

## AFRICA AND FASHION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Poverty and trade

Sub-Saharan Africa loses about 5% of GDP through shrinking trade income, or some \$28.4 billion annually, a figure that exceeded total aid flows and debt relief to the region in 2003. (2006 UN Human Development Report)

Poverty is a daily battle for millions of people in Sub Saharan Africa. Life expectancy at birth was 46 in 2004, as opposed to an average of 67 for the rest of the world. Infant mortality is more than double the global average at 102 per 1000 live births (2004) 45% of the population lives on less than \$1 a day, and an estimated 25,000,000 people are living with AIDS (2003)

At the same time, the world's consumers are spending around US\$1 trillion worldwide buying clothes. Clothing and textiles represent about seven per cent of world exports. Consumers in the UK spend about £780 per head per year. Through the ethical fashion movement, opportunities exist for African fashion businesses to successfully compete in a lucrative international market for fashion

If Africa, East Asia, South Asia, and Latin America were each to increase their share of world exports by one percent, the resulting gains in income could lift 128 million people out of poverty. (Oxfam)

### Environment

Poverty in Africa has led to deforestation and widespread animal poaching leaving many species of wildlife endangered. As a result of climate change, maize yields in sub- Saharan Africa are forecast to drop by 15% or more by 2020. The loss of healthy life years through global environmental change is predicted to be 500 times greater amongst poor African populations than amongst European populations.

### Fashion: Made in Africa

Trade in fashion products provides key opportunities for communities in Africa. Fashion is labour intensive, requires limited capital input, and with good design, traditional skills bring a high premium. In Kenya, statistics show that every job in the garment sector in Kenya generates 5 other jobs. In Lesotho, thanks to the apparel industry (representing 94% of merchandise exports) GDP per capita increased from \$558 in 2001 to \$3000 in 2004.

**The current demand for sustainable sourcing, coupled with innovation in skills and recycling and organic cotton, creates a USP for Fashion from Africa, and an important opportunity to boost trade.**



**Images:** Top: Lalesso- made in the SOKO ethical production unit, providing employment in the slums of Kenya, sold on the UK High St  
Bottom: Sika: Ghanaian fashion designer label supporting communities in Ghana, sold internationally