

MADE IN ABIA

FROM CRAFT TO COMMERCE



ORGANISED BY:



POWERED BY:





Welcome to Made in Abia

Made in Abia is a one-day showcase of Abia State's creative economy, presented in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

Hosted by 234Finance and the Black History & Lifestyle Awards (BHLLA), in partnership with the Abia State Government, the showcase brings Abia's heritage, enterprise, manufacturing, creativity and investment potential to an international audience of diaspora investors, policymakers, media, cultural leaders and potential partners.

Together, these stories provide an entry point into a much broader ecosystem of artisans, designers, manufacturers, entrepreneurs and businesses creating and producing across Abia.

Made in Abia is about taking that story from craft to commerce - creating new connections around market access, partnerships and investment, while keeping the people behind the products at the centre.



Leadership

The people representing Abia State at Made in Abia



Dr Alex Chioma Otti, OFR

Executive Governor of Abia State



Engr. Ikechukwu Emetu

Deputy Governor of Abia State



Mrs Priscilla Chidinma Otti

Wife of the Executive Governor of Abia State



Mr Chinenye Mba-Uzoukwu

Principal Secretary / Chief Strategy Officer

Leadership

Creative leadership and the organisations behind the showcase



Hon. Matthew C. Ekwuribe

Executive Governor of Abia State



Engr. Peter Ifendu Ukonu

Director-General, Abia State Technological Skills Acquisition Centre (ATSAC)



Eziada Folashade Balogun

Founder, Black History & Lifestyle Awards



Ezinne Nwazulu

Managing Partner, 234Finance



Order of Programme

10:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Arrival / Registration
11:00 AM – 11:10 AM	Opening Prayer
11:10 AM – 11:15 AM	National Anthem
11:10 AM – 11:15 AM	Welcome Address
11:30 AM – 12:00 PM	Akwete Fashion Showcase
12:00 PM – 12:30 PM	Presentation: Akwete and Aba-Made Products, The Abia Story
12:30 PM – 1:15 PM	Panel 1: Who Owns a Tradition? Akwete, Authorship and the Age of AI
1:15 PM – 1:27 PM	Made in Abia Documentary
1:27 PM – 2:12 PM	Panel 2: From Cloth to Category: Positioning Akwete for the World
2:12 PM – 2:47 PM	Fireside Chat: From Household Looms to a Heritage Centre and Production Hub
2:47 PM – 3:32 PM	Interactive Question & Answer Session
3:32 PM – 3:57 PM	Goodwill Messages
3:57 PM – 4:12 PM	Vote of Thanks
4:12 PM – 4:32 PM	Keynote Address
4:32 PM – 5:57 PM	Official Photograph / Networking



Abia - Where Enterprise Meets Creativity

Abia is a state with a deep cultural heritage and a long tradition of enterprise. Across its communities are distinct histories, festivals, traditional arts, craftsmanship and cultural practices, alongside a strong culture of trade, agriculture, manufacturing and entrepreneurship.

For Made in Abia at UNGA, the spotlight is on two expressions of that larger Abia story: Akwete textiles and Aba-made products.

In Akwete, Ukwa East, generations of women have sustained a distinctive hand-weaving tradition, passing knowledge of the loom, patterns and techniques from one generation to another. Today, Akwete cloth represents both a living heritage and an opportunity to build stronger connections between traditional craftsmanship, contemporary design and international markets.

In Aba, the story takes a different form. The city has built its reputation around enterprise and production, with networks of artisans, traders and manufacturers producing footwear, leather goods, garments and other consumer products.

These are not the only stories Abia has to tell. They are the stories Made in Abia at UNGA has chosen to bring into focus - Akwete for its heritage of handwoven craftsmanship, and Aba for the energy and ingenuity of its manufacturing community.

Together, they provide a window into a much larger Abia story: a state where culture, creativity, skill and enterprise continue to shape what people make and how they do business

Akwete - A Heritage Woven by Hand

A tradition shaped by women, ingenuity and generations of knowledge



In Akwete, an Ndoki community in Ukwa East Local Government Area of Abia State, weaving is more than a way of making cloth. It is a body of knowledge developed, preserved and passed from one generation of women to another.

Known for its wide handwoven form, rich use of colour and intricate patterns, Akwete cloth has a documented history stretching back well over a century. The tradition developed significantly during the nineteenth century as regional trade brought Akwete weavers into contact with new textiles, coloured yarns and design influences.

Dada Nwkwata and a Tradition of Innovation

At the centre of Akwete's weaving history is Dada Nwkwata, remembered as one of the great innovators of the craft. Historical accounts associate her with the development of the distinctive wide, single-panel cloth for which Akwete became known. Her story captures something essential about the tradition: innovation has long existed alongside inheritance.

