

# Thinking Through the Growth of The Fashion Design Industry in Kenya

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## Abstract

*This research aimed at investigating the foundation and environment that surrounded the government directive to the public to wear African clothes every Friday. It sought to unearth information on the status of the fashion industry in Kenya. Data was collected from media reports, internet sources and available literature coupled with information from the Kenya Fashion Council, in which the author serves as a council member. The findings indicate that Kenya, does not have a strong indigenous textile production history and depends on fabric mainly from West Africa; designers used cultural, style, handcrafted finishes and natural fabrics in their fashion products; and, government, models, institutions and red carpet events are important to the industry growth. The failure of the Kenya national dress was due to several factors, including omission of the Maasai shuka. The Kenya Fashion Council is expected to mobilize resources necessary to develop a vibrant fashion industry.*

**Keywords:** Fashion designers, African fabric, Kenya national dress, Maasai shuka, Kenya Fashion Council.

## INTRODUCTION

In October 2019, the Kenya Government issued a directive that all public officers wear African garments every Friday. The justification for this was explained as:

*'The ethos of this re-engagement speaks to an assertion of an affirmative African narrative that defines our Africanness and insists that at its core, its manifestations and reflections - being African is best. Clothing is a tool for self-expression, social activism and public diplomacy. World leaders often wear traditional clothing to interact with foreign publics and to advance cultural understanding.'* (Amolo, 2019).

This was another effort to jumpstart an interest and consumption of African wear after earlier attempts failed. The government further added that people should use the local fashion as a tool for diplomacy and to generate interest in the country's heritage. The directive elicited a lot of public debate with many critics saying that the political goodwill was a good signal for the local fashion design and textile industry (Komu, 2020). The industry was one of the worst affected with stiff competition from the more efficient Asian

and European markets coupled with influx of cheaper second hand clothes imports. It was seen that an organized fashion industry would see revitalization of the textile production companies, proper legal framework, government incentives, protection, structuring and improved training, among other things.

In more developed economies, fashion is recognized as a reflection of cultural identity and provides export opportunities. Several countries in Africa have developed distinctive national dresses that are iconic to them such as Rwanda, Uganda and Nigeria. Attempts to develop a Kenya National dress was not fruitful. This research looked at some reasons and highlights some successful cases like the *basuuti* of Uganda.

Various institutions have a role to play in the development of the fashion industry. The National Museums of Kenya and African Heritage House have been instrumental in preserving culture and promoting the same by exposing the fabrics, models, jewellery and accessories that contribute towards a vibrant fashion industry. The emergence of the Kenya Fashion Council (2019) is a major

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milestone towards mobilization of the various stakeholders and engagement with government to achieve this goal.

The main problem statement is that the Kenyan fashion industry has not been able to grow and become vibrant. This research is motivated by recent political directive presented earlier, that requires the public to wear African attire every Friday and to promote cultural diplomacy through their fashion (Amolo, 2019). And furthermore, it explores the benefit that such growth would bring to the country. Olabintan (2017), noted that fashion from Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for only about 2% of the global fashion industry that is estimated at \$1.5 trillion. Unlocking this potential in the fashion industry is explored here by looking at the fashion designers, the fabrics available, the models and institutions that need to work in harmony. Building on the success of other African countries that have successfully developed national dresses such as Uganda, this research examines some observations that affected its adoption. Finally, the research addresses the emergence of the Kenya Fashion Council, an attempt at mobilising stakeholders to achieve the vibrant fashion industry.

The main objective of this research was to investigate the status of the Kenya fashion industry and highlight the strategies being taken to strengthen it. The sub-objectives were to: establish who the fashion designers are, establish the fabrics that are available for fashion, investigate the development of the Kenya National dress and highlight the activities and institutions that promote Kenyan fashion including the Kenya Fashion Council.

