

Green Fashion Goes Global to Benefit the Developing World:

Reviving Uganda Through Sustainable Economic Development

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The current global environment, both figurative and literal, is like a galaxy of celestial bodies; each aspect growing, retracting, and pulling at each other with a gravitational-like force that makes even the most minute player of extreme importance to the whole. A country like Uganda may seem insignificant as a developing nation, but their expansion or collapse impacts all those within the global sphere, regardless of its size. As the nation moves forward, they must accurately plan the mode in which they get there, for the wrong choice could lead to unsustainable development, a trap often befalling poor economies in a rush to experience the promise of profit in global markets. By developing without consideration to the continuance of natural resources and the health of its people, countries fail to perpetuate their prosperity, leaving only environmental degradation and exhausted economic capital. If this is to be prevented, each country must use its resources and unique talents to develop accordingly.

The one factor that may be overlooked in this situation is that the methods in which environmental degradation is prevented and repaired can often encourage further advancement. Apparel companies have moved much of their production to developing nations, making the direction of the industry's concern imperative to these areas. Uganda's agrarian structure provides the perfect setup to grow sustainably while proving an excellent source for materials, production, and creativity to the ever "greening" global fashion market. The realization in the apparel industry of the growing popularity for responsible products, combined with a need in developing nations like Uganda for healthy, sustainable, economic growth, makes the concept timely for implementation within the country.

Part I: Eco-Development: The Function of a New Idea

A network of capitalism and industrialism has stretched itself across the globe, connecting both rising and mature economies. With this interaction comes a greater responsibility and a new set of challenges for economic growth. Heavy industrialization has long been assumed to be the ticket to economic success, but there has emerged a parallel shift in this logic (Kelleher and Klein 66). It is based on the theory that progress is measured in more than profit figures and gross domestic product (GDP) percentages. This concept, sustainable development, uses local tools and skills to create an industry of products and services that protect the environment while preserving human interests (Kelleher and Klein 95-96). Such “greening” of business is not an entirely new concept, but only in recent years has the trend come into mainstream popularity. While water, air, and land degradation have been transcending geographic borders for centuries, it took the realization of issues of a massive scale to force the issue to popular attention. With global warming now accepted as fact instead of a theory, and large scale environmentally catastrophes wrecking havoc across the globe, consumers and businesses alike are shifting their attentions toward making more informed decisions about product and practice. Currently there are limiting factors to developing in such a manner, but the rise of consumer demand, matched with proper implementation of methods can prove an excellent source of economic development.

There is little evidence of a historical benchmark for sustainable development. Growth has been typically associated with industrialization and the consumption of resources (Kelleher and Klein 66). The thought that an economy could develop without heavily consuming natural resources was considered ludicrous. The long established model was successful for countries like the United States afterall, but the consequences of that methodology are surfacing (Hawken

7). Excessive use of fossil fuels forms a dangerous mix with industrial and agricultural pollution; actively endangering and destroying many of the resources required for life, such as clean air and safe water (Kelleher and Klein 111). The problem has gone so far that it can no longer be ignored.

The silver lining is the increased concern stimulated in individuals by these circumstances. In an ever growing consumerist global economy, product selection is driven by the purchaser. Public reaction to environmental disaster has encouraged businesses to increase their offerings of eco-conscious items and services to meet the stipulations set forth by the consumer. And the demand is present. Where only 9.6% of waste was recycled in the United States in the 1980s, the figure has grown to 32%. Figures for 2006 place organic cotton sales at \$1 billion, and the purchasing of the resulting products is expected to total \$4.5 billion by 2009, leaping to \$6.8 billion by 2010 (Tran). With a steady growth rate of around 20% yearly for organic food sales and a 17% rise in 2005 for all organic products, the market is definitely trending in a greener direction (Nutrition Business Journal).

The demand for these products and services has created an opportunity for growth as industry can expand into this market and potentially do so with greater gusto than before. If developing nations and struggling economies can work themselves into the production circuit of environmentally friendly products, they may have a chance at quick growth without the mire of environmental consequences experienced elsewhere.

