

A FUSION OF AKWETE-IGBO WOVEN FABRICS AND BATIK INSPIRED BY ULI-IGBO MOTIFS FOR CONTEMPORARY FASHION: IMPERATIVE FOR ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

The Akwete hand-woven fabrics produced by the Igbo and found in the southeastern part of Nigeria celebrate a rich tapestry of intricate and colourful designs that convey significant messages rooted in the Igbo worldview. Traditionally, these fabrics are reserved for special occasions in Igbo culture, where women typically wear them as two wrappers paired with a lace blouse, while men also incorporate them into their attire. It is uncommon to see Akwete fabrics combined with other materials in everyday clothing, underscoring their unique cultural significance. In addition to the Akwete fabrics, Uli traditional hand painting features over a hundred symbolic motifs drawn from Igbo idioms, slogans, and proverbs. Historically, these designs were applied to bodies and walls, serving both aesthetic and spiritual purposes. Unfortunately, the practice of Uli painting has been in decline, approaching a state of near extinction in recent years. Given the cultural importance of these motifs, this study posits that integrating Akwete fabrics with Uli-inspired batik designs in clothing construction can aid in their sustainability and revitalize interest in these art forms. Through qualitative research, desk methodology and studio

exploration, the study produces sample apparel that highlights this synergy. The findings indicate that by incorporating diverse indigenous fabrics into contemporary fashion design, one can significantly bolster economic sustainability in Igbo land and beyond. Specifically, the combination of Akwete hand-woven fabrics and batik designs inspired by Uli motifs has the potential to enhance their marketability and longevity while simultaneously promoting cultural preservation. In conclusion, the study suggests that fashion designers embrace a variety of indigenous fabrics from different regions. This approach not only fosters unity but also safeguards the diverse cultural heritage of the nation, ensuring that traditional textiles like Akwete are celebrated and utilized more prominently in modern fashion.

Keywords: Akwete hand-woven fabrics, Uli traditional painting motifs, batik, contemporary fashion, Igbo, economic sustainability.

Introduction

Contemporary fashion in Nigeria has witnessed many transformations as regards to cloth styles of indigenous fabrics. Most ethnic groups in Nigeria have brought in some transformations probably inspired by western fashion to enhance their cloth styles made from indigenous fabrics. Some have also gone the extra mile of producing a printed version of their indigenous textiles to create varieties and promote accessibility, for instance the Adire dyed fabric print and Akwete- Igbo hand woven textiles to mention but a few. While some factory produced indigenous fabrics prints like Adire are frowned at because of the effects on the local producers, they are still being smuggled into the country. These

indigenous fabrics are still produced and utilized up till date.

Akwete hand woven fabrics produced by the South-Eastern Igbo found in Nigeria are one of the garbs worn by them and also indigenously woven manually by them. The Akwete people produce these fabrics that bear their name to further emphasize ownership and control. In the contemporary fashion scene in Igbo land, one could rarely find people adorned in Akwete hand-woven textiles, for some special occasion (Chudi-Duru, 2017). Some of the Igbo remember that their parents and grand relatives used these woven fabrics at one time or the other but not of recent.

In the Nigeria contemporary fashion scene today, Akwete hand woven fabrics have not been sufficiently utilized to construct some casual outfits which could be adorned frequently. This is what prompted this study. This study has observed that some of indigenous fabrics produced in Nigeria have been infused into the contemporary fashion; for instance the aso-oke, by using them to construct wears which could be used as office wears or more so, combined or patched with other fabrics to construct some simpler apparels which could be adorned as casual wear or leisure wear and boho - chic.

Uli traditional painting is not often utilized as part of dress in contemporary fashion, rather some of the Igbo prefer being tattooed. This particular culture is almost going into extinction. Willis (1974) recorded over a

hundred motifs utilized by the Igbo to decorate their bodies and walls and each is symbolic representing Igbo culture, worldviews and ideologies. This study posits that if these motifs could be transferred to the fabrics using batik as a medium and combined with akwete hand woven fabrics to construct some apparels, which could be worn frequently in contemporary fashion, perhaps it could aid their sustainability economically. As this fusion will produce some innovative cloth wear styles that are new and also suit the recent fashion instead of the former ways they were utilized. This practice offers better choices to consumer demands as newer styles evolve from this synergy. It will alleviate economic pressures on artisans while fostering an appreciation for Igbo cultural heritage in modern designs.

