

**Date of interview:** 15 November 2007

**Interviewer:** Elizabeth Kameo

**Interviewee:** Stella Atal,  
Ugandan Fashion Designer and Artist

**Place of interview:** Kamwokya, Uganda

**Type of interview:** Q & A

**Name of transcriber:** Erin Kelly

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**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**How far has the fashion world in Uganda come since you joined the industry?**

**Stella Atal:**

I think before I joined the industry, people did not know that there are designers in the country that make ready-to-wear clothes, because all they know is that the designers we have here are only making catwalk clothes. They did not think that they could make clothes for people to wear to work, or to parties. And since I joined it's really interesting, the response from the public. It's like something new is coming up. You are creating a different line from what they are used to and they are so much willing to change and support the local designers because they want to wear something purely produced in Uganda.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**How does our fashion industry here compare with countries like Kenya or any other Commonwealth State?**

**Stella Atal:**

I think what I could say is we are trying to get up but the problem we have is the finishing is not good at all. We lack the final touches and the materials. We are not so blessed like other Commonwealth countries that was can manufacture our own materials. We do have 1000 ranges which manufacture fabrics, but then they do not have a wide variety of fabrics. So we are forced to buy materials from Asia because they are cheap and they have a variety of colours to choose from.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Do you believe the fashion industry in Uganda is something that can be sustainable?**

**Stella Atal:**

Yes. Because we have a lot of support from the public, they are willing to support us and support the fashion industry as long as you are able to make something durable, something worth the money they have to pay for it. Because people have a belief that design clothes are so expensive they cannot be afforded. People who are still in school, earn little money can't afford them.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**How have you and other people in the industry used fashion to alleviate poverty in the communities in which you work and live?**

**Stella Atal:**

First of all, because we do employ people in the villages, people who have the talent of sewing but have nothing to do. And then these are people who have families, we bring them up and then try to give them money so they can look after their families. And we also try to encourage each other to buy materials here. We try to use what we have on top of what we get from outside. That way when we run out of what we have then at least we can buy from outside.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Would you say the fashion industry has government support in Uganda?**

**Stella Atal:**

Right now not yet. That is why we have a big problem because it looks like people are not willing to put their money into fashion to support fashion designers. They do support the musicians because they know they are going to perform live and attract crowds, but if you approach them and say we are organising a fashion show they will think of how they will benefit.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Would you do more if you had government support?**

**Stella Atal:**

Yes.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Why do you think government has not made the link yet between fashion, the fashion industry and poverty alleviation?**

**Stella Atal:**

I think maybe because they believe we cannot do something to the international standard. But then if they could come help us, maybe help the farmers, the cotton growers, at least if we can have everything produced and processed here, grow the cotton, make the yarn and then make the outfits then that would help the whole chain because everybody is earning right from the farmer, the people in the processing industries, the designers, the manufacturers.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**What challenges do you face as a fashion designer in Uganda?**

**Stella Atal:**

Competition from the outside countries. We do clothes, we want our clothes to be unique, use durable materials but then we have so many synthetic materials coming in, like from China, and clothes that are very cheap so there is tight competition on pricing. And of course most people are used to cheap clothes; it is really hard to convince them to buy something that is going to last.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Have you sold any of your fashions to the outside world?**

**Stella Atal:**

Yeah, I have a lot of clients from outside – USA, UK and Germany.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Has it been easy for you to get access to that market?**

**Stella Atal:**

Not so easy. It is not like I have a big market. It is just a few people because they have seen my clothes worn by friends who return home. They do not order in bulk but at least I get individual orders.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**How do you incorporate culture into your fashions?**

**Stella Atal:**

What I do is try to use cultural materials such as bark cloth, the Ugandan kikoyo; I use African beads, cowry shells.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Would you say that your fashions are clean?**

**Stella Atal:**

Yes, my fashions are clean. I ensure I make clothes the right way, in a way that will not offend the public.

**Elizabeth Kameo:**

**Do you think it is possible for us to have a fashion world in the Commonwealth states that is clean?**

**Stella Atal:**

Yes I think it can be possible. As long as we have help from government I believe everything is possible because it is up to the government to push to stand up for us and say we have good designers and then they can guarantee that our products are good. Designers cannot do this on their own.