

**EDITION
1**



SUSTAINABLE FASHION IN AFRICA

**THE THINKING WATERMILL
SOCIETY**

JUNE 2021

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EDITION 1



Product by
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Disclaimer

Ethics and sustainability are concepts not clearly defined and as such they may be perceived and interpreted in different manners on the basis of the culture, education and sensibility of each person called to apply them.

This issue of the TTWS Fashion Magazine is based on the opinions of African fashion designers living in different countries of the Continent and working in different sectors of the fashion industry. Our scope is to promote a debate among readers with the hope that the different opinions gathered in the magazine may be of help in understanding the various facets of ethics and sustainability.

**-THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE THINKING
WATERMILL SOCIETY, MARIO DI GIULIO**



“Demand quality, not just in the products you buy, but in the life of the person who made it.” - Orsola de Castro.

**MAGAZINE EDITOR, THE THINKING
WATERMILL SOCIETY, SOPHIE GAI**



1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Sustainable fashion is fashion made with consideration to the environment and community. It is a commitment that companies make to produce their products in a method that has the least negative impact on society and environment. It is all about being aware of where your products are from and how they are produced. It is about being a conscious consumer and choosing products that are produced in a sustainable way. Sustainable fashion is also second hand and does not only apply to new production.

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

I think most people are aware of the negative impact the textile industry has on the environment.

This negative impact was brought to attention about 20 years ago in the media where larger brands were made to take responsibility for the negative impact the textile industry had and still has on countries where their textiles are being produced. These negative impacts included poor working conditions, environmental hazards such as water pollution etc. I became aware through media in my late teens when I started to become interested in fashion.

3. Do you consider your brand sustainable? Why?

I would say my brand is sustainable. I believe in working closely with suppliers, making sure I am aware of the production process, knowing where and how products are being made. Being part of supporting job opportunities and maintaining sustainability in a financial, social, and environmental way.

"I believe in working closely with suppliers, making sure I am aware of the production process, knowing where and how products are being made."

Teresa Lackey

-SAHILI



4. What inspired your brand?

I was inspired to start my brand after seeing trends of African inspired products in a lot of the interior design shops, for instance baskets, textiles with African prints, wooden artifacts. It frustrated me that traditional handicrafts were being exploited and mass produced in factories somewhere outside Africa, and that the local community where these designs originate from do not gain a profit or benefit from this large industry. My aim is to offer customers the real genuine handmade African handicrafts while supporting local communities rather than large corporate companies.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

The main challenge is competing with the larger brands that are well known and dominate the market.

But I believe that the trends are shifting and that consumers are more aware today about what they buy and where the products are from. People want to choose wisely. Hopefully, the smaller businesses such as I that cut out the middleman and work closely with suppliers is the type of businesses that is the future.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Kenya and why?

I believe Kenya has a future with sustainable fashion. I think that the combination of talented artisans, designers, and creators we see from Kenya shows so much potential. This combined with the small-scale textile production that has not been exploited means that the industry can make wise decisions from the start and be the forefront of a "green industry."

7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

We see a huge movement with secondhand shops, and I think it is great! I think it is a big part of sustainable fashion and combining secondhand with ethical production is the future. In an ideal world we would stop production of new things, but if we are producing new things, we should do it in the best way possible.

8. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

Not so much. The word sustainable is a broad term, one can be economically sustainable for instance. Whereas ethical has a more definite meaning. To me it means that the production process is made to a high standard and focuses on the well-being for people and planet.

Sahili is based in Sweden. For more info contact them on hello@sahili.se or check out their website www.sahili.se



1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Sustainable fashion is a movement that is allowing fashion designers to re-look at their brand. It comprises addressing the whole system of fashion. This means dealing with interdependent social, cultural, ecological, and financial systems.

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

The media world has been highlighting this movement for a number of years and we jumped on board with our brand in the last 5 years as our brand started to get notice and grow.

3. Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

We continue to strive in making our brand a sustainable fashion brand with humanity being our focus. We are living in a world of fast fashion and instant gratification, where consumers are happy to buy a number of cheap garments

and accessories to be worn NO more than once and twice. It's our responsibility as designers to promote that "Fast Fashion" is NOT free, people and the environment are paying the price at a HUGE cost. Ngirigiri Bags are all hand made in our small workshop in Mombasa Kenya where we strive to empower not only our workers but our consumers in the story behind our brand.

4. What inspired your brand?

Ngirigiri Designs came about working alongside a disabled workshop in Mombasa, Kenya. We have gone on to set up our own small workshop keeping disability very much at our forefront. To change lives and have an impact on fashion in Africa is what inspires this brand.

"This means dealing with interdependent social, cultural, ecological, and financial systems."

Suzanna Haller

**-NGIRIGIRI
DESIGNS**



5.What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

Challenges come with any line of work and we are NO different. To create designer items that have limited impact on the environment need to be made to last and not land up in landfills. We pride ourselves on our workmanship and offer our clients a service where they can send their bags back for a facelift if needed.

6.Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Kenya and why?

I believe Sustainable fashion is a movement that is growing momentum around the globe. We all need to become connected to the impact that the fashion industry, as a whole, is having on our environment and how we can reduce the impact in small ways and making those changes within our brand. Kenya Designers are getting onboard and you will begin to see some strong fashion trends coming onto the fashion

scene under the sustainable fashion umbrella. This is exciting times for Kenya Designers and one to keep an eye on.

7.How do thrift shops impact your business?

Thrift shops are a wonderful place to find those hidden treasures and where you can find old material and items to up cycle which we should all be doing!

8.Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

I believe as a fashion brand that both Ethical & Sustainable ethics need to be applied into the brand. Good and fair working conditions , empowering our employers, fair wage (above the living conditions) low chemical impact on the environment. Creating lasting fashion pieces, giving back to the community. Our motto is "fashion with humanity" and its what we work by.

"We all need to become connected to the impact that the fashion industry, as a whole, is having on our environment and how we can reduce the impact in small ways and making those changes within our brand. "

Suzanna Haller

**-NGIRIGIRI
DESIGNS**



1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Sustainable fashion to me is the adoption of conscious methods to meet our present fashion needs without jeopardizing the ability of the future generations to meet theirs. This starts from the inception of the fashion supply chain of farmers, producers, consumers, up to the end-life of each garment.

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

Sustainable fashion has always been a way of life for me since I can remember. It became more profound in college where I had to survive with little pocket money I would buy second hand clothes for myself because they were cheap and would also spare my little pocket money to buy a few extra clothes and shoes which I would sell at a profit to my classmates to help with my daily school and personal expenses.

"Sustainable fashion has always been a way of life for me since I can remember."

Emily

- AIMIES' CLOSET

3. Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

Yes, I do. This is because my brand operates on three key principles. These are, Upcycling, Recycling and Zero Waste. The beginning process for this brand is sourcing which is done from secondhand markets here in Nairobi, majorly Toi Market. When sourcing, I go for oversized clothes which I have found to be the most overlooked and also because they offer more fabric to work with when transforming the outfit to a new design. This not only extends the life span of the fabric used, but also reduces the chances of them ending up in landfills which is one of us biggest dilemmas globally. I also use the leftover scrapes from different projects to make patched pillowcases and artwork which also helps in ensuring little to zero waste.