Problem of the study

Uli traditional painting is not often utilized as part of dress in contemporary fashion, rather some of the Igbo prefer being tattooed. This particular culture is almost going into extinction. Willis (1974) recorded over a hundred motifs utilized by the Igbo to decorate their bodies and walls and each is symbolic representing Igbo culture, worldviews and ideologies. This study posits that if these motifs could be transferred to the fabrics using batik(wax resist dyeing-adire) as a medium and combined with akwete hand woven fabrics to construct some apparels, which could be worn frequently in contemporary fashion, perhaps it could aid their sustainability economically. As this fusion will produce some innovative cloth wear styles that are new and also suit the recent fashion instead of the former ways they

were utilized. This practice offers better choices to consumer demands as newer styles evolve from this synergy. It will alleviate economic pressures on artisans while fostering an appreciation for Igbo cultural heritage in modern designs. The question is this: why can't Akwete fabrics be constructed into some casual cloth wears that could be utilized often in the contemporary fashion just like some of its peers.

Aim of the study

1. To produce a kimono jacket using a sample of Akwete-Igbo hand woven fabric and a batik fabric inspired by Uli-Igbo traditional painting symbols as motifs.

Theoretical framework

Several theories can be applied in this study, each providing a distinct lens through which to understand the intersection of culture, fashion, and textiles. Below are the theories relevant to this study:

- Cultural Sustainability theory by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) firmly establishes that culture fundamentally shapes one's understanding of the world. F. David Peat (1938-2022) advocated for the necessity of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage preservation. This theory asserts the need to preserve and adapt traditional practices, such as Akwete weaving and Uli designs, ensuring cultural continuity amid globalization.

- Design theory - Propounders: - Victor Papanek (1923-1998) stressed the designer's critical role in effecting social change and implementing sustainable practices. Roozbeh Shirazi (1967-Present) - advocated for integrating traditional motifs in contemporary design, underlining their cultural relevance. This framework decisively supports the fusion of traditional Akwete fabrics with Batik techniques, emphasizing the significance of cultural motifs in modern fashion.
- Economic Sustainability theory propounded by E.F. Schumacher (1911-1977) proposed 'Small is Beautiful,' focusing on sustainable economic practices that prioritize local resources and skills. Amartya Sen (1933-Present) highlighted the need for capabilities and sustainable development in economic practices. This theory frames how the fusion in fashion can create sustainable economic opportunities for local weavers and artisans, directly enhancing their livelihoods while promoting cultural heritage.
- Fashion Theory, propounded by Katherine M. G. Stansfield (1980-Present) - analyzed the powerful connection between culture, identity, and fashion. Miriam Schapiro (1923-2021) - highlighted the invaluable contributions of women's art and craft to the narratives of art and fashion. This theory compellingly explores how the fusion of Akwete hand woven fabrics and Uli batik designs can transform identities within contemporary fashion by celebrating rich cultural heritage.

The converging perspectives of Cultural Sustainability, Design, Economic Sustainability, and Fashion theories create a powerful framework to examine the critical importance of merging Akwete-Igbo woven fabrics and Batik inspired by Uli-Igbo designs. This fusion not only actively fosters economic sustainability but also contributes to the preservation and evolution of cultural identities in modern fashion. This theoretical framework will decisively guide this research and practice to alleviate economic pressures on designers while forging a deeper appreciation for the rich cultural heritage in contemporary designs.

Literature Review

Textile

Textiles are flexible materials composed of a network of natural or artificial fibers, known as yarn or thread. These fibers are interlaced, knitted, woven, felted, or bonded together to create fabrics or cloths, which are then used in a multitude of applications ranging from clothing and household items to industrial and medical products. The term "textile" originates from the Latin word *textilis*, meaning "woven." Traditionally, textiles were made from natural fibers such as cotton, wool, silk, and linen. With advances in technology, synthetic fibers like polyester, nylon, and acrylic have been developed, offering additional properties such as strength, elasticity, and resistance to moisture and chemicals (Kadolph, 2014). The manufacture of textiles involves several steps:

Fiber Production: Fibers are sourced either from natural origins (plants, animals) or synthesized chemically. Yarn

Formation: Fibers are spun into yarns through processes such as twisting and drawing.

