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6 Evolution, Innovation and Sustainable Entrepreneurship in Africa's Fashion Industry

Abstract: Fashion has long been used as a strong identifier for people of different origins. Most peoples' historical and cultural evolution can rarely be discussed in full without a consideration for the way they dress and make the clothes they wear. Creating and designing wears and associated articles of fashion have evolved into multi-billion dollar enterprises across the globe and Africa has not been left out of this evolutionary trend in the global fashion industry. Thus, in considering the experience of the African industry from the precolonial to the colonial and up to the present age, the searchlight is focused not just on the historicity of the industry but also on the evolution, innovation and technology of the African fashion industry from an entrepreneurial perspective. The discourse presented in this chapter covers fashion in the precolonial, colonial and post-colonial era, fashion as influenced by religion and culture, Afrocentrism and indigenisation and the fashion space in Africa, African fashion industry and sustainable development goals as well as the way forward for the industry in Africa. The value-addition of this contribution will be to generate deep insights into how the evolution, innovation and technology of the African fashion industry have aided entrepreneurial drives and aided achievement of sustainable development goals over the years. The thoughts presented in this study would produce beneficial considerations for various stakeholders including entrepreneurship scholars, practitioners, economic agents and policymakers.

Keywords: fashion, Africa, sustainability

Introduction

Africa, often referred to as a dark continent, is rich in cultural values and the cradle of civilisation. A case in point is the Egyptian pyramid of Giza, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the most famous and discussed structure in history, constructed around 2500 BC (Alekhya, Chaitanya & Chandramouli, 2021).

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History, evolution, innovation and entrepreneurship as they relate to African fashion undoubtedly represent an area of interest to policymakers and industry practitioners, a broad spectrum of economic agents and the society at large. Weaving, knitting, dyeing, designing, shoemaking, bag-making and other fashion-related activities have come to be recognised as not just African fashion accessories but major occupations for Africans.

Today, the fashion industry has evolved into specialist professions like fashion/designing, makeover artistry, beauty salon professionals, hair styling professions etc. It is pertinent to note that international trade, globalisation and westernisation impacted African fashion industry to a great extent. Globalisation increased global connectivity, integration and interdependence in the economic, social, technological, cultural, political and ecological sphere, accentuated through the use of television, mobile phones, satellite and internet facilities (Fashionomics, 2016). Movement of people and goods across borders need not be done physically. The world became a global village and fashion, with a multi-billion dollar industry creating jobs for designers, models, beauticians, makeover artists, event organisers/planners, etc. (WIPO, 2011). In the evolution and transitional state of African fashion, men and women now take leading positions, unlike in the pre-colonial days when fashion was seen as an area only for women in Africa (Jennings, 2011). This has obviously enlarged the fashion space and the narratives have changed. Distance is no longer a barrier and orders that used to be delivered in months now take days or hours.

With all these changes come the examination on what the future holds for the African fashion industry. Some designers are championing Afrocentrism in the fashion industry while others are largely conscious of business models that work with little or no attention on the Afro-centric nature of their labels (Balintulo, 2019).

In summary, this chapter is geared towards appraising the growth and evolution of the African fashion industry from the prism of entrepreneurship with close consideration on the impact of international trade, globalisation and Westernisation. The drive for Afrocentrism and indigenisation of the industry in concepts, designs and style are also considered. The discussion shall capture African fashion industry in the pre-colonial era, the colonial and post-colonial periods. Historically, the pre-colonial era dates before 1861. The colonial period dates between 1861 and 1960 while the post-colonial period covers the period after 1960 when Nigeria had her independence (Ugwukah, 2021). Generally, the nineteenth century marked colonial activities in most African countries (Ajayi, 1989).

While this discussion appears scholarly, it is a deliberate attempt at creating awareness about the entrepreneurial, innovation and technology side to African fashion. This is for the imperative of repositioning the industry as a major player in driving the Africa of the next century. Also, it is an effort at changing the narrative from African Fashion as a picture of people with a piece of cloth around their waists with slight covering for the upper part of their bodies to a global brand that is influencing the fashion senses of other continents of the world. Also, this study will situate the

evolving African fashion industry as a vanguard for the actualisation of key sustainable development goals (SDG) by showing the nexus between the models of African fashion industry and set SDGs of the United Nations.