4. What inspired your brand?

Initially my inspiration was accessibility and affordability. Not only was it easy to get a huge variety of options with different designs and fabrics, the prices from secondhand markets are known to be very pocket friendly compared to buying directly from the new stores. With research and knowledge of the unbecoming and almost non-existent disposal measures taken by the government on proper waste management, I saw this as an opportunity to inspire change and show that there are sustainable and unique options we can adopt and play a role in sustaining our planet. This I do by upcycling and recycling what is already in the market.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

Some of the few challenges the brand faces are exposure, education, and funding. Education and awareness of sustainable fashion is something that has not been fully embraced by many people. It takes a considerable amount of time to explain the reasoning behind the brand and the major concept of how fast fashion

affects all of us. I use my blog and social media platforms to document the design and production process of each item I purchase from the second hand markets to bring awareness. I use videos to showcase each stage of this process from sketching the new design, to showing the state the item was in during purchase, then follow this up with a step by step guide on cutting and transforming the outfit to the new design which finally goes up as the final product available for purchase. With funding, I would aim to get a fabric recycling machine and shredder which would allow accommodation of more waste fabrics from the second hand vendors. At the moment the focus is on transforming the clothes and fabrics to our capacity while staying away from overproduction.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Kenya and why?

Yes, I do. That is because it is the only way for us to have a future. Africa is known to be the highest consumer of secondhand clothes in the world and unless this is completely brought to a halt, those bales are, and will, continue to cross our borders

"Some of the few challenges the brand faces are exposure, education, and funding."

Emily

-AIMIES' CLOSET

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a black high-neck crop top and a matching black skirt. She is standing outdoors with trees in the background. She is holding a black clutch bag in her right hand.

Sustainable fashion covers the production process from the products used to create garments, chemicals used, water consumption, energy and finally a fabric, final dispose, and end life. I believe these two complement each other in that they both strive for a general sustainable fashion lifestyle.

Adopting a sustainable fashion lifestyle is the only way for our future generations to survive. Another reason is that more and more people are embracing conscious shopping and the secondhand markets, so I believe if we continue putting emphasis on education and awareness of the dangers lurking in the near future for our environment, only then can we have a chance at beating this menace. Leading with examples and solution will invite more people to join the lifestyle and show the world that it is possible to live sustainably.

7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

Thrift shops are such strong forces in sustainable fashion. Not only do they offer variety and quality, thrift shops offer affordability that cannot be matched by high end brands. This provides access and endless options for the brand.

8. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

Yes. I think both complement sustainability in general. Ethical fashion carries more focus on manufacturing morals, social welfare, and human rights of everyone involved in the fashion cycle. This is an umbrella that covers fair work environments and conditions, fair pay, animal cruelty fabrics and products, and the people involved throughout this cycle until its reception to the consumer.

"Sustainable fashion has always been a way of life for me since I can remember."

Emily

-AIMIES' CLOSET

*Aimies' Closet is based in Kenya.
For more info contact them on
aimiesclosetclassified@gmail.com*

1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Sustainable fashion generally has to tick certain elements if not all of them.

- Locally manufactured to reduce their ecological footprint
- Preserve the natural capital (the raw materials) by optimal utilization i.e., good quality to last longer and avoid further extraction of raw material, can also be upcycled etc.
- Be biodegradable and safe (avoid harmful chemicals) as much as possible to aid in the safe and faster assimilation in the environment.
- Ethical - Upholds dignity and human rights

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion? I have practiced and studied Environmental Economics. So, our goal is to promote sustainability in fashion and home decor enterprise.

3. Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

Yes, to a good extent though not wholly. We seek to subscribe fully to all the elements mentioned in (1) above.

4. What inspired your brand?

My passion and training in environment/sustainability and passion for creativity.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

Mainly it is the proliferation of mass-produced products that defy sustainability values and are cheaply and readily available in the market.

That coupled with a less conscious consumer. We seek to educate the public, enhance our visibility to provide more choices and eventually to lobby policies to favor sustainability options.

We are also working on a business development program to support enterprises to move towards sustainability.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Kenya and why?

Yes. Indeed, the world is moving in that direction and we are fast movers. There are also quite a number of sustainable enterprises that have emerged and continue to in the last couple of years.

7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

If thrift shops are about giving new life to products, it is a good business model.

8. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

Ethics is a critical component within sustainable fashion.

"Ethics is a critical component within sustainable fashion."

WAIRIMU MWANGI

-YRIMU
COLLECTIONS

YrimuCollection is based in Kenya. Contact them on info@yrimucollection.com or social media @yrimucollection





1.What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

I don't really have a personal definition. I just go with the dictionary definition: it's fashion that is made with a process that stays within the limits of resource replenishment so it can continue for the foreseeable future.

2.How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

I was planning on becoming a theater creator and was working with theater groups and also creating costumes for the performing arts. In fact I had developed a musical show based on a series of highly dimensional and expressive costumes called Perplex. To be honest, 9/11 gave me quite a jolt. I began reading authors like Noam Chomsky, Vandanna Shiva, and Naomi Klein. Barreling toward the 6th extinction- I decided to change course.

