

# Promoting Akwete Traditional Textiles of Abia State for International Consumption and Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

*This article examines the potential and growth opportunities in Akwete woven textiles. It explores how international exposure can sustain the weaving tradition, contribute to the economic advancement of Akwete people, and foster sustainable practices in a textile industry that often succumbs to pollution. It evaluates the transformative possibilities for this traditional craft that constitutes an integral part of the Akwete people's culture, but which began to face challenges in the wake of the industrial revolution, compounded by limited governmental support, leading to the near-extinction of textile industries in Nigeria. Despite these challenges, traditional crafts such as Akwete textiles have still captivate the public's interest, particularly that of foreigners. In today's digital age, where information flows effortlessly across borders, this presents a good opportunity to showcase this vibrant traditional craft to global audience. Moreover, the very nature of textile production offers a platform to promote vital ideologies like conscious buying, cultural appreciation, and slow living. In essence, it is believed that garnering worldwide exposure for Akwete textiles can catalyze sustainable development while making a significant positive impact. Both literary sources and primary data were used for data collection and analysis. Primary data acquisition involved the utilization of semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate that Akwete textiles can carve a significant niche in the global fabric market if properly promoted. By capitalizing on the increasing demand for sustainable, ethically produced fabrics, Akwete weavers and fashion entrepreneurs can seize new economic opportunities and contribute to the growth and prosperity of their community.*

## Introduction

Akwete traditional weaving boasts of a rich history, deeply embedded in the cultural heritage of the Akwete people in Abia State, Nigeria. Revered as one of the most strategic towns among the Igbo community, Akwete serves as the administrative centre of Abia State's Ukwu East Local Government Area. Nestled amidst the Ndoki rain forest, it lies 18 kilometres north of Port Harcourt and 18 kilometres south of Aba. The town's prominence as a weaving hub is evident in the grand monument that graces its entrance; an awe-inspiring sculpture paying homage to their ancestral weaver, Daada Nwakata, credited as the matriarch of Akwete and the originator of their treasured weaving tradition ("Akwete: Land of Weaving", 2021).

In Nigeria's historical landscape, Akwete fabrics earned acclaim during the 14th to 19th centuries, cherished for their distinctiveness and sought after as souvenirs by guests and tourists alike (Ekwezia & Ubah, n.d.). The Akwete cloth, imbued with deep cultural significance, adorns festive occasions such as weddings, chieftaincy ceremonies, and burials (Austin 2015). Evolving with the times, the fabric has adapted to meet customer demands, incorporating emblems

like the Nigerian flag and coat of arms, serving as a testament to its enduring relevance and adaptability (Austin, 2015). The meticulous Akwete weaving process unfolds on a vertical broadloom leaning against a wall, as documented by Davis (1974). Beyond the simple act of thread twisting, the women weavers masterfully blend different coloured threads, infusing their creations with captivating textures, artistic patterns, and captivating effects, all contributing to the unique allure of their fabric (“Akwete: Land of Weaving,” 2021).

This time-honored craft finds its roots intertwined with the ancient heritage of the Igbo people. Cloaked in secrecy, this practice has been discreetly transmitted solely to those from the Akwete town, whether as indigenes or through matrimonial ties. From tender ages, young Akwete girls are carefully tutored in the art of weaving, initially mastering basic motifs on fabric measuring 15 to 30 inches in width. Notably, it is regarded as of paramount importance that every female member of the community acquires proficiency in this art (Davis, 1974).

Dada Nwakata emerges as the pioneer of the intricate designs adorning Akwete fabric. Oral traditions attribute her accomplishments to divine inspiration, endowing her work with an aura of sacred significance (Bellafricana, 2016). Other narratives allude to her ingenuity in appropriating patterns from fabrics originating in Portugal, skillfully adapting, and incorporating them into her own creations, thereby establishing herself as a much sought-after artist renowned for her distinct designs (Bellafricana, 2016). Central to the preservation of the tradition is that Akwete women imposed strict regulations preventing men from participating in the craft. Such restrictions emanated from a desire to maintain the occupation as an empowering domain exclusively under feminine control, regardless of the prevailing patriarchal mores in the wider society (Chudi-Duru 2017). Indeed, the weaving of cloth by men is perceived in Akwete as a grave taboo, believed to attract spiritual afflictions (“Tears of Akwete Cloth Weavers,” 2020).