## THEORY

The fashion industry is part of a larger social and cultural phenomenon aptly referred to as a fashion system (Major & Steele, 2020). A fashion system has the business of fashion, the art and craft of fashion and the consumers in it. Equally important is the fashion designer and the imagery used to connect with the consumers. Some of the drivers of fashion are intrinsic while others are external. Trend setters play a role and changes in lifestyle also affect fashion. Major & Steele (2020) state that

the fashion industry thrives by being diverse and flexible enough to gratify any consumer's desire to embrace or even to reject fashionability, however that term might be defined. Pather & Pather (2015), in the context of South Africa observed that inclusive development in fashion had to consider historically inherited weaknesses of the sector and impediments to inclusive development. This implied identification of impediments to a growth strategy through stakeholder engagement. Pather & Pather (2015) acknowledge the complexities in managing interventions as key to success. From the foregoing, fashion is a complex system that involves several stakeholders who work together. History is important when considering a growth strategy. This forms the premise on which this research was undertaken.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This is a descriptive research that was exploratory in approach relying heavily on secondary sources such as articles, media reports and information from websites through a directed search. The information was collected and clustered according to the research objectives. The information collected is presented in narrative and descriptions supported by images.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Kenya Fashion Industry

At independence in 1963, Kenya fashion already had strong European influence coupled with Christian teachings, there was a rapid abandonment of indigenous clothing. Since then Kenyan fashion has grown merging different influences and cultures. The predominant fabrics are *kitenge*, cotton, silk, linen (dyed or batik printed) and the Maasai *shuka*. Local designers have showcased designs locally and internationally using these fabrics. West Africa has a strong culture of indigenous fabrics such as *bongolanfini*, *adire* and mud cloth that have also penetrated the local market. Democratic Republic of Congo produced *shoowa* and *kuba* cloths, and it was the source of *kitenge* before the European and Asian countries penetrated that market.

A singular statement style has been elusive in Kenya even after the launch of the national dress in April

2004. The dress was largely considered a failure. As a result, there is no singular style for Friday fashion, for example, President Uhuru Kenyatta and First lady Margaret Kenyatta, are often seen in locally produced fashion made from *kitenge* and complimented by indigenous jewellery. One true fashionista, Ambassador Orié Rogo Manduli, makes strong African fashion statements through her dressing and jewellery (Nyota, 2017). Apart from them, there is no public figure or group that is pushing a specific style for the Kenyan fashion.

Institutional capacity is important for the growth of the fashion industry and training of designers has been identified as a key factor for designers to create fabric (and fashion) that the Kenyan market

desperately needs (Nation Media Group, 2016). Graduates have an opportunity to collaborate with textile mills to create a profoundly singular signature.

### Kenyan fashion designers

Kenya fashion scene has been dominated by various persons at various stages, bringing fresh creative apparel into the market, innovating with available materials such as leather, bones and feathers. At various stages of their growth they have received local and international recognition for their work. The designers who have been associated with Kenya fashion are listed in **Table 1**.

**TABLE 1:** Kenyan fashion designers

	Name	Label	Design feature(s)
1	Ann McCreath	Kikoromeo	Mentioned in Top 100 Women influencing Africa (2009). Uses Maasai <i>shuka</i> in her designs.
2	Anyango Mpinga	Anyango Mpinga boutique	Cultural inspirations taken from Luo (KE) and Sakina (TZ). Creates whimsical and timeless contemporary apparel.
3	Aulgah Nato	Neto Designs	Effortless, easy style.
4	Deepa Dosaja	Deepa Dosaja Boutique	Handcrafted, gorgeous designs made from natural fabrics.
5	Jamil Walji	JW Couture	Bold and vibrant fashion. Couture bridal gowns that depict glamour, individuality and sophistication. Makes high quality garments using delicate and exclusive fabric.
6	John Kaveke	John Kaveke	Fascinating and unique way of incorporating Maasai culture in suits for men.
7	Neomi Ng'ang'a	Style by Neomi	Custom made outfits with quality fabrics for plus size women.
8	Ogake Mosomi	Ogake Bridal	Combination of fashion, style and talent to make delectable bridal dresses.
9	Patricia Mbela	POISA Label	Kenyan fashion and jewellery designer.
10	Ruth Abade	Blackfly	Uses <i>adire</i> indigenous fabric from Nigeria.
11	Sally Karago	SK	Incorporated Maasai <i>shuka</i> and <i>kikoi</i> in designs. Loose, free flowing and trendy. Has dressed a few first ladies of Africa.
12	Wambui Mukenya	WM Label	African bridal wear. Daring, strapless necklines, complemented by delicately boned bodices reminiscent of Victorian corsetry.