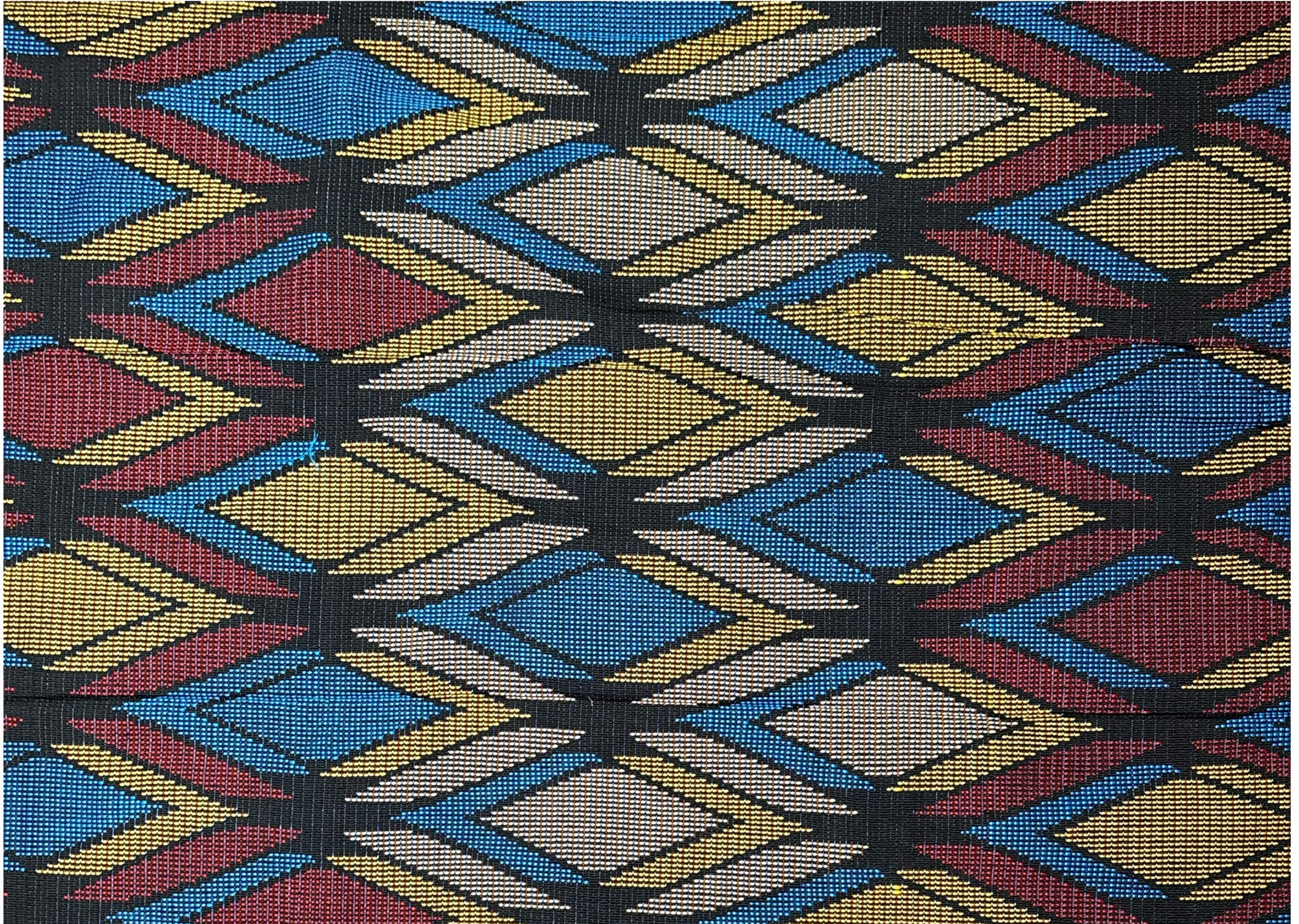
Woven and Preserved by Women

For generations, women have been at the heart of Akwete weaving. Younger girls learned by observing and working alongside mothers, grandmothers and experienced weavers. What passed between generations was not simply a method of production, but a visual language and a source of livelihood.

For generations, the women of Akwete have been not only the makers of the cloth, but the custodians of the knowledge behind it.

The Craft of Akwete

Where pattern is created on the loom, one thread at a time



One of the defining features of Akwete weaving is the wide upright or vertical loom. Unlike narrow-strip weaving traditions, the Akwete loom allows the weaver to create a broad panel of cloth as a single woven piece.

A loom is the equipment or frame used to weave threads together to make fabric. The warp - the vertical threads held under tension - forms the foundation. Horizontal weft threads are worked through the warp, while supplementary weft threads are introduced to create decorative patterns.

The pattern is not printed onto the fabric. It is created as the cloth itself is woven

A Language of Pattern

Chevrons, zigzags, diamonds and lozenges, stripes and other geometric forms appear alongside figurative motifs inspired by animals, objects and the world around the weaver. Materials and colours have evolved over time, but the defining principle remains: the design is constructed through weaving.

