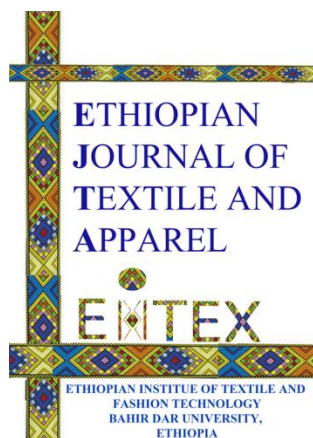




WEAVING FUTURES: CLOTHING, TEXTILES, AND THE PURSUIT OF
FAMILY SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract:

This study explores the intersection of clothing, textiles, and family sustainability within the Nigerian context, highlighting how traditional and contemporary textile practices contribute to household resilience and economic continuity. In Nigeria, clothing and textile production serve not only as cultural expressions but also as critical sources of income and social stability for families. The research examines how families engage with local textile industries, ranging from weaving, dyeing, and tailoring to informal fashion entrepreneurship, to sustain livelihoods across generations. It further investigates the challenges that hinder sustainable practices, including limited access to resources, fluctuating market demands, and environmental pressures. Through a qualitative approach, the study draws on interviews with textile artisans, family business owners, and community stakeholders, providing insights into strategies that enhance both economic viability and cultural preservation. Findings are expected to reveal that sustainable engagement with clothing and textiles strengthens family cohesion, promotes intergenerational knowledge transfer, and fosters resilience in the face of socio-economic challenges. The study underscores the importance of integrating sustainability principles into textile practices, advocating for policies and community initiatives that support local production, reduce waste, and empower families to leverage clothing and textile resources for long-term well-being. By linking cultural heritage with contemporary sustainability imperatives, this research offers a framework for understanding how clothing and textiles can function as instruments for family-centered development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Clothing, Textiles, Family Sustainability, Nigerian Households, Livelihood, Cultural Heritage*

Introduction

In many Nigerian marketplaces, rural settlements, and urban districts, the rhythmic hum of sewing machines and weaving looms has been described by scholars as a continuing marker of livelihood and creativity. Researchers emphasise that these sounds emerge from households whose

survival and aspirations are closely tied to garment and textile production. Studies further note that tailoring workshops often occupy small rooms or roadside stalls where family members cut fabrics, sew garments, attend to customers, and train apprentices. Such observations have been interpreted as evidence of the strong relationship between

clothing production and family sustainability in Nigeria.

Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2021) argue that clothing in Nigeria functions not merely as a practical necessity but as a medium of expression, identity, and social affiliation. They demonstrate that traditional fabrics such as Aso-Oke, Adire, and Akwete communicate ethnic identity, social status, and cultural belonging, particularly during ceremonies, festivals, and rites of passage. In addition, historical analyses indicate that textiles operated as economic resources: cotton cultivation, dyeing practices, and weaving activities provided employment, facilitated trade, and sustained household economies. However, Adebayo and Akinyemi (2019) contend that the influx of imported fabrics, structural challenges within the industry, and the pressures of globalisation have disrupted this balance, thereby undermining family-based textile livelihoods.

Despite these challenges, traditional and contemporary clothing practices continue to sustain families, particularly in informal and semi-formal production systems. From the dyeing pits of Kano to the weaving looms of Iseyin and the tailoring workshops of Aba, textiles remain a source of income, a repository of culture, and a channel for community cohesion. Simultaneously, the global movement toward sustainable fashion has highlighted the environmental and social impact of clothing, prompting renewed interest in traditional production methods that minimise waste, utilise local resources, and reinforce social resilience (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

This paper explores the intersections of clothing, textiles, and family sustainability in Nigeria. Specifically, it examines how household and community-based textile

practices contribute to economic resilience, preserve cultural heritage, and support environmentally responsible production. It also considers the challenges confronting these systems and identifies opportunities for integrating sustainability principles into Nigeria's vibrant textile ecosystem.

Literature Review

Scholarly discussions on clothing, textiles, and sustainability have expanded considerably in recent years, particularly as researchers increasingly examine the social and environmental implications of global fashion systems. While early studies on fashion and textiles largely focused on design aesthetics, production technologies, and consumer behaviour, contemporary scholarship has broadened its scope to include sustainability, cultural heritage preservation, and the socio-economic dimensions of textile production. Within this emerging discourse, particular attention has been given to the ways in which local textile traditions and small-scale production systems contribute to sustainable development.

