



Nama • Benz •

The African Success Story

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The Nana Benz at the time.

Introduction

The **NANA BENZ**, these intrepid women from Togo, have left an indelible mark on their nation's economic history. Their names resonate with respect and admiration in the corridors of commerce, and their unique legacy remains a symbol of success and determination. Their economic influence is not only limited to Togo, but also extends internationally. **NANA BENZ** have successfully exported their know-how and

influence to international markets, contributing to the promotion of African fashion worldwide.



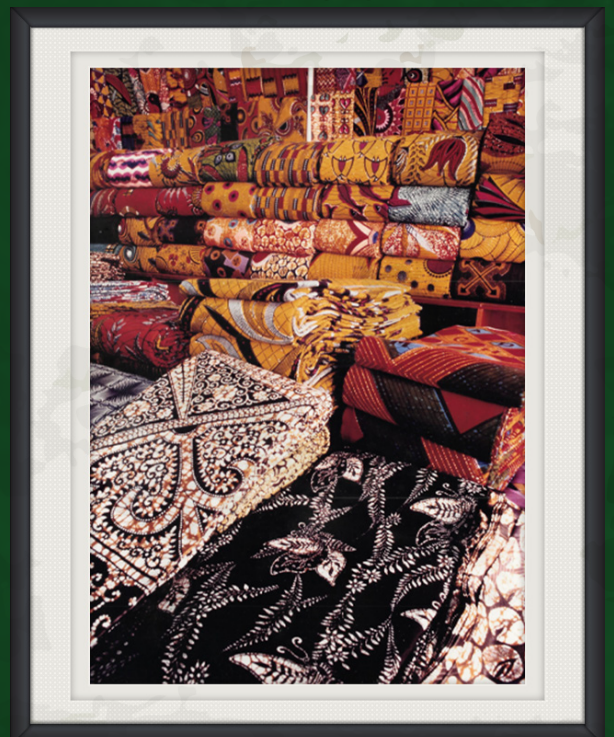
Welcome of Chadian President François Tombalbaye in Togo by Nana Benz

Who are NANA BENZ ?

The **NANA BENZ** are Togolese businesswomen who have achieved immense success in the textile industry. They started their careers selling fabrics imported from Holland, but over the years they quickly evolved by establishing their own textile factories in partnership with the Togolese government.



These factories, including the **Textile Industry of Togo (ITT)** and the TogoTex Textile factory, have become references in the textile sector. With their expertise in weaving and dyeing, **NANA BENZ** have been able to create unique designs that have been a great success with both local and international customers.





The Nana Benz in a party organized in their honor by the late Head of State GANSSINGBE Eyadéma

NANA BENZ has played a crucial role in Togo's economic development by creating jobs and stimulating the growth of the textile industry. They have also contributed to the empowerment of women as successful entrepreneurs and by encouraging girls' education. **NANA BENZ** are a source of inspiration for future generations of Togolese entrepreneurs.

Meaning of «NANA BENZ»

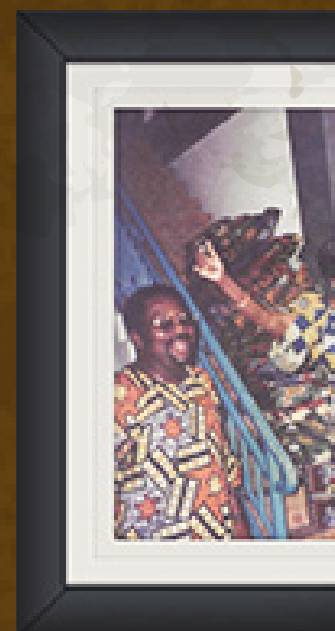
The origin of the term «**NANA BENZ**» is deeply rooted in the history of Togo. The word «NANA» is a hypocoristic of «na» (or «ena»), meaning «**mother**» or «**grandmother**» in Mina, a Togolese dialect. The term «**BENZ**» is associated with the Mercedes Benz cars they loved to drive. Over time, this term evolved beyond its original meaning and became a sign of respect and consideration to emphasize the prominent social position of the Nana Benz.