What We Have Done So Far

Our commitment to Akwete begins with the people who have kept the tradition alive. Since 2023, we have worked to give the weaving industry greater visibility, strengthen recognition of its cultural and economic value and open new conversations around its future.



Her Excellency Visits Akwete | 2026

Mrs Priscilla Chidinma Otti visited the women weavers in Akwete, meeting the women behind the looms and seeing their craftsmanship first-hand. During the visit, she described herself as the first serving First Lady of Abia State to visit the community and reaffirmed the commitment to promoting Akwete locally and internationally.

Akwete on the Global Stage | New York, 2025

During activities around the 80th United Nations General Assembly, Mrs Otti showcased Akwete fabric in New York, drawing international attention to the weaving heritage of Ndoki women and its connection to culture, women's enterprise and economic opportunity.

Promoting Akwete Beyond Abia

Akwete has increasingly been positioned as part of Abia's cultural and creative identity, with emphasis on expanding awareness beyond its traditional market and encouraging greater patronage of locally made textiles.

Keeping the Women at the Centre

Our approach recognises that Akwete's value begins with its makers - the women who preserve the knowledge, create the textiles and pass the craft to younger generations.

Our focus is not only on promoting Akwete cloth, but on ensuring that the women and community behind it remain central to its growth.



The Future of Akwete

Akwete is entering a new chapter — one that seeks to preserve the integrity of its centuries-old weaving tradition while creating the conditions for greater production, stronger livelihoods and wider market access

Her Excellency Visits Akwete | 2026

In July 2026, Nigeria's First Lady, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, CON, visited the Akwete Weaving Cooperative Society alongside Governor Alex Otti and Mrs Priscilla Otti.

The visit brought national attention directly to the home of Akwete weaving. The First Lady met the women, observed the weaving process and saw younger generations learning the craft. Mrs Otti described it as the first visit by a Nigerian First Lady to Akwete in support of its women weavers.

Building the Next Chapter

- **₦2 Billion Intervention**
Senator Oluremi Tinubu announced ₦2 billion towards the revitalisation of the Akwete weaving industry and pledged to promote the locally woven fabric.
- **Modern Production Hub**
Plans have been developed for a modern production hub for Akwete weavers, with a proposed partnership with the Office of the First Lady of Nigeria towards its development.
- **Protecting Authenticity**
Intellectual-property and trademark protection are part of the effort to safeguard the Akwete name, its origin and the knowledge behind the craft as it reaches wider markets.
- **Expanding Market Opportunities**
The next phase is to connect Akwete's heritage and craftsmanship with contemporary design, increased production and greater access to Nigerian and international markets.

Looking Ahead

Preserve the heritage. Protect the identity. Strengthen the women. Expand production. Reach new markets.

The future of Akwete is not about replacing tradition with modernity. It is about giving an indigenous craft and the women who have sustained it the platform, protection and opportunity to grow.

Aba - The Enterprise City

A city built on trade, skill and enterprise



Aba is the commercial heart of Abia State and one of Nigeria's best-known centres of indigenous manufacturing. Its reputation has been built over generations by traders, artisans, apprentices and entrepreneurs who have turned practical skills into businesses and businesses into production networks.

Long before Made in Aba became a recognised expression, the city had established itself as an important centre of commerce. Its history includes the Aba Women's War of 1929, one of the defining anti-colonial protests in Nigerian history, while its markets and trading networks continued to expand in the decades that followed.

Akwete on the Global Stage | New York, 2025

Aba's manufacturing story grew largely from the ground up. Small workshops, family businesses and apprenticeship systems created generations of shoemakers, tailors, leatherworkers and other skilled producers. The establishment of Ariaria International Market in the 1970s provided an important centre for this growing manufacturing community.

Over time, specialised production clusters emerged around Ariaria and other parts of Aba, bringing makers, suppliers, traders and buyers into the same commercial ecosystem.

Here, skills are learned by doing, businesses often begin on a small scale, and knowledge passes from master craftspeople to apprentices who eventually establish enterprises of their own.



Made in Aba

Made by skill. Built for market.

Behind the words Made in Aba is a vast network of artisans, manufacturers, designers, traders and entrepreneurs producing goods for customers within Nigeria and beyond.

Production is concentrated across specialised clusters, including Ariaria International Market, Shoe Plaza, Garment Village and other manufacturing areas across the city. Research mapping Aba's garment and leather industries identified distinct clusters for footwear, bags, mass-produced apparel and bespoke clothing

What Aba Makes

Footwear — shoes, sandals, slippers and boots

- Leather Goods — bags, belts, wallets and accessories
- Garments — ready-to-wear clothing, uniforms and bespoke fashion
- Textiles & Fashion Products
- Trunks, Boxes & Travel Goods
- Furniture & Upholstery
- Metal Fabrication & Machinery
- Cosmetics & Personal-Care Products
- Plastics & Household Products

The strongest international recognition remains around footwear, leather goods and garments — industries built around clusters of highly specialised makers. Contemporary reporting continues to identify these sectors as central to Aba's manufacturing economy.