One major strand of literature addresses the environmental consequences of the global fashion industry. Researchers have argued that the rapid expansion of fast fashion has significantly intensified the environmental footprint of clothing production through increased resource consumption, chemical pollution, and textile waste (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The fashion industry is now widely recognised as one of the most resource-intensive sectors of global manufacturing. Fletcher (2016) observes that conventional fashion production models often prioritise speed and cost reduction at the expense of environmental sustainability, leading to large volumes of discarded garments and excessive energy consumption.

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasised the need for systemic transformation within the global fashion industry in order to address its environmental and social impacts. Scholars have observed that contemporary clothing production systems are characterised by a linear economic model commonly described as “take–make–waste”, in which raw materials are extracted, manufactured into garments, consumed rapidly, and ultimately discarded as waste (Brydges, 2021). This model has been widely criticised for generating large quantities of textile waste and placing considerable pressure on natural resources. In response to these concerns, sustainability researchers have advocated the adoption of circular economy principles that encourage the reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling of textile materials (Niinimäki, 2018). The circular economy framework has gained increasing recognition within policy and industry discussions as a pathway towards reducing the environmental footprint of the fashion sector while maintaining economic viability.

Further studies have examined the production processes within textile and apparel industries in order to identify strategies for improving environmental performance. For example, Islam et al. (2020) investigated environmentally sustainable practices within textile manufacturing systems and observed that improvements in resource efficiency, waste management, and production technologies can significantly reduce environmental impacts. Similarly, Dissanayake and Sinha (2015) explored the potential of fashion remanufacturing as a sustainable alternative to conventional garment production, arguing that remanufacturing processes extend the lifecycle of clothing while minimising

material waste. These approaches reflect a growing recognition that sustainability within the fashion industry requires innovation not only in design but also in production systems and supply chain management.

In addition to production-oriented strategies, scholars have also highlighted the importance of consumer behaviour in advancing sustainable fashion systems. Research conducted by Perry and Wood (2018) suggests that sustainable clothing consumption depends largely on consumer awareness and willingness to prioritise durability, repair, and ethical sourcing when purchasing garments. Likewise, Ritch (2017) notes that consumers often interpret sustainability in diverse ways, sometimes associating it with quality, longevity, and responsible manufacturing practices. Encouraging consumers to value durable garments and locally produced textiles may therefore play an important role in strengthening sustainable production networks.

Another emerging area of research examines the social and economic dimensions of sustainability within African fashion systems. Ajayi and Mmutle (2020) argue that African fashion industries possess unique opportunities to integrate sustainability principles with indigenous cultural practices.

Similarly, Acheampong and Boateng (2021) observe that sustainability transitions within African textile industries require policies that support local producers while fostering innovation and global competitiveness. These perspectives suggest that traditional textile systems, which often rely on small-scale production methods and locally sourced materials, may offer valuable insights into. Within wider development debates, sustainability has consistently been framed as

a central element of global development strategies. Sachs et al. (2022) emphasise the necessity of integrating economic growth with environmental protection and social inclusion in order to realise long-term development objectives. When applied to the textile industry, their analysis highlights the capacity of clothing and textile activities to contribute not only to economic livelihoods but also to cultural preservation and responsible resource management.

In response to these challenges, scholars have advanced alternative models of sustainable fashion that prioritise durability, repair, recycling, and ethical production practices. Gwilt (2020) contends that sustainable fashion design requires a holistic perspective that addresses the entire lifecycle of garments, from material sourcing and production processes to consumer use and eventual disposal. Likewise, Henninger et al. (2016) argue that sustainability in the fashion sector must integrate environmental responsibility with social and economic dimensions. Their research underscores the importance of developing production systems that uphold fair labour practices and community livelihoods while reducing environmental harm.