Symbolizing the epitome of elegance, Akwete fabric graces the attire of Igbo women during momentous occasions. Typically, a pair of these fabrics is adroitly arranged, with one draped around the waist, cascading gracefully to the ankle, while the other is deftly tied to avoid exceeding mid-calf length. To complement their ensembles, Igbo ladies selectively pair these exquisite Akwete wraps with resplendent blouses, adorned with a diverse array of captivating designs (“Tears of Akwete Cloth Weavers,” 2020). However, the allure of the fabric has been impacted over the years, but in recent times, mainly by security concerns, leading to a decline in foreign patronage and tourist visits, as elucidated by Madam Hellen Ebere in an interview cited in “Akwete: Land of Weaving” (2021). This study examines literary and primary sources of data on the tradition of Akwete textiles to understand the essence of Akwete textiles, along with their manufacturing process, while also addressing the difficulties

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and prospects of the fabric. This exploration centres on key themes and ideas connected to the subject matter.

#### **Production Materials and Weaving Process**

Akwete woven cloth draws from a rich repository of materials, encompassing cotton, wool, silk, raffia, tree bark, and hemp (Austin, 2015). The fabric production resources, including cotton, silk, raffia, bamboo, and dyes, are culled from various regions across Nigeria (Lolade 2018). Eberé (2021), as cited in ("Tears of Akwete Cloth Weavers," 2020), provides invaluable insights into the pivotal materials employed in the production of Akwete textiles, encompassing the loom, raffia yarn, cotton yarn, silk yarn, the heddle, and twine/rope. She highlighted the paramount role of raffia fiber that is often skillfully processed into yarn in the creation of Akwete fabric. Historically, these essential components were readily available, and sourced effortlessly from their surrounding environment. However, contact with the Western world introduced improvements, such as intricate embroidery threads from China ("Tears of Akwete Cloth Weavers," 2020).

Kimani (2018) offers a coherent explanation of the intricacies of the weaving process. "After processing the cotton to desired thread form, the weaver fixes a set of threads on the loom to form the warp and then the weft thread (network of thread) is passed over and under the warped thread. The weft thread can be passed over more than one warped thread at a time to produce variations of thread colours and patterns in the woven cloth. As the weaving progresses, the finished cloth is slipped down over the lower beam and up and back. Then, the weaver uses a weaving stick to separate the odd and even warp thread before she winds the weft thread onto a long narrow stick which is passed from side to side." Notably, it is commendable that skilled weavers can complete a full-size piece measuring 45 x 65 inches within a span of two weeks, often concurrently working on multiple pieces (Davis, 1974).



Plate 1: Woman weaving Akwete fabric on a vertical loom

## **Method**

In this research endeavour, both literary sources and primary data were used for data collection and analysis. Primary data acquisition involved the utilization of semi-structured interviews, employing verbal questions, thoughtfully designed to elicit profound insights from the interviewees, unrestricted by preconceived notions. The participants in these interviews comprised both Akwete weavers and Akwete fashion business owners, carefully chosen to illuminate the current landscape of the weaving practice. They were identified through their online profiles on the social media platforms and via recommendations from their colleagues. Through these candid exchanges, a detailed understanding of the commercial aspects of the weaving business emerged, along with the identification of prevailing challenges and opportunities primed for growth. Literary materials utilized comprised journal articles, websites, and scholarly publications, primarily sourced from online databases such as Summon and Google Scholar. Information collected from both interviews and literary materials unveiled remarkable avenues for international exposure, economic advancement, and the invaluable contributions of Akwete traditional textiles in sustainability and cultural appreciation. Data presentation and analysis were done qualitatively, utilizing descriptive and narrative approaches to logically convey the information.

