



Sustainability
Table SERIES

2019

GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK: SUSTAINABILITY AND FASHION

November, 2019

SUSTAINABLE FASHION



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SUSTAINABILITY TABLE DISCOURSE MONOGRAPH

**SUSTAINABILITY TABLE
DISCOURSE MONOGRAPH SERIES
VOL 2, NO.3, 2019**



GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK: SUSTAINABILITY & FASHION



November, 2019



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GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK: SUSTAINABILITY AND FASHION

This monograph is based on the report of the Sustainability Table Discourse Series 2019.

The Sustainability Table Discourse Series was sponsored by Unity Bank, Cadd Centre- Riverbank Technologies, Access Bank, IHS (Nigeria) Limited and Kopek Construction Limited.

STS is profoundly grateful, and we appreciate your support.





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GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK: SUSTAINABILITY IN FASHION

Can ethical consumption exist in the mainstream fashion market and is it particularly important in an emerging market/developing country?

INTRODUCTION



In order to achieve some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) particularly goals (9) and (12), it is crucial to consider the production of clothes, shoes and accessories in environmentally and socio-economically sustainable manners. Whilst manufacturers imbibe sustainability into their production strategies, consumers also must enshrine these SDG tenets into their patterns of consumption and purchasing. More sustainable patterns of consumption and use-ethical purchasing, which necessitate shifts in individual attitudes and behaviour needs to be imbibed to achieve the UNSDGs.

The fireside chat with Zara Odu (Designs Consociate) explored the adoption of newer technology and business models to design products that can be recycled or re-engineered into newer styles with minimal use of virgin materials, water, energy and chemicals for the fashion industry. Furthermore, a paradigm shift in consumer behaviour to enshrine sustainability especially in an emerging economy where these is not perceived particularly popular due to the more pressing socio-economical challenges.

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FIRESIDE CHAT EXCERPTS

How realistic is it for businesses and the brands within the fashion industry principally in Nigeria to practice ethical consumption, sustainable methods of producing without negatively affecting their bottom line?

As regards sustainability in the fashion industry, one of the key things to think about is consumption. **The statistics suggest that 500 billion t-shirts are made annually and that's just too many products that are made for us to buy.** Consumption is something that we need to change; the way that we think about the things we buy and what is important. Until we begin to think about buying things that are well made, things that have a story or have the ability to be re-worn, resold or reused, we are going to be stuck in the current issues.

In the UK, I would walk on the streets and see trash cans filled with T-shirts and clothes and I never overly thought about it. People are throwing clothes away; they are burning clothes and you see landfills filled with clothes. Contextualising it to Nigeria, it is about going back to the drawing board. Carefully selecting materials. Think about how we can create something that will have a long life and when that life is over you can break down the materials and reuse them.

While our infrastructure is not like that of China or other first world countries in terms of volume and quality production, we have the opportunity to start now. We can begin to say: "if there's going to be a production factory, what method of production will be employed such that the type of materials that will be used will not be damaging to the environment or the individual?". Which fabrics are we going to be using? Can we start developing our fabrics internally?

About two years ago I started thinking about why designers constantly import fabrics. Why don't we think about sourcing internally? Why are we not thinking about those other methods, things that have to do with innovation? Why are people not studying how to recycle bottles and turn that into the material; how to give something a second life? So, the consumption pattern is very important in the fashion industry. People need to start thinking about what they are buying and why they are buying it.

Global production has doubled. Between 2000 and 2014, garment lines have become more efficient. Production cycles have sped up and ultimately, there are better bargains for shoppers and these have helped the fast-fashion industry. Why this will seem attractive to the outsider, has negatively affected the environment. For instance, 1,500 gallons of water is used to make a pair of jeans and I think that is outrageous. What strategies can our local manufacturers imbibe to ensure sustainability while still ensuring that they can make a good living for themselves and can cater to demands?

When we talk about consumption, we refer to both manufacturer and consumer actors. I previously spoke about the consumer and said we need to think about why we buy. From a manufacturer's perspective, what you create is equally important. When the consumer says I'm not going to buy this item, the retailer responds to you. When you go into a store and ask why don't you have this stuff, the retailer will say it's because the people don't buy it. So, customers have a strong influence on the purchasing cycle. When you put your foot down and say I'm not going to buy these items anymore because it's harmful to the environment, the manufacturers begin to rethink and consider an environmental component.

In practical terms, for designers, I think it all boils down to materials. We need to start thinking about what we can source

locally, what we have access to here and even when sourcing locally, how you can reduce your carbon footprints. One of the ways you can reduce carbon footprints is by not importing as much and seeing what you have access to locally.

Textile development, materials, recycling, waste management, even ethics about how things are being made, are all important factors to be considered. In Nigeria, I believe we are paying our tailors good enough wages, we are doing a good thing. But in terms of how our goods are being produced, they must be produced to international standards, last long and be recyclable. So, the power is in our hands to hold the designers and manufacturers accountable.