The United States has been trying to turn around job loss from the outsourcing crisis by involving itself in the “green” boom. Factories for solar cells, wind turbines, and biofuels are popping up around the country; replacing typical manufacturing jobs sent overseas and giving a shot in the arm to a drooping job market faced with layoff after layoff. An extremely beneficial

factor of this trend is that there is a growing need for workers at all levels, from the newly termed “green collar” factory workers, to environmentally conscious CEOs (Greenhouse). Taking advantage of these developments, companies now have a jump on the market, increasing their salability. This profits them not only economically, but does so in a manner that improves the local and global environment.

The issue that haunts eco-friendly manufacturers is that such products have traditionally been more expensive to produce, requiring special techniques or materials and experiencing profit loss from long lead times (WWD staff). If production requires too much investment, then low income communities will be unable to afford its setup, therefore missing out on its benefits. For example, in order to grow organic cotton with the same yields, six million additional acres of land would be necessary, actually increasing the cotton’s environmental impact and requiring more resources from the farmers that they just do not have (Robinson). Small agriculture can not seem to compete in this scenario, except that the principles of organic cultivation are better suited to traditional, scaled down production coupled with reduced consumption (Vossenaar). In fact, the world could use a healthy dose of lower consumption and farmers can still make a profit because of the premium that organic crops sell for.

The places most likely to benefit from these and other eco-development opportunities are nations in the developing world. The World Wildlife Fund, through their study of species work, has found that when communities work to protect biodiversity they can promote usable resources like fertile soil and clean water, thereby helping ensure their own economic future. Species protection programs in countries across Africa, Asia, and Central America have not only increased populations of endangered animals, but also aided the communities through the creation of jobs and social empowerment. Individuals act like park rangers and are paid to

monitor and control animal populations as well as protect habitat. There is also the benefiting of the whole region from eco-tourism that has sprouted up around the recovering wildlife. In 2002 alone, sea turtle tourism in Tortuguero, Costa Rica encouraged an estimated \$6.7 million in related income (Mekay).

Opposition to this idea exists, and comes from many arenas. Namibia is one of the countries mentioned by the World Wildlife Fund's study, with its efforts successfully going to fund local projects like roads, schools, and irrigation systems (Mekay), but others within the country claim the programs are not as effective as they could be. Since its independence in 1990 many pieces of promising environmental legislation have been enacted, but countless introduced plans have failed to take flight. These programs, mostly for biodiversity preservation, are not making headway because the essential systems of tourism do not exist. They lack the hotels and travel services needed to bring in and house visitors (Sasman). Further infrastructure building, education, and investments could help this process along. To fully realize their potential, the people have to understand the achievable benefits and have the enthusiasm to help themselves by participating in local and governmental efforts. They can do this with help from independent organizations, like the World Wildlife Fund, who work to educate, build partnerships, complete research, and encourage action (WWF), in combination with efforts from within the country in the form of community based organizations and government support.

Despite opposition and rough starts, there are many positive effects to be explored within eco-development. By following the direction of consumer demand toward "green" products, companies can remain profitable in today's competitive global markets, at the same time creating jobs and helping the environment. Organic agriculture produces exportable product that can break developing nations into the global market, and nature preservation efforts provide

opportunities for local communities to produce income through eco-tourism. Environmental strategy that could aid in these endeavors has been slow to implement in developing nations because the infrastructure must exist to support and enforce it, but with changing opinions and outside encouragement, these ideas could be the key to their future. The result is healthily advancing cultures and a positive impact on global environmental issues.