## **Results**

Empirical and theoretical findings are presented to examine the opportunities for global exposure and sustainable development of the woven Akwete textiles. They will be discussed under the following sub-headings: (1) Source of employment, (2) Prospect for international commerce, (3) Proven audience for targeting, and (4) Sustainable practices in Akwete Weaving.

### **1. Source of Employment**

In an interview with an Akwete weaver, the significance of Akwete cloth weaving as a means of sustenance for her family came to light. Recounting her family's legacy, she reflected, "My mother used to own a weaving factory where she hired weavers to assist in growing and sustaining the business. She started doing the business as a teenager, and she utilized it to raise her children. Currently, she is sixty-three years old" (Priscilla, 2022).

She also revealed how her mother fostered her own passion for Akwete weaving, offering her unwavering support and guidance. At the tender age of seven, a small loom was thoughtfully prepared for her to begin her practice. Today, Priscilla stands proudly as a full-time Akwete weaving business owner, with a series of thriving shops that grace various locations across Nigeria. She further stated, "I have been running my Akwete business for six years, and it has allowed me to expand my clientele to include individuals of high social status, such as politicians and luxury fashion designers" (Priscilla, 2022). Her journey exemplifies the profound intergenerational impact and continued relevance of this cherished tradition within the fabric of Nigerian culture.

### **2. Prospect for International Commerce**

Despite major setbacks faced by the Akwete woven fabrics in recent times due to industrialisation and importation, the allure of African traditional fabrics persists, resonating not only within Nigeria but also far beyond its borders.

In a conversation, Ola reveals her pursuit of excellence by crafting stunning fashion clothing and accessories with Akwete fabrics. Drawing clients from diverse backgrounds, including tourists with an appreciation for traditional fabrics, she establishes herself as a sought-after provider. As she shared, "Most of my products are bought by foreigners who come on tour to Lagos. They buy them from the stores I supply in Lagos" (Ola, 2022). Notably, Ola observed an interesting trend in the market, noting that while family and friends show unwavering support by purchasing her clothes, accessories like bags and sandals emerge as top sellers, particularly among tourists. This valuable insight offers a glimpse into the potential international demand for traditional woven fabrics.

Presently residing in Canada, Ola (2022) reflected on her recent experiences as an Akwete business owner, where her products attract significant attention and admiration. "When I go out with one of my bags, the people here stop me to compliment me and even ask for my contact information so they could buy my product. I believe the best audience for my products would be Westerners and Africans in the diaspora who feel nostalgic about their cultural heritage."

Indeed, this sentiment is shared by Priscilla, the weaver, who concurred that her outreach to international clients is significantly bolstered through the social media. This convergence of artisanal craftsmanship and digital platforms

highlights the global reach and potential for traditional fabrics to transcend geographical boundaries and captivate hearts across cultures.

### **3. Proven Audience for Targeting**

According to Priscilla (2022), the revered Akwete fabrics have garnered the attention of notable fashion designers, who now incorporate them into their exquisite collections. One such designer is Coker, who drew inspiration from Kenneth Ize, who is renowned for featuring traditional Nigerian textiles in his acclaimed global fashion shows, thereby embracing Akwete fabrics for his own creations. Notably, Lisa Folawiyo joins the league of designers who utilize the Aso oke woven cloth of the Yoruba people to craft luxurious clothing items, often commanding prices in the thousands of dollars (Priscilla, 2022).

The allure of Akwete textiles arguably shines brightest during Nigerian wedding celebrations. "Nigerian weddings are full of color, vibrant, and are flashy. Without your fabrics, you're not having a traditional Nigerian wedding." Mrs. Olutoye, an observer of traditional Nigerian weddings asserted (Olanrewaju, 2019). Priscilla (2022) affirmed this, stating that "People wear the Akwete for different kinds of occasions, especially weddings. They order it for themselves and their bridal train." The transformative power of Akwete fabrics is exemplified by the story of a famous actor who embraced woven textiles during her wedding, igniting a trend that rapidly captivated the fashion world, leading to soaring demand. Ugochi (2022), another talented Akwete weaver, reinforced this, sharing that many of her clients acquire her fabrics for wedding events.