Another strand of scholarship investigates the role of traditional textile practices in advancing sustainability. Kozlowski et al. (2018) demonstrate that many indigenous textile systems operate in ways that closely align with contemporary sustainability frameworks. They show that small-scale weaving and dyeing practices often rely on locally sourced materials, employ labour-intensive rather than energy-intensive methods, and produce textiles in limited quantities based on demand. Such characteristics, they argue, minimise waste while reinforcing community-based economic

systems. alternative models of sustainable fashion.

Within the African context, scholars have increasingly emphasised the importance of indigenous textile traditions as vehicles for cultural expression and economic empowerment. Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2021) argue that traditional textile practices serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and identity, reflecting the historical experiences and social values of communities. These textiles are not merely functional commodities; they embody symbolic meanings that connect individuals to their cultural heritage.

Research on Nigerian textile traditions further illustrates the complex relationships between culture, livelihood, and sustainability. Oyetunde and Adebayo (2019) observe that indigenous fabrics such as Adire, Aso-Oke, and Akwete represent important elements of Nigeria's cultural heritage. These textiles are produced through techniques that have been transmitted across generations, often within family or community networks. The authors argue that preserving these traditions is essential not only for cultural reasons but also for supporting local economies and maintaining artisanal knowledge.

Studies focusing on informal economic systems in Nigeria have also highlighted the significance of small-scale enterprises in sustaining family livelihoods. Afolayan and Aina (2019) note that the informal sector accounts for a substantial portion of employment in Nigeria, particularly in urban centres where many individuals rely on entrepreneurial activities for income generation. Within this context, tailoring and garment production represent important sources of employment and skill development.

The garment production cluster in Aba has received particular scholarly attention due to its role as a major hub of small-scale manufacturing. Eze and Ogbo (2018) report that the Ariaria International Market in Aba hosts thousands of workshops engaged in garment production. These enterprises operate largely within informal networks where skills are transmitted through apprenticeship systems and family participation. The authors contend that such clusters demonstrate the capacity of locally driven industries to generate employment and stimulate economic development.

Despite the resilience of these enterprises, several scholars have identified structural challenges facing Nigeria's textile sector. Okeke and Eze (2020) argue that the influx of imported fabrics has significantly undermined local textile production by creating intense price competition. Similarly, Adebayo and Akinyemi (2019) suggest that the decline of large-scale textile manufacturing has forced many workers to transition into informal production systems where resources and institutional support may be limited.

Overall, the literature reveals that clothing and textiles occupy a complex position within contemporary sustainability debates. While the global fashion industry continues to face criticism for its environmental impact, traditional textile systems offer valuable insights into alternative production models that integrate cultural heritage, economic livelihood, and environmental responsibility. However, the sustainability of these systems depends on supportive policies, consumer awareness, and the preservation of artisanal knowledge.

Methodology

This investigation employs a qualitative and interpretive methodology to explore the relationship between clothing, textiles, and family sustainability in Nigeria. Instead of utilising quantitative data collection techniques, the study relies on a comprehensive review and critical analysis of existing scholarly literature, policy documents, and recorded case studies concerning Nigerian textile production and sustainable fashion practices. By adopting this approach, the research is able to synthesise multiple perspectives and identify recurring patterns and themes that shed light on the role of textiles in sustaining family livelihoods.

Qualitative research methods are particularly appropriate for studies that seek to understand social phenomena within their cultural and contextual settings. In the case of textile production, many of the relevant processes—such as skill transmission, cultural symbolism, and family participation—cannot easily be measured through numerical indicators. Instead, these phenomena require interpretive analysis that considers historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is grounded in the broader theory of sustainable development. Sustainable development refers to development practices that meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2015). Within the context of clothing and textiles, sustainability involves the integration of three interconnected dimensions: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability.

Environmental sustainability relates to the responsible use of natural resources and the reduction of pollution associated with textile production. In traditional Nigerian textile systems, environmental sustainability can be observed in practices such as natural dyeing techniques, small-scale production, and the reuse of textile materials.

Economic sustainability concerns the capacity of production systems to provide stable livelihoods and economic opportunities for individuals and communities. Family-based textile enterprises contribute to this dimension by generating income through tailoring, weaving, and garment production. Social sustainability refers to the preservation of cultural heritage, social cohesion, and knowledge transmission across generations. Indigenous textile practices play a significant role in maintaining cultural identity and community traditions, particularly when skills are passed down within families.