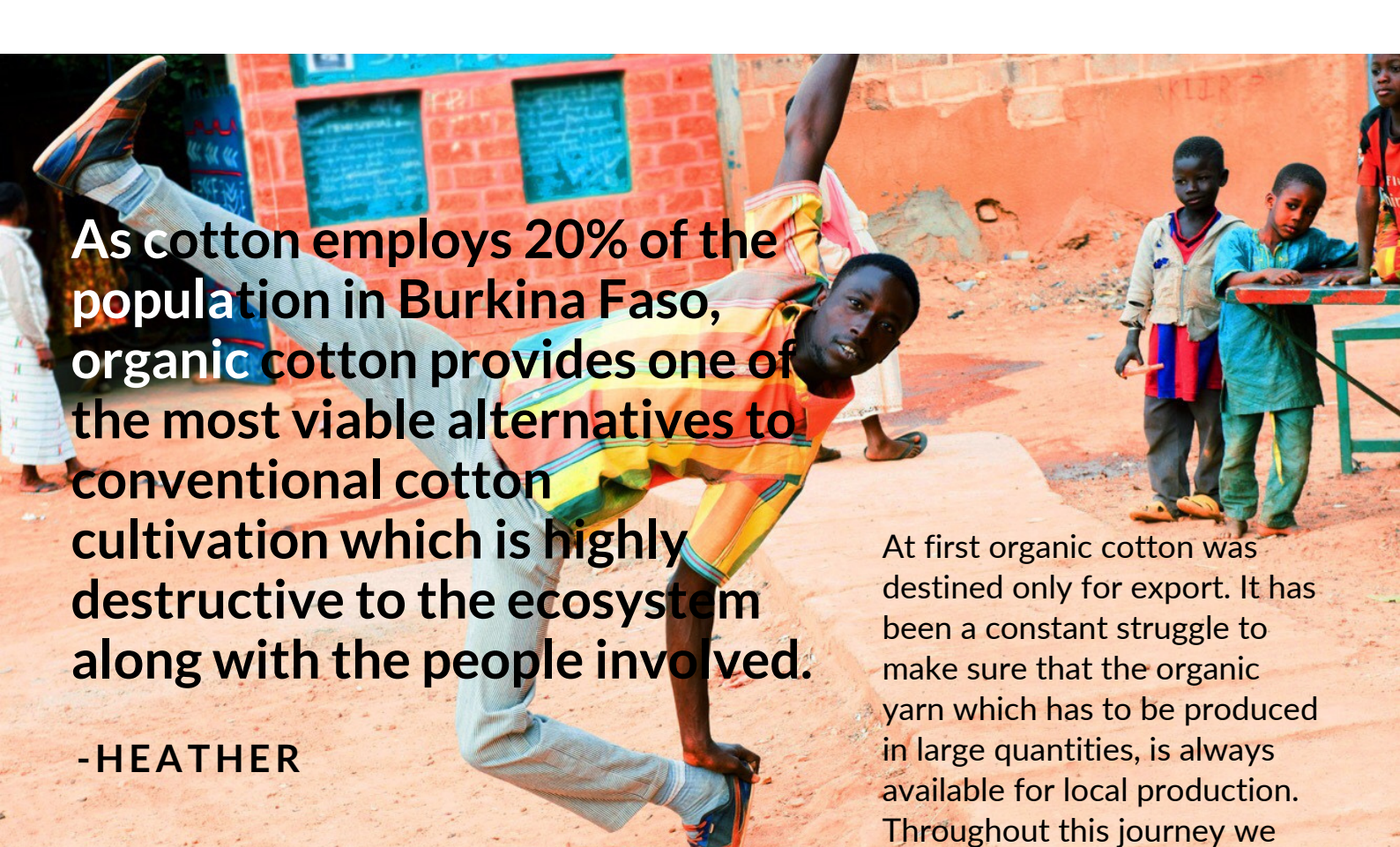
I stopped playing around in the fantastic world of theater and endeavored to put my talent in the service of creating a just economy. As I knew something about making clothes- I decided to use my creative juices in that domain. It was around 2004 that I began searching for ecological fabrics to realize this plan. The choices were sparse so I realized I would need to make the fabric as well as the clothing- It was in 2010 that I made the first textile prototypes and Xoomba was officially born in 2011.

3.Do you consider your brand sustainable and why? 4.What inspired your brand?

Xoomba was created to be part of a solution for economic injustice which starts with environmental abuse. We're not perfect but our road map is drawn and leading us toward sustainability.

"It's fashion that is made with a process that stays within the limits of resource replenishment so it can continue for the foreseeable future."

- HEATHER




As cotton employs 20% of the population in Burkina Faso, organic cotton provides one of the most viable alternatives to conventional cotton cultivation which is highly destructive to the ecosystem along with the people involved.

- HEATHER

At first organic cotton was destined only for export. It has been a constant struggle to make sure that the organic yarn which has to be produced in large quantities, is always available for local production. Throughout this journey we

have had years where there was none left and the business had to be paused.

Another significant challenge is to figure out the best way to dye the cotton. I have chosen to use fiber reactive, GOTS certified dyes, as the most environmentally responsible way to have an infinite color palette, and colorfast functionality. We are always researching how to do this as responsibly as possible. I'm super excited that we are now installing a new process called the cationic treatment which will allow us to save 80% of our water usage, 50% of our dyestuff and will leave the dye bath practically clear and easy to recycle.



Xoomba produces everything in Burkina Faso using local and sustainable materials and local personnel. This is our response to an extractive and colonial structure that sucks the natural resources out of Africa to add value by processing elsewhere. Our base material is the organic and fair trade cotton which is grown here. There may be other fibers that are theoretically more sustainable but there are no structures for processing them here. As cotton employs 20% of the population in Burkina Faso, organic cotton provides one of the most viable alternatives to conventional cotton cultivation which is highly destructive to the ecosystem along with the people involved.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

There are many challenges. The main one has been to ensure a steady stock of organic cotton yarns for local artisans to use here.

Beyond that there is just a general lack of infrastructure here in this land locked country and a lack of appropriate skills so it turns out working in a poor country, where the cost of living is relatively low, is actually a costly endeavor as we spend so much on training and expensive utilities.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Africa and why?

I think sustainable fashion along with sustainable production of all products, is the only way we'll have a future anywhere in the world. But I do think In Africa, we can be leaders as we're starting almost from scratch here. The fact that there are no textile factories here give us the chance to build our own clean systems, starting small but building up from there using the technology appropriate to our development.



7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

Here in Africa, thrift puts the tailors out of business. Thankfully the people here are determined to keep their style especially for special occasions so custom made clothing is still common.

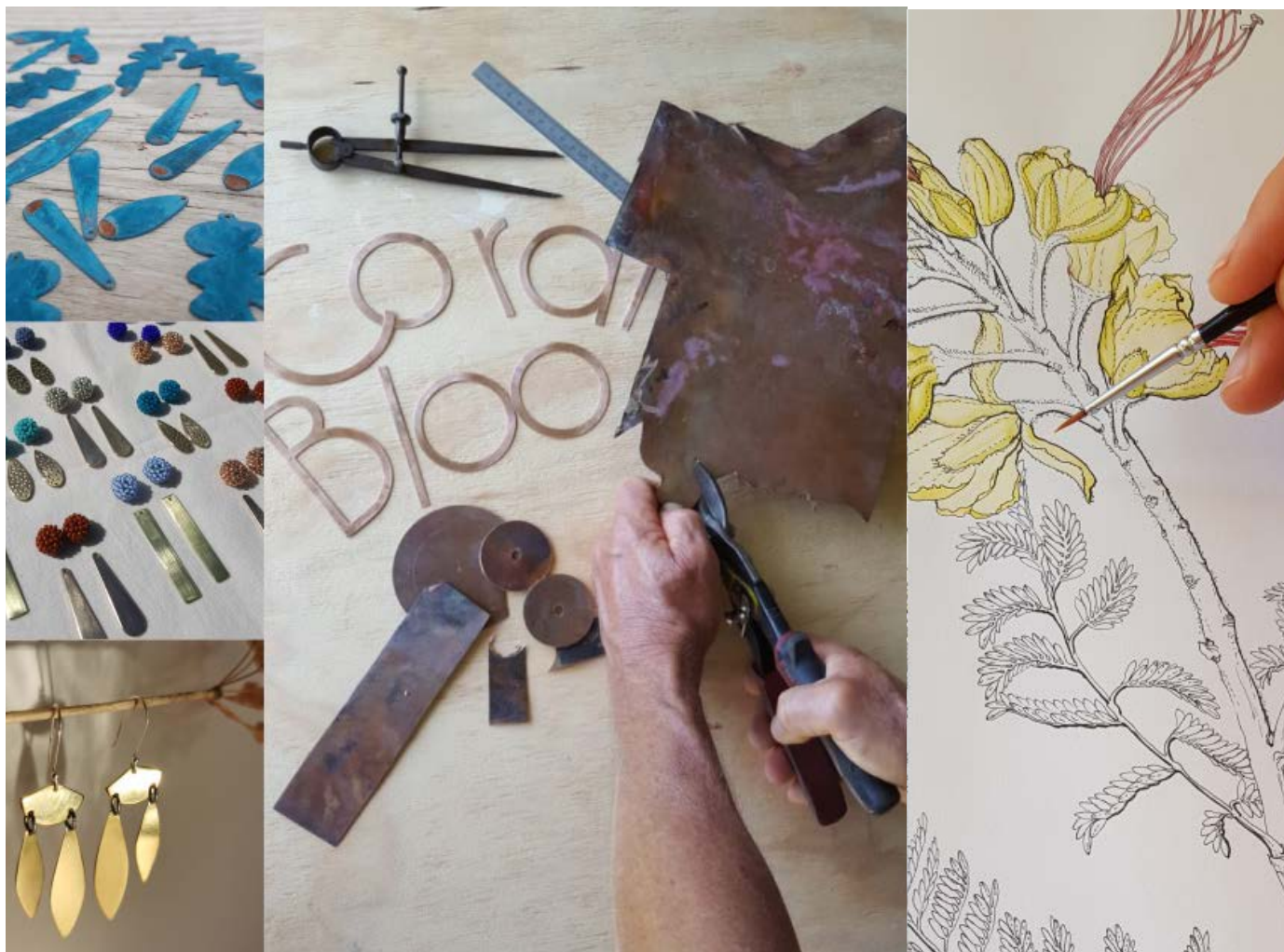
Thrift is a quick and immediate answer to our excessive consumerism but I am working for an idyllic future where second hand will be precious and rare. People will not be tossing clothes with every season but rather buying ethically made pieces with thoughtful care, wearing them and repairing them until they turn to rags.

8. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

There should not be a difference though it seems that in the public discourse, ethical fashion has come to mean concentrating on workers rights and helping artisans to find markets while sustainable fashion has come to signify concentrating on ecological practices. The truth is that humans are another animal in nature. To be ethical means to do no harm.

You can't be ethical or sustainable without respecting the whole ecosystem. The challenge of actually finding alternatives is another question and it's never possible to address all issues at once. Each company has to make priorities in relation to their context and draw a road map towards making fashion harmless.

Xoomba is based in Burkina Faso. Contact them on heatherandnils@gmail.com or xoomba.com



1.What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

In my view sustainable fashion refers to a mindset where manufacturers and consumers are more informed and conscious about producing and buying products that cause less short and long term damage to the environment. While accepting that all resources are precious and limited, in our view sustainable fashion aims to produce smaller quantities of goods made from natural or recycled materials, whilst ensuring top quality craftsmanship and timeless style so that products may last much longer than goods produced for the fast fashion industry.

2.How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

I first learnt about sustainable crops and materials during an undergraduate module at university on climate change and sustainable development.

Learning about the sustainable aspects and versatility of hemp fibers in particular really tickled my curiosity. It was so wonderful to learn that hemp plants require significantly lower water consumption to produce a crop and also require no fertilizers and pesticides. There is no waste as 100% of the plant may be utilized from food to medicine to building materials and even textiles. The properties of hemp textiles are astounding – they are very durable and strengthen with age (amazing, not many other textiles get better with age!) and the hollow properties of the fibers, similar to pure linen, make the material adaptable and suitable for both summer and winter. I am focused on continuously expanding my knowledge and learning as we go, doing in depth research for each step of the process when we explore new product designs for CoralBloom.

3.Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

Yes, CoralBloom is a sustainable brand. We align ourselves with slow and circular design principles and strive to create thoughtful items that communicate a story of respect and care for Mother Nature. We ensure that materials and supplies are sourced locally and work with local printers who use eco-friendly water-based inks and energy saving equipment. Our range is currently available in pure cotton, linen and hemp. We want to continue introducing hemp in the form of familiar products while educating consumers about the benefits of hemp as an eco-conscious alternative to synthetic and natural fibers. To prevent wastage, we have digital catalogues of prototypes and products are made to order. Layouts for printing are meticulously planned to minimize offcuts and wastage. Each item is then lovingly hand- made by us in our local studio in Somerset West. We are committed to an ethical and transparent growth of our brand and take the responsibility to educate consumers to choose products that consider the health of our environment.



To share a place so close to our family's heart, we have entwined traditional botanical watercolor artworks with modern designs on high-quality products that are made to last. Through our art and designs we hope to share a part of the natural world that is not accessible to everyone on a daily basis. Our family's passion is heart driven and we have always had a synergistic dynamic where we love working by bringing together everyone's unique skills. The art we use is my mother's and sister's (Ann and Megan), who are both self-taught. Each original artwork is meticulously drawn and painted by hand. Megan recently finished her degree in conservation ecology. My father(Nico) is our talented carpenter and self-taught jeweler who transforms reclaimed metal into jewelry and builds our displays. I use the artworks provided by Ann and Megan to create the digital designs while balancing running the business, marketing, production and sewing.

4.What inspired your brand?

CoralBloom is a family run business with a functional art range that celebrates the Cape Flora and Fauna of South Africa. For the last 23 years the small coastal village of Cape I fanta has been our family's treasured retreat where my parents fostered a deep lying love, admiration and respect for nature in both my sister and I from an early age. The times spent exploring the rock pools, river, mountains and veld surrounding the village has inspired all our creative endeavors. CoralBloom started as a part-time venture while I was a first year university student in 2010. At the beginning of 2019 when I completed my PhD in Botany and Microbiology I took the opportunity to turn CoralBloom into a full-time business making botanical-inspired stationery and jewelry. 2020 launched us into a new trajectory of digital textile printing and face mask manufacturing that sustained CoralBloom throughout the lockdown period.

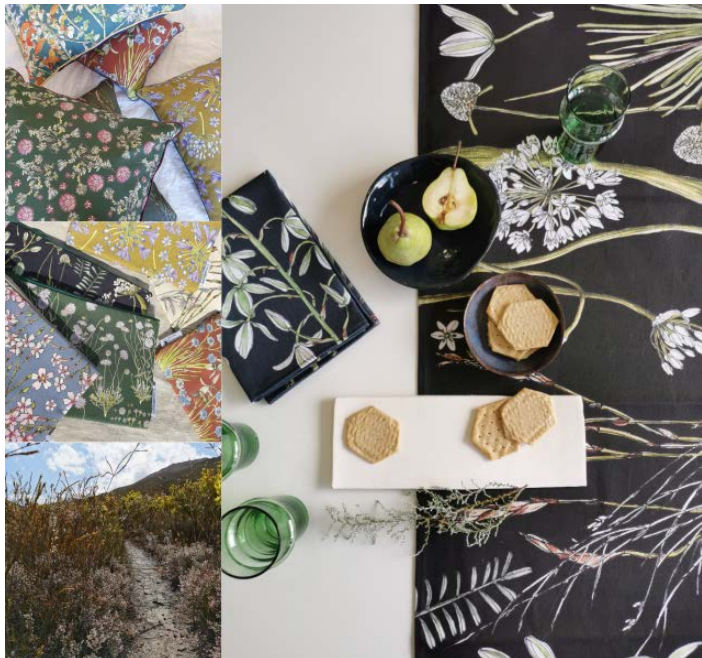
The jump into textiles provided us with an opportunity to design and launch a functional range of products which includes table-ware, home-ware, loungewear, décor and accessories. We have also been involved with various collaborations with local designers, including a limited edition linen clothing range and a new wallpaper range featuring our printed textiles.

