Once deemed the ‘hopeless continent’, Africa has been resurrected as a source of economic optimism—a site of investment, growth and buoyant labor markets (The Economist 2000, 2011). Within this context, development donors and transnational corporations champion the power of inclusive markets to redress decades of jobless growth by incorporating the poor and marginalised into new models of financial inclusion and entrepreneurship. Women, held up as development’s ‘greatest asset’, have been at the forefront of such initiatives, as novel coalitions of corporations, donors and social enterprises reposition them as ‘entrepreneurs’, who will drive forward economic and social transformation. This paper examines the inclusive market agenda ethnographically by tracing the experience of a small women-owned enterprise based in Nairobi, Kenya – Mkiwa Designs – on its journey to inclusion in the global marketplace of Magasin, one of the world’s top twenty retailers. Chronicling the efforts of Mkiwa’s directors to scale up and empower their workers, we explore the relationship of corporate patronage and clientelism that unfolds in the enactment of this promise of market inclusion. We find that the conversion required to attain anticipated rewards of the global marketplace, leaves small enterprises like Mkiwa, constrained, rather than free; leveraged and dependent rather than secure and autonomous. The inclusive market, we suggest, becomes a vehicle of unfulfilled aspiration and opportunity foreclosed, a space of clientelism that falls short of its empowerment and inclusionary ideals.