News



Young ladies undergo dressmaking training at the Mater Ecclesiae Skills Training Centre at Kwaekese, in the Afram Plains of Ghana. (Damian Avevor)



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Through the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church skills training program, some school dropouts and teenage mothers in the Afram Plains of Ghana have been empowered with the knowledge and skills in many handicrafts such as dressmaking and soapmaking.

Mater Ecclesiae Skills Training Centre, a charity-based apostolate in Kwaekese, started in 2016 with funding support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in collaboration with the Conference of Major Superiors of Religious Ghana. (Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is a major funder of Global Sisters Report.)

The initiative is driven by the belief that empowering women through entrepreneurship can significantly improve household incomes and contribute to community development. The center aims to alleviate the poverty and suffering of the growing number of female school dropouts and teenage mothers in the area by providing training for employable skills.

The center began as a bakery in 2016, but in 2021, it was transformed into a dressmaking center.



Sign post leading to the Mater Ecclesiae Skills Training Centre at Kwaekese, in the Vicariate of Donkorkrom, in the Afram Plains of Ghana (Damian Avevor)

Mary Mother of the Church Sr. Cecilia Clare Kudexa, founding mistress of the center, told Global Sisters Report that "when the center started, we gave skills training in breadmaking, local soft drinks, and preparation of salads. About 40 to 45 young women now have some type of skills which is profitable for them."

"We began to experience a dwindling number of trainees because almost every young girl in the area had the same skill and sold the same product to a limited business market in the area," Kudexa said.

"We also train the young women management skills, as well as social, moral and spiritual guidance," she said.

Kudexa, former superior general of the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church congregation, said that with the training, the women are now able to pay for their children's school fees and are able to provide better nutrition for their families.



Trainees working at the Mater Ecclesiae Skills Training Centre at Kwaekese (Damian Avevor)

"The centre has actually impacted the community and the young ladies positively. They have the sense of feeling good about themselves because they can work with their hands and get their own money and not rely on anyone completely," Kudexa said. "Their children are no longer dropping out of school and this will create an economically strong society in the future."

The people in the area are mainly farmers, fishermen and traders. The rate of school dropouts is high as hundreds of villages are on a number of islands. Eighty percent of the residents are estimated to live below the poverty line, according to the Vicariate of Donkorkrom.

Ghana's total unemployed population in 2024 was about 592,000, a slight increase from 2023, when around 582,000 people were unemployed, according to data via Statista.

One 2018 bakery center graduate, Christy Numetu Aletevi, 34, told GSR that the skills she learned has helped her prepare hundreds of baked goods to help take care of her four children.



Sr. Francisca Kumevor, the mistress of Mater Ecclesiae Skills Training Centre at Kwaekese, makes presentations to young ladies after the end of their two-year skills training in dressmaking. (Courtesy of Vicariate DEPSOCOM Office)

"Business has been very rewarding and enjoyable and I give thanks to the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church for the opportunity and making life easy for me," Aletevi said.

Another 2018 graduate, 39-year-old mother Rebecca Agboli, told GSR that "my livelihood has changed as every day I bake and sell over 300 pieces of doughnuts. … I didn't anticipate that the business would boom. For six years now, school children buy my doughnuts a lot and it is very encouraging."

Kudexa's hope for the future "is to see the center expand to include other departments and even grow into a vocational institute where many of the disadvantaged young women in Afram plans can write national examinations and get employed."

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"I'm proud to be among the first batch of trainees of Mater Ecclesiae Skills Training Centre," Cecilia Mirekua, 23, told Global Sisters Report. "This training has been a blessing to me. After my secondary school, I didn't know what to do but when my parish priest at St. Cecilia Parish at Forifori, one of the towns in Afram Plains, made an announcement about the center, I was touched and decided to enroll. Thank God, now I have the skills and confidence to start something to earn some money to help myself and my family."



Trainee Cecilia Mirekua, receives an award from a dignitary at the graduation of 13 trainees on Nov. 16, 2024 in Kwaekese. (Courtesy of Vicariate DEPSOCOM Office)

Sr. Francisca Kumevor, mistress of the center, said their aim is to help young women gain jobs and be responsible in managing their lives, children and homes.

"This training program is so relevant because looking at the situation of the beneficiaries, the circle of poverty is created around their children and giving them the skills that will help them earn money and become self-reliant, will break that circle of poverty and give a better chance to their children," Kumevor said.