

Towards Circular Textile and Fashion Value Chain: WATCH the Replay

7TH EABF EU-AFRICA
BUSINESS FORUM 2022



Towards a more Sustainable, Digital and Circular Textile and Fashion Value Chain

14 February 2022
4:00 PM CET



Africa's textile and fashion industry holds immense potential for economic transformation. According to some economists, continent-wide industry retail sales are worth around \$1.3 trillion. However, organizations like the United Nations Environmental Program and climate change researchers say the industry worldwide is also a key contributor to global warming, accounting for 10% of global carbon emissions.

On the sidelines of the European Union-African Business Forum 2022, held in Brussels this week, the African Development Bank's [Fashionomics Africa initiative\(link is external\)](#) hosted a virtual session on how African countries can tap into the industry's potential while reducing environmental and climate change impacts and fostering circular economy actions. The webinar showcased circular business models, and participants discussed opportunities for investments and trade cooperation within Africa and the European Union.

"The circular economy is already embedded in many African fashion brands, as they draw on indigenous knowledge of textile manufacturing processes that respect the environment and people. There are market opportunities that need to be covered, and here's where the African Development Bank's Fashionomics Africa and its partners come into play," said Emanuela Gregorio, economist and Fashionomics Africa coordinator.

Fashionomics Africa organized the online session on 14 February in partnership with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and EU-funded [In-Text Project\(link is external\)\(link is external\)](#), and with the European Union Directorate General for International Partnership's [SWITCH to Green Facility\(link is external\)](#).

Panelists said systemic changes are needed to disrupt the predominant business model of "fast fashion" — where industry suppliers mass produce low-cost knock-offs of recent catwalk trends and high-fashion designs for sale while demand is highest. Speakers also urged the industry to move from producing large volumes of disposable items, to producing items that remain in use for longer, before being repurposed or recycled.

"As part of the [In-Text Project\(link is external\)](#) UNEP accompanies textile SMEs in Kenya, Tunisia and South Africa to transform their business models and works with partners to increase knowledge on life cycle thinking, eco-innovation and product environmental footprint. UNEP provides strategic leadership and with partners such as the EU and the African Development Bank, also provided sector-wide collaborations to accelerate a just transition towards a sustainable and circular textile value chain," said Claudia Giacobelli, Program Officer at the United Nations Environment Program.

Cécile Billiaux, Head of Unit at the Directorate General for International Partnerships for Micro-economic Analysis, Investment, Climate, Private Sector, Trade and Employment, presented the joint EU/AU commitment on transitioning to circular economy in the domain of textile production. Her presentation included the European Union's plans through the upcoming [EU Textile Strategy \(link is external\)](#) to make the garment sector value chains more sustainable and promote decent work.

Tshepo Bhengu, co-founder and director of South Africa-based textile innovation project [Rewoven\(link is external\)](#) told attendees that boosting demand for recycled fibers requires government participation in improving traceability systems alongside the textile and fashion value chains, as well as improved regulatory frameworks. Bhengu said one of the main challenges he faced was getting producers to understand the negative impact of textile waste because of a "if I cannot see it, it's not a problem" mentality.

Olivia Okinyi, co-founder of Kenya-based footwear design [Pine Kazi\(link is external\)](#), and [winner of the Fashionomics Africa sustainable fashion competition in 2021.\(link is external\)](#) said consumers need to shift their mindset and be proactive in picking sustainable fashion garments. "Our mission is to create impact in our community, creating jobs for women and youths whilst producing sustainable footwear from pineapple waste," Okinyi told webinar attendees.

For more information about Fashionomics Africa, click [here\(link is external\)](#).

The discussion took place at a virtual side event at the **7th EU-AFRICA BUSINESS FORUM 2022 on Monday, 14.02.2022, 16:00 CET.**

WATCH the Replay at [Fashionomics Africa](#). (Log-in required)

Text:Fashionomics Africa initiative (AFDB)