13	Yvonne Odhiam-bo	Yvonne Afrostreet	Effortless, easy style. Specializes in print and fashion. She has dressed Sauti Sol, Yemi Alade and Vanessa Mdee (2019).
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Source: Osanjo 2020

Looking through **Table 1**, Kenyan designers are known and recognized for various reasons and it can be seen, for example that Ann McCreath, Anyango and Aulgah Nato. Ann McCreath, of KikoRomeo, is the founder of Fashion for Peace, Festival of African Fashion and Arts (FAFA) and Fashion Revolution Day. She was named as one of the 'Top 100 Women Influencing Africa' by Arise Magazine in 2009. Ann has a passion for contemporary African designs and the Maasai shuka fabric (McCreath, 2018). Anyango Mpinga provides fashion that is both whimsical and timeless. Her inspiration comes from contemporary art and rich, multi-cultural heritage that she combines to create elegant ready to wear pieces that are authentic in design and timeless in apparel (Mpinga, 2019). Mpinga's had a fashion show dubbed 'Kondu Udo' in 2016 that was inspired by the ostrich feathers that were adorned by traditional warriors and dancers from the Luo tribe (Mpinga, 2019). Aulgah Nato of Nato Designs, injected fresh blood into the Kenya fashion scene at a time the fashion scene was experiencing a lull or burn out with a versatile style for all body types in 2017 (Robi, 2017). Nato's style is 'effortless and easy', nothing too avante garde or overworked (Robi, 2017). Other designers specialize in occasional wear like the bridal gowns and Abade employs *adire* fabric from Nigeria.

The fashion designers bring out certain features that begin to define the Kenyan fashion such as fabric that is quality, has African print, is versatile and colourful, has a story and is referenced from locally available cultural artefacts. The garments are described as bold and vibrant, whimsical and actual works of art. Furthermore, many of the designers have formal training both in Kenya and abroad. This is happening in small spots across Kenya and in the continental landscape, and what remains to be seen is a harnessed force to make more impact locally, continentally and globally.

### Indigenous African fabric

African fabric is a major element of what is defined as African fashion and West Africa has been described as the nucleus of African textile production (Freeman, 2017). Popular indigenous textiles include Bongolanfini, Shoowa, Kuba and Adire. Bongolanfini, with origins in Mali, is made of geometric patterns on cream-coloured textile. Zaire is home to some unique textiles such as the Shoowa from the Kuba people. The fabrics were designed, made, colored, embroidered and decorated through very specific processes. The geometric patterns from Shoowa fabric define many of what is referred to as African interiors in contemporary design even today. Adire fabric (Nigeria), is made through tie and dye that results in striking patterns of deep blue and white. Adire was a revered cloth, produced in limited quantities and its production was an integral part of any family's heritage, as only specific people were entitled to participate (Freeman, 2017). The trade in the cloth peaked in the 1920s and 1930s, before it declined. In the 1960s it got a brief lease of life when the US Peace Corps based in Nigeria identified it and used it as a symbol of peace, freedom, protest and free-spiritedness (Sapellestyle, 2018). Ruth Abade (Blackfly) is one of the Kenyan designers who uses Adire clothe (**Figure 1**) to make appealing youthful fashion.



**FIGURE 1**

Adire jacket worn by Ruth Abade

Source: Abade 2019

Kente and Adinkra cloths from Ghana, that hitherto were produced by selected artisans for selected families and for specific use have also suffered from influx of cheap mass production imitates (Sapellestyle, 2018) from Europe and Asia. Today, there is a revival of these indigenous textiles spearheaded by a few designers who see an opportunity to keep the textiles as essential for the development of Africa fashion. This includes internationally renowned designers Aboubakar Fofana (Mali), Boubacar Doumbia (Mali), Samuel Mensah and Laurence Chauvin-Buthaud (French-Ivorian) and Amaka Osakwe (Nigeria). Amaka Osakwe designed Lupita's African outfit (Figure 2) and has dressed other known personalities, such as Beyonce and Rihanna (Sapellestyle, 2018). Kolapo (2017) acknowledges that there are problems impeding the growth of the African fashion industry, and more can be done in infrastructure, supply chain and international partnerships. However, it is worth celebrating and promoting the efforts being undertaken (Kolapo, 2017).