Part II: Fashion for Eco-Development in Uganda

One industry that has the influence to make huge strides in promoting the agenda of economic development through sustainability is the fashion industry. It makes so much sense, as it is probably one of the largest offenders of environmental and social disregard. With increasing global concern, apparel and textile companies are waking up to the notion that developing nations are viable, albeit vulnerable, suppliers. As a historically based cotton producer, Uganda is an ideal candidate for environmentally and socially conscious apparel producers to begin sourcing from because the infrastructure is already in place. The switch comes only in adapting to sustainable production methods. This is not much of a stretch because more traditional methods are still prevalent, and the cessation of longstanding conflict has provided the perfect opportunity to rebuild and improve the system (Kwa). Foreign investors have already begun sampling the market with success (Zachary), and designers have found further value in Uganda as a manufacturer of their apparel items (Binkley). If such nations can become known for their sustainable supply and manufacture, they will have a selling point that will continue to make them unique and attractive to big contractors in other countries.

Uganda has been a place of much turmoil in the past. The northern region of the country has been embroiled in a twenty-one year civil conflict between the Ugandan government forces and those of the rebel LRA (Lord's Resistance Army). The radical group considers itself in part

a Christian movement and is made up of people of the Acholi ethnic group (Reuters). The Acholi were, in history, relegated to farm labor and the military, while their southern counterparts received education and better vocational opportunities. Then along came Joseph Kony, who formed the LRA to fight back the repression of his people. Unfortunately, Kony's bizarre tactics and brutal policies wreaked havoc across the north, killing many, forcing others into his service and devastating the farmlands on which most people made their living (Gettleman). When most of the population fled to refugee camps, the economy ground to a halt and food supplies ran short, as there was no one to farm the land that had been ravaged and left unusable. A once thriving agrarian industry was reduced to non-existence by conflict and poor governance (Zachary).

Eastern Africa relies heavily on its agricultural viability, making up almost half of its exports (Butler). As a country that has a large portion of its exports being agricultural products, Uganda was hard hit by these circumstances, especially in their cotton sector. There has been growth since conflict slowed, but the use of subsidies in industrialized nations is keeping Ugandan farmers from breaking into the market (Butler). By funding domestic farmers, nations like the U.S. can keep their prices low, giving them the edge over small farmers in countries with less economic clout. These developments have blocked African producers from taking a lead in textile production for the apparel market (Zachary).

There are also more subtle ways Uganda is being pressured by foreign competition. The American company Monsanto is seeking to further its growing monopoly of the seed industry by lobbying for intellectual property laws on their hybrid and genetically modified (GM) seeds. The Plant Variety Protection Bill that is currently up for consideration in the Ugandan parliament seeks to favor the seed companies by imposing strict restrictions on the use of GM seed, mainly

disallowing its reuse and the further hybridization of it. Uganda has a strong cultural tie to the trading of seed for planting, but because it is the intellectual property of Monsanto, this is not allowed. Small farmers must buy new seed each season instead of saving some back from their harvest for replanting. Local farmers are speaking out against such a system because the majority do not have the funds or transportation to continually go back to market for new seed (Kwa).

Ironically, these seeds were promised to be the savior of countries like Uganda. In 2007, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, a partnership of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melina Gates Foundation, in an effort to stimulate this economic sector in Africa, gave \$150 million to develop hybrid seed research, supply chemical fertilizers, teach water management, and stimulate seed propagation (Kwa). While this may sound extremely generous and supportive, it is actually verging on counterproductive. Contained within the issues with reserving seed crop, the technology proposed may be beyond the communities to afford, forcing dependence on continual support from wealthy nations (Kelleher & Klein 136). Small farms do not have the collateral for loans and barely make enough to keep their operations going. They do not have the means to purchase modern farming aides unless given direct funding to do so. Tack onto that fertilizers and equipment and there is no way local farmers can make these adjustments on their own (Kwa). A tractor is no good if one can not afford the diesel to make it run or the parts to maintain it. In fact, the technology fails to meet expectations in many areas, as indigenous plant varieties are naturally more resilient to native conditions and traditional methods have better soil management for the region (Kwa).

