



The Blueprint for a Regenerative Fashion Future

African Fashion Coalition

Declaration

Before circularity became language, it was practice.

Before sustainability became strategy, it was survival.

Before fashion became industry, it was community.

This is our starting point. And Africa already has the answer.

We are the farmers, dyers, weavers, artisans, tailors, makers, designers, creatives and catalysts who have run circular systems for generations, long before the world had a word for any of it. We have watched our own practice renamed as innovation and sold back to us at a markup. We are done watching.

Africa sells the world roughly 15 billion dollars of raw textiles each year and buys back more than 23 billion in finished clothing and footwear.¹ We grow it, and someone else sews it, names it, prices it, and sells it home to us. The resources are ours. The value is theirs. We are celebrated as a source of inspiration and shut out of the industry we inspire. That is not a gap in talent. It is a gap in ownership, and it was built that way on purpose.

The future the industry is scrambling toward already lives here, in our markets, our hands, our history. What is missing was never our vision. It is the world's willingness to learn from it. The question is no longer whether change is necessary. The question is who will lead it.

Africa is ready.

¹UNESCO, *The Fashion Sector in Africa: Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for Growth* (2023). Africa exports textiles worth about USD 15.5 billion a year and imports textiles, clothing and footwear worth about USD 23.1 billion a year. unesco.org



What We Stand For

Craftsmanship is infrastructure.

Culture is intellectual property.

Circularity is not a trend but lived tradition.

Economic growth must create shared prosperity.

Fashion must operate within planetary boundaries.

Communities should participate in the value they help create.

Africa has the right and responsibility to shape the future of global fashion.

What We Reject

We reject the role written for us - suppliers of raw material, owner of nothing.

We reject the idea that our heritage is a resource to mine and our culture a pattern to lift, with no name credited and no one paid.

We reject a trade that ships the world's overproduction to our shores under the language of donation, and then leaves us to deal with the injustice that is waste colonialism.

We reject being asked to absorb the cost of consumption we did not drive and do not profit from.

We reject the polite fiction that innovation is born in studios and laboratories, while the circular systems we have practiced for generations are filed away as the past.

We reject summits, frameworks and pledges that study us, quote us, photograph us, and changes nothing.

We reject the place the industry keeps for us, a permanent seat at the edge of a table we helped build.



We reject the idea of designing systems that extract value from us then claim ownership over what was ours.

Manifesto Pillars:

These are the foundations we build on. Not aspirations to grow into, but ground we already stand on.

Pillar 1: Fashion as Cultural Heritage and Living Knowledge

Pillar 2: Circularity as Foundation, Not Trend

Pillar 3: Community-Led Creation and Inclusive Prosperity

Pillar 4: Cultural Sustainability and Intellectual Property Protection Principle

Pillar 5: Waste Justice and Global Accountability

Pillar 6: Local Production and Economic Sovereignty

Pillar 7: Climate-Responsive and Regenerative Innovation

Pillar 8: Market Access and Platform Power

Pillar 9: Infrastructure And Systems

Pillar 10: Conscious Consumption and Behavioural Change

What We Want

For too long, Africa has been discussed in the language of potential and the time for potential has passed. We hold the creativity, knowledge, entrepreneurial energy, cultural wealth, craft traditions and the circular systems the future of fashion is reaching for. What



has been missing was never vision. It's investment, infrastructure, ownership, and an equitable share of the value created from African ideas, materials, labour and culture.

So what we want is ownership and industry. Power over the value of our ideas, our materials and our craftsmanship.

If there is one place to begin, it is here. Keep the value from leaving. The craft, the circularity, the climate work and the culture all depend on Africa building and owning the industry that turns its materials into finished goods. When we commit to protecting and nurturing that together, the rest becomes possible.

United, and in the spirit of Ubuntu this is a call:

To governments. Stop exporting our natural resources in its raw state and importing it back as finished garments. Build the policy and the financing that keeps processing, manufacturing and brand value on the continent. Reward the people who make, not only the people who ship.

To investors. Fund the systems, not the moment - infrastructure, education, capacity building, technology, logistics, intelligence and craft enterprises that outlasts collections and fashion weeks. We need patient capital.