**FIGURE 2**  
Lupita Nyong'o wearing Adire outfit by Maki Oh label  
**Source:** Sapellestyle 2018

### *Kitenge, Khanga and Lesso fabric*

*Kitenge*, that is commonly referred to as *Ankara* in Western Africa, is the name given to a wide range of colourful, exotic coloured wax print fabric that are mainly supplied by Vlisco, a Dutch company, that has successfully penetrated the African market. *Kitenge* is the predominant fabric used by designers in Kenya because Kenya does not share a rich tradition of textile printing like the West African countries. Secondly, the textile firms such as Kicomi (Kenya) and Jinja (Uganda) closed down in the 1990s due to competition. Rivatex (Kenya), is one of the local fabric manufacturers

that continues producing the local fabrics being promoted as part of the renewed cultural diplomacy (Amolo, 2019). The factory produces cotton fabric with African inspired patterns and prints as can be seen in Figure 3. They have supplied a variety to the head of State, President Uhuru Kenyatta, who happily adorns them every Friday.



**FIGURE 3**  
*Kitenge* fabric with *khanga* motif from Rivatex Kenya  
**Source:** Rivatex 2020

*Khanga* is the Swahili word for the Guinea fowl bird and many of the early *khanga* fabrics bear images of the guinea fowl, a bird that is known for its noisiness when disturbed, but otherwise shows pride, majesty and gracefulness (Hassan, 2016). *Khanga* refers to cotton fabric that are rectangular in shape and bears symmetrical patterns around the edges. The *Khanga* has origins in Zanzibar where they were traditionally printed by stamping carved wooden blocks onto the fabric using mallets. Although used as an everyday wrap around in the coastal regions, the *Khanga* takes on a very symbolic meaning during cultural fetes, wedding or other ceremonies. A typical *khanga* has a wide border (pindo in Swahili), the central motif (mji in Swahili), and the writing (ujumbe or jina in Swahili) (Hassan, 2016). The message or ujumbe such as 'Akili ni mali' (Brains are wealth) that is always at the bottom of the *khanga* is a major sales pointer. With increase in uptake by international fashion houses, production of *khanga* has continued and its use has expanded to include beautiful beachwear.

*Lesso* is another name for the *khanga* fabric and it is made from light cotton fabric. It has origins in Asia from where it found its way to the East Africa coastal region. The *lesso* has a special pride of place for the coastal cultures as it is used to trade and gift people. The design features of the *lesso* are similar to those of the *khanga* with a symmetrical pattern built around a thick border and Kiswahili writings centered at the base. The *lesso* remains a wrap around and is rarely made into any other fashion product. Building on its appeal and significance, *lesso* can be exploited to develop fashion.

### The Maasai shuka

The Maasai *shuka* is a chequered red fabric that was appropriated by the Maasai tribe and has become their trade mark. It is typically accessorized with jewellery that has gained international appeal (Wa Gacheru, 2020). It has spread all over the world and is often featured in local/African fashion to the extent that Joy Mboya, in her reflections on the Kenya National Dress felt that it should not have been overlooked (Mboya, 2019). Maasai *shuka* print was evident in the Kikoromeo collection, 'Desert Rhapsody' in 2018 Festival International de la Mode Africaine (FIMA) (Kikoromeo, 2019). **Figure 4** shows a model in Maasai headgear, fine print trousers and abstracted Maasai cultural features on the garment.



**FIGURE 4**  
Maasai *shuka* nomadic inspiration by Kikoromeo, FIMA 2018  
Source: McCreath 2018

International designers, including Vogue Japan and Louis Vuitton, have also used Maasai *shuka* in their fashion. Vogue Japan, shot its May 2016 cover issue in Kenya with Brazilian model Renata Zandonadi as seen in **Figure 5**. Dubbed, 'African Vibration', the model posed next to wildlife and well captured beautiful backgrounds and the Maasai community. She accessorized her bold, colourful fashion with Maasai cultural accessories (Jowy, 2016).