5.What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

We have found that input costs of sourcing locally produced, natural textiles and materials are significantly higher. We have also learnt that the majority of goods have a generally accepted ceiling retail price, often resulting in smaller profit margins per product. However, we are proud of the decision to build a brand committed to a slow and sustainable fashion approach. Accessibility to local textile printers that are transparent about their materials and techniques have been a challenge, but throughout the last two years we have formed relationships with companies that are committed to using eco- friendly water-based inks and energy saving equipment. Packaging of goods may sometimes pose a challenge, but we have found local suppliers of biodegradable cello-plastic to replace standard plastic bags and use minimal packaging for our range - natural string and a paper swing tag per product. We have found that not all consumers are environmentally-conscious and without proper education and exposure on the topic, it may often be a difficult barrier to cross. We continuously have to work at creating, generating and connecting with customers, retail spaces and online platforms to get our brand noticed, in order to connect with consumers who understand or are willing to change their behaviors (consuming and spending in a conscious way creating less detrimental effects on our environment). Local and international social media platforms and online marketplaces have been a great starting point and we are on a journey to continuously build and expand our network.

6.Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Africa and why?

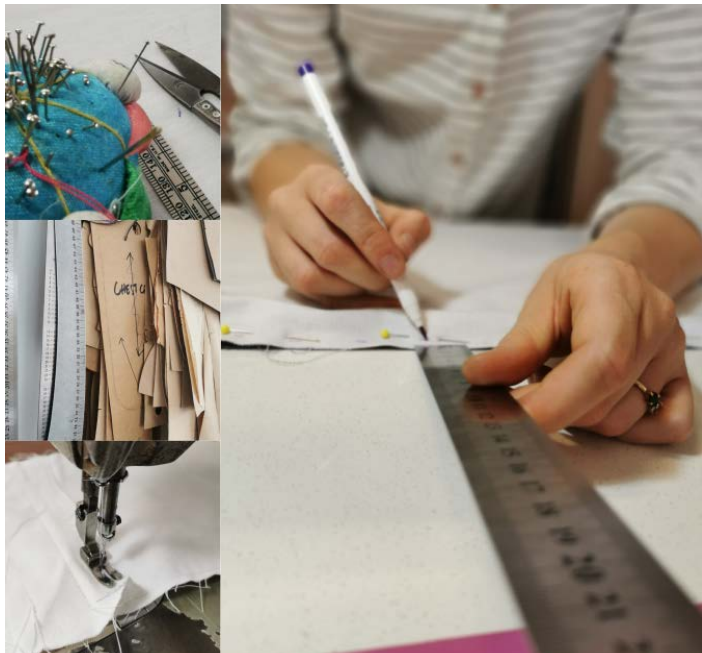
Yes, I think that an inclusive, ethical and sustainable fashion approach would be the ideal future for Africa. Many indigenous people from Africa have been living harmoniously and sustainably with their surrounding environment and the Western world would have a great deal to learn from them. Two local organizations, Twyg (<https://twyg.co.za/future-of-fashion/>) and Rewoven (<https://www.rewoven.africa/our-story>) have a wonderful ongoing project addressing this topic in detail, definitely worth taking a look.



"Sustainable fashion refers to a mindset where manufacturers and consumers are more informed and conscious about producing and buying products that cause less short and long term damage to the environment."

Dr. Michelle Jooste

-CORALBLOOM



7.How do thrift shops impact your business?

Currently thrift shops do not seem to have a large impact on our business (homeware, tableware and loungewear ranges) in particular, as the majority of South African thrift shops are more clothing and furniture-orientated.

8.Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

Yes, in our view ethical fashion refers to the human impact and social implications of the industry in terms of fair wages, proper working hours and working environments and prevents cruelty toward people or animals. Sustainable fashion refers to a mindset where manufacturers and consumers are more informed and conscious about producing and buying products that cause less short and long term damages to the environment. While accepting that all resources are precious and limited, in our view sustainable fashion aims to produce smaller quantities of goods made from natural or recycled materials, whilst ensuring top quality craftsmanship and timeless style so that products may last much longer than goods produced for the fast fashion industry.



CoralBloom is based in South Africa. Contact them on info@coralbloom.co.za or <http://coralbloomstudio.com/>.



1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Sustainable fashion means more than one thing for me. It means reducing waste for energy conservation and environmental preservation, whilst delivering on intended commercial and economic benefits. It means taking the best possible care of our clothes by appropriately laundering and mending them when necessary. This will reduce our need to frequently buy or replace clothes, and ultimately lower the carbon footprints in the fabric making industry. It also means ensuring that, when we do buy clothes, we aim for simple fashionable items that are both versatile for multifunctional purposes and resilient for multiple use. Lastly, buying from brands that are conscious about being eco-friendly, pay workers fairly and operate in the most conducive environment possible. The companies that mostly meet the said criteria are small independent designers.

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

I came to know about sustainable fashion when I started sewing in 2017. Before then, I was mainly a consumer of fast fashion. When I started sewing, I got firsthand experience on the effort and sweat involved in creating a single piece of clothing, and realized I should be paying more for the clothes I buy. From that time, I became more aware of the information around, especially on social media; about horrors of the fashion industry, how workers are treated and the amount of waste it generates.

3. Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

Yes, my brand was founded on the ethos of sustainability. I wanted to reduce waste by only producing made-to-order items. I also use fabric cutouts to make other items such as wall art and accessories like scrunchies, bonnets and reusable face pads.

"In sustainable fashion, it becomes non-beneficial to focus on the environmental impact of garment production while disregarding the health, welfare and commensurate remuneration of workers. The same goes for ethical fashion; while focusing on the workers, it should also focus on how the fashion is being consumed as well as the environmental footprints."

**- PELUMI
OLADOKUN**

The products are made from 100% African print cotton which is a sustainable fabric. We also source our materials locally and ship products with minimal plastic using eco-friendly packaging. I also ensure that the designs are unique and simple, so that my customers can wear them often.

4. What inspired your brand?

My brand is inspired by my love for sustainability and African print fabric. I feel like anything termed eco-friendly and sustainable is often in neutral colors and I love colour. Monochrome is not my thing. So, my brand is African inspired and sustainable in the ways I explained earlier. In Nigeria, where I come from, Ankara is used to make elaborate styles that only get worn on special occasions or occasionally. I love Ankara but I also wanted both simplicity and versatility that will enable frequent and all-occasion wear, rather than hoard in a wardrobe due to flamboyant styles. So with my knowledge on sewing, I decided to start my brand and share with clients that have similar interests.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

A main challenge for me is marketing and promoting the business to generate revenue. Although the desire for these sustainable goods is only growing, existing shopping platforms rarely highlight sustainable items, and often focus on the aesthetics. For designers like myself with little investment and backing, it is difficult to get noticed in the sea of advertisements on the internet. Often, we are compared to big brand items that are similar but that are not produced on ethical and eco-friendly values. To address this challenge, I have started to share more about sustainable fashion on my social media page to educate customers, and I am also exploring other offline marketing channels.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Africa and why?