To brands. Attribution is not optional and inspiration is not a licence. If you build on African design, name the source, share the value, and bring the community into equitable ownership.

To manufacturers and retailers. Own what you make until the end of its life. Pay to repair and recover the clothing you send here, through the kind of producer levy that traders in Accra have already put on the table.² – extended producer liability. Stop calling your waste our problem.

To cultural institutions and media. Stop covering us as a story about the future. We are writing it. Credit African voices as authors, not subjects.

²The Borgen Project, “The Impact of Textile Waste in Ghana” (2023). Kantamanto traders submitted a proposal to the European Environment Bureau calling on clothing producers to pay a per-item fee toward managing textile waste. borgenproject.org



To African designers, makers and leaders. Claim it. Our knowledge, our materials, our markets, our future. Work together, not in silos. Let us build together. The world is looking for a model of regeneration. We are not waiting to be invited into that conversation. We are already leading it.

This manifesto recognises Africa's opportunity to lead the global transition towards responsible fashion. By leveraging the continent's creativity, entrepreneurial talent, and traditions of circularity, Africa can redefine fashion systems to be regenerative, equitable, and rooted in human dignity. Rather than replicating extractive industrial pathways, this manifesto calls for a distinctly African fashion future that restores ecosystems, empowers communities, and positions fashion as a driver of planetary and social regeneration.

The question was never whether Africa belongs in the future of fashion. The question is whether the future of fashion is ready to learn from Africa. It will be built with us, by us and for us.

Manifesto Pillars: What We Stand On.

Commitment and Call To Action:

Pillar 1: Fashion as Cultural Heritage and Living Knowledge

Principle

Craft is not merely an aesthetic choice, it serves as essential economic infrastructure.

Intent

Elevate artisanship as a scalable, investable system.

Commitment

We commit to recognising craftsmanship, artisanal knowledge, and traditional making practices as critical infrastructure within African fashion ecosystems.



Craft sustains livelihoods, preserves cultural memory, strengthens local economies, and embeds lower-impact modes of production. Fashion systems must invest in artisans not as symbolic contributors, but as innovators and central economic actors.

Pillar 2: Circularity as Foundation, Not Trend

Principle

African fashion was born circular, it is a foundational element of our heritage and industry

Intent

Position circularity as inherited knowledge, not innovation.

Commitment

We commit to ensuring that all African transforming fashion systems transition from extractive, linear models into regenerative circular economies that eliminate waste, extend material lifecycles, and restore value to resources already in circulation.

African communities have long practiced repair, reuse, adaptation, resale, and stewardship. These traditions must not be treated as backward systems to replace, but as foundations upon which future-facing fashion economies can be built.

Pillar 3: Community-Led Creation and Inclusive Prosperity

Principle

Community is the origin of creativity. By fostering community-led initiatives, we can drive inclusive prosperity and ensure that creative growth benefits everyone involved.

Intent

Protect collective knowledge systems and ensure equitable participation across fashion economies.

Commitment



We commit to building fashion systems that generate shared prosperity, dignified livelihoods, and inclusive economic participation across the value chain.

Fashion value is created collectively across the ecosystem. We champion opportunities for artisans, workers, entrepreneurs, informal traders, educators, youth, women, and communities whose contributions sustain and strengthen the industry. Fashion economies should create shared prosperity rather than concentrate value in the hands of a few.

Pillar 4: Cultural Sustainability and Intellectual Property Protection Principle

Culture is not raw material, it is intellectual property. We must ensure that our practices reflect this principle by protecting and respecting the cultural heritage involved in our work.

Intent

Shift from extraction to respect, and ethical collaboration.

Commitment

We commit to protecting, celebrating, and advancing Africa's diverse cultural identities, indigenous knowledge systems, and creative heritage.

African fashion must not merely serve global markets; it must also strengthen narrative sovereignty, cultural continuity, and equitable representation. Traditional knowledge and cultural expression must be protected from appropriation and exploitative extraction.

Pillar 5: Waste Justice and Global Accountability

Principle

Waste is a global responsibility, not a local burden and this focus is essential to ensuring equitable accountability across the industry.