Fashion Industry and Entrepreneurship in Africa – Precolonial and Colonial Era

Precolonial Era

Africa enjoyed relative peace, and economic buoyancy until the nineteenth century when it became a place of scrambling for Western imperialists, who, motivated by national pride, scouted African countries for cheap raw materials and control and expansion of their market (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). Language, culture and creative arts were the identity code of Africa. Creative arts were expressed in music, dance and fashion. Prior to colonisation in Africa, women engaged in weaving, hand crocheting and knitting of textile material patterned along the line of African rich cultural heritage. Igala textile industry contributed to the socio-economic, cultural and political development of the Igala people in the precolonial era (Naankiel, Danladi & Rufai, 2016). Designing served as a tool for orchestrating the culture of different communities in the African society. Clothing became one of the tools used to reflect artistic designs inspired by various cultural values of the diverse African villages. African fashion was unique because it was tied to its tropical weather condition (African Fashion: History & Future, n.d.). Dressing in Africa did not just involve the covering of the body. It was an expression of creativity as well as a conscious effort at survival. Innocence and freedom shaped their fashion sense, as can be seen in Figures 6.1–6.7.

The earliest forms of clothing in Africa were bark cloth, furs, skins and hides. The women wore wraps around their waists or breasts with the rest of the body adorned with decoration marks and colour pigments, “Uli”; beads were worn round their waists (*jigida*) and jewellery worn on their necks, wrists and ankles.

Women’s headgear was fashioned from seashells, bones, ostrich eggshell pieces and feathers (Njoroge, Nyamache & Tarus, 2012). All these ornamentals added up to a rich and embellished costume used especially for ceremonial purposes and to indicate significant moments, tribe and ritual passages. African women’s style of dressing was strongly significant in the precolonial era. The beauty, age and status of women were judged by their clothing and accessories (African Fashion: History & Future, n.d.).

Men dressed in loin cloths or aprons. Males in Igboland, in southeast Nigeria, wrap cloth that passed between the legs over a waist belt called *Iwa Ogodo*. Many of these customs are now non-existent although some African communities like the Karo people of Ethiopia, the Xhosa people of South Africa, the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria and a host of others still carry on with these customs to date (Akinbileje, 2014). Aside from



Figure 6.1: Pre-colonial styles in Kenya (photo: Léo-Paul Dana).



Figure 6.2: Dressed to shop at the market in Aneho, Togo (photo: Léo-Paul Dana).



Figure 6.3: Dressed to sell (photo: Léo-Paul Dana).



Figure 6.4: Porter at Mombasa, Kenya (photo: Léo-Paul Dana).



Figure 6.5: Preparing dinner (photo: Léo-Paul Dana).

consideration of the weather, culture and custom are the most significant influences on the type of cloth worn by Africans. The Yoruba culture and custom in Southwest Nigeria has rich and elaborate fashion which is evident in their festivities or social events like weddings, birthdays, burial ceremonies, thanksgiving services and other kinds of ceremonies.

Furthermore, African chiefs and titled men are distinguished by their way of dressing. Prior to the fifteenth century, many African societies dedicated their time to arts and crafts, knitting, weaving and carving, etc. The fashion industry includes textile production, designing, modelling, sewing and trading on hand-knitted or crocheted clothing materials, hair plaiting/ weaving and more.