La toute première voiture Mercedes Benz achetée par une Nana Benz



The Nana Benz in front of their Mercedes Benz car



The Manatex store



Nana Benz dont Mana AHIANKPOR

In short, «**NANA BENZ**» represents the fusion between tradition and modernity, between African culture and economic success. It reflects the exceptional status and influence of these women entrepreneurs in Togo who have been extraordinarily successful in the textile trade, especially in the sale of wax fabrics.



Mana AHIANKPOR, Nana Benz

Testimonials of **NANA BENZ**



Decoration of Mana AHIANKOR, Nana Benz by the Fire Gal. GNASSINGBE Eyadéma

The testimonies and appreciation of General GNASSINGBE EYADEMA and Edem KODJO for the **NANA BENZ** are a true recognition of their exceptional role in the history of Togo. General Gnassingbe Eyadema, Former President of Togo, shared a poignant testimony from the time when Togo received the Heads of State of the Conseil de l'Entente in 1968. Faced with the inability of the State to provide cars, he requested from the **NANA BENZ** to lend their Mercedes 200 to transport the Heads of State and house them. Their generosity and contribution to Togo's international image have been invaluable.



Edem KODJO

Edem Kodjo, former Prime Minister of Togo and former Secretary General of the OAU, highlighted the high sense of patriotism of these women and their dedication to the nation. He recalled how they generously made their cars and houses available to the State to welcome Heads of State and diplomats visiting Lomé, thus contributing to the country's influence.

These testimonials underscore the deep gratitude and respect to the **NANA BENZ** for their positive impact on the nation and their dedication to serving their country in a way that goes far beyond the textile trade. They remain examples of commitment and patriotism in Togo.



Feu Général GNASSINGBE EYADEMA

“On May 29, 1968, we received for the first time the four heads of state of the Conseil de l’Entente. We were unable to convey them. It’s not a shame; Today, I continue to pay tribute to women sellers. They are the ones who lent us their Mercedes 200s to transport, aren’t they, the four heads of state and their houses to accommodate them too..”

dixit GNASSINGBE EYADEMA, Former President of Togo



Edem KODJO

“All these women had a very high sense of patriotism. To ensure a pleasant stay for the Heads of State and diplomats visiting Lomé, these Nana Benzes made their cars and houses available to the State.”

Dixit Edem KODJO, former Prime Minister of Togo and Former Secretary General of the OAU

The Genesis of NANA BENZ

In the 1930s and 1940s, the first textile retailers initiated the importation of fabrics from Ghana for sale in Togo. However, when the 1950s and 1960s saw tensions grow between Togolese President of the time Sylvanus Olympio and Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, due to issues related to British Togoland and the Ewe issue, these traders had to adapt their business model by soliciting companies for the direct supply of Dutch wax in Lomé. In an effort to distinguish themselves from Ghana, they then introduced custom patterns and designs to these companies, including both British and French players.

After Togo's independence, **NANA BENZ** quickly established their own textile factories in partnership with the Togolese government. This took place in 1962 in Datcha and in 1978 in Lama-Kara. These factories, notably the Industrie Textile du Togo (ITT) in Datcha and the Textile TogoTex factory, have become pillars of the textile industry.



Thanks to their commitment and entrepreneurial spirit, **NANA BENZ** have conquered the top of the textile market, elevating Lomé to the undisputed status of the textile capital of Africa.



Marguérite LAWSON, *Daughter of Nana Benz*

Daughter of Nana Benz

The remarkable rise of **NANA BENZ** in the textile trade is the result of a combination of factors. Their success stems in part from their remarkable ability to adapt to economic fluctuations and political changes, as well as their unwavering determination to achieve their ambitious goals.



Sorting of loincloth samples by Nana Benz

NANA BENZ have also forged strong and trusting relationships with both their valued customers and their suppliers. To remain competitive on the international stage and face fierce competition, they have entered into exclusive contracts with major global textile suppliers. This strategy has strengthened their position as major players in the Togolese economy, while consolidating their influence in the textile sector in Africa.