In addition to efficiency concerns, one must also consider long-term aspects of these “advancements.” Even if the farmers can find the funding to supply fuel for farm equipment,

mechanization takes jobs away from farmers, as it makes the process less labor intensive. Polluting emissions from the vehicles directly affect quality of life by posing health risks and contributing to global warming (U.S. EPA). Furthermore, Chemical fertilizers and poor soil management destroy the land and cause additional ailments in humans. They allow for multiple harvests, but this depletes the soil quickly and crops will suffer later without more and more chemical additives (Kwa). Additional chemicals like pesticides leach into land and water systems, resulting in chronic health conditions ranging from tumors and nervous disorders to birth defects and infertility (Penn State 2). It is a matter of what price is to be paid for a better economic future. A more nuanced approach is needed if the appropriate technology is to be implemented in Uganda, and essential investments from developed nations will be needed for the country to make that quick of a logistical jump. If the tool is going to collapse later prospects, then the system lacks the one feature of an inexhaustible economy: sustainability.

Sustainable development is more than the environmental activism associated with it. It is a holistic approach with focus on social equality, the preservation of biodiversity, and economic continuation through natural resource preservation as a means of supplying this generation with its needs while maintaining the resources needed for future generations (Butler). By basing an economy on this structure, a country can provide for itself and retain the ability to do so in the future; a much more successful model than currently in place around the globe. As with any proposed system, there has been speculation about the feasibility of such an arrangement, but Uganda has shown some examples of how this could be their key to a brighter economic future.

An important part of sustainability is promoting local interests. This fits Uganda perfectly since its structure is set up around small communities. As its economy has been historically based on agriculture, this is where the most opportunities have been centralized. The

world is beginning to realize this as well. The focus of one design discipline has drawn its eyes to Uganda in a way it has never before looked. The apparel industry has found it can benefit greatly from sustainable developments in Uganda, sourcing both raw materials and labor.

Much of Uganda's recognition for fiber supply can be attributed to William Dunavant, who is credited with having the prescience to enter Africa in 2002 for his cotton sourcing. As the chairman of the largest privately owned cotton brokerage, Memphis based Dunavant Enterprises, he came to countries like Uganda with a "cash on delivery" guarantee to over 180,000 small farmers (Zachary). With the large majority of poor Africans living in rural areas, being reliant on agriculture for their income and suffering poorly for it (Butler), such payments are a heavy incentive to grow cotton. It relieved insecurities about income generation and wretched debts from government companies (Zachary). By letting the nation's people do what they do best, grow cotton, the economy could capitalize on their unique abilities to expand.

Such simple principles as proper plant spacing and manual weed elimination, methods mostly disregarding the technological treatments of other ventures, are taught and passed on from villager to villager (Zachary). This learning strategy strengthens small communities by allowing them to become self reliant (Butler). The company continues to help by providing micro-credit investments, lending millions a year to local farmers, making Dunavant the largest micro-financer in Africa (Zachary).

Uganda's cotton industry has grown by leaps and bounds since and has peaked the interest of more than one designer. All that investment helps the apparel developers by building an area rich in raw materials. Producers looking to find a way to follow the "green" boom have discovered that Uganda has the means to supply them the required resources.

Peter Ingwersen is the head of the Noir luxury brand that produces socially conscious fashion by using materials that are fair trade and environmentally friendly. Working with sustainable suppliers in developing countries is all part of his mission, so it was not so strange that he developed his own line of fair trade organic cotton fabric (due out this year). To be used internally as well as sold to other companies, Illuminati II fabrics come straight from sustainable and fair trade producers in Uganda (Borrelli-Persson). Promoting this economic sector there ensures that the company has a constant supply of raw materials at the quality standards they require.

Such benefits are chiefly influential to agribusiness, but some companies have found that delving into the creative talents of the Ugandan people can bring about positive change for investor and investee alike. Edun, a brand sponsored by rock star Bono and his wife, has sought to go even further than the supply chain. Not only are their materials from African countries, but they also have garment manufacturing facilities in Uganda. They seek to fight poverty by creating multiple jobs, but there are issues needing to be addressed. There is not enough organic cotton to go around, especially with the trendiness of the fiber today. In addition, workers are currently poorly trained in garment construction, so silhouettes must remain simple (Binkley).