From Workshop to Market

The Made in Aba ecosystem works because production and commerce exist side by side.

A shoemaker can source materials, produce within a specialised cluster and connect to traders supplying customers far beyond the city. Garment makers operate through similar networks, while generations of apprentices continue to enter these trades and establish businesses of their own. Products made in Aba are sold across Nigeria and also reach buyers elsewhere in West and Central Africa.

Footwear • Leather • Garments • Fashion • Lifestyle • Manufacturing

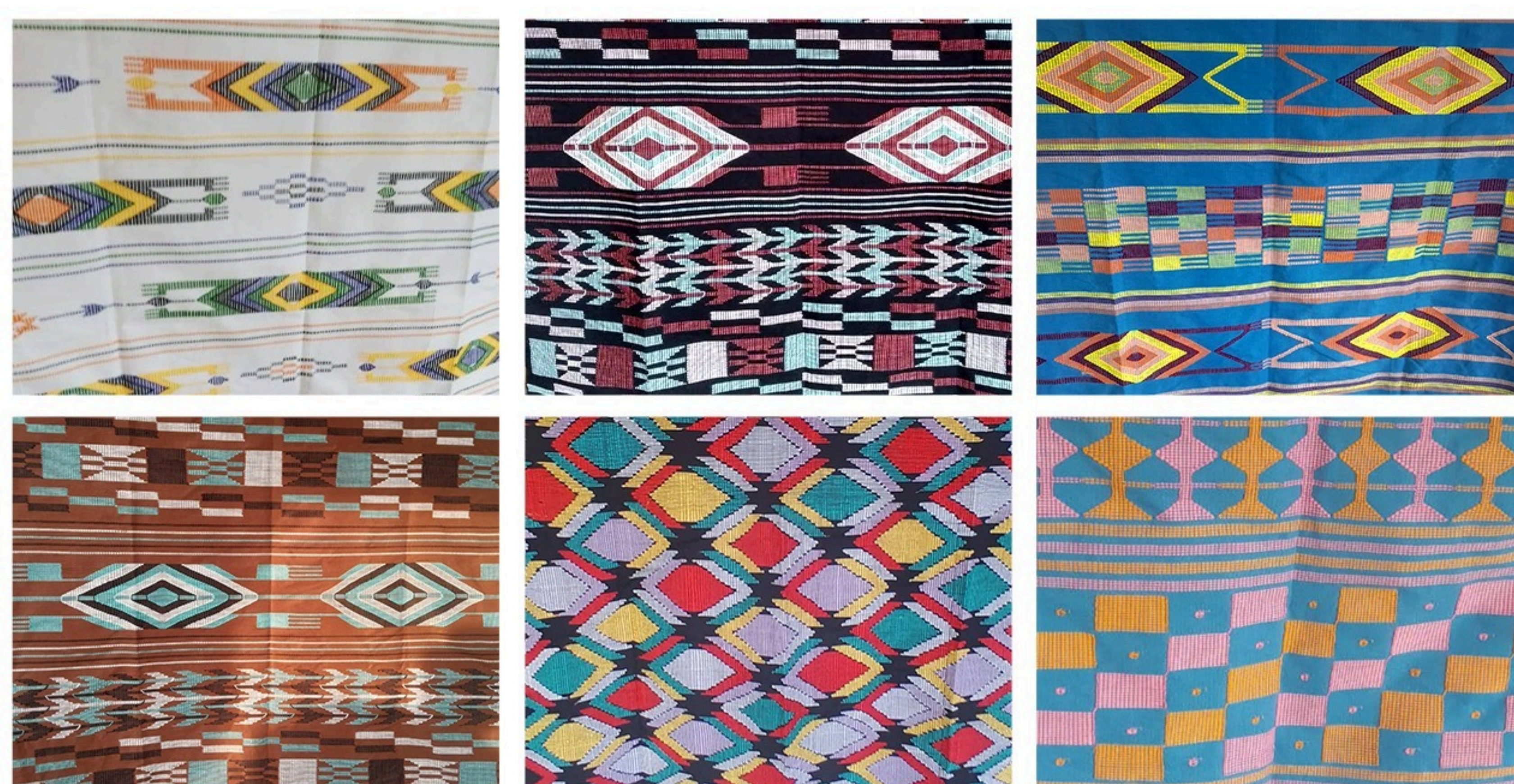
Made in Aba is ultimately about the people behind the products — the hands that cut, stitch, shape, assemble and finish them, and the entrepreneurial culture that has allowed those skills to become businesses.

Aba does not simply sell. Aba makes.

People Behind the Products - Meet the Makers

Ordor Patience Ugochi

Weaving Akwete has been a beautiful and rewarding journey for me. It has given me a source of income, strengthened my creativity, and deepened my connection to my culture. Every fabric I create reminds me that I'm not just weaving threads—I'm weaving stories, preserving heritage, and building something I'm be proud of.