Historically, trade in Africa during the precolonial era was sporadic and irregular, hence one of the dominant concerns of the then African traders was to overcome hunger and famine (van Zwaneberg & King, 1975). They engaged in hunting or agricultural production. They also produced cloths, iron or copper implements, pottery, jewellery, weapons for hunting or warfare. Trade routes were established, allowing people to trade by bartering in the form of cowries, beads, cattle or iron coins (Prince-

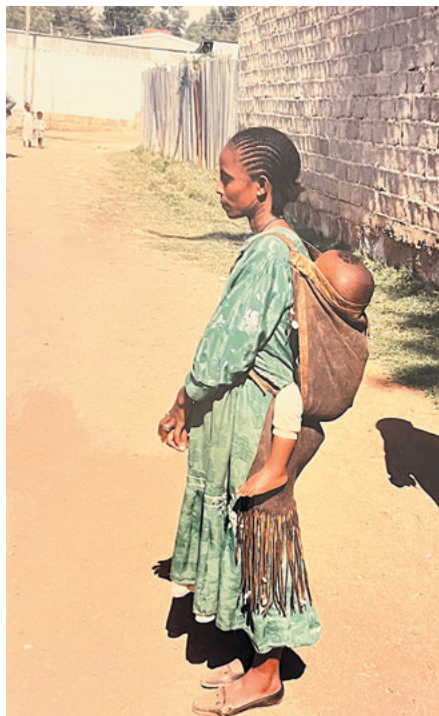


Figure 6.6: Mother and child in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (photo: Léo-Paul Dana).



Figure 6.7: At railroad station, Johannesburg (photo: Léo-Paul Dana).

Iroha, 2016). Trans-Atlantic trade (which started in the fourteenth century and lasted for 400 years) and Trans-Sahara trade effectively left Africa culturally bereft and brought about the adulteration of the African fashion industry (Adeleke, 2015). With the movement of traders along the trade routes, Africans were exposed to European contact. The interaction, for instance, between the Nupe and Timbuktu traders resulted in the Yorubas adopting the “Buba” attire (Fakunle, 2022).

Colonial Era

The quest by the Europeans to seek new markets and cheap raw materials during their industrial revolution gave rise to massive colonisation of the African continent. Colonisation dealt a huge blow to African fashion because Africans were forced to imitate the European way of dressing and disregard theirs (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). The colonial masters considered the African style of clothing as bestial and unfit to be worn around (African Fashion International, n.d.). African fashion during the colonial era was further downgraded by Christianity. Africans imbibed Christian tenets which emphasised covering of the body as a more civilised and decent way of dressing (Aris, 2007). The textile industry suffered a great deal during this period because local textile industries were manually operated and not able to match the unexpected competition from Europe that was better mechanised (Naankiel, Danladi & Rufai, 2016). Africa, formerly with many players in the textile industry, suddenly lost most of them as a result of Western colonisation.

In 1945, Nigeria had the largest textile industry with more than 180 textile mills, while Kenya had 75 textile and clothing establishments (Naankiel et al 2016). Although textiles and knitting mills were capital intensive ventures, and African governments supported them with protectionist trade policies, many crumbled in the 1980s and 1990s when African economies liberalised, opening up to foreign trade (Ajayi, 2017). As a result, cheap garments from Asia and second-hand clothes from the West flooded African markets. Local industries struggled to compete, with no success. By 2013, Kenya had only 15 main textile mills in operation, as opposed to 52 in the 1980s. Nigeria had 25 in 2019 (<https://qz.com>).

This made foreign materials readily available at cheaper prices. Laws and policies were made in favour of the Europeans with free flowing rights of bringing items of trade into the colonised country while carting away raw materials at very cheap rate to their country. Evidently, there was a shift from the undiluted form of cultural designs and styles the African fashion was known for during the precolonial era to more colourful wears such as pleated skirts, blouses, trousers, ball gowns, boots and hats (Oladejo, 2022). Colonisation enforced a massive change in the daily wear in African cities. It heightened the spread of western culture and lifestyle throughout colonised African states. Westernisation however, connotes the absorption of Western culture and custom, that is, integrating the American and European industries, technology, lifestyle, etc. into

the native culture (Scott, 2007). This being the case, western fashion infiltrated African markets so much so that all aspects of the creative industry were affected. Notably, during the colonial era, men were looked upon as being strong and those that should embark on more serious occupations than fashion. To that end, women were mostly involved with fashion, styles and the textile industry. Prominently, the Igala women took to weaving, dying of clothes and the like. Also, since women then were predominantly teachers, Christianity penetrated via the establishment of schools. School operators were mandated to use western uniforms in schools. Western style was also adopted for attending church services, marriage ceremonies and other festivals.