Fabric Construction: Yarns are then converted into fabric via weaving, knitting, or non-woven technologies like felting or bonding. Finishing: The fabric undergoes treatments to enhance appearance, texture, or performance, such as dyeing, printing, and coating (Corbman, 1983).

Textiles are ubiquitous in daily life. They are essential for apparel, upholstery, carpets, curtains, and bedding. In industrial contexts, textiles are used for conveyor belts, filters, and reinforcements in composites. Technical textiles serve specialized functions in aerospace, medicine (e.g; surgical sutures, bandages), and automotive industries (Horrocks & Anand, 2016). Modern textile science is increasingly focused on sustainability, developing eco-friendly fibers and recycling processes to reduce environmental impact (Fletcher, 2014). Innovations such as smart textiles—fabrics with integrated electronic components—are expanding the possibilities of textile applications.

Contemporary Fashion

Contemporary fashion refers to clothing and accessories that reflect the current trends, tastes, and cultural influences of the present moment. It is a dynamic and ever-evolving segment of the fashion industry, characterized by its responsiveness to contemporary lifestyles, advancements in technology, shifts in social values, and the global exchange of ideas. Unlike traditional or classic fashion, which tends to emphasize timeless silhouettes and enduring styles, contemporary fashion is distinctly modern, often embracing innovation,

experimentation, and a forward-thinking approach to design.

At its core, contemporary fashion is defined by its relevance to the present day. Designers and brands in this segment typically target a demographic that values style, quality, and accessibility, often appealing to urban professionals, millennial, and Gen Z consumers. Contemporary fashion labels are known for producing garments that are more trend-driven than luxury fashion yet offer higher quality and a greater sense of individuality than mass-market fast fashion. This segment bridges the gap between high-end designer wear and affordable, everyday apparel, providing consumers with versatile, stylish options that align with their lifestyles and values (Jackson & Shaw, 2009). A key feature of contemporary fashion is its rapid response to cultural and social changes. Designers draw inspiration from art, music, social media, political movements, and global events, translating these influences into clothing that resonates with the current generation. For example, contemporary fashion often incorporates themes of inclusivity, sustainability, and gender fluidity, reflecting broader societal conversations and consumer expectations. The rise of eco-friendly materials, ethical production practices, and diverse representation in advertising campaigns is all hallmarks of contemporary fashion's commitment to staying attuned to the world around it (Black, 2012).

Contemporary fashion is also shaped by technological innovation. Digital platforms, e-commerce, and social

media have transformed how designers present their collections and how consumers engage with fashion. The immediacy of online communication allows trends to emerge, spread, and evolve at an unprecedented pace. Virtual fashion shows, influencer marketing, and direct-to-consumer business models enable contemporary brands to connect with audiences globally and respond quickly to shifting tastes (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019).

While the term “contemporary fashion” is sometimes used interchangeably with “modern fashion,” it typically refers to a specific price point and market segment within the fashion industry. Contemporary brands are positioned between high fashion (also known as haute couture or luxury fashion) and fast fashion. They offer stylish, on-trend pieces at mid-range prices, balancing quality and affordability. Examples of contemporary fashion labels include Theory, Sandro, Maje, and Vince, which are known for their clean lines, sophisticated aesthetics, and adaptability to both casual and professional settings.

Contemporary fashion is a reflection of the present, shaped by cultural, social, and technological forces. It prioritizes relevance, innovation, and accessibility, offering consumers stylish options that resonate with their identities and values. As society continues to evolve, contemporary fashion will remain at the forefront of expressing and shaping the zeitgeist. Samples of contemporary fashion inspired by cultural forces are placed in the plates below.



Plate 1: Kimono jackets inspired by Aso-oke hand woven fabrics of the Yoruba. Source: Pinterest. This is used in Nigeria contemporary fashion.