The interviews offer valuable insight into the already existing market of the traditional textiles. They also offer insights into how to effectively position and promote the traditional fabrics, especially considering the existing demand in contemporary fashion and wedding ceremonies.

### **4. Sustainable Practices in Akwete Weaving**

Locally produced textiles like Akwete fabrics emerge as significant drivers in the sustainable fashion industry. The looms are hand-constructed using locally sourced bamboo and wood, and minimal waste is produced during the fabric production process (Ugochi, 2022). According to Priscilla (2022), the manual nature of the weaving process results in remarkably minimal waste generation. Additionally, the incorporation of supplementary weft threads to craft the intricate motifs adorning the fabrics guarantees the thorough utilization of fibres.

Priscilla (2022) also stated that the production process of woven fabrics ensures their remarkable sturdiness, enabling them to endure for generations. The durability of Akwete fabrics appeals strongly to environmentally conscious

buyers, as it aligns with the principles of slow fashion and sustainability. Continued enhancement of sustainable practices in Akwete weaving holds the potential to inspire and promote sustainable fashion consumption. Effective communication and promotion of the quality and value of traditional fabrics can position them as sustainable and eco-friendly choices, encouraging improved environmental consciousness and fostering a culture of sustainability.

## **Challenges Facing Akwete Textiles**

### **Restricted Participation**

Since the inception of Akwete weaving practice, both the craft's execution and fabric marketing have been confined solely to the town of Akwete. Exclusive participation is granted to women of Akwete origin or those married into the community, posing difficulties for outsiders seeking to learn the practice (Chidi-Duru, 2017). The weavers attribute their reluctance to teach outsiders to a belief that sharing the tradition might displease their ancestral deities (Chidi-Duru, 2017). Additionally, Akwete women exclusively handle the marketing of these textiles. Furthermore, the limited display of woven textiles in marketplaces hampers their visibility, requiring interested buyers to travel to Akwete or arrange for direct deliveries (Aronson, 1982).

Despite having established a cooperative society in 1963 to encourage communal weaving, the weavers still prefer weaving in private spaces to prevent design theft (Aronson, 1982). Their cultural ethos dictates that each design is a unique gift from their forebears and should not be copied (Davis, 1974). This tradition of design secrecy may have fostered innovation, rendering the replication of Akwete textiles near impossible. However, its restrictive nature also presents drawbacks. While the secrecy surrounding weaving processes and designs historically safeguarded the tradition from appropriation and competition, it can hinder its growth. This belief system enabled the weavers to maintain a competitive edge and shield their craft. Aronson (1982) suggested that myths served as tools for economic advantage. However, in contemporary times, these practices are impeding progress as they fail to align with evolving market dynamics.

The inadequacy of marketing strategies is another challenge confronting the Akwete trade. Efforts to promote the textiles, including showcasing them at trade fairs, have yielded limited returns ("Akwete: Land of Weaving," 2021). It is postulated that loosening the confines placed on the tradition could lead to fruitful collaborations and enhanced trade visibility that will foster growth and innovation in the sector.

### **Escalating Material Costs**

In the era preceding Nigeria's modernization, raffia and cotton were the primary materials employed for textile weaving (Ibebabuchi, 2012). The production of Akwete fabric traditionally relied on yarn processed from raffia fibres harvested from local raffia trees (Austin, 2015). However, contemporary advancements ushered in a shift, introducing sturdier embroidery threads originating from China.

Currently, the primary raw material for crafting Akwete fabrics, the yarn, is being imported from China and acquired by local artisans at significantly high costs. It is noteworthy that West Africa holds a significant position as the sixth-largest cotton-producing region globally, with countries like Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso ranking prominently ("How will West Africa benefit?" 2021). Curiously, West Africa exports a substantial portion of its cotton, around 90%, to Asian nations, notably China, at notably lower prices, only to re-import spun and woven threads. Remarkably, less than 2% of cotton is processed domestically in West Africa ("Akwete: Land of Weaving," 2021).