**FIGURE 5**  
Renata adorning Maasai cultural jewellery posing with a Maasai warrior  
Source: Jowy 2016

Marc Jacobs (USA) for Louis Vuitton, unveiled Maasai inspired men's wear for its spring/summer collection 2012. **Figure 6** shows a model in Maasai *shuka* shirt and neck wrap. It is accentuated with open sandals. Designers such as Klara Grisch, a Kenyan designer based in the United States also unveiled her Maasai inspired cloth line, Tamani Couture, in Nairobi in 2011. The success of this collection showed that Maasai inspired clothes were among the best selling in the world at that time (Tamanicouture, 2011).

The exploitation of the Maasai culture (sandals, jewellery, furniture, interior decor and even cultural names) necessitated the formation of the Maasai Council of Elders in 2010. The mandate of the council included protection and exploitation of the culture for the benefit of the community. To this end, using Maasai names for hotels,



**FIGURE 6**  
Maasai *shuka* inspiration by Louis Vuitton 2012  
**Source:** Jambonewspot 2011

businesses and products needs seek permission from the elders. The same applies for photography and filming of their cultural events. Therefore, the use of Maasai culture and other cultures can be beneficial to the communities if structures are put into place.

### Faces of African fashion

Fashion trends are reflected on faces and globally these faces are drawn from models and media personalities. Over the years a few African faces have had presence in the global fashion scene such as the recently crowned Miss Universe 2019, Zozibini Tunzi (bn 1993) of South Africa. She graced the global stage with short afro hair that could barely hold up her crown. Models including Ajuma Nasanyana (bn 1985), Alek Wek (bn 1977), Emma Too (bn 1970s), Khadija Adams (bn 1960s) and Iman (bn 1955) also made their mark in the global catwalks. Looking at the very contemporary photograph of Ajuma in **Figure 7**, it can be seen that features of 'African beauty' have shifted from the hitherto preferred lighter skin colour and long flowing hair to a darker palette, natural short hair and lean nomadic features.

The features hold true for Alek Wek, Ajuma and Zozibini and these beauties have gained accolades from more seasoned models like Naomi Campbell who commented that it was very lonely to be a top



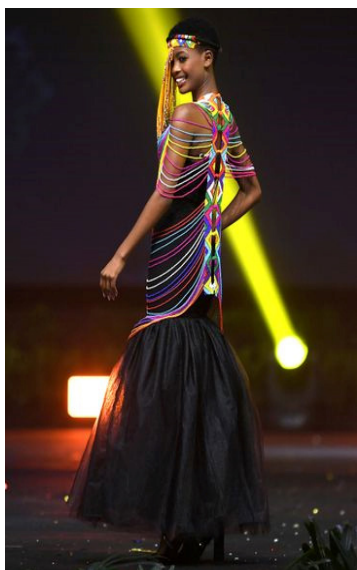
**FIGURE 7**  
Culturally inspired swimwear modelled by Ajuma Nasanyana  
**Source:** Nasanyana 2020

model of dark skin and descent as she felt like a trophy model (Relaxnews AFP, 2020). To grow the fashion industry, a platform has to be created for models to be nurtured and exposed. These models act as fashion ambassadors building local brands through their activities.

### Cultural diplomacy through fashion

Cultural diplomacy is closely associated with beauty and fashion as elements of identity. In the world beauty pageants, models adorn culturally significant outfits that represent their countries of origin. In 2018, African beauties came out adorning animal prints, feathers, porcupine spikes, leather, beadwork and tribal patterns (**Figure 8**).

Miss Kenya adorned an elaborate beaded corset over a black frock with a flared-out base. The emphasis is on the beaded corset. The beadwork is echoed on a headband worn over short afro hair. Kenya, like most other African countries, is proud of its colourful beaded jewellery. Recent reports say that this jewellery has finally made it onto the United States runways. Miss Ghana remains true to her heritage with her fibre and leather outfit. On her head and atop her hand-held mace is an Adinkra symbol, *Dwenneimmen* (ram's horns) as shown in **Figure 9**.