Post-Colonial Era

This brought to mind the experience of a thirty-two-year-old Gambian economist Marie Ba who used to refresh her wardrobe by patronising British fashion retailer ASOS but now updates her closet with some tailored wax print African dresses through Ghana's KIKI Clothing platform. She felt so happy with her newly found designer because by buying from KIKI she supports African products and looks quite unique in their products. She was also intrigued that her clothes were delivered by DHL from Accra to her door in Gambia's largest city, Serekunda, within five days (McBrain, 2021). This is modern technology playing out in a world compressed by the e-fashion market. Just as the medical industry has experts in every part of the body, today's fashion has specialists in footwear, headgear, eyewear, etc. As published by Euromonitor, Sub-Saharan Africa's clothing and footwear market is worth \$31bn. Ironically, fashion companies are fulfilling increasing orders from the African Diaspora, particularly in Europe and America, while orders for Ankara gowns and African print dresses are on high demand among non-African customers (McBrain, 2021). This has led to the establishment of African-based e-fashion platforms. As African clothes, footwear, bags and materials are being exported, African culture is also being exported and readily accepted by the western world. Designers today can build an online "shop" with digital tools provided by Afrikrea. This enables them to set prices and communicate directly with customers. The world visibility of African designs is high as Afrikrea has facilitated sales since the company's inception in 2016. Notably, their biggest market is the United States, followed by France and the rest of the European Union. The wider African e-commerce landscape is fast forwarded by sales in fashion. Statista projects an annual growth rate of 14.2% between 2020 and 2024.

Fashion is not just clothing as it cuts across all other facets of beautification by men and women, and is considered a conveyor of status, statement, affiliations, values, ideals and perceptions. Incidentally, the struggle today among world countries is supremacy in fashion trends and this predicts the extent of the influence a country has in the global clothing industry (<https://african.business>). The world today is obsessed with image, and being the top influencers of fashion trends also ensures that countries increase their ex-

ports of clothing and textiles across the world, taking advantage of areas of competitiveness and materials readily available to them (<http://www.tradезimbabwe.com>).

Interestingly, African fashion is taking a reverse turn whereby western fashion is being Africanised. Print materials are used to design cooperate wears. Africa, previously an exporter of raw material, now utilises raw materials to produce unique designs. In 2017, Louis Vuitton partnered with the Basotho tribe in making clothing made from their traditional blanket garments which retail for as much as R33,000.00 in Europe and abroad. This translates to Louis Vuitton successfully turning a R1000 blanket into a R33,000 high end luxury fashion trend for men (<http://www.tradезimbabwe.com>).

Influence of Religion and Cultural Orientation on African Fashion Industry and Entrepreneurship

Fashion is constantly changing, but such changes are still within societal contexts: styles come and go, revolving around the norms and values of the community. Sometimes an old style or design finds its way back into the current generation. Baggy trousers won in the 1980s rose like the phoenix not long ago and resonated among young people. Dreadlocks, a hair style that was used as an instrument of protest among reggae artists and by native priests to emphasise their lack of interest in worldly beauty, has returned today. Young men adore dreadlocks so much that they spend huge sums of money and time to grow their hair and get it locked. People in Africa seem to have started wearing clothing around 180,000 years ago, soon after *Homo sapiens* evolved, about the time the first body lice evolved, with lice needing clothing to live in (Carr, 2017).

After the introduction of animal-skin clothing, people learned to make clothes out of the bark from trees such as fig. They learnt to peel off the bark of trees, pound it on rocks until every juice was squeezed out, before sewing it together. As time went on people began using the raffia palm to make cloth. Knowledge continued to expand; new technologies led to the production of linen clothing. The flax plant was the major raw material for the linen cloth. Egyptians soon built workshops that produced quality linen that was sold to people in other places. This historical reference also acknowledges the entrance of cotton clothing; people in west and central Africa learnt weaving, with this knowledge putting their abundant cotton into commercial use.