The Glory of **NANA BENZ**



In the 1970s, **NANA BENZ** experienced a meteoric rise, becoming an undisputed pillar of the Togolese economy. They played a key role in establishing Lomé as a regional textile distribution centre, particularly dominating the trade in wax loincloths from the Netherlands, Belgium, France and England. It is

estimated that between 1976 and 1984 they held at least 40 per cent of the commercial activities in Togo.

Beyond their commercial success, **NANA BENZs** were a crucial support for Togo's national economy at a time when the country was facing large budget deficits, rising from 13.4% of GDP in 1973 to 39.6% of GDP in 1979. The «**Nana Benz**» were the first female millionaires, or even billionaires, on the African continent. Their businesses generate exceptional sales and profits. Indeed, a **NANA BENZ** was capable of achieving an annual turnover ranging from hundreds of millions to billions of CFA francs. This remarkable achievement helped cement their status as economic icons in Togo.

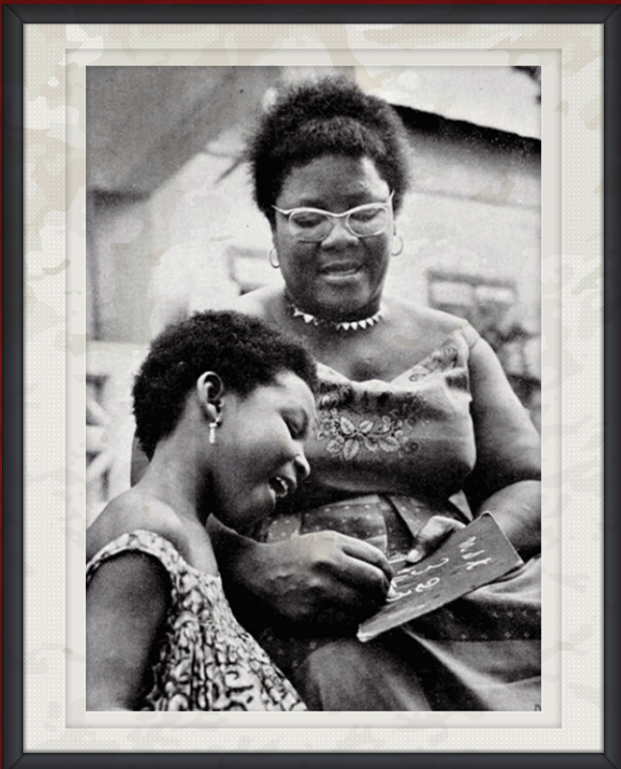


The first generation of **NANA BENZ**



The first generation of Nana Benz

The first generation of **NANA BENZ** was marked by the presence of iconic pioneers. Among these key historical figures are names such as Eunice ADABUNU, Patience SANVEE, Dédé Rose CREPPY, Laura Doe BRUCE, Julie BOCCO, Nadou LAWSON, Ayélé SANTANA and Manavi SEWOA AHIANKPOR. These women played a vital role in the establishment and success of the textile trade in Togo, becoming icons of that era.



