

The Future of Work in Africa's Fashion Industry”

2025



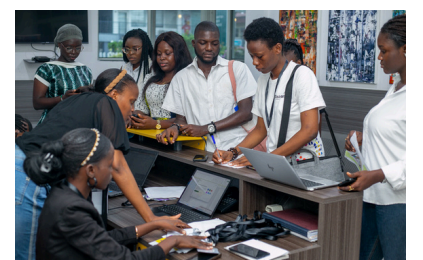
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FASHION CAREER SUMMIT & FAIR



THE BRIDGE INSTITUTE



THE FASHION CAREER COACH



**DAMILOLA
ADEMILOKUN**
FOUNDER OF OBSIDIAN ADVISORY AFRICA

As the Founder of Obsidian Advisory Africa, it is with great pride that I present this report on the Future of Work in the African Fashion Industry.

This document is the culmination of years of research, observation, and collaboration with industry professionals, experts, and visionaries across Africa. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive outlook on how the fashion sector will evolve in the coming years, driven by technological advancements, shifting consumer behaviors, and emerging global trends.

Africa is often heralded as the next frontier for economic growth, and the fashion industry stands as a pillar of that potential. With its rich cultural diversity, burgeoning talent, and increasing access to global markets, the African fashion ecosystem is poised for significant transformation.

However, navigating this evolution requires a deep understanding of the changing dynamics of work in the sector—how it is being reshaped by technology, new business models, and the growing demand for sustainability and inclusivity.

This report explores the intersection of these forces and offers insights into the future workforce within the fashion industry—what skills will be in demand, how traditional roles are transforming, and the emerging opportunities for both established players and newcomers.

It is our hope that this document not only serves as a resource for decision-makers and stakeholders but also ignites conversations about how Africa can lead in shaping the future of fashion, creating jobs, and advancing sustainable practices across the continent.

As we look ahead, it is clear that the future of work in the African fashion industry is not just about adapting to change—it is about driving it. It is an exciting time, and we at Obsidian Advisory Africa are proud to contribute to this vital conversation.

Thank you for your interest, and I invite you to join us on this journey as we explore the future of one of Africa’s most dynamic industries.

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The African fashion industry is currently experiencing a period of dynamic transformation, driven by a combination of entrepreneurial vigour, technological advancements, and the increasing global appetite for authentic, high-quality African-made apparel.

As the industry continues to evolve, there is a growing recognition of its potential to become a key player on the global fashion stage. However, this rapid transformation also brings with it a set of unique challenges and opportunities, particularly in areas such as workforce development, business model innovation, and cross-sector collaboration. These factors are critical to ensuring that the industry can harness its full potential, while also addressing pressing issues such as skill gaps, labour compensation, and the need for sustainable growth.

This report explores these emerging trends in detail, providing data-driven insights and actionable recommendations for industry leaders, business owners, policymakers, and workforce development specialists. Key areas of focus include the importance of creating competitive and fair labour compensation practices, the need for structured career progression plans, and the potential of co-production hubs and lean manufacturing to drive business efficiency.

Additionally, the report highlights the growing importance of intra-African skill exchange and the role of trade agreements such as AfCFTA in facilitating cross-border collaborations.

By examining the current state of the African fashion workforce, identifying key growth areas, and outlining practical steps for addressing challenges, this report aims to equip stakeholders with the knowledge and strategies necessary to build a sustainable, thriving workforce for 2025 and beyond.

The recommendations provided seek to support businesses in enhancing their talent management practices, policymakers in fostering an environment conducive to growth, and workforce development specialists in creating effective training programs that align with the needs of both employers and employees.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that Africa's fashion industry not only thrives but becomes a recognized leader in global fashion, driven by a skilled, diverse, and highly motivated workforce.