Indigenous fabrics

Indigenous fabrics are traditional textiles that originate from specific cultural, ethnic, or geographic communities and reflect centuries-old techniques, patterns, and meanings passed down through generations. These fabrics are often handcrafted using locally sourced natural fibers such as cotton, wool, silk, or plant-based materials, and are produced through methods like weaving, dyeing, embroidery, or basketry unique to each region. Examples include the kente cloth of Ghana, ikat and java batik from Indonesia and India, Guatemala's huipil, and the bark cloth of Uganda.

Indigenous fabrics are more than just materials for clothing—they are symbols of cultural identity, heritage, and artistry. The motifs, colours, and weaving patterns embedded in these textiles often hold deep cultural

significance, representing social status, spiritual beliefs, or historical narratives. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the importance of preserving these traditional crafts, both as a means of supporting indigenous communities economically and as a way of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Integrating indigenous fabrics into contemporary fashion and design not only celebrates their beauty but also helps raise awareness about the diverse cultures and histories they represent.

Akwete- Igbo hand woven fabrics

In the Southeastern part of Nigeria, especially Akwete in Ndoki and Asa areas of Abia State, women and girls practiced the art of cloth weaving known as Akwete using the women's vertical loom. Lamb & Holmes (1980) note that Akwete is the most famous of all places that utilize the woman's' vertical loom in Nigeria; although there are various areas in which weaving is being practiced, for instance Asaba in Delta state, Abakaliki in Ebonyi state, Owerri in Imo state and Nsukka in Enugu state. Goodlife (2010), Powerhouse Museum (2008), Nwachukwu and Ibeabuchi (2012), proclaim that the Igbo are widely known for Akwete-cloth weaving which is basically practiced by women. Lamb & Holmes (1980) has a report that the origins of the Akwete weaving tradition are far from clear and there seems to be a number of external influences combined in Akwete to bring into existence those cloths which are now considered to be characteristic of this region. They further reported that an Igbo legend

mentions that weavers from that village were among the pioneers of Akwete weaving in the late nineteenth century. From the mid to late nineteenth century, weaving grew from a part-time activity to full-time occupation in which all Akwete women participated. At this period, Akwete weavers were responding to the patronage of neighboring Ijaw people of the Niger-Delta and evolved novel techniques in creating desired patterns in new textile materials. According to Nwachukwu et al (2012), the Akwete cloth is originally referred to as “Akwa Mmiri” (cloth of the water) meaning towel. The people believe that Akwete cloth is as old as the Igbo nation. Because of the dexterity of the weavers who demonstrated great mastery of technique and beauty of design; the art of Akwete cloth weaving was erroneously believed to have been introduced from Okene in Kogi State where a similar but highly developed style had earlier existed.

Ekwueme (2009) and Aronson (1980) believe that the ancestors of this Igbo traditional costume were imported from the island of Bonny in Rivers state. These ancestors settled in the mainland. While the men’s occupation was fishing, the women designed and wove the intricate patterns now known as Akwete. She further states that these intricate designs have arguably been adjudged as one of the most famous of the womens’ vertical loom cloths in Nigeria. Ekwueme (2009) supports Lamb & Holmes (1980) and asserts that though the origin of this unique traditional industry is still shrouded in mystery, history however, reveals that the production of the cloth is the traditional profession of the women folk who

started weaving from until their hands were strong enough to handle a narrow wall loom. She opines that Akwete is common amongst Nigerians mostly in the eastern part of the country but this study strongly opposes this as most young men, women and youths do not even know what Akwete looks like talk less of acquiring one. However, Afigbo and Okeke (1982) and Goodlife (2019) disagree with this view of the origin of Akwete weaving because they believed that the legendary weaver Dada Nwakata who is acclaimed to be the founder of Akwete weaving began weaving with designs of her invention. She is said to be the founder of Akwete weaving and has remained a role model for Akwete weavers who like her claim they can weave any cloth design set before them. Dada Nwakata unraveled threads from an open woven cotton cloth locally known as “acham” brought to the area through trade with the Potoki (Portuguese) between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries when the latter operated in the Bight of Biafra. After studying the weave structures of the heavily ornamented cloth, Dada Nwakata copied them and secretly began to weave a new style of Akwete designs. This style was revealed after her death by a deaf and dumb friend who was the only person she permitted in her company when she wove her cloths.