Omofakpo Chinwenwa Olive

Weaving Akwete fabrics has helped me in many meaningful ways. It has given me a source of income while allowing me to turn my creativity and skills into something valuable.

It has also helped me preserve and promote our cultural heritage. Every piece I weave carries a story, tradition, and craftsmanship that can be passed on to the next generation.

Beyond business, weaving has taught me patience, discipline, creativity, and attention to detail. It has connected me with different people and opened opportunities to share the beauty of Akwete fabrics with a wider audience.

Most importantly, weaving Akwete has given me a sense of purpose and pride. I'm not just making fabrics, I'm helping to keep a beautiful cultural tradition alive while building something of my own.





People Behind the Products - Meet the Makers

Emmy Kasbit

My journey in fashion began growing up in Abia State and later studying in Calabar, where my fascination with clothing and garment-making gradually became a way to support myself through university.

In January 2014, I founded Emmy Kasbit with a simple vision: to create clothing for the unconventional man and woman. I developed my craft through internships, working with established designers and gaining practical experience in the industry.

A defining point in my journey came when I discovered a community of Akwete weavers in Abia State. While I understood the cultural connection as someone from the region, working directly with the artisans gave me a deeper appreciation of the craft.

I first introduced Akwete into my work during my debut Lagos Fashion Week season. What began as an effort to distinguish my work became a way to explore how a traditional handwoven textile could be brought into contemporary fashion without losing its identity.

Since then, Akwete has become an important part of the Emmy Kasbit story. I have continued working with artisans and exploring new ways to present the textile through tailoring, structured silhouettes and contemporary interpretations.

Every piece of Akwete carries the hands and knowledge of the person who made it. For me, the craft represents more than heritage. It represents continuity, and the possibility of giving something deeply rooted in where we come from a place in where we are going.