This unfolding scenario has significantly contributed to the decline of the Akwete textiles trade, primarily due to the inflated cost of the fabrics when contrasted with cheaper, factory-produced textiles. Mrs. Nwaulu (2021), cited in ("Akwete: Land of weaving," 2021), highlighted in an interview that a single piece of Akwete fabric is sold at a considerable price of fifty thousand naira, equivalent to around a hundred and forty US Dollars. This price surpasses the financial means of the average earner in Nigeria, rendering Akwete fabrics largely inaccessible to the general populace.

### **Tendency Towards Imported Goods**

Imported products are gaining preference due to their fashionable appeal and cost-effectiveness, thereby overshadowing domestically crafted fabrics (Ugochukwu, 2019). Andah (1988) observed that colonial history detrimentally impacted local industries, subtly eroding the confidence of craftsmen, such as weavers, potters, carpenters, architects, and doctors. He emphasized that European entrepreneurs and governmental bodies further exacerbated this situation by appropriating local patents and designs in areas like weaving, furniture-making, architecture, and medicine.

Akpomuvie (2011) asserts that successive African governments, albeit inadvertently, have contributed to the decline of native technology by unrestrictedly importing foreign technological goods. He argues that this extensive importation has cultivated feelings of inferiority among Africans, leading to a biased perception that foreign products are superior to their indigenous counterparts.

Faleye (2013) concurs, attributing the industry's woes to ill-conceived government policies on imports, which paved the way for unhealthy

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competition from foreign textile enterprises. He contends that the massive influx of imported textiles during pre and post-independence Nigeria, persisting even today, has detrimentally impacted the local textile market. Consequently, native Nigerian fabrics are losing favour among consumers, as the preference now lies with imported garments from Europe and Asia for special occasions (Lolade, 2018).

This influx of cheap imports from China and the prevalence of second-hand clothing from the US and Europe have significantly impeded the growth of locally produced fabrics, including Akwete textiles, within the Nigerian market, thus undermining the domestic textile industry.

### **Insufficient Manufacturing Capacity and Waning Enthusiasm**

Several factors hinder the enhancement of the Akwete weaving industry, including outdated production methods, lack of public interest, limited demand for the product, and the influence of European trends, among others (Uchenna & Okenwa, n.d.). As for Davis (1974), Akwete weavers historically employed a vertical frame loom that was propped against a wall for crafting Akwete textiles. Kimani (2018) corroborates the use of a vertical loom for Akwete fabric creation. It is noteworthy that despite being half a century apart, both accounts highlight the lack of substantial technological advancements in Akwete fabric production. While retaining its eco-friendly ethos, the vertical frame loom remains outdated and time-consuming, demanding intricate handling for textile manufacturing. Minor refinements have been made to this equipment, but it still pales in comparison to contemporary innovations.

Conversely, other traditional Nigerian weavers like Aso oke and Akwa Ocha weavers in the southwest and South-South regions, respectively have modified their tools to enhance efficiency. For instance, Yoruba weavers crafting Aso-oke fabrics have transitioned from the frame loom to the more efficient treadle loom (Olajide et al., 2009). Similarly, the akwa ocha weavers of Delta State shifted from the frame loom to the treadle loom (Onwuakpa, 2017). While these adaptations have improved efficiency to some extent, the process remains intricate. Consequently, for the Akwete textile production to remain competitive within the fabric market, it urgently requires a technological upgrade.



Plate 2: Frame loom previously used to weave Akwa Ocha in South-south Nigeria (Own image)



Plate 3: Treadle loom used to weave Akwa Ocha in South-south Nigeria (Own Image)

Regrettably, the younger generation has lost interest in textile production, opting for white-collar careers instead. This shift has left only middle-aged and older women to sustain the weaving tradition ("Akwete: Land of Weaving," 2021). Madam Esther Chukwu (2021), cited in ("Akwete: Land of Weaving," 2021), emphasizes the necessity for additional workforce in Akwete weaving due to the energy-intensive nature of the craft. However, the waning interest among the younger generation has exacerbated the challenge, making the endeavor more arduous and undoubtedly more costly. Addressing the issues of subpar production and the disinterest among the youth is imperative to enable the Akwete textile trade to meet the demands of the swiftly evolving market.