The present national infrastructure has also proved difficult, lacking in the efficiency needed to transport goods in a timely fashion. But this does not mean they are out of the fight yet. Three years have developed the system further and now the products coming out of Uganda have become some of Edun's most successful sellers (Binkley). With proper investment in training and facility improvement the system can be made more capable of handling larger orders. Once the operation runs more smoothly, there will be greater opportunities for economic

development, in turn creating further stability, and cyclically working toward a healthier and better functioning nation.

Uganda has all the materials needed to develop their agricultural and manufacturing sectors, but, like most countries in the lower economic bracket, they have a need for investment and buyers willing to create supply chains. The use of sustainability as a drawing point could bring the boon they need without the costly price of the environmental and human rights degradation experienced by many other developing countries. Uganda is sitting on the natural resources needed to make them an economic player. If they treat those resources with careful handling, economic prosperity will follow.

Part III: Global Attitudes for Eco-development: Facets of Redemption, Consumption, and Participatory Needs

While small, agrarian economies like Uganda can focus their attention on the production of raw materials and manufacturing for sustainable apparel, each nation globally plays a different role. India, for example, fits highly into the manufacturing and textile production sector. After experiencing numerous health and safety issues related to the pollution created by their textile facilities, the country is in a position of cascading down the slippery slope of rapid industrialization (Tharoor). After developing in a harmful way for years, such issues present a host of goals to be tackled that could potentially benefit from the eco-development concept proposed for Uganda. The western world has begun to understand this, and is utilizing their own means to redeem their past discretions. U.S. designers are using American consumerism to the earth's advantage by encouraging the call for environmentally and socially conscious products through design initiative. Doing this turns an innately destructive quality into potential growth, while incurring the benefit of sustainable practices. Both India and the United States exhibit

important viewpoints and stages of environmental degradation that can be used as a learning tool for the developing world.

India is the land of the original tree-huggers, but as the country grew as a textile production and treatment center, correlating damage occurred to their environment. The World Bank estimates that two million deaths annually can be attributed to pollution related ailments, costing the country \$10 million (Mayur). India's growth is being affected by this, as pollution swallows up 4.5% of their GDP, wiping out over half their annual growth (Tharoor). The pollution is allowed to continue for the sake of progress, yet it is actually decreasing the country's potential.

A significant portion of productivity is lost due to the air in Indian cities, thick with emissions from industrial and residential sources. A study by an independent monitoring agency, the Community Environmental Monitors (CEM), found forty-five individual dangerous chemicals present in the country's ambient air, thirteen of which are carcinogens ("Indian Air..."). And air is not the only issue, with 90% of all water sources existing in any manner of polluted states. With a scarcity of supply to begin with, this leaves little for actual safe use (Mayur). Not all problems can be traced directly back to apparel production, but they are playing a significant role in environmental breakdown. The ever increasing amounts of textile factories spew out fumes and belch forth effluents from dyeing and tanning processes directly into major water systems (Shashikumar). If the textile and apparel facilities can clean up their acts, there could be a marked improvement in the overall environment. By taking the lead, they set an example that encourages all industries to take action, and such private interests are increasingly important with the currently adopted policies.

The Indian government has put a lot of faith into Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs), but water is failing to get treated, and that which does, is not thoroughly filtered (Shashikumar). The government wants manufacturers to pay half the cost of installation for these technologies, but financial issues often prevent this (Devraj). Those companies that have the capital to invest in clean-up technology fail to use it in order to cut costs. The recognition of this is encouraging legislation, but enforcement is a struggle continually being dealt with (“India: Pollution Norms...”). The ranks of 4.5 million small scale factories are the ones producing up to seventy percent of the industrial pollution, but typically the owners do not comprehend their effect on the environment and public health, choosing cheaper methods above all (Lakshmi). If the government continually ignores such abuses, it only perpetuates the situation. There must be a mental transition toward understanding the shared environment in order for any change to take place.

