



Africa & Textile Talks

Essentials

Your post-conference learning companion and action guide

The conversations didn't end when this year's programme drew to a close. From **31 July–1 August 2026 in Cape Town, Africa Textile Talks** brought together people working, researching and learning across the African textile system to consider what it might take to build textile futures that serve people, culture and nature. Against a backdrop of intensifying climate pressures, cheap new imports and the urgent need for African producers to regain the earning power once generated by garment manufacturing and connected supply chains. The programme asked us to look more closely at how value moves through the textile system. Where is value created, where is it lost, and what stands in the way of doing things differently? Across the two days, different perspectives illuminated a textile ecosystem that is rich in resources and ingenuity, and facing real challenges. This Essentials guide picks up where those conversations left off, drawing together some of the ideas, tensions and connections that emerged. It is an invitation to sit with what surfaced, interrogate assumptions, reach out to contacts, and plan what you can do next.



People working, researching and learning across the African textile system came together for Africa Textile Talks 2026.

How to use this guide:

- **Read the synthesis**

- **Reflect on the questions**

- **Explore the resources**

- **Take the next step**

From fibre to fashion on African soil

The ideas, people and conversations shaping textile futures

A disproportionate quantity of Africa's natural textile raw materials leave the continent in an unprocessed or semiprocessed state: sub-Saharan countries export more than 81% of the raw cotton produced in the region (UNESCO), while the African clothing and textile industry's total trade deficit has been calculated at around US\$3.3 billion (Southern African Customs Union). Africa Textile Talks set out to interrogate the gap in processing, manufacturing, design and markets: not an easy task, but it was a challenge the room's participants took on with stubborn hope, resilience, and impeccable style.

It became clear that building sustainable supply chains and keeping value in Africa is already underway.

Lumko Mboyi's work as a conservation ecology professional involves improving grazing practices in communal rangelands. He demonstrated how the quality of wool fibre begins with the health of the landscape that produces it; linking ecological care, sheep farmers' livelihoods and material value.

Textile processor, Lilitha Mahlati-Diatta spoke about the bottlenecks that can cause local value chains to break down, and the importance of strengthening each interconnected node. Farmers and factory workers need to succeed in their own right, says Mahlati-Diatta. This conviction extends her work beyond wool carding into strengthening her industry's ecosystem, and highlights a need for connecting "the right kind of funding to the right kind of enterprise".

Designer Wanda Lepphoto demonstrated how we can trust our own voice as Africans, and how African histories, philosophies and lived realities are valuable sources of cultural nourishment and pride.

Omoyemi Akerele's African Fashion Coalition reminds us how taking action is a joint effort, inviting us all to participate in strengthening the African fashion and textile industries from within by signing the manifesto, *The Blueprint for a Regenerative Fashion Future*.

Farming, manufacturing, design, heritage and policy might sound like separate conversations, but they share a common principle: they shape value chains that rely on each other's thriving. Farmers need healthy landscapes.



Artist and cultural practitioner Siwa Mgoboza opens the morning with Shweshwe as a Living Archive of Hybridity and Defiance.

Manufacturers need skilled employees. Designers need high-quality materials. None of these industries can survive on their own. It felt like a victory that so many people from different nodes of the textile ecosystem were in one room, present and participating. Yet, a thriving ecosystem needs to work within planetary limits while pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

Building stronger local value chains therefore goes hand in hand with finding better approaches. Speakers illustrated how this means changing the lens through which we look for new ways forward, and how sometimes the most useful ideas emerge in unexpected places close to home.

For Shaakira Jassat, a textile designer and well-versed experimenter, innovation means looking beyond human collaborators and partnering with bacteria. Laetus Buberwa and Sam Elsom both use seaweed as a solution. Their streamlined processes reduce environmental harm, improve efficiency, protect artisans, and produce a better quality product; an example of innovation from within heritage craft and cultural practices that have long existed across Africa.