Fashion was not just a dull cover for the skin. Aesthetics was an integral part of the clothing art. Indigo dye, made from the indigo plant, is still being used in the fashion industry today. The indigo is the blue in denim jeans. Since Africa had no indigo plant, the dye was imported from India (Carr, 2017). Another beautifying practice was tie-dyeing. Tie-dyeing was used by many African cloth makers to draw patterns on their products. There was the need to make this job easier, so cloth makers had a division

of labour of sorts: the men did the pounding, spinning and weaving while women did the fabric work. Meanwhile, in northeast Africa, particularly in Egypt, there were several styles for women. Influenced by the Middle Eastern cultures, it was common to see Jelabuja worn in the Gulf States: the djellaba worn in northwest Africa, the bou-bou, the dashiki and the Senegalese Kaftan. To add to the beauty, women in Nigeria wore head ties (Rukweve (2022)). South Africa, with an estimated population of more than 57 million people from countless backgrounds, ethnicities and religions, has an immense cultural diversity that is expressed through the vast array of topics ranging from cuisine, music and languages to celebrations. Fashion, connecting closely with one's daily life, also plays a crucial role in the identification of South Africa's culture and people, as it does everywhere else in the world. Each piece of clothing people choose to put on can be simply because it is in their reach, or as it is used as an expression of style as well as political and religious beliefs and perspectives in life. No matter how or why it was chosen, every single piece of clothing contains a long history.

There is no doubt that religion and culture influence dress codes. No matter how sophisticated a country is, no matter how liberal the culture and the laws are, people dress to reflect their belief systems.

Fashion designers survey the prevalent belief systems to know what designs will fetch them patronage in their area. In some countries including Nigeria, a number of factors comes into play. Religion influences the dress code of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Nigeria's southeast, south-south and north-central areas are predominantly Christian. The Christian faith does not regulate adherents' dress code outside the church premises. Therefore, the religion's (Church) clothes are relatively different from the people's regular wear. Southwest Nigeria is quite liberal, with Christians, Muslims and traditional worshipers who co-exist harmoniously, which is shown in the variety of clothing available as each group expresses themselves without much ado.

In recent years, there has been a boom in the development of fashion shops, clothing boutiques, in Accra, Ghana. There has been more recognition for the development of art through the creation of fashion in countries such as Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa (Ochuko (2022)). While there is a global disconnect between the western world and their interpretation of African fashion through the use of tribal patterns, many designers have risen and made an impact on the high-end fashion industry by putting a twist on their traditional African garments. New designers are now trying to expand their entrepreneurial footprint and enlighten the world about the versatility of African fashion.

Johannesburg has built up a fashion district in its inner city that has made a name for itself globally. Aba, an industrial city in Nigeria's southeast region, is a hub of the fashion industry in West Africa that has made a serious global impact through its sophisticated and durable clothes.

Also, Africans are synonymous with culture; the "the Yoruba people's life is wrapped in religion" Fakunle (2022). This assertion is not only peculiar to the Yor-

uba. Africans, generally, value religion. The link between religion and fashion is very strong. The essence of every religious practice is restriction. Religion restricts adherents from all acts which the leaders of that religion consider inappropriate and which in their opinion could impede the adherent's relationship with God. Fashion or clothes is an important aspect of religion. The traditional African religion used cloth to hide certain sacred sites. The use of white cloth by female worshipers to signify purity and innocence was rampant among the Igbo people. The use of red cloth to shield certain or all parts of the shrine was also a common practice among the Igbo and Yoruba peoples of Nigeria. Other costumes include designated caps, feathers, chalk, horsetail etc. Generally, the production of certain cloth and items of clothing has been influenced by religions of western extraction and those that exist locally (Fakunle, 2022)

Beyond religion, one of the mainstays of African culture is fashion. There are many rites imbedded in African culture, such as of passage, birth, puberty, marriage and death (Fakunle, 2022). Other celebrations include coronations, anniversaries, masquerade balls and dances. An expectant mother is supported by her husband to get befitting clothes for herself and her baby. Today, hospitals also promote the fashion industry by insisting that expectant mothers must come with baby clothes, wrappers and shoals during labour. After birth, the newborn baby continues to promote the fashion industry as they are prepared for dedication, consecration or naming. Whichever one this is, the baby's special day will excite the world of fashion as the baby, the mother, the father and other relatives will most likely get new clothes; no loving parents would want to present their baby to God in old clothes no matter how poor they might be.