Lamb & Holmes (1980) strongly believe that Akwete is the traditional hand woven cloth of the Igbo; produced by highly talented women in the town of the same name. The method uses a uniquely wide version of the single heddle loom and the skills have been transferred from mother to daughter since ancient times. Remnants of

Igbo weaving have been dated back to the 9th century A.D with the excavation of Igbo Ukwu woven raffia fibre cloth (Shaw 1970).

Lamb & Holmes (1980) further observed that it has been highly prized by Igbo women for ceremonial dresses such as the ‘up and down’ which is wrapped round the waist and another under the arms. Akwete was soon overtaken by cheap imported materials. With the introduction of the lighter polyester silk threads and beautiful new patterns, Akwete competes remarkably well with the best woven materials in the world. The artistry and craftsmanship that goes into the Akwete weaving have given it uniqueness far above other woven fabrics in West Africa. Lamb & Holmes (1980) postulate that although there are some uniquely traditional Akwete patterns passed down over centuries, each woman weaver still tries out new designs in keeping with modern fashion trends thus creating an interactive and vibrant industry. In the process, some of the women of Akwete have set up a cooperative to coordinate their marketing. Their works have the stamp of their individual designs innovations while retaining their traditional character. However if Akwete industry is vibrant as Nwachukwu et al (2012) claim, it would have been very popular like some of its counterparts such as the kente fabric of Ghana which is being used globally.

Clarke (2013) observes that Akwete village is on the southern fringes of the Igbo speaking area of Nigeria and that Akwete women wove cloths that were traded

throughout the Niger delta, for use on various ceremonial occasions. Akwete (2012) supported Shaw (1970) and notes that Igbo weaving must have dated back to the 9th century based on the Igbo Ukwu finds of woven raffia fibre cloth. It further states that Akwete is the traditional hand woven cloth of the Igbo, and produced by highly talented women in the town of Akwete and transferred from mother to daughter. According to Lamb & Holmes (1980), the unique weavings of Akwete women are known throughout West Africa, however, this study disagrees with this statement because Akwete cannot claim the same popularity as Kente woven cloth of Ghana. Today the location of Akwete village is somewhat remote, but in the 19th century it was strategically located along the slave and palm oil trading routes, from the interior to the port cities of Opobo and Port Harcourt, and textiles where it became a valued trade good. Shaw (1970) in Oyedele, Ayokanmi & Obisesan (2014) have mentioned that archaeological excavation has revealed the presence of woven textile made of fabric other than cotton at Igbo-ukwu, although how and by whom they were made was not known.

However, Akwete fabric is still woven in Akwete village but still remains unknown to the majority of the Igbo people. A new ground has to be broken so as to take Akwete designs to a higher ground. There is need therefore to find new ways of giving more exposure and recognition to the Akwete fabrics through further creative innovations. Some samples of Akwete hand woven fabrics can be viewed in plates 2-:



(Plate 2: akwete hand woven fabric) Plate 3: akwete hand woven fabric
Source: Chudi-Duru(2025). Source: Chudi-Duru(2025).



Plate 4: akwete hand woven fabric Plate 5: akwete hand woven fabric
Source: Chudi-Duru(2025). Source: Chudi-Duru(2025).



Plate 6: akwete hand woven fabric. Source: Chudi-Duru(2025).

Uli/Uri traditional painting

Uli is a traditional art form of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, primarily practiced by women. It involves the use of organic pigments, derived from plants such as the uli tree (*Combretum zenkeri*), to create fluid, linear designs on the human body and on the walls of buildings. Uli painting is distinguished by its freehand, spontaneous style, featuring motifs inspired by nature—such as leaves, animals, birds, and abstract geometric patterns.