## **Opportunities for Advancement**

### **Avenue for international recognition**

During the climax of the Akwete textiles trade, the exquisite fabric served not only as a cherished souvenir, but also found its way to distant corners of the globe through international exportation (Austin, 2015). The dogged efforts of Rufus Nna James, a distinguished Chief in Akwete town, were devoted to expanding the cloth's global reach and attaining international recognition (Kimani, 2018). By 1963, the Akwete textiles gained prominence as they graced the prestigious halls of the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., the United States, the Textile Museum of Canada, and the esteemed British Museum in the UK. A significant milestone came in 1990 when Prince Charles and Princess Diana commissioned the fabric, further elevating its standing on the world stage (Kimani, 2018). However, despite its past glories, the tradition has experienced stagnation, and its popularity and demand have continuously declined.

Nonetheless, the allure of African traditional fabrics persists, resonating not only within Nigeria but also far beyond its borders. The vibrant and electrifying trends of African textiles have long captivated admirers, and Africa is steadily asserting its role as a major player in the global fabric market ("More in the works for Africa," n.d.).

### **Potential means of job provision**

The origins of Akwete textile practice saw women engaging in it as a part-time occupation, supplementing their livelihoods with farming, while men predominantly pursued fishing as their primary occupation ("Tears of Akwete Cloth Weavers," 2020). As the fame and demand for the fabric grew, it became a substantial source of trade and exchange for the Akwete people, leading to the natural evolution of cloth weaving as a major occupation. This pivotal shift fostered further prosperity within the practice. From an early age, every woman in Akwete was taught the art and process of weaving on narrow frame looms, often beginning as young as eight years old ("Tears of Akwete Cloth Weavers," 2020). Weaving became a cornerstone of trade for the Akwete community.

However, in recent times, a reversal has occurred, compelling weavers to supplement their weaving with other occupations, such as teaching, to secure sustainable livelihoods (Chudi-Duru, n.d.). Nevertheless, the global recognition of African textiles and the rising demand for locally produced garments present an opportunity for partnerships and collaborations with West Africa, offering not only employment prospects for Akwete weavers, but also fostering broader economic benefits. The African textile sector ranks second in job creation after agriculture, with the artisan craft industry employing a significant number of people in developing countries (Emerging market facts, n.d.).

### **Fashion Revolution Potential**

The allure of African textiles has reached soaring heights, igniting demand both locally and globally. Fashion designers across the world draw inspiration from African prints, showcasing their creations in esteemed fashion shows from London and New York to Paris, Dakar, Shanghai, and Johannesburg (Tate, 2017). African traditional fabrics have become the very essence of cutting-edge designs, propelling budding fashion designers to achieve international acclaim (Tate, 2017). This surging interest in African prints extends to the demand for locally made products, including fabrics, wherein Akwete fabrics can play a significant role in fulfilling this need.

Over the past decade, Nigeria's fashion sector has flourished, garnering global interest, and amassing a substantial worth of \$4.7 billion, with a notable 17% growth since 2010 (Emerging market facts, n.d.). Furthermore, African print fabrics command a retail value of approximately \$4 billion, with 65% of the market emanating from the West African region, and Nigeria accounting for 38% of the total demand (Aibueku, 2020). These figures underscore a vast market for African textiles, within West Africa and particularly in Nigeria.

Akwete traditional textiles have found their way into contemporary fashion as visionary designers breathe new life into the age-old fabric. Renowned Nigerian fashion designer, Kenneth Ize, has transcended borders, employing weavers in Nigeria to create exquisite traditional woven textiles for his brand in the United States (Silbert, 2021). Emmanuel Okoro, Chinasa Chukwu, and the promising young designer Whitney Madueke are among those who ingeniously use Akwete textiles to craft modern cloth designs (Kimani, 2018). Distinguished personalities, including former British Prime Minister, Theresa May, and esteemed Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have adorned themselves in the woven splendour of Akwete fabric (Kimani, 2018). These endeavours unveil a vast potential for Akwete Textiles to make a resounding impact in the fashion markets, provided efforts are channelled towards promoting the knowledge and intrinsic value of traditional woven products.