Yes, I believe sustainable fashion certainly has great prospects in the African market and we can see that, especially with the growth of thrift stores among the millennials and younger generation. It is now a trend and will likely become more mainstream in just a couple of years.



7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

I love thrifting and refashioning thrift items. I think it has a place in sustainable fashion, but it is just one aspect of sustainable fashion, not the whole thing. If we stop buying new items, many sustainable fashion brands would go bankrupt. This means millions of people would lose their jobs; whereas we know unemployment itself defeats the goal of sustainability. Consuming conscious fashion is the solution. We are moving the economy and giving our money to people who are doing things right and making a change in this world.

8. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

There are differences but I don't think they are mutually exclusive. In my opinion, ethical fashion should be sustainable fashion. In sustainable fashion, it becomes non-beneficial to focus on the environmental impact of garment production while disregarding the health, welfare and commensurate remuneration of workers. The same goes for ethical fashion; while focusing on the workers, it should also focus on how the fashion is being consumed as well as the environmental footprints. For these reasons, they should go hand in hand. To my mind, the lines get blurred sometimes as I perceive both concepts to be similar, and I incorporate principles of both philosophies in my business.

Alake Lola is based in Nigeria. Contact them on shop.alakelola@gmail.com or social media @Alake Lola





1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Three words come to mind when thinking about sustainability – community, earth, and product. At Indego Africa, sustainability is more than a buzzword. As our brand expands, so too does our investment in the ethical and sustainable production of our products. Social impact is another facet of our sustainability commitment. It's not just about sustaining the earth, but local communities, and time-honored and traditional crafts. Sustainable fashion extends far beyond materials and sourcing and encompasses the entire supply chain, affecting all partners involved with the creation of product all the way through to the customer. We believe in not only being thoughtful about what goes into each product, but how it impacts the livelihoods of the women who make it and how we can educate the consumer on our process and more closely connect them with the artisans.

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

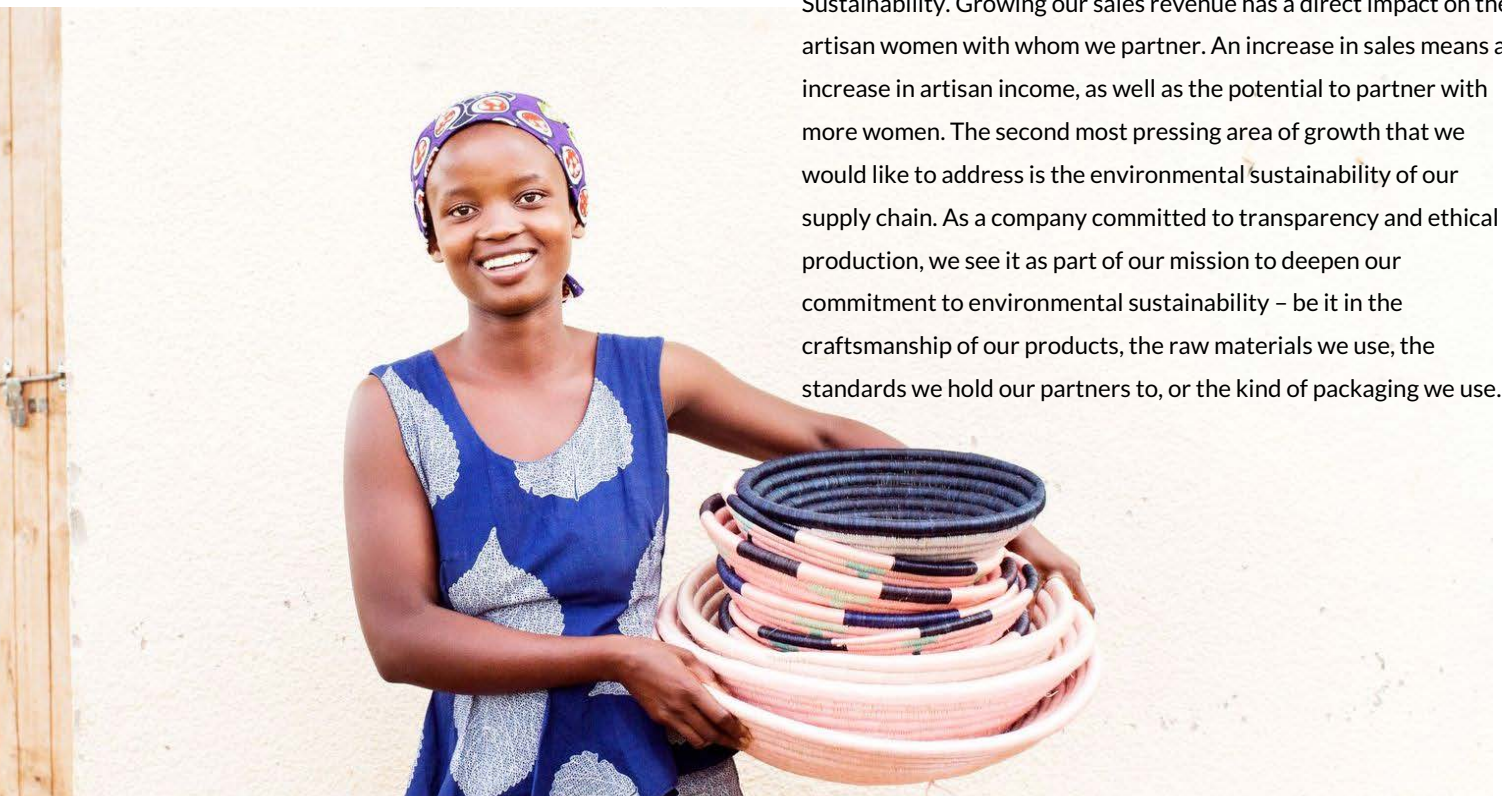
Having built my career within the fashion industry for several years as a designer, I became aware of the broader manufacturing process and nuances involved in production, as well as the negative impacts on the environment and local communities early in my career. This strengthened my ethics and values as a designer, propelling me to seek out partnerships with suppliers that innovated within their ethical and environmental practices. If I was to continue to grow my career within fashion, I needed to be involved in the full process from design through to production in order to make the right choices towards more sustainable design and sourcing. Through my work at Indego Africa, I'm able to implement my learnings from fashion and manufacturing towards continuing a model that preserves artisan crafts and supports capacity building for continued growth and impact within artisan communities.

"Three words come to mind when thinking about sustainability – community, earth, and product."

-SAPNA SHAH

3. Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

We create sustainable opportunities that support the integrity of artisan made goods as well as the economic security and entrepreneurial goals of the women who make them. Our commitment to sustainability follows the lifecycle of our products — from harvesting local, natural materials, to hand-dyeing and producing, all the way to packing, shipping, and product care. By sourcing natural fibers from the local communities where we work, we also help preserve traditional craft. Indego uses a range of natural fibers indigenous to Ghana and Rwanda, like sisal, sweetgrass, palm leaf, bolga straw, and banana leaf. We strive to be ethically and environmentally responsible in the local production of all of our products. By partnering with expert makers, developing a high quality product line, and providing access to international markets, we are able to cultivate economic inclusivity and enable our artisan partners to earn a sustainable source of income. We pay our partners fair, consistent wages for their work. On average, our partners earn 40% of the wholesale price of our items, vs. 5-10% in traditional retail. We recognize that social and environmental responsibility is a process, and requires collaboration with our artisan partners and other stakeholders. That's why we're always looking for ways to improve.