By examining clothing and textile practices through these three sustainability dimensions, the study seeks to demonstrate how family-based production systems contribute to broader development objectives. The framework also highlights the potential of traditional textile practices to inform contemporary sustainability strategies within the fashion industry.

Through the integration of literature analysis and conceptual reflection, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how clothing and textiles function not only as material goods but also as dynamic socio-economic and cultural systems that support family sustainability in Nigeria.

Clothing Production as a Family Livelihood System

Across Nigeria, clothing production is deeply embedded within family livelihood structures. Unlike large-scale industrial manufacturing systems that separate labour from domestic life, many Nigerian textile enterprises operate within small workshops or household environments where economic activities and family relationships intersect. This integration of family and production reflects a long-standing pattern in which households function not only as units of social reproduction but also as centres of economic activity.

Scholars examining informal economic systems in Africa have emphasized that family-based enterprises often play a critical role in sustaining livelihoods, particularly in contexts where formal employment opportunities remain limited (Afolayan & Aina, 2019). In Nigeria, tailoring and garment production represent one of the most accessible forms of entrepreneurship. Establishing a tailoring business typically requires relatively modest capital investment compared to other forms of manufacturing. As a result, many individuals and families view tailoring as a viable pathway to economic independence.

Within these family enterprises, labour is typically distributed according to skill levels and experience. For instance, a father or senior artisan may specialize in garment cutting and pattern design, while other family members focus on sewing, finishing, or customer relations. Women frequently play crucial roles in sewing, embroidery, and quality control processes, while younger members may assist with ironing, packaging, or marketing garments. This collaborative arrangement enables households to maximize productivity while strengthening family bonds.

The apprenticeship system further reinforces the role of clothing production as a family-

centered livelihood strategy. Apprenticeship has long served as one of the most important mechanisms through which vocational skills are transmitted in Nigeria. Young people, often introduced through family connections, spend several years learning tailoring techniques under experienced artisans. During this training period, apprentices contribute labour to the workshop while gradually acquiring technical expertise and entrepreneurial knowledge.

Researchers have observed that apprenticeship systems not only facilitate skill development but also function as informal social protection mechanisms. Apprentices typically receive accommodation, meals, and mentorship from their masters, creating relationships that resemble extended family structures (Akinwale, 2018). Upon completing their training, many apprentices establish their own workshops, sometimes with financial assistance from their mentors or relatives. This process generates new employment opportunities while expanding the network of family-based textile enterprises.

The garment production cluster in Aba, located in Abia State, provides a striking example of how family-based clothing enterprises contribute to local economic development. The Ariaria International Market hosts thousands of small garment workshops that produce a wide range of clothing items, including shirts, trousers, school uniforms, and fashion garments. These workshops supply markets across Nigeria and neighbouring countries, demonstrating the significant economic potential of locally driven textile production (Eze & Ogbo, 2018).

Within the Aba cluster, many businesses operate as family enterprises where

responsibilities are distributed among relatives. A typical workshop may involve a husband responsible for cutting patterns, a spouse who manages sewing operations, and children who assist with finishing and marketing garments. In some cases, extended family members migrate to Aba to participate in the garment trade, thereby expanding household income streams. The success of such enterprises illustrates how clothing production can support family resilience and economic mobility.

Similar patterns can be observed in other parts of Nigeria where traditional textile practices remain active. In weaving communities across southwestern Nigeria, families often collaborate in producing Aso-Oke fabrics. Elderly artisans teach younger family members how to prepare yarns, operate looms, and assemble woven strips into larger cloths. These activities not only generate income but also reinforce cultural continuity by ensuring that traditional weaving techniques are passed down through generations.

In northern Nigeria, dyeing practices associated with the historic Kano dye pits also demonstrate the integration of textile production with family livelihoods. Families involved in indigo dyeing often manage small enterprises where knowledge of dye preparation, fabric immersion, and colour finishing is transmitted through oral tradition and hands-on training. Such practices reflect a long-standing relationship between cultural heritage and economic sustainability.

From a broader perspective, these examples highlight how clothing production serves as a critical mechanism for supporting family livelihoods in Nigeria. By combining entrepreneurial initiative, traditional knowledge, and collaborative labour, families

transform textile production into a dynamic system that supports economic survival and social cohesion.