In a Masterclass on the production of Aso-oke, a participant asked how long it takes to successfully weave one Aso-Oke and the weave maker responded by saying 2 weeks. Now, that's a long time but these women have been doing it for years and they insisted they have never defaulted on an order. But we know that there is science and technology these days to make processes more efficient and a lot faster which obviously will result in higher numbers and a better bottom line. Is it realistic to say we should go back to our traditional ways of producing some of these garments?

I think that partnership is important when we talk about sustainability. This idea of

local textile, partnership, slow luxury, knowing that things are made in an efficient way that's also not harmful to the environment, the idea of people working with their hands, all goes back to something I call the hand-worker economy. It is about women across the world using their hands to make amazing pieces from garments to accessories to high-quality products. I think designers should return to methods that are accessible to craftsmen. Talking about technology, I think there's a way to merge both. I think in Nigeria because we are not that developed with regards to technology, we have the opportunity to perfect craft making.

regards to manufacturing, it's something that we haven't done well. A lot of our best brands are producing in Europe. We're not producing here because we don't have factories, a lot of our tailors are still cutting free hand so if you want to meet international standards, you're better off not producing in Nigeria. If all the stakeholders can come together, take all the elements together, and ensure that we build a factory around that so we can produce here, in the next ten years Nigerians can buy well-made Nigerian products that are sourced and made locally.

We've been talking about the Sustainable Development Goals. We know that the timeline for the goals is 2030. If there's one innovation or initiative that we could implement right away to put Nigeria on the path to actualising these goals within the specified timeline, what would that be?

There are two things for me. I keep talking about fabrics and materials. Textile development because if we're talking about the environment, it starts with the material. We want to go back to cotton, we want to go back to the farms, we want to go back to how these products are being made. The Nigerian government can promote cotton production in Nigeria, silk production in Nigeria, and other types of textiles. That's the only thing that would move the industry forward. Also, with

SUSTAINABILITY TABLE POINT OF VIEW

“The most environmentally sustainable jacket is the one that’s already in your closet...” — Patagonia’s Chief Product Officer Lisa Williams

A root of the problem lies in our excessive consumerism: we buy 10 while our grandmothers bought 2. We tend to think that buying new clothes will make us happy. Our consumption is something that we need to change; our psyche, the way that we think about the things we buy and what is important. Until we begin to think about buying things that are well made, things that have a story or have the ability to be re-worn, resold or reused, we are going to keep on making trash.

Consumption pattern is very important in the fashion industry. People need to start thinking about what they are buying and why they are buying it. Whilst manufacturers imbibe sustainability into their production strategies, consumers also must enshrine these SDG tenets into their patterns of consumption and purchasing.

We also need to start thinking in terms of quality. If we stop buying poor quality, it will push brands to improve the quality of their garments. It will also allow us to keep our clothes longer, which is good for our wallets and for the environment.

RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION

From a manufacturer’s perspective, what you create is equally important. We need to start thinking about how we can create something that will have a long life and when that life is over, we can break down the materials and reuse them.

In terms of how our goods are being produced, they must be produced to international standards, last long and be recyclable. If we’re talking about the environment, it starts with the material. We want to go back to cotton, we want to go back to the farms, and we want to go back to how these products are being made. That’s the only thing that would move the industry forward.

MANUFACTURING MATERIALS LOCALLY

Why are we constantly trying to source externally? Why don’t we think about sourcing internally? Why are we not thinking about those other methods, things that have to do with innovation?

One of the ways you can reduce carbon footprints is by not importing as much and seeing what you have access to locally. We need to start thinking about what we can source locally, what we have access to here and even when sourcing locally, how you can reduce your carbon footprints.

Manufacturing is something that we haven't done well. A lot of our best brands are producing in Europe. We're not producing here because we don't have factories, a lot of our tailors are still cutting freehand so if you want to meet international standards, you're better off not producing in Nigeria. If all the stakeholders can come together, take all the elements together, and ensure that we build a factory around that so we can produce here, in the next ten years Nigerians can buy well-made Nigerian products that are sourced and made locally.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership is important when you talk about sustainability. Designers should go back to methods that are accessible to craftsmen. And talking about technology, I think there's a way to merge both. I think in Nigeria, because we are not that developed with regards to technology, we have the opportunity to perfect craft making.



CONCLUSION

Sustainable fashion is partly about producing clothes, shoes and accessories in environmental and socio-economically sustainable manners, but also about more sustainable patterns of consumption and use, which necessitate shifts in individual attitudes and behaviour.

CONCLUSION

- Increased Government policy to encourage production of local fabric and fashion items in an eco-friendly manner especially by investing in the sector and creating incentives.
- Consumers awareness on the need to patronise local content and sustainably manufactured/eco- friendly fashion items as opposed fast fashion.
- Manufacturers should innovate, embed recyclables into value chain, produce timeless pieces, creating products that have a longer life span and can be recycled at end of useful life.

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