

## Fighting Coronavirus Through Tailoring

*Fairtrade International announced [increased flexibility](#) in its standards to enable producer organizations to take immediate action to protect the health and livelihoods of farmers, workers and their communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with this, we are featuring stories on how producers are utilizing Fairtrade Premiums to tackle the impact of COVID-19 on their workers and communities.*

Globally, countries continue to implement stringent measures to manage the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. As global cases continue to rise, so is the demand for protective gear such as face masks which in a country like Kenya must now be worn in public spaces. Consequently, Kenya like many other countries is dealing with the challenge of adequate protective gear for its health workers and national population. The current supply and demand dynamics have seen various institutions raise to fill up the gap by taking on manufacturing themselves. Oserian Development Company Limited, a Fairtrade Certified flower producer in Naivasha is one of them.

Following the revision of the Fairtrade standard in March to allow for more flexibility in the use of Fairtrade Premium funds, Oserian chose to begin manufacturing masks for its workers, their dependents and members of the Oserian community. Taking place in the farm's social hall, manufacturing is driven by a group of 36 tailors. Out these, 22 are employees of the flower producer who developed tailoring skills through short courses funded through the company's Fairtrade Premium kitty. With majority of them sent on leave owing to the decline of the flower market, they couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to meaningfully engage themselves.

"I trained as tailor at Kenya Institute of Development Studies. I thank Oserian so much for the measures they are taking to fight the COVID-19 menace. Making masks is a role that will see us protect our families and companies," said Mrs. Joyce Irungu, one of the tailors.

"It seemed like a hectic job but I find myself enjoying it more. I'm happy to serve and help the nation fight coronavirus through my tailoring skills," said Joseph Kakai who is a tailor helping in the operation.

They add that manufacturing the masks is helping them improve their artistry skills and more importantly earn some income during these difficult times.

"Working here helps us earn a little income at this time. So, we are happy to be working here to at least help make masks and save the company," said Ezekiel Onyango.

According to Mr. David Kamau who is in charge of production, the project was initiated to cut down the cost of buying face masks. "On average, buying masks from the market is more expensive compared to manufacturing them locally which only costs 0.27 Euros per mask translating to 1,733 Euros for the 5,860 pieces we plan to produce," he says.

The



masks are made from cotton tetron fabric which makes the outer layers of the triploid mask. This material can be worn and washed several times without wearing out. Another material that makes up the mask is canvas which is placed in the middle of the fabrics to act as a filter. According to Mr. Kamau, all tailors are screened for COVID-19 symptoms at the farm's health center. Prior to the start of the operation, they received training to ensure production of high-quality masks meeting the Ministry of Health's standards.

Wearing of masks is one the strategies that the producer is putting in place to control the spread of COVID-19. All workers including their dependents and other members of the surrounding community are receiving the masks for free.

"We appreciate Fairtrade for being flexible. We are now able to make decisions faster especially now in the management of COVID-19. This will also go a long way in cushioning workers who may lose their income along the way due to the decline of the market," said Julius Kigamba, Compliance Officer- Oserian Development Company Ltd.

*Workers at Oserian Development Company stitching masks*