Indigenous Textile Traditions and Cultural Heritage

Nigeria's indigenous textile traditions represent an important intersection between culture, livelihood, and identity. Long before the introduction of mechanised textile manufacturing and imported fabrics, communities across the region developed sophisticated techniques for producing cloth from locally available resources. These practices were often organised within family units and community networks, where the knowledge of spinning, weaving, dyeing, and embellishment was transmitted from one generation to another through observation, participation, and apprenticeship. Consequently, textile production became deeply embedded in the cultural and economic fabric of Nigerian society.

One of the most widely recognised indigenous textile traditions is the production of Adire cloth among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. Adire refers to indigo-dyed fabrics created using resist-dyeing techniques that produce distinctive patterns and motifs. Historically, women played a dominant role in Adire production, managing various stages of the process including fabric preparation, pattern creation, dyeing, and finishing. Scholars have observed that the Adire industry in cities such as Abeokuta historically provided employment for numerous families and contributed significantly to local trade networks (Soaga & Opeolu, 2018). The patterns produced through tying, stitching, or starch resist

techniques often carried symbolic meanings that reflected social values, spiritual beliefs, or community narratives.

In addition to Adire, the Yoruba region is also known for the production of Aso-Oke, a handwoven fabric traditionally worn during important ceremonies such as weddings, festivals, and chieftaincy celebrations. Aso-Oke weaving is typically carried out on narrow horizontal looms, producing long strips of fabric that are later sewn together to form wider garments. The weaving process requires a high level of skill and patience, and families involved in this craft often maintain specialised knowledge regarding yarn preparation, loom operation, and fabric finishing. The production of Aso-Oke demonstrates how traditional textile practices can serve both cultural and economic purposes, as the fabrics are valued not only for their aesthetic qualities but also for their cultural symbolism.

In southeastern Nigeria, Akwete weaving represents another important indigenous textile tradition. Practised primarily by women in Akwete communities in Abia State, this craft produces richly coloured fabrics featuring geometric patterns and symbolic motifs. The weaving techniques associated with Akwete cloth have been preserved for generations, often within family structures where mothers train daughters in the craft. Researchers have noted that such practices contribute to cultural continuity while providing a means of economic support for households (Oyetunde & Adebayo, 2019).

Northern Nigeria also possesses a long history of textile production, particularly through the use of indigo dyeing in the historic Kano dye pits. These dye pits, which have existed for centuries, represent one of the oldest surviving textile dyeing traditions

in West Africa. Families involved in the dyeing trade historically processed cotton fabrics that were traded across trans-Saharan routes, connecting local producers with regional and international markets. The continuity of these practices illustrates how indigenous knowledge systems can endure despite significant economic and technological changes.

Beyond their economic value, these textile traditions serve as important expressions of cultural identity. Clothing in many Nigerian communities communicates social information about status, ethnicity, occupation, and ceremonial participation. For example, particular styles of Aso-Oke garments may indicate the social standing of individuals during traditional ceremonies, while specific Adire motifs may convey symbolic meanings recognised within particular cultural contexts.

In recent years, scholars and cultural practitioners have expressed concern about the declining visibility of some indigenous textile traditions due to the increasing dominance of imported fabrics and modern fashion trends. However, renewed interest in cultural heritage and sustainable fashion has begun to stimulate efforts aimed at revitalising traditional textile practices. Designers, researchers, and cultural institutions are increasingly exploring ways to integrate indigenous fabrics into contemporary fashion while preserving the authenticity of traditional techniques.

These developments highlight the enduring relevance of Nigeria's textile heritage. By sustaining family livelihoods, preserving cultural knowledge, and offering environmentally responsible production methods, indigenous textile traditions

continue to play a vital role in the broader discourse on sustainability and development.

Sustainability Dimensions of Family-Based Textile Practices

The concept of sustainability within the clothing and textile sector encompasses environmental, economic, and social dimensions. In recent decades, scholars and policy makers have increasingly recognised that the fashion industry exerts significant environmental pressures due to resource consumption, waste generation, and pollution associated with textile production (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Consequently, the search for sustainable alternatives has drawn attention to traditional production systems that often rely on smaller-scale operations, locally sourced materials, and more resource-efficient techniques.

