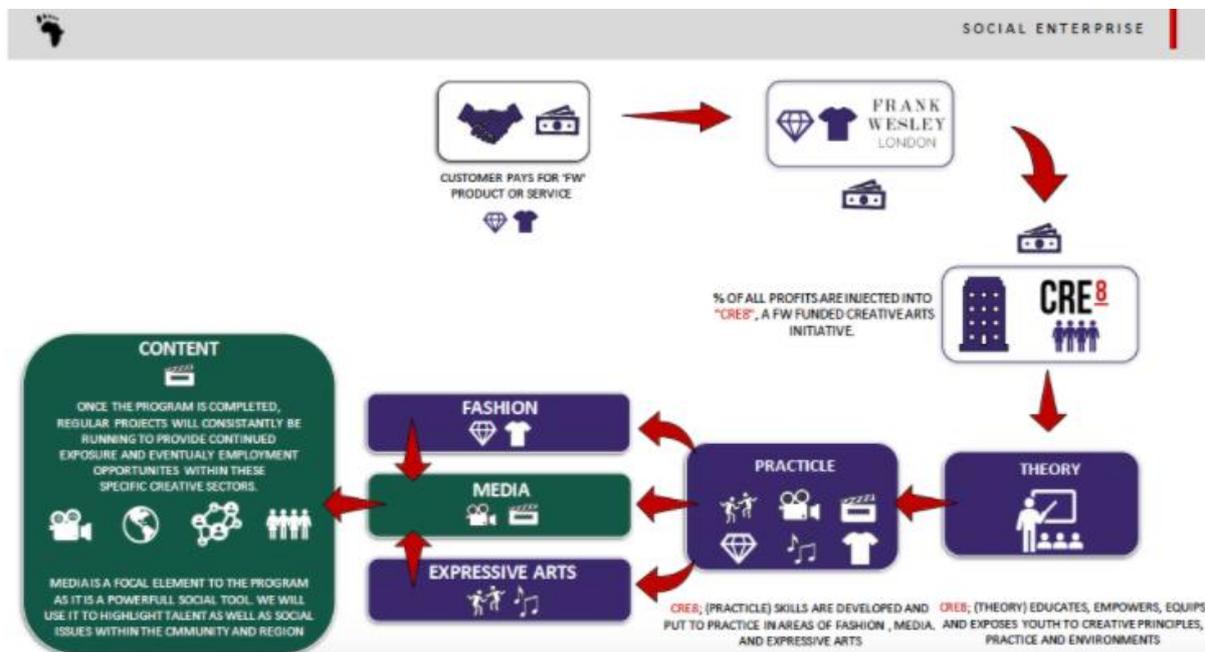
- Influences economic growth
- Encourages young designers to produce quality products
- Gives opportunities to those who are often overlooked
- Allows Africans to add a traditional touch to all their designs to celebrate African heritage

When fashion brands are founded solely for popularity and financial benefits, you can tell.



When fashion brands are founded for the purpose of making a lasting legacy and an impact on society, you can also tell.

Look at what Frank Wesley MIA does with its profits:



Here's a breakdown of how the social enterprise works:

- A percentage of the profits are used to fund the Creative Arts Initiative
- This initiative educates, empowers, and equips young youth to understand the theories of creative principles, practices, and environments
- This initiative also helps youth develop practical skills in fashion, media, and expressive arts
- Once the youth are done with the program, they have the skills they need to find employment in the creative and media sectors

When you analyze this, you'll notice that the money Frank Wesley MIA generates is given right back to the community.

This is what a social enterprise looks like.

This is what we should talk about more when the topic of sustainable and ethical fashion comes up.

| **The Future of Sustainable Fashion in Africa** |



Photo Credit: Frank Wesley Destiny Jewellery Collection

When it's done right, sustainable fashion can be a great asset to the economic growth of developing countries.

There are many issues that African fashion industries face in relation to sustainability.

Thankfully, there are many fashion designers already doing what they can to make a change.

It's important that these change-makers are highlighted, celebrated, and used as an example to prove that the future of sustainable fashion in Africa is truly bright.

It's also good to use these examples to develop even more innovative ideas that could positively impact the sustainable fashion movement in Africa.