Historically, uli painting was closely associated with important cultural and social events, including festivals, rites of passage, and other communal gatherings. The designs were often symbolic, conveying meanings related to fertility, beauty, prosperity, and spiritual protection. On the body, uli was applied as temporary

Figure 1: Drawings of *uli* motifs, with Northcote Thomas's annotations. Few of Thomas's field notes survive from his anthropological surveys. There is, however, a collection of these drawings on sheets of notepaper, evidently made by different people during his 1910-11 tour of what was then known as Awka District, Southern Nigeria. Cambridge University Library.



Plate 7: *Uli* decorations on the new concrete Iyazi shrine walls, Agukwu Nri, during the opening of the refurbished Odinani Museum, 28 December 2018. Photograph by George Agbo.

Batik

Batik is a traditional textile art form that involves creating intricate patterns and designs with wax on fabric as a resist-dyeing technique. The process centers on applying wax to specific areas of cloth to prevent those sections from absorbing dye, allowing artisans to build complex, multi-colored patterns layer by layer. While batik is practiced in various regions across the world, it

is most famously associated with Indonesia, where it has been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, 2009).

The Batik Process

The creation of batik is a meticulous and time-honored craft. Artisans begin with a piece of fabric, usually cotton or silk, and use a tool called a *canting* (a small copper spouted container) or a stamp known as a *cap* to draw or print patterns with hot wax. Once the wax has cooled and hardened, the fabric is immersed in dye. The waxed areas resist the dye, preserving the original color of the fabric beneath. After dyeing, the fabric is dried, and additional layers of wax and dye may be applied to achieve the desired complexity and variety of colors. Finally, the wax is removed, often by boiling the fabric, to reveal the finished design.

Batik is deeply rooted in cultural traditions and often features motifs with symbolic meanings. In Indonesia, for example, certain batik patterns were historically reserved for royalty or used for special ceremonies such as weddings and religious rituals. Common motifs include flowers, birds, geometric shapes, and mythical creatures, each carrying specific cultural messages or blessings. Batik designs are also found in African, Indian, Malaysian, and Chinese cultures, each adding unique regional influences and techniques.

In addition to its traditional uses, batik has found a prominent place in contemporary fashion, interior design, and fine art. Designers incorporate batik fabrics into modern clothing, accessories, and home décor, blending heritage with innovation. The versatility and beauty of batik patterns have made them popular globally, and modern artisans experiment with new color palettes, abstract forms, and non-traditional materials to expand the boundaries of the craft (Kusuma, 2011).

Batik production remains a significant economic activity in many communities, supporting local artisans and preserving traditional skills. In Indonesia, for instance, batik-making provides employment for thousands of people, especially women. Governments and cultural organizations also promote batik as a symbol of national identity and as a valuable export product.

While batik is celebrated for its artistry, the process can have environmental impacts, particularly due to the use of synthetic dyes and large amounts of water. In response, some artisans are adopting eco-friendly dyes and more sustainable methods, ensuring that the tradition can thrive in harmony with environmental concerns (Yuniati, 2018).

Batik is much more than a textile; it is a living tradition that encapsulates the values, beliefs, and creativity of the communities that practice it. Through its combination of artistry, symbolism, and craftsmanship, batik continues to inspire and connect people across cultures and generation. In this study, some uli traditional motif

symbols were drawn on a fabric using wax after which it was dyed to the desired colour, to produce a batik inspired uli traditional motif symbols. This batik was utilized in the studio exploration.



Plate 8: An artist using wax to create designs on fabrics. Source: wordpress.com

Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability refers to a system or process's ability to support long-term economic growth without negatively impacting social, environmental, and cultural aspects of the community. At its core, economic sustainability means managing resources efficiently and responsibly so that future generations can meet their own needs while current generations continue to prosper. This

concept is one of the three pillars of sustainability, alongside environmental and social sustainability.

In practical terms, economic sustainability involves promoting stable employment, encouraging innovation, and fostering a resilient economy that can adapt to changing circumstances. It emphasizes the importance of balancing growth with prudent use of resources, avoiding practices that lead to depletion or long-term harm. Sustainable economic practices include investing in renewable energy, supporting local businesses, and developing policies that ensure fair wages and equitable access to economic opportunities. Ultimately, economic sustainability seeks to create lasting prosperity that benefits individuals, communities, and the planet as a whole.