**FIGURE 8**  
 Cultural outfit worn by Miss Kenya 2018  
 Source: Afinidad-Bernardo 2018



**FIGURE 9**  
 Cultural outfit worn by Miss Ghana 2018  
 Source: Afinidad-Bernardo 2018

These symbolisms provide the pillars for strong identity. One of the early African fashion queens was Mary Oriego Manduli, who has been referred to as 'Mama Afrika' because of her style. The former Safari rally driver, Ambassador and farmer, has provided a consistent face of African fashion, characterised by oversize headgear and fine fabric from West Africa as can be shown in Figure 10. She loves kitenge because she believes it is the only fabric that is uniquely African.



**FIGURE 10**  
 African attire worn by Oriego Manduli  
 Source: Maina 2013

Cultural diplomacy is also embedded in national costumes that communicate a sense of belonging and pride. The African national dresses or costumes are diverse but as stated earlier the fabric forms a major component.

### The Kenya National Dress

The story of the Kenya National dress has not had much success to date. One major initiative was in the mid 1980s when a committee made up of designers and stakeholders was sponsored by Unilever, Sunlight brand. The six main concepts of the dress were based on a sash, cape, apron and cloak and they were unveiled at the Kenya fashion week, 2004. The Kenya National team to the Olympics in 2008 adorned a version of the dress as can be shown in Figure 11. By 2009, however, it had been declared that the dress was a failure and that Kenyans 'found it weird, celebrities despise it and politicians disregard it' (Kiberenge, 2009).

According to Mboya (2019), there was misunderstanding, lack of political goodwill and shortcomings in the process. Critics say the dress did not match up with the expectations. It was said that the design failed to reflect the 42 tribes of Kenya, was not regal enough and lacked ownership. Mboya (2019) says that the designers developed a concept not a prescription, from which, other designers were supposed to make their own adaptations as shown in Figures 11 and 12.





FIGURE 11

The Kenya national dress worn by the team to the Olympics in 2008

Source: Ondego 2004



FIGURE 12

Kenyan ministers wearing cloak versions of the national dress in 2004

Source: Ondego 2004

Kenya has not been successful in delivering a national dress unlike Uganda for example, who embraced the *gomesi* or *basuuti* dress that was designed by a Goan tailor (Figure 13). *Basuuti* is made from lengthy fine silk and linen. The fabric is layered at the base and has a special thick linen girdle that is tied loosely around the waist. The *Gomesi* lends itself well to the Ugandan culture especially the 'bird' dances that involve vigorous gyrating movement of the waist.

### African Folktales and Fashion

Folktales provide products with authenticity and cultural value. The wildlife, artefacts, environment coupled with culture domiciled in over 3,000 tribes of Africa, is an insurmountable reservoir. This has been seen in stories such as The Lion King and



FIGURE 13

The *Basuuti* dress

Source: Taylor 2019

Tinga Tinga tales, among others. Folktales, culture, wildlife and the environment provide inspiration for fashion. Anyango Mpinga, for example, makes fashion through involving infusing elements from her Luo roots and Sukuma (Tanzania) upbringing. One of her collections was inspired by the ostrich bird using the feather motif to create fabric and fashion that was aesthetic (Mpinga, 2020). The garments are woven with history, culture and quality. Available raw materials including leather clothes, bone and metal accessories have also endeared themselves to African fashion. Leather dresses, bold jewellery and iconic handbags designed by Adele Dejak target women who are strong yet feminine (The Designers Studio, 2016).

### The Fashion Institutions

Formal training of designers is very important to their success and the curriculum and exposure will allow them to push the creative boundaries (Nation Media Group, 2016). Fashion design institutions include the likes of Evelyn's College of Design (Sally, Akinyi and Monica Kanari as alumni). Universities and colleges that train fashion designers include- University of Nairobi's School of Art and Design (Ruth Abade as alumni), Kenyatta University, Maseno University, Technical University of Kenya, Buru Buru Institute of Fine Arts, McCensal (owned by Sally Karago) and MEFA Institute (owned by Akinyi Odongo). Institutions such as the National Museums of Kenya and African Heritage House have advanced indigenous African fashion, artefacts, culture and architecture over the years. Allan Donovan was one of the founders of African Heritage, and together with Joseph Murumbi, they had a grand idea for the advancement of African culture

(Figure 14). He was instrumental in launching the modelling careers of many of the African models such as Emma Too and Khadija Adams.