Furthermore, marriage rites or weddings have, for hundreds of years, promoted the fashion industry in Africa. Today, weddings are more or less fashion shows. Some weddings have as many as five uniform groups: the bridal train (aso ebi); men in suits; committees of friends; the bride's family members; and the groom's family members. This does not include the little bride, the little groom, the chief bridesmaid and the best man.

The celebrants themselves (especially the bride) could have three different sets of clothes for their wedding day. Some cultures also insist that the mother of the bride is clothed in different attires at different stages of the marriage rites. Thus, a wedding (traditional, Christian or Islamic) is a fashion carnival of sorts in Africa. Close associates of the celebrants even with no special roles at the wedding still frown at wearing old clothes to the event. They prefer to wear brand new clothes in line with the colours chosen by the couple. Kings, when crowned and in remembrance of the day they were crowned, celebrate their crowns with large-scale events. The coronation, a celebration among the different peoples of Africa, sees the king and his family dress in unique designs to suit the occasion. Traditional rulers from other kingdoms who are invited also take the opportunity to visit their tailors and designers to acquire new pieces of clothing. Other such celebrations are anniversaries and festivals (New Yam,

Christmas, Idel Kabir, New Year's Day, etc.). These festivals often see the populace add to their wardrobes.

Last but not least are memorial rites. In Igboland, for instance, the deceased individual goes into the grave dressed in good clothing material. Mourners and friends adorn relatives of the deceased with print materials (abada, ankara). The picture of an influential person at a mother or father's funeral will amaze a non-native. The chief mourners and others are furnished with many items of clothing, with many tied to their waists, chests, shoulders and around their necks. Even in mourning, the fashion industry in Africa has a reason to be jubilant.

Africans have continued to evolve, with some cultural inhibitions removed over time. The clothing patterns of old are giving way to new ones in an attempt to reduce gender profiling and to ensure safety. Designers who want to remain relevant must update themselves.

Furthermore, African fashion has become, undoubtedly, an instrument of unification. To start with, the marks of distinction popularly called "tribal marks" are disappearing. Not many people born 30 years ago have them. The caps, the trousers, the wrappers, the head ties, the shirts, the skirts and the earrings were all once distinguishable. Today, these tribalised dress codes are occasional dresses. They are no longer dominant. It is difficult to differentiate a Ghanaian from a Nigerian. Many citizens of Benin Republic are in Nigeria without their neighbours knowing that they are not Nigerian citizens, except if they revealed this. This is one huge success story for the African fashion industry. Change changes itself and the African fashion industry will continue to change what it changed into. This has also changed the entrepreneurial orientation in the African fashion industry, making it more globalised in its uniqueness and style.

Fashion Industry in Relation to Afrocentrism and Indigenisation

Since the mid-twentieth century, there have been cultural and political movements mainly comprised of African American enthusiasts who regard themselves and all other blacks as syncretic Africans and believe that their worldview should positively reflect traditional African values (Anderson, 2012). The activist Molefi Asante in conjunction with some African American scholars championed this cause by formulating the terms Afrocentrism, Africology and Afrocentricity in the 1980s (<https://www.britannica.com>). They believe among other things that people of African descent should trace back their values/ culture which was adulterated or completely erased by slavery and colonisation; that African culture and history began in ancient Egypt which is the place