Relating economic sustainability to the fusion of Akwete-Igbo woven fabrics and Batik inspired by Uli-Igbo motifs for contemporary fashion involves exploring how this creative integration can support long-term economic growth, resource efficiency, and community well-being within the fashion industry. Through this one could also achieve the following:

1. Value Addition and Local Industry Growth:

By merging traditional Akwete weaving techniques and Batik dyeing enriched with Uli-Igbo motifs, the fashion designers will create unique, high-value products that stand out in the global and local markets. This value addition can stimulate demand, encourage local production, and reduce reliance on imported fabrics,

keeping more economic activities and profits within the region.

2. Job Creation and Skill Preservation:

The fusion process requires skilled persons—Akwete weavers, Batik makers, and Uli artists—thus creating employment opportunities and incentivizing the transfer and preservation of indigenous skills. This sustains livelihoods and prevents the extinction of cultural arts, aligning with the principles of economic sustainability.

3. Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):

The innovative blend of fabrics and motifs can lead to the establishment and growth of SMEs focused on textile production, garment making, and fashion retail. Thriving SMEs contribute to broad-based economic growth and resilience, which are key elements of economic sustainability.

4. Export Potential and Foreign Exchange Earnings:

Contemporary fashion that highlights the fusion of these rich cultural expressions has significant export potential. By appealing to diaspora and international markets interested in authentic African fashion, this approach can generate foreign exchange and strengthen the local economy.

5. Sustainable Resource Use:

Traditional textile practices were relying on locally sourced, renewable materials, and eco-friendly dyeing

methods. But by adopting and modernizing these methods which is what is taking place recently, the fashion industry can minimize environmental impact while achieving economic goals—an essential aspect of economic sustainability.

6. Cultural Tourism and Brand Identity:

The unique aesthetic created by blending Akwete and Batik inspired by Uli traditional motifs symbols can serve as a cultural ambassador, attracting tourists and enhancing Nigeria’s brand identity. This, in turn, brings in additional revenue streams for the local economy.

Fusing Akwete-Igbo woven fabrics and Batik inspired by Uli-Igbo motifs for contemporary fashion is not just an artistic innovation but a strategic move towards economic sustainability. It drives local industry growth, employment, exports, and cultural preservation, while promoting resource use—all of which are imperative for sustaining economic prosperity in the fashion sector and beyond.

Studio exploration

During the studio exploration, some materials were used in the studio to achieve the fusion of Akwete-Igbo hand woven fabrics and batik inspired by Uli-Igbo traditional painting motifs as an imperative for economic sustainability. They are as follows: Akwete hand woven fabric, batik fabrics, sewing machine, a pair of scissors, thread, sewing needle, beads, tape and tailors chalk. Some other materials were also used to enhance the hand

woven fabrics with a view to improve the surface quality, add more value, and aesthetics. A hand woven fabric named fancy block was utilized for this studio exploration alongside a piece of batik decorated with various Uli traditional motif symbols. The studio processes are hereby recorded below:

1. The sketch of the Kimono jacket to be constructed was made.
2. Akwete hand woven fabric and the batik inspired by Uli traditional motif symbols were laid and cut according to the sketch of the design made with the appropriate measurement.
3. The cut out pattern was constructed with the aid of a sewing machine.
4. It was then enhanced with some beads.
5. The finished garment was modelled on a gown and some pairs of trousers.

The sketch utilized in this study:

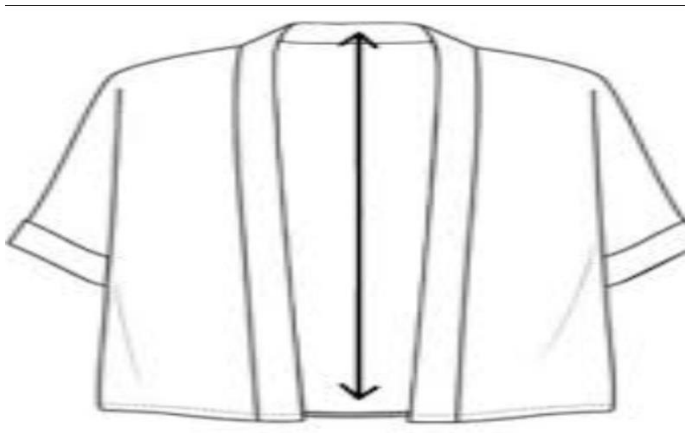


Figure 2: sketch of the kimono jacket constructed in this study. Source: Chudi-Duru(2025).