In December 2020, Indego Africa launched an Artisan Advancement Program designed to further build on training programs - helping to strengthen the capacity of artisan women to successfully and sustainably scale their cooperative enterprises. This program is taught on site to four cooperatives per semester, the program's goals are threefold:

1. Workshop & Sustainability Certification: Dyeing consistency and techniques ,
2. Improved access to capital and knowledge of Savings & Credit Unions,
3. Business Plans for 2020-2021 to achieve cooperative specific goals.

4. What inspired your brand?

Since 2007, Indego Africa has been propelling the creation, growth, and sustainability of women-owned businesses in Africa by providing artisans with a global market for their handmade products and investing in their education. What began as a model to empower artisan women in post-genocide Rwanda has grown into an unwavering commitment to help artisans, unemployed youth and refugees across Rwanda and Ghana participate in the artisan economy. As a nonprofit, we invest donations plus profits from product sales into business, vocational and leadership training for two generations of women who handcraft our products.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

The top two areas we continually look to grow in are Sales and Sustainability. Growing our sales revenue has a direct impact on the artisan women with whom we partner. An increase in sales means an increase in artisan income, as well as the potential to partner with more women. The second most pressing area of growth that we would like to address is the environmental sustainability of our supply chain. As a company committed to transparency and ethical production, we see it as part of our mission to deepen our commitment to environmental sustainability – be it in the craftsmanship of our products, the raw materials we use, the standards we hold our partners to, or the kind of packaging we use.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Africa and why?

Yes, most certainly! Sustainable fashion has a future globally and there is a pressing need for change as consumers are more aware of how products are made and deserve transparency from brands. Africa is abundant in its resources and talent, but it is the responsibility of brands to develop and produce product in ways that add back into the community and replenish the environment. More and more brands are being thoughtful and innovative in how they approach their supply chains and partner with makers. It's an exciting time and there's so much potential! At Indego, fostering a collaborative partnership with our artisan partners has been really rewarding. Whether working together in person or communicating virtually, Indego Africa has a culture where everyone's voice is heard. Engagement and feedback from the artisans is truly valued. I'm constantly inspired by how much dedication and passion for craft our partners have. Their resilience to continue working through business challenges that arise, and the pride they share during their cooperatives' successes makes our mission even more tangible.

7. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

Ethical fashion represents the moral standards by which a brand operates and grows. The shared values that guide us in our decision making process. While Sustainable fashion is the longevity and overall health of the supply chain and the long-term commitments to the communities we partner with, the environment, and our customers.



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1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

In my opinion sustainable fashion encompasses the lifecycle of fashion items which define trends that are timeless, and more importantly, with the least environmental degradation on how they are sourced and recycled.

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

I unknowingly was interested in sustainability born and raised in Africa where every aspect of life was connected to nature and every produce was grown organically. Where everything natural was promoted and being natural was praised e.g. natural beauty means no makeup; traditional clothing made out of natural material and foods that are organically grown.

These components are encouraged now yet it has been a way of life in Africa - be it consumption or cloth making.

3. Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

Qaal designs has incorporated the use of natural fabrics over the years, making this a gradual shift. For example, over 25 years ago, I designed using bark tree (used as a burial cloth for royalty in Uganda). I think sustainability should be factored right from when, where, how we source, design, produce, consume, and the after- life of our products, and how we could best minimize environmental impact at each stage- not just when you donate or discard the cloth items. My brand works with partners that share our belief and make efforts to:

1. Use biodegradable and sustainable fabrics, and natural dyes.
2. Are transparent with the footprint of our production;
3. Use of organic materials that are harvested in the fairest way.
4. Consider the end life of the products they can be repurposed, recycled 100% compostable.

"As a designer, I have to consciously factor in where the cloth fabrics are sourced, from how it impacts the farmer, the community, the supply chain, its consumption to its after life."

-NIMCO ADAM

4. What inspired your brand?

At Qaal designs we get our inspirations through travel and social interaction with communities. We try to understand the cross-cultural influences as impacted by the geographic location, weather, available materials, fashion trends and conscious efforts to how we produce and consume fashion.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

I think the main challenges would be:

1. constraints in the supply chain
2. lack of access to bigger markets
3. lack of support from capital investors - there are very few public companies that are operating under their sustainability model
4. Lack of skilled workforce as most designers are absorbed into the fast fashion where pay is greater.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Kenya and why?

It does, but this depends on the business model you run. The I.T industry has advanced in Kenya so that's a plus in a creative industry where technology will be used.

7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

Thrift shops bring on more value-addition to fashion as it helps consumers extend the shelf-life of products- they are also great sources for our fashion designs and collections - looking back into the past defines what our future designs.

8. DO YOU SEE ANY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE FASHION?

These terms define the same coin, except it's the two sides of a coin. Ethical fashion is sustainable fashion.

1. Sustainability in fashion is really having mechanisms in place to ensure we preserve the source /raw materials we consume while avoiding depletion of scarce resources in environment.

2. Ethical in fashion to me would mean equity example is a high fashion brand should avoid exploitation of low- income tailors within an outsourced production model. So ethical fashion ensures workers' employment conditions are in line with acceptable global norms (fair wages, workers' rights, no use of child labor, safe working environment etc.



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1.What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Sustainable fashion consists in applying to a brand mindful, ecological and ethical practices throughout the whole chain of a brand's supply and sourcing chains but also in terms of business model and culture. The challenge is to be able to implement them in the long-term, that is the path SEKBI Bogolan chose to pursue.

2.How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

Sustainable fashion is not a new phenomenon, but lately luxury and then mainstream brands have understood the importance of doing fashion in a different way that protects the environment, or at least, drastically reduced the damages caused to it. When founding SEKBI, sustainability and consciousness were always two key points of our vision.

3.Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

SEKBI Bogolan is a luxury sustainable fashion brand, and one of the few issued from the African continent to compile several organic certifications at this time. We carefully choose our partners and suppliers who have to align with our social and ethical values, and respect of individuals. Our signature print is produced on a controlled process in order to avoid waste of energy and water, plus the ink is made of non-harmful chemicals by an Oeko Tex certified supplier. We are constantly improving our fabrics and trims sourcing to find solutions that respond to eco- friendly standards. Finally, we also produce on demand allowing a better management of stocks and material consumption.

"We carefully choose our partners and suppliers who have to align with our social and ethical values, and respect of individuals."

- BINTA



4. What inspired your brand?

On a larger scale, we are inspired by our heritage and the richness of African culture, and beyond that comes the result of mixing that heritage with a modern aesthetic. Bogolan, a traditional hand dying textile craft from Mali, is the main source of inspiration of SEKBI. We feel and have a strong connection to its graphic aesthetic, story telling and iconography meaning, in addition to its eco-friendly approach.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

Being sustainable is a long-term process, it requires effort, dedication and patience. Today we have the chance to be informed and find sources related to this topic on many platforms, so it makes it much easier than 30 years ago for instance. Getting the information and communication with partners is crucial to succeed in this journey. At SEKBI Bogolan so far, we have been lucky to work and collaborate with forward thinkers and conscious entities that share the same vision.