Within the Nigerian context, many family-based textile enterprises naturally incorporate elements of sustainability, even if these practices are not formally framed within academic sustainability discourse. For instance, traditional weaving and dyeing activities often operate on a small scale that limits excessive resource consumption. Artisans typically produce fabrics according to market demand rather than engaging in mass production, thereby reducing the likelihood of unsold inventory and textile waste.

Another aspect of sustainability relates to the efficient use of materials. Tailoring workshops across Nigeria frequently repurpose fabric remnants into smaller clothing items, accessories, or household textiles. This practice reflects an informal circular economy in which materials are reused and extended through multiple stages of production and consumption. Researchers

studying sustainable consumption patterns have noted that practices such as repair, reuse, and modification of garments can significantly reduce the environmental impact of clothing production (Laitala & Klepp, 2018).

Environmental sustainability has increasingly been associated with the revival of natural dyeing practices. Although synthetic dyes have gained widespread use due to their convenience and affordability, natural dyes derived from plants such as indigo are recognised as environmentally friendly alternatives. Researchers note that some artisans and designers have begun to reintroduce natural dyeing techniques as part of broader initiatives to advance sustainable fashion in Nigeria.

From an economic standpoint, family-based textile enterprises have been shown to contribute to sustainability by generating reliable sources of household income. In contexts where unemployment remains high and formal job opportunities are scarce, small-scale textile production provides a viable route for economic participation. Afolayan and Aina (2019) observe that such enterprises play a crucial role in sustaining livelihoods and reducing vulnerability among low-income households.

Social sustainability represents another important dimension of family-based textile practices. These enterprises facilitate the transmission of knowledge and skills across generations, ensuring that cultural traditions remain vibrant and relevant. The apprenticeship system, which remains a prominent feature of Nigeria's vocational training landscape, enables young people to acquire practical skills while participating in productive economic activities.

Furthermore, the involvement of women in textile production contributes to gender empowerment and household stability. In many communities, women manage dyeing enterprises, weaving cooperatives, or tailoring businesses that provide financial resources for family welfare. Such activities enhance women's economic agency while strengthening family resilience.

Pulling all these together, the environmental, economic, and social dimensions illustrate how family-based textile practices contribute to broader sustainability goals. By integrating traditional knowledge with contemporary innovation, Nigerian textile enterprises possess very significant potential to support sustainable development.

Challenges Facing Family Textile Livelihoods

Despite the resilience of family-based textile enterprises, numerous challenges continue to threaten their sustainability. One of the most significant issues is the influx of imported fabrics and second-hand clothing into Nigerian markets. These imports often sell at lower prices than locally produced textiles, making it difficult for small-scale producers to compete. Researchers have observed that the dominance of imported fabrics has contributed to the decline of many local textile industries (Okeke & Eze, 2020).

Another challenge involves the proliferation of imitation fabrics that replicate traditional Nigerian designs but are produced abroad using industrial methods. These imitations are frequently marketed at lower prices, reducing demand for authentic handcrafted textiles. As a result, artisans who rely on traditional production methods may struggle to maintain sustainable income levels.

Limited access to finance also represents a significant barrier for many family-based enterprises. Because many textile businesses operate within the informal sector, they often lack the documentation or collateral required to secure loans from formal financial institutions. This limitation restricts their ability to invest in improved equipment, expand production capacity, or adopt environmentally sustainable technologies.

Furthermore, shifting cultural attitudes among younger generations sometimes discourage participation in traditional crafts. Urbanisation and changing career aspirations have led many young people to pursue alternative occupations rather than continuing family textile traditions. Without deliberate efforts to preserve and promote these skills, there is a risk that valuable cultural knowledge may gradually disappear.

Implications for Sustainable Development

Recognising the role of clothing and textiles in family sustainability offers valuable insights for policy and development initiatives. Supporting small-scale textile enterprises can contribute to poverty reduction, cultural preservation, and environmentally responsible production. Policies that provide training programs, microfinance opportunities, and market access for local artisans could significantly enhance the viability of these enterprises.