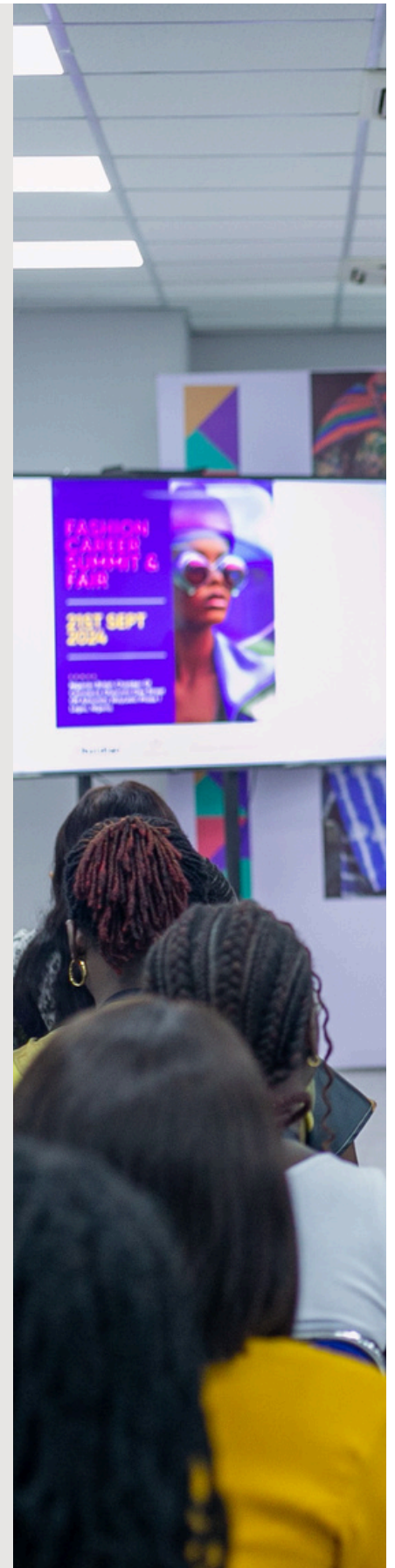
INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

Africa is renowned for its vibrant entrepreneurial culture. Many young Africans aspire to launch businesses immediately after completing their education, driven by limited formal job opportunities and the allure of creative freedom. This has resulted in a surge of fashion entrepreneurs but a simultaneous scarcity of employable, highly skilled labour. To bridge this gap, workforce development programs must focus on practical training, mentorship, and employment pathways.

The fashion industry is witnessing a pivotal shift from manual freehand techniques to technologically advanced manufacturing methods. This shift is fueled by increasing demand for precision, scalability, and efficiency in meeting local and international market needs. Workforce upskilling in areas such as digital pattern making, computer-aided design (CAD), and automated manufacturing will be critical.

A clear dichotomy exists between bespoke services, which cater to personalization, and ready-to-wear offerings, which prioritize scalability. While bespoke remains a hallmark of African craftsmanship, the growing appetite for ready-to-wear reflects global trends and the demand for quick, high-quality fashion solutions. Workforce training must prepare professionals for both sectors.

The "Made in Africa" label is gaining traction among Africans in the diaspora and international markets. It represents cultural authenticity and superior craftsmanship, positioning African brands as key players in the global fashion scene. For this trend to thrive, a well-equipped, skilled workforce is necessary to sustain and expand production capabilities.





Workforce Insights for 2025

1 Revised Labor Compensation and Benefits

Labour compensation in the African fashion industry often falls short of global standards, leading to high turnover rates and dissatisfaction among workers. To attract and retain talent, companies must adopt competitive pay structures, benefits, and career growth opportunities.



One of the key strategies for achieving this is wage benchmarking, which involves comparing a business's salary structure with industry standards and regional wage norms. This process helps fashion businesses align their compensation with what is expected in the market, ensuring that employees are paid fairly for their skill levels, experience, and job responsibilities. By regularly reviewing and adjusting pay scales based on the latest benchmarks, companies can stay competitive, retain top talent, and avoid costly turnover. In addition to wage benchmarking, fashion businesses must implement structured career progression plans to provide employees with clear paths for growth. Career progression gives employees a sense of purpose and direction, motivating them to stay with the company long-term. By outlining distinct career ladders and defining the skills and experiences required for advancement, companies can create a roadmap for employee development. Structured progression plans should include training and mentorship opportunities to help employees acquire new skills and gain the experience needed to take on higher roles. This approach not only fosters loyalty but also enhances the overall productivity and innovation of the workforce, as employees are more likely to remain engaged when they see opportunities for personal and professional growth within the company.

2. Strengthening Internal Structures and Systems

Many fashion companies struggle with weak organizational frameworks that hinder employee growth and productivity. Without clear job roles, efficient workflows, and structured development programs, employees may feel uncertain about their responsibilities and career progression, leading to inefficiencies and disengagement.

To address this, companies must create formal HR structures that clearly define roles and responsibilities at all levels, ensuring employees know their specific duties and how they contribute to the overall success of the business. Establishing standard operating procedures (SOPs) can further streamline workflows, providing employees with clear guidelines on how to perform tasks efficiently, reduce errors, and improve consistency. Additionally, implementing employee development plans is crucial for fostering growth, as these plans provide employees with opportunities to upskill and advance in their careers. This comprehensive approach not only boosts productivity and innovation but also strengthens company culture, creates a more positive work environment, and ultimately leads to greater employee satisfaction and retention.