Intent

Challenge extractive systems, textile dumping, and environmental injustice.



Commitment

We commit to advocating for accountability across global fashion systems and confronting the unequal environmental burdens placed on African countries and communities.

Fashion systems must no longer externalise the environmental and social costs of overproduction and disposable consumption onto African countries and communities. Accountability must be shared across the value chain, from production and consumption to end-of-life responsibility.

Pillar 6: Local Production and Economic Sovereignty

Principle

African production should retain value beyond the export of raw materials to ensure long-term economic sovereignty.

Intent

Build sovereign production ecosystems rooted in local value creation.

Commitment

We commit to strengthening African manufacturing, regional supply chains, and value-added production systems that retain economic value within the continent while being regenerative.

Africa's role in global fashion must evolve from raw material supplier and cultural reference point to a leader in production, innovation, and brand ownership.

Pillar 7: Climate-Responsive and Regenerative Innovation

Principle



Fashion must adapt to climate realities. This focus ensures that our industry remains resilient and proactive in the face of environmental changes.

Intent

Position African materials, ecosystems, and knowledge systems as climate solutions.

Commitment

We commit to accelerating regenerative and climate-resilient fashion systems that restore ecosystems, protect biodiversity, reduce emissions, and strengthen resilience.

Fashion must evolve from a driver of ecological degradation into a force for regeneration.

Pillar 8: Market Access and Platform Power

Principle

Visibility is access.

Intent

Close the gap between talent and opportunity.

Commitment

We commit to creating equitable pathways to markets, investment, platforms, visibility, and global participation for African designers, innovators, and enterprises.

This acceleration requires not only creativity, but access — to capital, networks, buyers, institutions, technology, and storytelling platforms.

Pillar 9: Infrastructure And Systems

Principle

Talent without infrastructure is unrealised potential.



Intent

Shift focus from moments to systems.

Commitment

We commit to building the long-term enabling systems required for transformation across Africa.

Lasting change requires investment in physical infrastructure, policy environments, financing systems, research, logistics, traceability, education, and innovation ecosystems.

Sustainability cannot depend solely on individual brands or short-term visibility cycles.

Pillar 10: Conscious Consumption and Behavioural Change

Principle

The future of fashion must value meaning over excess.

Intent

Transform relationships between people, clothing, value, and consumption.

Commitment

We commit to fostering cultures of conscious consumption driving durability, care, repair, intentional purchasing, and emotional connection to clothing.

The future of fashion requires shifts not only in production systems, but also in the cultural narratives and consumer behaviours that drive disposability and overconsumption.

The Problem(s) We Must Confront

Start where the contradiction is most visible. Start at Kantamanto (Accra), Katangoa (Lagos), Gikomba (Nairobi) and Owino (Kampala) markets.



Every week, the clothing arrives at markets like Kantamanto market in Accra by the truckload, more than the largest second-hand market in West Africa can possibly absorb.³ Cut open a bale and much of it is unwearable the moment it sees daylight. Too cheap, too damaged, too far gone. It does not vanish. It burns in open air, blocks the gutters, washes into the sea, and feeds the Korle Lagoon, now among the most polluted places on earth.⁴

This clothing has a return address. It comes from Britain, from China, from the United States, sent under the language of donation and recycling.⁵ What actually crosses the water is overproduction the West cannot absorb and will not bury at home. The countries that consumed the least carry the cost of the excess.

There is a name for this. Waste colonialism.⁶ This is not simply a waste problem. It is a value-chain, accountability and justice problem.

The challenges facing African fashion are not the result of a lack of infrastructure alone, they are the result of systems. For decades, global fashion value chains were built to concentrate ownership, manufacturing, capital, infrastructure and decision-making in a small number of markets, while regions like ours supply the raw materials, the labour, the cultural influence, and the consumption.

Africa has not been excluded from fashion. Africa has been included on unequal terms.

We supply the cotton, the leather, the natural fibres, the craftsmanship, the creativity and the culture. Our aesthetics shape global fashion season after season, while our designers, artisans, manufacturers and entrepreneurs face barriers to financing, infrastructure, market access and scale that others never have to think about.

This did not happen by accident, and it did not happen by nature. It was built.