EMMY KASBIT

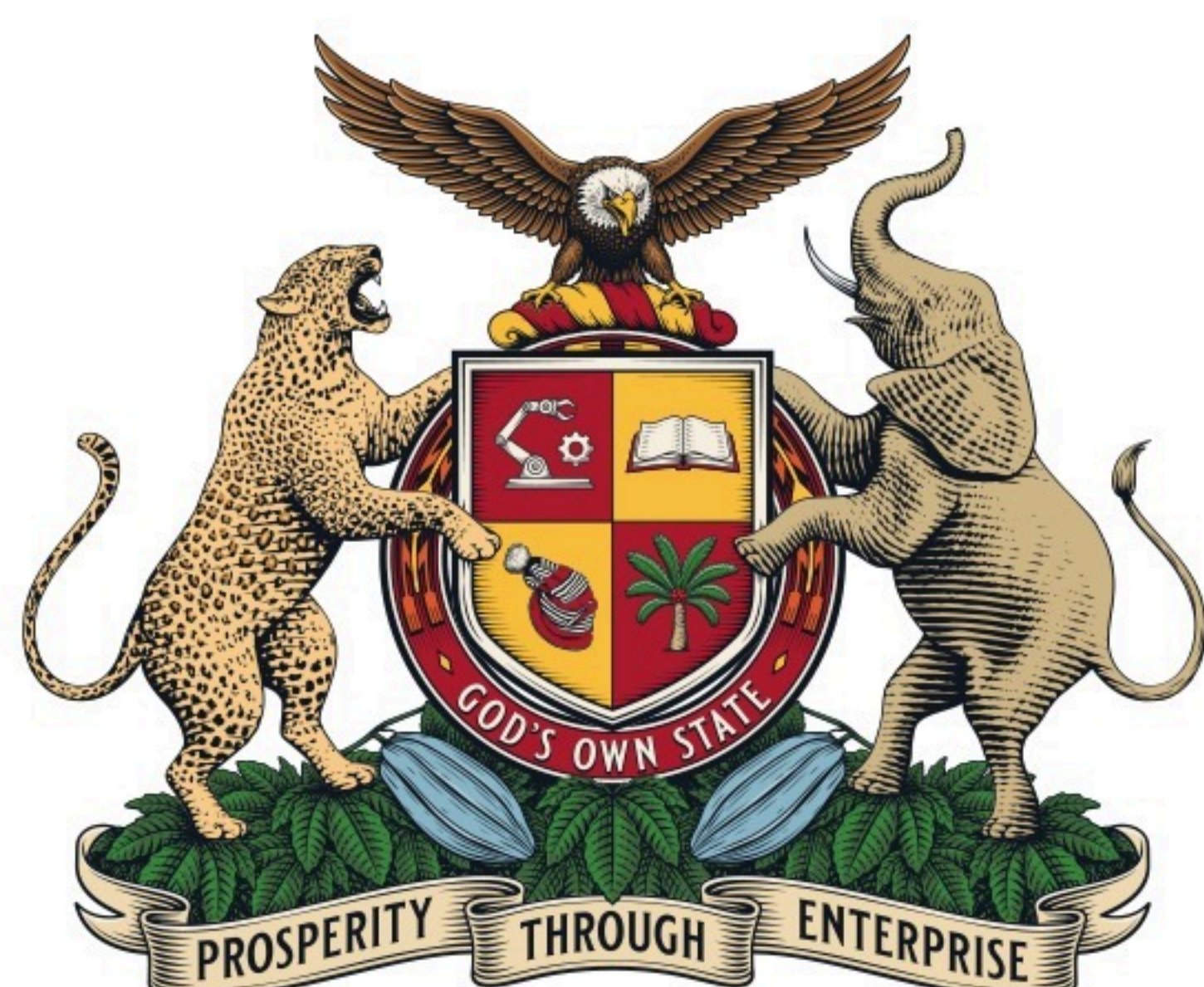


EMMY KASBIT





Partners, Credits & Acknowledgements



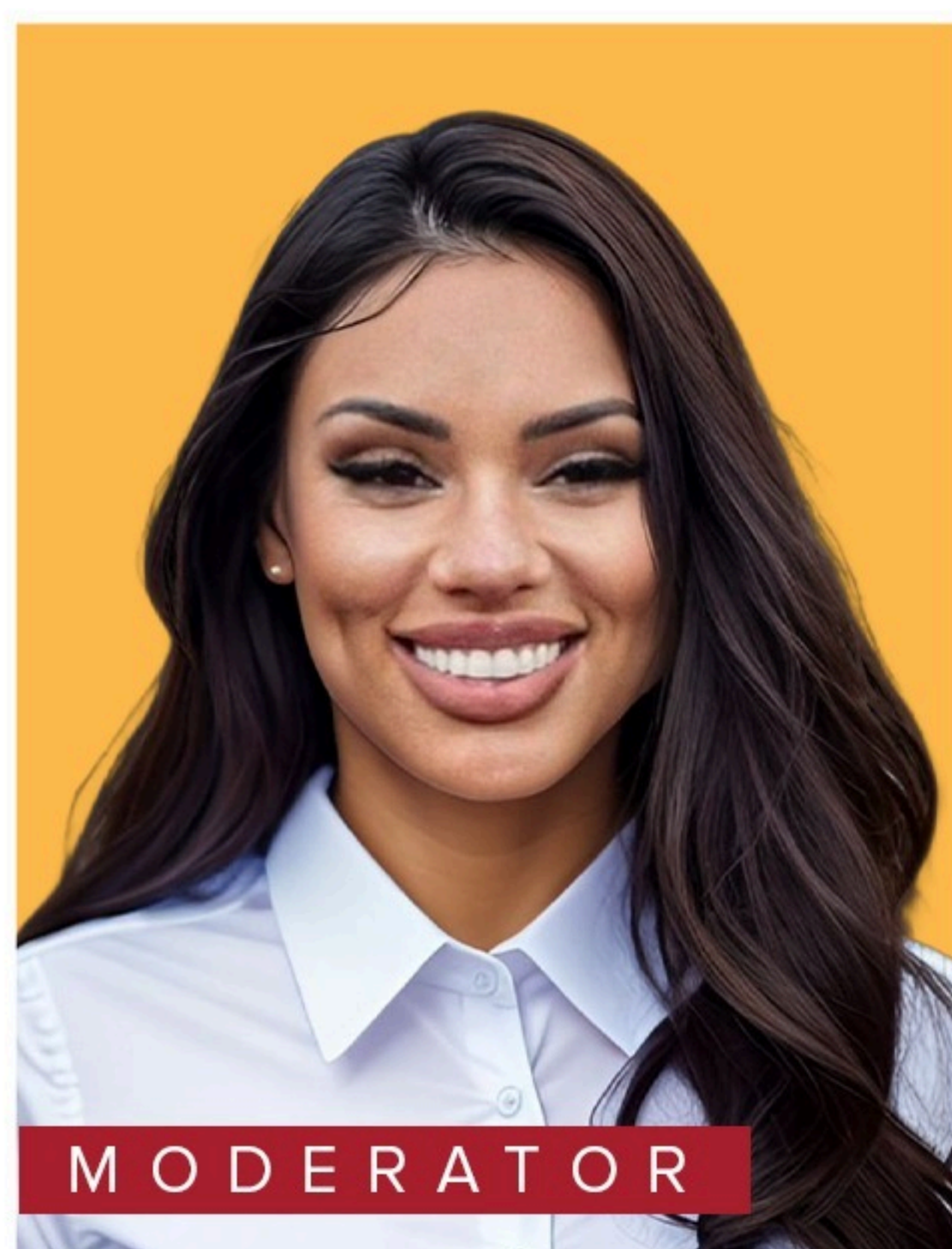
**Abia State
Government**



Panel 1:

Who Owns a Tradition?

Akwete, Authorship and the Age of AI



Charmaine Hayden
Strategic Facilitator &
Manufacturing Entrepreneur
Founder, Damal Garments Ltd.