CREATE



ESTABLISH



IMPLEMENT

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3. Cross-Sector Collaborations

Fashion businesses can significantly enhance workforce engagement by exploring cross-sector collaborations with industries such as logistics, tourism, music, and financial services. These partnerships can help address various challenges while creating new avenues for growth. For instance, collaborating with fintech companies can streamline payroll processes, making them more efficient and transparent, which in turn improves employee satisfaction. Additionally, working with the tourism industry can help raise the profile of African fashion by showcasing local designs at cultural events and international festivals, offering exposure to a global audience.

By establishing strategic industry partnerships, fashion businesses can not only create new job opportunities for skilled workers but also facilitate skills transfer across sectors. This exchange allows employees to gain new knowledge, diversify their skill sets, and remain competitive in the evolving job market. By fostering these collaborations, businesses can strengthen their workforce, expand their market reach, and contribute to the development of a more interconnected and resilient African fashion ecosystem.





4. Lean Start-Up Models through Cost-Effective Scaling and Leveraging Co-Production Hubs

The high cost of production for small minimum order quantities (MOQs) often strains fashion entrepreneurs, making it difficult for them to scale their businesses while maintaining quality and profitability. Lean start-up models address this challenge by encouraging entrepreneurs to start small, test their products, and iterate based on customer feedback. This approach minimizes waste, allowing businesses to scale cost-effectively while generating employment opportunities

A key solution to supporting this model is training fashion entrepreneurs in lean production methods. By equipping entrepreneurs with the skills to optimize their production processes, reduce costs, and focus on quality, they can navigate the challenges of small-scale manufacturing and increase their chances of sustainable growth.

Another effective strategy for enhancing production efficiency and reducing costs is the establishment of co-production hubs, which enable multiple entrepreneurs to share manufacturing facilities and resources. This model not only reduces individual production costs but also ensures that high-quality output is maintained across the board.

Co-production hubs foster a collaborative environment where fashion professionals can exchange ideas, share best practices, and innovate together. The solution lies in supporting the development of shared workspaces equipped with state-of-the-art machinery.

By creating these hubs, the industry can facilitate cost-effective scaling, improve access to advanced technology, and nurture collaboration, ultimately enhancing workforce efficiency and boosting the growth of small fashion businesses across the continent.

The Bridge

INNOVATION HUB FOR THE FASHION INDUSTRY

2025

COMING SOON

JOB CENTER

The Job Center provides recruitment services, career coaching, and access to industry-specific job listings, helping bridge the gap between talent and business needs.

CO-WORKING/ TRAINING SPACE

A flexible workspace where entrepreneurs, startups, and fashion professionals can come together to collaborate, network, and share resources.

Training Center

The Training Center aims to upskill and empower the next generation of African fashion talent, ensuring they have the expertise to thrive in the modern industry.

Podcast Studio

A professional-grade podcast studio where fashion experts, entrepreneurs, and influencers can create and share content.

5. The Rise of Freelancing in Fashion



The rise of freelancing in fashion, especially among Gen Z professionals, is reshaping the way businesses operate, offering a flexible work model that allows individuals to collaborate with multiple brands and work on diverse projects. This shift is driven by the desire for autonomy, work-life balance, and exposure to a range of creative opportunities. To integrate freelancers effectively into their operations, fashion companies need to establish streamlined processes for hiring, onboarding, and project management. A practical solution is to create a structured freelance marketplace within the company, where freelance opportunities are clearly outlined and accessible. For example, companies can develop an internal platform or use an existing freelance marketplace like Upwork or Fiverr, allowing freelancers to apply for projects directly, manage their timelines, and communicate with the team seamlessly.



Standardized contracts should be used to define the scope of work, deadlines, payment terms, and intellectual property rights, ensuring clarity and protecting both parties. Furthermore, a standardized payment system such as PayPal, Stripe, or local payment solutions, should be implemented to facilitate timely and transparent payments, preventing misunderstandings. This organized approach not only helps businesses integrate freelancers more efficiently but also provides them with a professional environment that enhances collaboration, creativity, and project success.

6. Intra-Continental Skill Exchange Across Africa

African countries stand to benefit greatly from intra-continental skill exchange, which can enhance the overall capacity and competitiveness of the fashion industry across the continent. By leveraging the diverse skills and expertise found in different regions, businesses can tap into specialized craftsmanship and advanced techniques. For example, artisans in West Africa, known for their exceptional beadwork and intricate embroidery, could share their expertise with fashion businesses in East or Southern Africa, where such skills may be less common. Conversely, regions with robust digital marketing, creative design, and business development sectors, such as South Africa or Kenya, could offer these services to other parts of the continent.