**FIGURE 14**  
 Osanjo with Allan Donovan outside the African Heritage House, 2020  
 Source: Osanjo 2020

Nation Media Group (2016), proposed that instead of overdosing on Ankara, 'we work on upgrading our textile mills.' This can be complimented by exchange programmes within the continent that would build and illuminate the minds of the designers. With technology, data scientists can 'dive into the world of consumer psychology, understanding patterns and behaviour... allowing even the most eccentric creative to plan ahead.' The article concluded by saying that fashion and tech combined can push boundaries. Both are restless, fluid, dynamic, innovative, vibrant, impossible to pin down and transient. Both are symbiotic and adaptable, customisable and allowing for self expression. A union between the two would unlock the potential and possibilities that are not yet even imagined (Nation Media Group, 2016).

The African Heritage fashion collection is periodically exhibited on models for fashion shows. The artefacts themselves provide a rich resource for designers and it remains a one stop resource centre for African fashion with a global presence. These institutions have a major role to play in crafting of an authentic fashion African fashion.

### Red Carpet Events

Red carpet events are the heart beat of fashion in any city and country. In a recent media presentation

(KTN, 11/04/2020), the panellists observed that it was exciting that several country fashion weeks have appeared such as DRC and Kigali Fashion Weeks giving African designers opportunities for exposure and capacity building. Several attempts have been made at developing red carpet events with The Nairobi Fashion Week and the Kenya Fashion Week for example, but these are not consistent in presence. Maybe effort should be made to merge them or resources be injected into one of them in order to build capacity and sustainability.

The Kenya Fashion Council (KFCO) has emerged in 2019 to facilitate the growth of the local fashion industry including red carpet events. It seeks to harmonize the activities of the designers and stakeholders. The council's vision is to have a vibrant fashion industry. The government is very keen to see that this value chain is developed to address job creation and development of local capacity. There are many parts of the fashion value chain that are not in place but through goodwill and mobilization of resources, KFCO is optimistic that these will be overcome.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper was motivated by the directive that public servants must wear African fashion every Friday. Within the Kenya fashion industry, designers are receiving international and local recognition, some draw inspiration from the environment such as Anyango Mpinga who had used the ostrich as inspiration. There is opportunity to exploit the folktales and culture to produce more meaningful, appealing and interesting fabrics and fashion. Kenya does not have a strong indigenous textile sector, however *kitenge*, *khanga*, *lesso* and Maasai *shuka* fabrics are readily available. *Kitenge*, sourced from Rivatex, is the preferred fabric for African fashion Friday.

The Kenya National dress developed in 2004, was seen as a failure by 2008, although it was successfully applied in the design of the Kenya National Team to the Olympics, 2008. In reflections, Mboya (2019) alluded to the fact that they developers should not have ignored the Maasai *shuka*, that enjoys international appeal. Maasai artefacts that typically accompany the *shuka*, are also enjoying

international exposure and (Wa Gacheru, 2020) reported that the jewellery has been well received in the United States of America.

It is noted that national fashion industry needs Red carpet events that showcases the best in the industry and emerging talent. To this end, the Kenyan fashion scene requires a red carpet event. It is noted that institutions such as the African Heritage house, has exposed many models into international scene such as Iman. These museums coupled with training institutions need to review their curriculum so that they are responsive to the changing needs of the fashion industry.

The Kenya Fashion Council that emerged in 2019, is a strong entity that can mobilize the fashion industry players towards the realization of a vibrant Kenya fashion industry. The Council has the support of the government to present the needs of the various groups towards a strong Kenyan style. It is seen that the Fashion Council has made some progress towards lobbying government and getting recognized as the voice of fashion. It is still too early to say that the fashion council is successful, however, seeing the support and the environment, it is safe to predict that it is in a good position to lead the fashion industry into growth.

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