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Africa and why?

Yes, there's definitely a future for sustainable fashion in Africa, that's why it made sense for us to make sustainability at the core of SEKBI Bogolan. Africa already have the natural resources: many artisans use traditional techniques, often including nature elements and locally sourced cotton. We believe that in the next couple of years, many African brands will emerge as being sustainable.

7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

It does not really impact our business as SEKBI Bogolan is on an affordable luxury segment. However, our collections are made to last and be timeless, the simplicity and elegance of the designs make them essential basics to wear in the long-term.

8. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

Ethical and Sustainable fashion complement each other. We don't think you can apply one and leave the other on the side. At SEKBI Bogolan, both ideas are important and interact with each other strengthening the essence of our label and the legacy we are building.

SEKBI Bogolan is based in Ghana. Contact them on contact@sekbibogolan.com or sekbibogolan.com

1. What does sustainable fashion mean to you?

Our Sustainability Roadmap

So much!! But most of all it means we do our best to do better. In our manifesto it says:

“The journey towards great change comes with vulnerability and mistakes.. that ‘s ok. If we do it for the better, if we do it all together, if we do it to celebrate the beauty in everyone of us”.

Sustainable fashion for us means in the first place: taking care of the people we work with, we treat everyone as equals, we work together based on love, we listen and we learn from each other. It goes beyond the production team, our branding and design also breathes cross cultural collaboration. With the relaunch of AFRIEK we added profound ecological sustainability to the brand: organic cotton that is locally sourced (Tanzania), locally made into fabric, locally sewn into garments (Rwanda). I personally went to visit most of the places that are part of our supply chain, because it's not guaranteed that when companies say they are doing well, they actually do.

Slow fashion is another layer to sustainability: We decided not to produce a collection, instead we are introducing a “UNIFORM”: one item in a few prints that is versatile, comfortable, easy to fit. We want to cater to as many different people as possible, but without the waste and stress of big collections. It is hard enough to do sustainable fashion right, so I decided we start again with just one item and make it a statement: When you wear AFRIEK you can do what you believe in while wearing what you believe in: Wear the change.

Together we can achieve a lot, and we are super grateful for the partners we work with toward sustainability. But it goes beyond AFRIEK and beyond showing how great we are doing. There are many challenges and many choices to make - nothing is perfect. We want to inspire other brands and consumers by opening up the conversation, communicating about our thought

process behind our choices, decide based on our own common sense not the logic of the industry, and inspire others to do the same. We can learn so much from each other and creating sustainable fashion We do believe that raising awareness, sharing the challenges and successes, being honest and open, helps us to learn and grow. We do live in a world unfortunately where fast fashion is the by product of our fast pace society. All we can do is to encourage people to slow down and ask themselves some questions before they buy: Who made my clothes? What conditions are the workers exposed to? What is in my fabrics?

2. How and when did you first come to know about sustainable fashion?

The tragedy of Rana Plaza occurred around the same time as when we started AFRIEK, but it was not connected in any way to our idea. When me and my ex-cofounder started AFRIEK, we were simply thinking what would be common sense: pay people well, make sure they like the job, and create beautiful garments together that will last and will be loved for a long time. Even though we were creating sustainable fashion, it was only months later that we understood it on a greater scale. We attracted people that were promoting sustainable fashion as they invited us to become part of their programs (W.Green, ASN Bank, MINT at the Modefabriek) and they made us aware of all that is wrong in the fashion industry.





3. Do you consider your brand sustainable and why?

Yes, we are a sustainable fashion brand. We believe that we can come together from different cultures and all work and create change based on equality. When AFRIEK was founded in 2013, our focus was on fair trade in a way that we connect the wearer of our garments with our tailors. This we did through writing the name of the tailor making the garment in the neck label. Of course, we also make sure our tailors are paid above industrial wage and have safety and insurance staying with us. Concerning the development of the brand, we now have moved to improve our sustainability in depth. This means that we also look into our environmental sustainability. For example, our dress is made from organic cotton in North-East Tanzania while printed and sewed in Rwanda. Since it is a constant process of becoming more sustainable we have decided to be 100% transparent about it, so we

share on the website our Sustainability Roadmap in which we explain where we came from, where we are right now, where we want to go and what challenges each step brings. We believe transparency is one step towards making and embodying the change that the fashion industry needs to see.

4. What inspired your brand?

So many things, so many conversations. But it started with my master Conflict Studies and Human Rights: I learned the very first step in conflict (war) starts with seeing "the other" as less. We are all equal human beings, we are all equally worthy, and if we can see that, if we can imagine and understand life through the eyes of others, we will see that we all are love and want to be loved. We start seeing others as less out of scarcity, fear and greed. When I was in Rwanda for the first time, I realized that I - with all my studies trying to understand conflict and

being aware of the triggers - was looking down on people in Rwanda. I was shocked and ashamed, and was wondering how that could happen? And not only to me but to everyone around me. I realized that the unequal relationship we have had with Africa over the last centuries have influenced all of us heavily, and that we need to shift perspective back to equality. That is what inspired me to make beautiful garments, and the whole production process would be centered around equality.

5. What are some of the challenges you face as a sustainable fashion brand and how do you manage them?

Many! It's already hard to run a fashion business, so to do it in a fair and sustainable way is an extra challenge. We run our own production atelier which is much more challenging than just order any designs from established (fast fashion) producers, we carefully select all materials that go into our garments. The organic, vegan or recycled materials are often more expensive and so we have to educate our customers on the higher price.



Finally, in fashion the look, fit and quality is most important for customers, and thus even though we have less options, we still have to make it look great! We manage them by just launching one garment at the time. So we can do that one thing really well! Slow fashion baby 🌱

6. Do you think sustainable fashion has a future in Africa and why?

Yes! Not only in Africa but the entire world. Africa's fashion production is still small scale compared to other continents and there will be more and more interest to produce in Africa as there is an abundance of (organic) cotton and there are many people that can work. Hopefully we can learn from the mistakes of the industry in other countries and build up the fashion industry in a very ethical and sustainable way.

7. How do thrift shops impact your business?

They help us style our beautiful and powerful dresses and shirts! ;) AFRIEK is proud to be part of LENA, a fashion library in Amsterdam. They rent out garments - both vintage and new - to customers who get the luxury to change their wardrobe as often as they want, without buying anything! Sometimes we wonder if we should be producing new garments (because is that really sustainable at all?) but we offer a great alternative to fast fashion brands. So combining sustainable brands with second hand is the perfect way to go!

8. Do you see any difference between Ethical and Sustainable fashion?

Sustainable fashion is often used to refer to the impact on the planet, ethical fashion more for the relationship with people and animals. We focus on both as they go hand in hand. In the past I focused mainly on the Ethical part because I thought that was hard enough. Now I have learned the abundance mindset and that the more we align with what is good for us and for our world, the more positive impact we can have, and the easier things become! With the relaunch of AFRIEK and our Organic dresses we go all in!

AFRIEK is based in Rwanda. Contact them on info@afriek.com or afriek.com



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