Moreover, integrating sustainability education into fashion and textile training institutions can encourage emerging designers and artisans to adopt environmentally responsible practices. Collaboration between academic institutions, government agencies, and artisan communities may foster innovation while preserving traditional knowledge.

Ultimately, clothing and textile production in Nigeria represents more than an economic activity; it is a dynamic system that connects culture, livelihood, and sustainability. Strengthening this system requires acknowledging the central role that families play in maintaining and transmitting textile knowledge and entrepreneurial practices.

Conclusion

Clothing and textiles remain central to sustaining families and communities throughout Nigeria. Through practices such as weaving, dyeing, tailoring, and garment production, households generate income while simultaneously preserving cultural traditions that have evolved over centuries. Scholars have highlighted that these activities exemplify the interconnectedness of economic survival, cultural identity, and environmental responsibility within the Nigerian textile sector.

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that family-based textile enterprises make a significant contribution to sustainable development. Researchers argue that such enterprises provide employment opportunities, facilitate the transmission of knowledge across generations, and encourage environmentally responsible production practices. These findings suggest that textiles function not only as economic assets but also as cultural and ecological resources.

Taken together, the literature illustrates that Nigerian textiles embody a multidimensional model of sustainability. Household-level production systems reinforce livelihoods, safeguard cultural heritage, and promote ecological responsibility. By merging economic resilience with cultural continuity and environmental stewardship, family-based textile enterprises exemplify how local

practices can advance broader sustainable development goals. Indigenous textile traditions such as Adire, Aso-Oke, Akwete weaving, and the dyeing practices associated with the Kano dye pits exemplify how cultural heritage and economic livelihood can coexist within sustainable production systems.

However, the sustainability of these enterprises is threatened by several challenges, including the dominance of imported fabrics, limited access to finance, and changing consumer preferences. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from government institutions, educational organisations, cultural institutions, and industry stakeholders.

Recommendations

The recommendations proposed in this study are intended to strengthen the capacity of clothing and textile activities to contribute meaningfully to family sustainability in Nigeria. Because the sector operates at the intersection of livelihood generation, cultural preservation, and environmental responsibility, effective interventions must address multiple dimensions simultaneously. Expanding these recommendations provides a clearer understanding of how policy makers, educators, industry stakeholders, and communities can collaboratively ensure that the textile sector continues to support household resilience and sustainable development.

The first recommendation emphasises the importance of policy frameworks that actively support family-based textile enterprises. Across Nigeria, a significant proportion of textile production and garment-making activities occur within small and

medium-scale enterprises, many of which operate informally within households or community clusters. Tailoring workshops, local dyeing centres, weaving groups, and garment traders often rely on family labour and apprenticeship systems to sustain their operations. Despite their importance in generating employment and sustaining livelihoods, these enterprises frequently encounter structural barriers such as limited access to capital, inadequate infrastructure, and weak institutional support. Establishing supportive policy frameworks can therefore significantly enhance their productivity and long-term sustainability. Governments at federal, state, and local levels can introduce targeted microfinance schemes designed specifically for small-scale textile producers. Access to low-interest loans or cooperative credit facilities would enable families engaged in textile production to purchase improved equipment, invest in quality raw materials, and expand their businesses. In addition to financial support, policy initiatives should provide technical training programmes that enhance entrepreneurial and production skills. Such training could focus on modern design techniques, quality control, digital marketing strategies, and environmentally responsible production methods. When these forms of institutional support are combined with improved market access through trade fairs, exhibitions, and export promotion programmes, family-based textile enterprises can evolve from subsistence-level activities into sustainable and competitive micro-industries.

The second recommendation highlights the role of educational institutions in integrating sustainability principles and indigenous textile knowledge into fashion and design curricula. Universities, polytechnics, and vocational institutions play a crucial role in shaping the knowledge base and professional

outlook of future designers and textile practitioners. However, many fashion and textile programmes historically emphasised Western design trends and industrial production techniques while giving relatively limited attention to indigenous practices and sustainability considerations. Incorporating sustainability-oriented coursework into fashion education can address this imbalance and encourage students to develop environmentally responsible design practices. For example, curricula can include modules on sustainable materials, eco-friendly dyeing processes, waste reduction strategies, and the lifecycle assessment of garments. Equally important is the inclusion of indigenous textile knowledge within academic programmes. Nigeria possesses a rich heritage of textile traditions, including weaving, embroidery, resist dyeing, and hand-printing techniques that have been refined over generations. Teaching these techniques within formal educational settings can help preserve valuable cultural knowledge while enabling students to reinterpret traditional aesthetics within contemporary design contexts. Furthermore, collaborations between educational institutions and local artisans can provide students with practical exposure to traditional textile production processes. Such interactions not only enrich academic learning but also foster mutual knowledge exchange between artisans and emerging designers.