The promotion of cost over health and safety may come unintentionally from outside sources. Consumers around the world want apparel in the cheapest way possible, but in order to achieve this, developing nations like India have paid the environmental price. With purchasers in wealthy nations showing a greater concern for environmental and social issues in production, there is a beneficial push for more transparency in the process. This is what will drive more cooperation in the future, because if no one wants to buy “dirty” product, then there is no money to be made in the process of polluting.

The government’s efforts are also noble, but enforcement is key. When a government pushes for ten percent industrial growth a year, corners are bound to be cut (Devraj). Corrupt officiating must be confronted, and the deep rooted attitude of self advancement over global or even regional environment needs further enlightenment (Tharoor). The appeals of the small

communities that often fall victims to the results of expansion are what could develop into a successful movement toward change.

Where places like India have fallen into trouble is in their following of the old industrialization model. Countries like Great Britain and the United States destroyed much of their natural resources and polluted air and water for generations before the mistakes of industrialization had been realized. Meanwhile they continue to top the charts as serious global polluters. The current consideration should be how to prevent this from happening repeatedly in developing nations, like India, and how can a place like the United States make up for their past and present failures? Being the consumers that they are, Americans have joined the sweeping “green” movement in fashion with eco-consumerism based on the innovative design that just might help themselves and exporting countries.

Fashion designer Linda Loudermilk leads her field in environmentally conscious fashion with her Luxury Eco™ line of clothing. She does not sacrifice style to make product sustainably, and that allows even the most discriminating shopper to promote a healthier world. The garments use the latest in renewable materials, such as soy silk, bamboo, and sasawashi, a seaweed based fabric (“Linda Loudermilk / Luxury Eco™”), all of which are available to developing nations to produce. She further contributes with her “Mission Line,” that sends proceeds to clean water and global warming initiatives (“Mission Wear”). This idea is taking the industry by storm, and flurries of “green” items have made their way into the Fashion Weeks held across the country. Encouragement from the consumers is driving this and they are making demands that could make or break a business. With this trend, if a design company is not going green in the apparel market, it is as good as being black listed. Wal-Mart has even joined the crowd, based on its sheer size, consuming the largest amount of organic cotton of any retailer for

the second year in a row (Tran), proving even companies with earlier wrap-sheets of environmental abuse can turn around. And where Wal-Mart goes, there is always a wake of followers.

The economic weight of retailers like Wal-Mart has the potential to promote sustainable development around the global apparel industry. With such demand from the West for organic cotton and viable alternatives to wasteful production methods, the fashion industry has no choice but to invest in eco-development. If this support goes overseas to fund organic cotton growers in Uganda or pay for effluent filters on dyeing facilities in India, all nations benefit. The designer gets the materials they need to feed consumer requests, and developing regions get a boost to economic and environmental well-being, at a lower cost than might normally be required, giving them higher incentive to do so. In this way consumer demand can actually be the driving force behind global social and environmental responsibility.

The situation is not as perfect as it seems though. While the persuasive big spenders can afford to push around their influence, the classic “American way” may pose a treat to such zeal. The free-market that creates the demand also finds ways to exploit it. Possibilities may arise where, unless labeling is controlled, products containing minimal sustainable materials could be marked as such, simply to snatch a portion of the trend. And truthfully, business is about making money by capturing consumer attention, and doing so at the lowest cost. The Industrial Revolution began an education in exploitation that still lingers to this day. Low prices bring in customers, so industry sees no need to stop abusing environmental and social resources (Hawken 7). Whether shoppers do or do not want responsible items is of no consequence if the product is unaffordable. A ninety dollar bamboo tee does nothing for anyone in the product cycle if it languishes on a shelf. Coming into play here is the importance of demand, which can lower

prices by spurring additional production. If more developing nations jump on board, they will find a definite market for their product.

Emergent nations must be careful not to fall into the pattern of “progress” previously set forth by industrial nations in the past. Developed nations must redeem themselves and, as a dominant consumer, countries like the United States can use responsible product selection to call the shots in important markets like apparel. Using this, they can determine the direction of industry standards, allowing for a more globally enforced responsibility, even where legislation and enforcement are lacking.

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