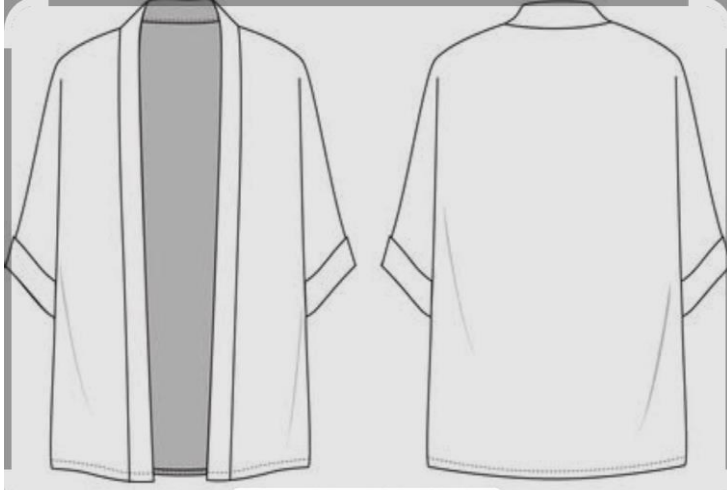


Figure 3: sketch of the kimono jacket showcasing the front and back views. Source: Chudi-Duru(2025).



Plate 9: batik inspired by Uli traditional symbols. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025). Plate 10: Akwete hand woven fabric. Source: Chudi-Duru(2025).



Plate 10: cutting of the Akwete hand woven fabric into a Kimono.
Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 11: cutting of the Akwete hand woven fabric and some stripes of Uli inspired batik. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 12: constructing of the Akwete hand woven fabric and some stripes of Uli inspired batik to produce a Kimono Source: Chudi Duru (2025).
(Plate 13: the completed Kimono



Plate 14: a kimono made with Akwete hand woven fabric and some stripes of Uli inspired batik to suit the contemporary fashion in Nigeria. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).

Results, Discussion and Findings

The findings indicate that by incorporating diverse indigenous fabrics into contemporary fashion design, one can significantly bolster economic sustainability in Igbo land and beyond. Specifically, the combination of Akwete hand-woven fabrics and batik designs inspired by Uli motifs has the potential to enhance their marketability and longevity while simultaneously promoting cultural preservation. In conclusion, the study suggests that fashion designers embrace a variety of indigenous fabrics from different regions. This approach not only fosters unity but also safeguards the diverse cultural heritage of the nation, ensuring that traditional textiles like Akwete are celebrated and utilized more prominently in modern fashion.



Plate 15a: a kimono made with Akwete hand woven fabric and some stripes of Uli inspired batik to suit the contemporary fashion in Nigeria being modelled. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).



Plate 15b: a kimono made with Akwete hand woven fabric and some stripes of Uli inspired batik to suit the contemporary fashion in Nigeria being modeled. Source: Chudi-Duru (2025).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the fusion of Akwete-Igbo woven fabrics with batik techniques inspired by Uli-Igbo motifs presents a compelling pathway for innovation within contemporary fashion while promoting economic sustainability. By integrating these rich indigenous textile traditions, designers can create unique and culturally resonant garments that appeal to both local and global markets. This synthesis not only revitalizes traditional craftsmanship but also provides new economic opportunities for artisans and communities involved in fabric production and design. Embracing this fusion supports the preservation of cultural heritage and encourages sustainable practices through the use of locally sourced materials and artisanal methods. Ultimately, leveraging the aesthetic and symbolic power of Akwete and Uli in contemporary fashion is not just an artistic endeavor, but a strategic imperative for fostering economic resilience and cultural pride in an increasingly competitive and globalized industry.

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