Lesley Hudson offered a fresh perspective on an indigenous silkworm, rethinking centralised farming systems with take-home kits, pairing her own access to high-end markets with empowering local communities. The spirit of experimentation also made room for play.



Working across textiles, archives and artistic practice, Thuli Gamedze examines the political lives of second-hand clothing and asks how garments continue to carry meaning long after they leave their original owners.



Omoyemi Akerete, founder of Lagos Fashion Week, presenting her vision for regenerative African fashion before joining Simone Smit for a conversation on design as a catalyst for development.



Drawing on architecture, drought research and material experimentation, Shaakira Jassat's work investigates how designers can rethink relationships between food systems, landscapes and textiles.



The panel discussion, *The price of cheap fashion*, unpacks global trade and fashion economics, featuring Tanya Zack, Dr Johanna von Pezold (online), Harald Harvey, Marthie Raphael, and moderator Jackie May.

Cultural practitioner Siwa Mgoboza brought playfulness to his reimagining of Shweshwe, suggesting that heritage need not be a fixed visual language to be preserved intact, but something we can build on, question and make our own.

Cultural worker Thulile Gamedze's experimental work approaches design as cumulative: a garment's previous life is referenced when upcycled, while its meaning changes in a new context. Here archives are not stagnant or fixed, but fertile ground from which innovation can grow.

Zara Odu and Ifebuche Madu challenge the assumption that innovation comes from elsewhere, demonstrating how traditional fabric-dyeing practices can be adapted for contemporary conditions. Other conversations brought in productive tension.

Tanya Zack, author of *The Chaos Precinct*, and Johanna von Pezold in her Africa-China research, discussed how informal traders importing cheap goods from China have built remarkably successful businesses by knowing their customers and networks intimately and 'making a plan' against the odds. Fast fashion has become a dirty word in sustainability circles, yet for cash-strapped consumers it meets a very real need.

The panel, *The price of cheap fashion*, debated the environmental and economic consequences of this model but acknowledged that there is something to learn from its agility and resourcefulness.

Perhaps we need to examine where our definitions of 'sustainable' come from, and whether they leave enough room for the realities of the economies we are trying to transform.

During the fireside chat, *From here to where?* moderator Agisanang Magooa raised the need for moving beyond Africa's potential to competitive participation in building thriving textile ecosystems.

Speakers across the Africa Textile Talks programme demonstrated how this is happening despite imperfect conditions, perhaps a tribute to the resilience of Africa's people.

Alongside this call for global competitiveness, regeneration kept surfacing as a theme with calls to look after what sustains us. Moving beyond 'doing less harm', and towards care as an active practice: tending to landscapes, livelihoods, local industries and the relationships stitched between them so they can thrive.

We were invited to think of sustainability less as a destination, and more as a verb by lifting our heads from individual challenges to tend collectively to the conditions that allow good work to happen.

The task is already underway; the manifesto, *The Blueprint for a Regenerative Fashion Future*, developed by the African Fashion Collective, recognises the plurality of our contexts while offering a shared direction and framework for moving forward.

Africa Textile Talks helped us formulate better questions, nurture stronger connections and renew our hope that many of the foundations for regenerative textile futures are already here. The work now is to recognise them, strengthen them and persist in weaving them together.



The audience joined the conversation with their own questions and provocations.



Textile innovation, indigenous knowledge and material futures panel, featuring Shaakira Jassat, Laetus Buberwa, Henry Kavuma (online) and Lesley Hudson, and moderator Kiera Crowe Pettersson.

Threads to follow

Africa Textile Talks left us with plenty to ponder. Look back over your own notes, use these prompts to make connections, capture ideas, and identify where you might want to take the conversation next.

What stayed with me?

What idea, question or provocation from ATT keeps coming to mind?

What problem am I trying to solve?

How does what I heard change or deepen my understanding of it?

What could regeneration look like in my context?

How could I move from minimising harm to creating conditions for thriving?