The cotton economies set up under colonial rule were designed to feed mills in Europe, not to clothe the people who grew the crop. Independence did not undo that design. In the 1980s and 1990s, structural adjustment programmes pushed by the IMF and the World

³Greenpeace Unearthed, “UK brands found in ‘fast fashion graveyard’ in African conservation area” (2025). Accra’s waste management department reports roughly fifty truckloads of used clothing arriving at Kantamanto each week, much of it unsellable. [unearthed.greenpeace.org](https://www.unearthed.greenpeace.org)

⁴TIME, “The Race to Upcycle Africa’s Fast Fashion Dumping Ground” (2025). Textile waste leaching from landfill has contributed to the Korle Lagoon’s reputation as one of the most polluted sites on earth. [time.com](https://www.time.com)

⁵Business of Fashion, “Used Clothes Pile Up as Ghana’s Kantamanto Market Struggles to Rebuild After Fire” (2025). Used clothing imported to Ghana comes primarily from the United Kingdom, China and the United States. [businessoffashion.com](https://www.businessoffashion.com)

⁶Human Rights Research Center, “Second-hand Fast Fashion Waste in Ghana” (2024), on the framing of textile dumping as waste colonialism, a term also used by The Or Foundation and researchers working at Kantamanto. [humanrightsresearch.org](https://www.humanrightsresearch.org)



Bank forced African economies to drop their tariffs and open their borders, and the textile industries built after independence were left to compete with cheaper imports and second-hand bales they could not undercut. Nigeria once ran one of the largest textile industries on the continent, scores of mills and hundreds of thousands of jobs. After the borders opened, imported and smuggled cloth took most of the market, the mills closed, and the workforce collapsed from hundreds of thousands to a fraction of that.⁷ What looks today like a lack of capacity is the wreckage of capacity that was dismantled.

And when African governments have tried to rebuild, the same system has pushed back. In 2016 the countries of the East African Community agreed to phase out second-hand clothing imports to give their own garment industries room to grow. A United States recycled-textiles lobby petitioned its government, and in 2018 Washington suspended Rwanda's duty-free access to the American market for refusing to reverse the policy. Three of its neighbours backed down. Rwanda did not.⁸ The lesson was not lost on anyone watching. Protect your own industry, and the trade terms offered as generosity can be withdrawn as punishment.

So when the question is asked why Africa has the cotton but not the mills, the talent but not the factories, the answer is not that the capacity was never there. The system was built to move value in one direction, and rebuilt every time we tried to turn it around.

And the extraction is not only material. Season after season, global brands and luxury houses send African patterns, motifs and craft techniques down their runways and into their collections, lifted, renamed and sold at a premium, with no name credited to the communities they came from, no consent asked, and nothing paid back. Our heritage is treated as an open archive. It is not. It is ours.

The result is a contradiction we refuse to keep living inside. Africa is recognised as a source of creativity and underinvested in as a source of industry. Celebrated for its culture and shut out of the value that culture creates. Expected to participate in global fashion while denied equitable access to the systems that shape it.

⁷On the collapse of Nigeria's textile industry after the 1986 Structural Adjustment Programme and trade liberalisation: scores of mills closed and employment fell from hundreds of thousands to a fraction as cheaper imports and smuggled cloth took the market. Daily Trust, "How Nigeria Lost An Industry Employing Millions" (2026). [dailytrust.com](https://www.dailytrust.com)

⁸The East African Community moved in 2016 to phase out second-hand clothing imports to protect local garment industries; after a petition from a US recycled-textiles trade group, the United States suspended Rwanda's duty-free apparel access under AGOA in 2018, while Tanzania and Uganda stepped back from the ban. WWD / Sourcing Journal (2018). [wwd.com](https://www.wwd.com)

LAGOS
FASHION
WEEK



THE
**EARTHS
HOT
PRIZE**

The future of fashion cannot be built on these contradictions. A genuinely regenerative future requires more than sustainable materials and responsible marketing. It requires a redistribution of opportunity, investment, visibility, ownership and power. It requires moving beyond extraction toward regeneration, beyond participation toward leadership, beyond recognition toward ownership.

This manifesto is our contribution to that future.