of birth of civilisation; that African culture is more informed, circular, cooperative, intuitive and closely knitted with the spiritual world of gods and ghosts than the European culture, which is opposite (Adeleke, 2015). This renewed attention to African culture will be psychologically beneficial to African Americans by reminding them of their culture and values which have been erased by Europeans (Chukwuokolo, 2009). In order to inculcate their beliefs to other African Americans, they promote the preservation of their past expressed in language, cuisine, music, dance, arts and clothing. Other messengers of Afrocentrism include Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey and WEB Du Bois, the founder of National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in 1919. Leopold Senghor, Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X formed the Negritude in 1930 to foster need for a black homeland and superiority of black culture and genetics over others. In 1966, Maulana Karenga founded Kwanzaa. The list of activists of Afrocentrism is quite long and this contributed to its speedy legitimacy in the United States in the 1960s with the institution of the Civil Rights Movement, the multicultural movement and the influx of a large number of non-whites into the United States (Chukwuokolo, 2009). Although this movement has been greatly criticised and their arguments refuted by Lefkowitz (1996) in her book *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (1996), it is still maintained by activists that the movement is relevant for African Americans in order to value and preserve their culture. The Afrocentric perspective reflects African history and applies it to all creative, social and political activities (<https://www.britannica.com>).

From the research conducted by the Lenzing Group across nine countries, over 80% of respondents expressed a strong inclination towards sustainable fashion and purchasing clothing made from sustainable materials. Home-grown industries focus on producing and sourcing fashion materials locally which is eco-friendly and sustainable. It is expedient that Africa adopts indigenisation as well as home-grown industries for a more holistic Afrocentrism. A reflection of this ideology can be seen from the dominance of African designs in various fashion shows across the world. There is nothing wrong with copying technology. Many technologically developed countries of the world at some point in their history copied. However, the crux of the matter lies in applying the idea gained and adapting it to local needs. Moreso, the African brand is gaining global appeal even though non-Africans are beginning to embrace it.

The fashion industry today has championed this move whereby Ankara materials are used to design beautiful office clothes for both men and women. On the other hand, the Africanised designs are not just used by Africans as African ideas have been sold to the west, courtesy of Africans in Diaspora. Indigenisation and home-grown industries have steered the fashion industry in Africa towards looking inwards to use sustainable materials within Africa for their productions (<https://qz.com>).

Conclusion: African Fashion And Sustainability

Fashion in Africa and the relative enterprises have over the years been influenced by religion and culture but have lately been driven by the need to promote local content within business models that guarantee survival and resourcefulness.

Looking at the African fashion industry from the prism of the UN SDG (2020), three areas of interest are worth noting.

1) SDG 17:10 and 17:1

17.10 Promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organisation, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda

17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020

The African fashion industry is currently focused on making fashion non-discriminatory in outlook while also promoting its trade across the globe. It is growing into a multi-billion dollar industry that is enhancing the export profile of many African countries..

2) SDG 8:1–3; 5 and 9

8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries

8.2 Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

The expanding view of the African fashion industry has accentuated the growth rate of African economies, increased job opportunities, and aided diversification, technology and innovation, creativity and entrepreneurial activities. Micro-, small and medium-scale enterprises which represents the main stay of the African industrial activities have been incentivised.

3) SDG 9.2, 9.4 and 9b

9.2 Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries

9.4 By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities

9.b Support domestic technology development, research and innovation in developing countries, including by ensuring a conducive policy environment for, inter alia, industrial diversification and value addition to commodities

The burgeoning status of the African fashion industry undoubtedly places it as a pathway to diversification for most African countries whose economies have depended on primary goods such as oil, coal and gold, including agricultural products. Evolution in the fashion industry has aided innovation, industrial development and diversification as well as enhanced gross domestic product. All these benefits are consistent with a good portion of the SDG 9 as presented above, making the industry a vehicle for sustainable growth and development.

This thought is shared by Turner (2022) who pointed out three key value additions of the expanding African fashion industry to include the encouragement of entrepreneurship, stimulation of the local economy and creation of a sustainable business model. The encouragement of entrepreneurship and stimulation of local economy implies the increasing of domestic production, increased gross domestic product, job creation, increase of exportable goods and services, expansion into new market and small businesses, etc. Serving as a sustainable business model makes reference to the encouragement of economic development by the industry, creating a value chain from the provision of raw materials to weavers who handle the fabrics, down to the merchants who trades the finished product. Also, sustainability of the fashion industry derives from the local retention of profit and enhanced investments for the communities, including the eco-friendly nature of the activities of the industry. Of course, a prosperous and diversified African economy alone does not satisfy all aspects of sustainability; environmental concerns must also be addressed and this can be a topic for future investigation.

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