What relationships make my work possible?

Who and what (beyond humans) do I depend on? Where could I strengthen those relationships?

What can I activate?

What resources, knowledge, skills or connections do I already have that could contribute to our collective objective?

Who can I reach out to?

What conversation, collaboration or connection could help move an idea forward?

Next steps

Participate in the African Fashion Collective's vision. Sign the manifesto, The Blueprint for a Regenerative Fashion Future, and pledge to do your part.

Continue the Conversation

Thandile Zonke	Contact
Wanda Lephoto	Contact
Omoyemi Akerele	Contact
Simone Smit	Contact
Lumko Mboyi	Contact
Sam Elsom	Contact
Natasja Ambrosio	Contact
Zubeida Zwavel	Contact
Marthie Raphael	Contact
Dr Johanna von Pezold	Contact
Tanya Zack	Contact
Harald Harvey	Contact
Jackie May	Contact
Khanyi Mashimbye	Contact
Lilitha Mahlali-Diatta	Contact
Agisanang Magooa	Contact
Siwa Mgoboza	Contact
Thuli Gamedze	Contact
Berendje Willemina	Contact
Nkhensani Mkhari	Contact
Nuraan Petersen	Contact

Shaakira Jassat	Contact
Laetus Buberwa	Contact
Henry Kavuma	Contact
Lesley Hudson	Contact
Kiera Crowe Pettersson	Contact
Zara Odu	Contact
Ifebuche Madu	Contact
Gracey Owusu Agyemang	Contact
Khudija Zaib	Contact
Monica Ebert	Contact
Cape Wools SA	Contact
Lache Davids	Contact
Mahlatse Mohlala	Contact
!Khōdanab Bradley Van Sitters	
Mphoentle Mongale	Contact
Sunny Dolat	Contact
Dr Erica de Greef	Contact
Kelechi Memeh	Contact
Nokuphila Mthembu	
Tadiwanashe Aaron Chikomwe	

Read more

[The Chaos Precinct](#)

[Logos unleashed: Giving in creatively to the global desire for brandedness](#)

[Counterfeits as Social Goods: The Ethics of Chinese Fashion in Mozambique](#)

[Global China and everyday mediation in the Global South: Selling Chinese fashion in Mozambique via WhatsApp](#)

Be in touch with:

Innovators, experiments + alternative models

African Fashion Collective's [The Blueprint for a Regenerative Fashion Future](#)

[Fleece Naturally](#)

[Sea Forest](#)

[Keltex leather](#)

[Studio Sway](#)

[Twyg](#)

Studios and producers

[Afrikstabel](#)

[The Capensis Project](#)

[Green Route Hemp](#)

Events and initiatives

[Lagos Fashion Week](#)

[After Library](#)

Government organisations + policy

[KwaZulu-Natal Clothing and Textile Cluster \(KZNCTC\)](#)

[African Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\)](#)

[Clothing, Textiles, Footwear and Leather Growth Programme \(CTFLGP\)](#)

[“Master Plan”](#)

Awards, funding + prizes

[The Earthshot Prize](#)

[Global Change Award](#)

[Funding opportunities: Clothing, Textiles, Footwear and Leather Growth Programme \(CTFLGP\)](#)

Weave it into practice

One person or project I'd like to follow:

One resource I'll explore next:

A person I'd like to speak to next:

One action I'll take this month:

A commitment to myself:

Your move

Your post-conference learning companion and action guide

Fashion and textiles are complex, interwoven industries. Combing out the sticky web of production created by globalisation and fast fashion will take collaboration, experimentation and a willingness to get stuck into the messy work of change. Across Africa, efforts are already underway to bring production closer to home, rethink how we make and use materials, build cleaner and more resilient industries, and make sure the people and places behind our clothes are valued. It's happening. And there's good reason to feel hopeful about what comes next. Are you ready for it?

Explore more at twyg.co.za

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For Twyg + Africa Textile Talks 2026

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