To facilitate this, trade agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can play a crucial role in creating frameworks for talent exchange programs. These programs could enable artisans and fashion professionals to work across borders, fostering knowledge sharing, improving business processes, and creating a more cohesive and skilled workforce. For instance, a fashion business in Nigeria could partner with a digital marketing expert from Ghana to enhance its online presence, while simultaneously sending its tailors to Uganda to learn sustainable fashion techniques. By tapping into this exchange, African fashion businesses can build stronger networks, diversify their skills, and position themselves as global leaders in the fashion industry.



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Intra-continental skill exchange can unlock Africa's fashion potential by fostering knowledge sharing, enhancing competitiveness, and building a more skilled and connected workforce across the continent.

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Actionable Recommendations

FASHION COMPANIES

Attract and — Retain Top Talent

Implement competitive pay and benefits packages based on industry standards to attract and retain skilled talent, ensuring job satisfaction and reducing turnover.

Empower Through — Growth

Invest in employee growth through tailored training programs and mentorship, empowering them to take on higher roles and contribute to business innovation.

Strengthen Industry — Collaborations

Partner with local industries, such as logistics and technology, to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and expand market opportunities—creating a stronger, more interconnected business network.

Recommendations to Policymakers

A skilled workforce is essential for the future of Africa's fashion industry, as emerging technologies, sustainability demands, and global market expansion reshape traditional roles. However, many aspiring fashion professionals lack access to specialized training that aligns with industry needs.

Investing in industry-specific education and skill development is the key to unlocking Africa's fashion potential and securing its place in the global market.

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Enhance Infrastructure & Business Support for Fashion Entrepreneurs



Boost Local Production & Infrastructure

Invest in local textile production, manufacturing hubs, and logistics to reduce dependence on imports.



Support Fashion Entrepreneurs

Create funding schemes, tax incentives, and grants to support fashion startups and SMEs.



Protect Creativity & Innovation

Strengthen intellectual property laws to protect African designers from counterfeiting and exploitation.

Workforce Development Specialist



Design practical, industry-focused training programs that not only cover technical skills like digital design and e-commerce but also include soft skills training such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, ensuring workers can thrive in diverse work environments.



Provide corporate orientation programs for artisans and vocational talents, helping them understand business operations, professionalism, and workplace expectations while preparing them for roles within established companies.



Incorporate work ethics and workplace culture training into all development programs, emphasizing punctuality, responsibility, adaptability, and collaboration, ensuring that workers are not only skilled but also aligned with the expectations of modern businesses.



Ensuring fashion professionals receive both technical and soft skills training, including digital design, e-commerce, communication, and teamwork, to thrive in the evolving industry..

Embedding values like punctuality, responsibility, adaptability, and collaboration into training programs to align workers with the demands of modern businesses.

Introducing corporate orientation programs to help artisans and vocational workers understand business operations, professionalism, and expectations within structured work environments.



CONCLUSION

The future of work in Africa's fashion industry is being shaped by a dynamic blend of technology, innovation, and human creativity. As the industry continues to evolve, investing in skill development, infrastructure, and policy reforms will be critical in unlocking its full potential. By fostering cross-border collaboration, embracing sustainable practices, and equipping the workforce with future-ready skills, Africa can position itself as a global leader in fashion.

At Obsidian Advisory Africa, we remain committed to driving these conversations, providing insights, and supporting stakeholders as they navigate this transformation. The road ahead is filled with opportunities, and by working together—governments, businesses, and creatives alike—we can build a thriving, competitive, and sustainable fashion industry that sets new standards for the future of work in Africa.

ABOUT OBSIDIAN

Launched in June 2022, Obsidian Advisory Africa is dedicated to becoming a leading force in shaping the career paths of Africa's fashion talents and revolutionizing business recruitment strategies within the industry. Through our innovative initiatives and personalized services, we add significant value to our talent's professional journeys and enhance the recruitment strategies of our clients.

With a deep understanding of the fashion industry, a global perspective, and an extensive professional network, we have positioned ourselves as a strategic partner for companies, candidates, universities, business schools, and other key stakeholders in Africa's fashion sector.

Obsidian Advisory Africa envisions a transformed African fashion workforce, driven by sustainable HR solutions, talent development, and industry innovation.

Our mission is to bridge the gap between fashion businesses and skilled talent by providing strategic HR solutions, workforce development programs, and recruitment innovations that contribute to the sustainable growth of the African fashion industry.

We strive to be recognized as a key reference for Africa's fashion industry players. By combining expertise with personalized approaches, we continuously add value to our talent's career paths and strengthen the recruitment strategies of our clients.



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