

Using data to create iconic fashion to map cities

Three African fashion designers have created 12 extraordinary outfits from vast amounts of data extracted from the cities of Nairobi, Lagos and Johannesburg. Fashion and technology fused in a thought-provoking project, Fabric, that demonstrated how data can transform African cities.



Central bus station, Nairobi, Kenya.

Tech leader Siemens used data from the cities of Lagos, Nairobi and Johannesburg, and wove it into unique fabrics which tell a story about each city. Three iconic African fashion designers then used the fabrics to create one-of-kind outfits, both stylish and smart.

The projected showcases how digitalisation of the industrial world is fast becoming the biggest transformation of our time, and highlights how data combined with smart technology will ensure that tomorrow's cities are more connected, efficient and powered.

The intricate garments by Kenyan John Kaveke, Nigerian Zizi Cardow, and Palesa Mokubung from South Africa, outline a variety of patterns from power grids, shipping and tonnage to population densities, transport and areas of connectivity. Data from each of these sectors tell a powerful story about each city and how digitalisation can transform them. All of this is told through the universal language of fashion and design.



Illupeju, Lagos, Nigeria.

“This is how we thought to express the aspect of digitalisation. As urbanisation rapidly increases, cities need to start preparing for the effects it will have on infrastructure, energy, water and transportation systems,” said Keshin Govender, group communications head for Siemens South Africa.

“Data gives greater insight on what makes each city tick, helping us make calculated decisions and improve service delivery to the people. Through the Fabric project, it was evident that the challenge is not what to do with the avalanche of data, but rather accessing reliable and recent data.

“This project has highlighted the need for access to data in order to make sound urban planning decisions,” explained Govender.

Nairobi-born Kaveke said there was no better way to tell the story than through fashion. “Fashion and technology are a universal language and the two combined create a formidable team,” he said.

Lagos-based Zizi Cardow added: “It’s time Africa equipped itself with information. Africa is often overlooked in terms of technology and science, so pushing forward on these incredibly important aspects is the next step to propel the continent. Having more data about Africa means understanding our nations better and equipping ourselves to solve the problems we face.”

While there is a growing adoption of intelligent machines within certain sectors like the automotive industry, the real opportunity for Africa lies in sectors where it has not yet been explored like manufacturing, energy and transportation. This is a remarkable opportunity for Africa which will result in the establishment of new industries and new jobs, while exponentially increasing skills development and contributing to GDP, according to Siemens.

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