The third recommendation focuses on the potential of public–private partnerships to promote collaboration between traditional artisans and contemporary fashion designers. In many cases, local textile producers possess exceptional craftsmanship and cultural knowledge but lack access to large markets or modern branding strategies. Conversely, contemporary designers may have access to national or international markets but may not

fully utilise indigenous textile resources in their collections. Public–private partnerships can bridge this gap by facilitating collaborations that combine traditional craftsmanship with modern design innovation. Through such partnerships, artisans can supply handwoven or hand-dyed fabrics that designers transform into contemporary garments suitable for local and global markets. Government agencies, industry associations, and fashion councils can support these collaborations by organising design competitions, exhibitions, and innovation hubs that bring together artisans, designers, and investors. These initiatives can also enhance the visibility of Nigerian textiles on international platforms, contributing to cultural diplomacy and economic growth. When traditional fabrics such as Aso-Oke, Adire, and Akwete are incorporated into modern fashion collections, they gain renewed relevance among younger consumers while providing sustainable income opportunities for artisan communities. The fourth recommendation underscores the importance of consumer awareness in strengthening demand for locally produced and sustainable textiles. Consumer preferences play a decisive role in shaping production patterns within the fashion industry. If consumers primarily prioritise inexpensive imported garments, local producers may struggle to compete with mass-produced alternatives. However, when consumers develop an appreciation for locally produced textiles and recognise the social and environmental value embedded within them, they are more likely to support indigenous production systems. Awareness campaigns can therefore play a vital role in transforming consumer attitudes. Government agencies, cultural organisations, and media platforms can collaborate to highlight the cultural significance, craftsmanship, and sustainability benefits of Nigerian textiles. Documentary

programmes, social media campaigns, fashion exhibitions, and cultural festivals can showcase the stories behind traditional fabrics and the communities that produce them. By emphasising the environmental advantages of small-scale textile production—such as lower resource consumption and reduced industrial pollution—these campaigns can also encourage more environmentally conscious consumption habits. When consumers recognise that their purchasing choices directly support local families and cultural traditions, demand for sustainable textiles is likely to increase, thereby strengthening the economic viability of family-based production systems.

The final recommendation calls for the documentation and preservation of indigenous textile practices by government institutions and non-governmental organisations. Many traditional textile techniques are transmitted through oral instruction and apprenticeship systems rather than formal documentation. While this mode of knowledge transmission has sustained these traditions for centuries, it also makes them vulnerable to loss as older practitioners retire or pass away. Systematic documentation of indigenous textile knowledge can therefore play a crucial role in safeguarding these skills for future generations. Cultural heritage agencies, research institutions, and NGOs can undertake comprehensive documentation projects that record traditional weaving methods, dyeing techniques, symbolic motifs,

and production rituals associated with various textile traditions across Nigeria. These records may include written descriptions, photographic documentation, and video recordings of production processes. Such documentation not only preserves technical knowledge but also captures the cultural narratives and social meanings associated with textile production. In addition, documented materials can serve as valuable educational resources for researchers, students, designers, and cultural historians. When indigenous knowledge is carefully preserved and disseminated, it can inspire innovation while ensuring that the cultural foundations of textile production remain intact.

Pulling all these together, these recommendations highlight the interconnected roles of policy support, education, industry collaboration, consumer awareness, and cultural preservation in strengthening the contribution of clothing and textiles to family sustainability in Nigeria. By implementing these strategies in a coordinated manner, stakeholders can create an enabling environment in which traditional textile practices continue to thrive while adapting to contemporary economic and environmental challenges. Such efforts will not only sustain family livelihoods but also preserve Nigeria's rich textile heritage and promote more sustainable patterns of production and consumption within the fashion industry.

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