Charmaine Hayden is a global strategist, investor and economic commentator with experience across venture capital, startup policy, board leadership and digital education. She has led investment strategy and capital deployment into sustainable and tech led ventures across Africa and steered foreign direct investment across Africa and the Caribbean.

As a micro angel with two successful exits, Charmaine brings a founder focused lens to early stage investing, with a strong instinct for identifying and supporting high growth businesses.

Beyond venture, she is a respected content creator who makes complex financial, economic and policy issues accessible to wider audiences, particularly women and underrepresented communities. She also holds several board roles, supporting international expansion, strategic partnerships and private sector collaboration,

Her work has been recognised by Forbes, the Financial Times and 40 Under 40 Africa.



Ugo Mozie
Couturier, Image Director,
Filmmaker & Founder,
Eleven Sixteen

Ugo Mozie is a Nigerian-American fashion stylist, creative director, and entrepreneur known for his culturally rich aesthetic, sustainable values, and global influence. Mozie has worked with style icons like Beyoncé, Justin Bieber, Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, Jon Batiste, Travis Scott, Maluma and Celine Dion, and served as U.S. PR Director for Vivienne Westwood. Ugo has custom designed a variety of Met Gala looks such as: Diana Ross, Alton Mason, Maluma with Versace and Hugo Boss, Lena Waithe with Versace, and Jeremy Pope with Balmain.

He is a huge champion for African fashion through his designs and in early 2024 launched his debut luxury fashion brand, Eleven Sixteen—an innovative label that blends African heritage with contemporary design. A sought-after speaker, Mozie has addressed cultural diversity and fashion business at institutions like Harvard, Oxford, and Columbia.



Panel 1:

Who Owns a Tradition?

Akwete, Authorship and the Age of AI



Peter Ifendu Ukonu

Director-General of the
Abia State Technological
Skills Acquisition Centre
(ATSAC)

Peter Ifendu Ukonu is the pioneer Director-General of the Abia State Technological Skills Acquisition Centre (ATSAC), where he leads the State's digital transformation, technology and artificial intelligence agenda, including digital infrastructure, emerging technology adoption and technology talent development.

He is also the Founder of Antly, a no-code AI Work Operating System that helps governments and enterprises automate workflows and improve decision-making. Antly has supported public-sector initiatives, including the World Bank's SABER programme.

Peter has contributed to major Nigerian government technology systems including Project Lighthouse, BIMMS, the National Asset Register, the FAAC Management Tool and the IT Project Clearance Portal. He also developed the Directive Tracking System and Executive Dashboard for the Office of the President and previously served as Ecosystem Development Manager for Software & Human Capital Development at the Office for Nigeria Content Development in ICT, supporting local technology capacity and talent development.



Ugonna Madueke

Strategic Facilitator &
Manufacturing
Entrepreneur | Founder,
Damal Garments Ltd.

Ezinne Nwazulu is a strategic business leader with over 13 years of experience across Energy, Finance and Digital Innovation in Africa and Europe.

She is the Managing Partner of 234Finance, where she champions African entrepreneurship through capacity building, mentorship, access to finance and cross-border business opportunities. Through 234Finance, she has disbursed over \$150,000 in grants and leads programmes including the Pan-African SME Bootcamp, mentorship programmes, masterclasses and exhibitions.

Ezinne began her career at Mercuria Energy Trading in Geneva, where she executed energy trades, before returning to Nigeria to launch Sterling Bank's Private Banking unit. She is also a recognised Mastercard Foundation Mentor and serves in leadership and advisory roles supporting entrepreneurship and family businesses.

Her work focuses on helping African entrepreneurs build stronger businesses, access capital and participate more effectively in regional and global markets.

Panel 1:

Who Owns a Tradition?

Akwete, Authorship and the Age of AI



Obi Asika

Director-General and
Chief Executive Officer
of the National Council for
Arts and Culture (NCAC)

Obi Asika is a creative industry leader and ecosystem builder with over two decades of experience spanning music, film, television, sports, technology and culture. He has played a significant role in advancing Nigeria's creative economy, soft power and cultural industries.

He is the founder of The Omniverse, a multi-sector collaboration platform connecting storytelling, technology and the creative industries. He also founded Storm 360/Storm Records, which played a key role in launching a generation of Nigerian artists and producing major television programmes including Big Brother Nigeria, The Apprentice Africa, Dragons' Den Nigeria and Naija Sings. He co-founded Social Media Week Lagos and has worked across major international sports and entertainment events.

In government and policy, Asika became Nigeria's first Presidential Senior Special Assistant on Digital Policy & Social Media in 2015. He has served on numerous government committees focused on culture, media, sports, tourism and the creative economy, including the technical working group for *Nigeria Agenda 2020–2050*.

He is also the founder of Iba Ajie, a cultural, arts and innovation hub in Onitsha, and co-convened the Africa Soft Power Project. He has served on the boards and advisory bodies of organisations including Africa No Filter, DAAR Communications and the Nigerian Olympic Committee.