### **Sustainability Factor**

Amid a mounting environmental consciousness, consumers in developed nations are increasingly gravitating towards products that embrace natural and sustainable manufacturing practices (Bruzzone, 2021). West African textile producers are eager to seize the opportunity presented by the growing demand for organically farmed and ethically produced cotton, as the adverse environmental effects of oil production weigh heavily on the globe. As a result, there is a renewed appreciation for cotton as a natural, hypoallergenic, and breathable fabric (Bruzzone, 2021).

Locally produced textiles like Akwete fabrics emerge as significant drivers in the sustainable fashion industry. For generations, Akwete weaving culture has

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embodied sustainable industry practices (Ugochukwu, 2019). Obasi (2022) revealed that culture is a fundamental constituent of sustainability. As a result, ethical and sustainable approaches are integral to nearly every stage of fabric production, from hand-constructed looms using locally sourced raffia palm to minimize waste during the fabric production process. Although the recent use of imported artificial fibres from China presents a concern, it opens an avenue for addressing cost-related implications.

Continued enhancement of sustainable practices in Akwete weaving culture holds the potential to inspire and promote sustainable fashion consumption. Effective communication and promotion of the quality and value of traditional fabrics can position them as sustainable and eco-friendly choices, encouraging heightened environmental consciousness and fostering a culture of sustainability.

**Visual Presentation of Akwete Traditional Textiles in Modern Fashion**



Plate 4: Woman wearing Akwete dress (Akwete plus, 2021)



Plate 5: Woman wearing Akwete jacket (Folawiyo, 2018)



Plate 6: Chimamanda Adichie in Akwete trousers (Oyibo, 2018)



Plate 7: Woman in Akwete blazer (Madueke, 2020)



Plate 8: Woman in Akwete skirt and blouse (Madueke, 2020)



Plate 9: Man wearing Akwete jacket (Kimani, 2018)



Plate 10: Theresa May wearing Akwete jacket (Akwete (Oyibo, 2018)



Plate 11: Akwete Purse and headgear fabrics by Beeju, 2019)

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This research examined the immense potential of promoting Akwete traditional textiles on the global stage as a catalyst for sustainable development. Findings demonstrated that with strategic promotion and international exposure, Akwete textiles can carve a significant niche in the global fabric market. By capitalizing on the increasing demand for sustainable, and ethically produced fabrics, Akwete weavers and fashion entrepreneurs can seize new economic opportunities and contribute to the growth and prosperity of their community.

Consequently, the following recommendations are offered to promote Akwete traditional textiles for international consumption and sustainable development. Firstly, there is need to conduct a comprehensive market research to identify specific target markets and consumer preferences. This will help to develop a strong and unique brand identity that highlights the rich cultural heritage and sustainable production practices associated with Akwete fabrics. Secondly, online presence of the fabric and e-commerce will facilitate easy access to international buyers.

It is therefore pertinent to establish a robust online presence through websites and social media platforms to reach a global audience. There is also the need to foster collaborations with fashion designers, retailers, and international organizations interested in sustainable fashion in global fashion events and exhibitions to showcase the versatility and appeal of Akwete textiles. Thirdly, environmental consciousness is critical to uphold sustainable practices in the production process. The use of eco-friendly materials and their ethical sourcing to align with the growing demand for environmentally conscious products

become very pertinent. Finally, there is need to facilitate cultural exchange programmes that expose international consumers and designers to the beauty and significance of Akwete fabrics.

By implementing these and related recommendations, Akwete traditional textiles can be transformed into internationally recognised products for sustainable development. The interplay of heritage, craftsmanship, and conscious production can position Akwete fabrics as a symbol of cultural pride and a driving force for positive change in the global fashion landscape. As Akwete textiles forge a path towards global recognition, the Akwete community will simultaneously be empowered by preserving their heritage, while embracing a future of sustainable prosperity.

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