Asika currently serves as Director-General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, where he continues to contribute to the development and positioning of Nigeria's cultural and creative industries.



Panel 2: From Cloth to Category: Positioning Akwete for the World



Ezinne Nwazulu
Managing Partner,
234Finance

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**Chinenye
Mba-Uzoukwu, fncs**
Principal Secretary to the
Governor & Chief Strategy
Officer of Abia State

Chinenye Mba-Uzoukwu is a technology strategist, digital transformation leader, entrepreneur and policy expert with nearly 30 years of experience across the private and public sectors.

He founded InfoGraphics Nigeria and led the company to five Microsoft Worldwide Partner Awards before joining Microsoft Corporation as General Manager for Anglophone West Africa and a member of the Microsoft WECA management team responsible for 53 countries. He later became Managing Partner of GrandCentral, leading digital transformation and entrepreneurial ecosystem projects across government and key sectors.

A Fellow of the Nigeria Computer Society and former President of the Institute of Software Practitioners of Nigeria, Mba-Uzoukwu has contributed to national initiatives including the Nigeria Startup Act and FG Agenda 2050. He is also an experienced investor in youth-led startups.



Panel 2: From Cloth to Category: Positioning Akwete for the World



Ramona Dunlap
Assistant Professor and
Assistant Chair, Fashion
Business Management,
Fashion Institute of
Technology (FIT)

Ramona Dunlap is a tenured Assistant Professor in the Fashion Business Management (FBM) Department at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). A recognised thought leader at the intersection of fashion, technology and emerging media, she regularly discusses artificial intelligence in the fashion industry. Her engagements include leading high-level policy discussions with U.S. congressional delegations, serving on FIT's AI in Instruction and Mentorship (AIM) Group, and offering commentary on AI representation in Vogue Business.

Before entering academia, Dunlap spent over 15 years as an executive and entrepreneur, directing brand marketing, strategy and business development for major global brands including Calvin Klein Underwear, DKNY and Hanesbrands. She previously served as Acting Assistant Chair of FBM at FIT NYC and Department Chairperson for FBM at SUNY Korea FIT in Songdo. Dunlap holds an MBA from NYU Stern School of Business and a BA in English from North Carolina A&T State University. She serves on the Corporate Advisory Board for RAISEfashion, supporting initiatives to advance equity across the fashion industry.



Bhushan Sethi
Partner, PwC and Adjunct
Professor, NYU Stern

Bhushan Sethi is a global business leader operating at the intersection of strategy, people, and policy. A Partner at PwC US Consulting, he is a recognized thought leader on globalization, future of work and AI, named among the Top AI Consultants and Leaders of 2026. He advises global clients on AI strategy and workforce transformation, and has recently presented at global forums including UN, IMF, WEF and India AI summit. Outside of PwC, he teaches Strategy Consulting at NYU Stern School of Business.

Fireside Chat: From Household Looms to a Heritage Centre and Production Hub



Cynthia Ivi Nwaubani
Founder & CEO Nwaubani
Holdings

Cynthia Nwaubani is the Founder and CEO of Wubani Holdings, a diversified holding company that builds and operates businesses across healthcare, logistics, real estate, financial technology, and agro-industrial development. Her operating thesis is that durable enterprise value and inclusive prosperity are the same strategy: disciplined capital, strong governance, and real pathways to opportunity for the frontline workers and communities those businesses serve.

Before founding Wubani, Cynthia spent more than a decade as a global investment and corporate banker, structuring and delivering billions of dollars in financing for companies with revenues of up to \$10 billion. At HSBC, she advised multinational enterprises operating in more than 60 countries on capital structure, risk governance, and cross-border growth. At Wells Fargo, she advised healthcare, real estate, and industrial companies on capital, liquidity, and expansion.

Cynthia earned her accounting degree at the University of Nigeria in Enugu and an MBA in Corporate Finance from Southern Methodist University's Cox School of Business in Dallas. She completed executive education at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and the ABA Stonier Graduate School of Banking, and is a Texas-licensed CPA.

She serves on the Global Board of 4word and the Board of Directors of WiNGS, and has mentored women entrepreneurs worldwide through the Institute for Economic Empowerment of Women. Her honors include the Dallas Business Journal Women in Business Award, the Texas Women's Foundation Young Leader Award, the Immigrant Journey Professional Excellence Award, and the SMU Women's Symposium Profiles in Leadership Award. She lives in Frisco, Texas, with her husband and three daughters.



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About Black History and Lifestyle Awards (BHLA)

The Black History and Lifestyle Award (BHLA) is a registered non-profit platform established in 2022 to drive strategic impact within the global Black community. Operating across Lagos, Los Angeles, and New York, BHLA serves as a catalyst for economic empowerment, professional excellence and cultural leadership — functioning as a professional network, think tank and creative economy convener, fostering strategic partnerships across business, government and community sectors globally.