Eunice ADABUNU
Nana Benz



Manavi SEWOA AHIANKPOR
Nana Benz



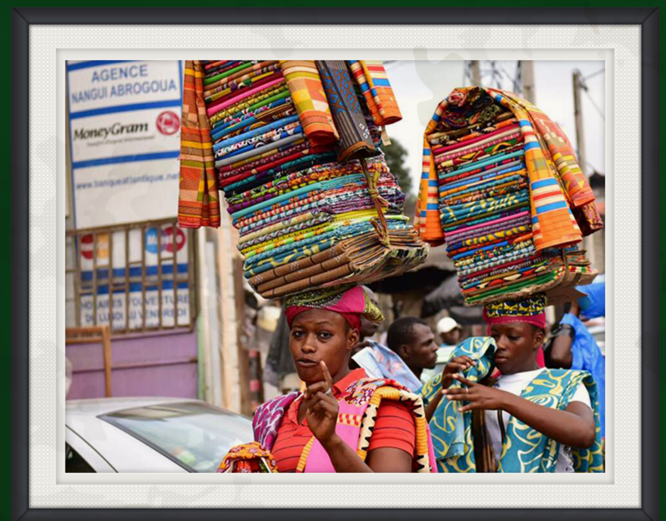
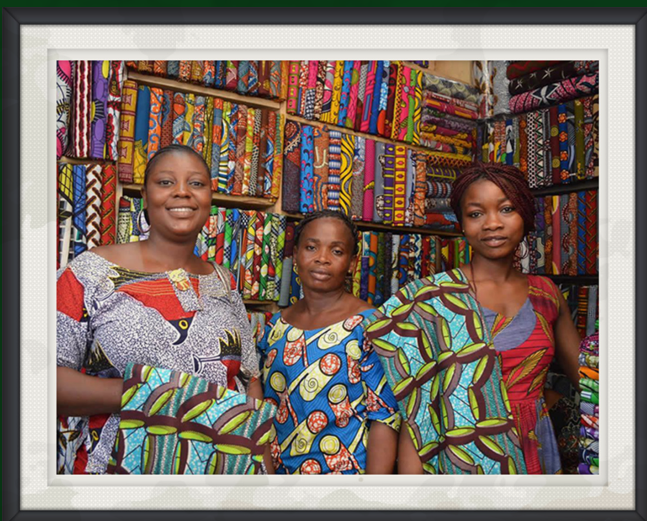
Dédé Rose CREPPY
Nana Benz

The NANA BENZ Business Model

NANA BENZ developed a clever sales strategy that relied on the creation of two women's groups to optimize their merchandise distribution. The first group was made up of semi-wholesalers, while the second group consisted of street vendors. They worked hard to get the fabrics to the doors of their customers' homes, making it easier to sell wax fabrics.



Association of Loincloth Resellers of Togo - ALRT



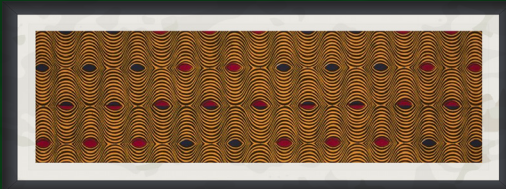
The Flagship Marketing & Sales Strategy

NANA BENZ have initiated an original practice to promote wax fabric in Africa. They instituted the custom of attributing local names and specific meanings to various designs and loincloths. For these savvy entrepreneurs, each fabric tells a story or communicates a particular message, a ploy they have adopted to optimize their sales. Among the plethora of motifs, here are a few that particularly appealed:



If you go out, I go out

if you deceive me, I deceive you! But more broadly, women also have rights!



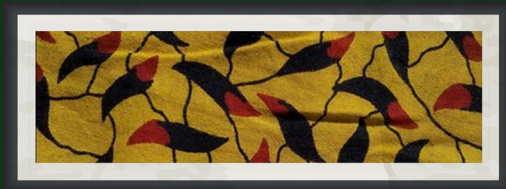
The eye of my rival

where we see that rivalry plays a big role, the loincloth meaning, "I keep an eye on my husband"



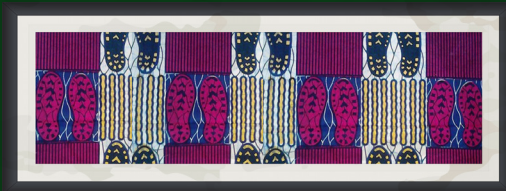
My husband is capable

the lips for the message in a recurring motif which can mean my husband has the means, but also that he is capable... in bed!



Sankara's tears

is a wax print which was produced shortly after the death of Thomas Sankara in 1987. He was a third worldist, pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist. He did a lot for education in his country.



Mandela's footsteps

is a wax that was created at the time of the release of South African leader Nelson Mandela

Passing the baton to their daughters



For the **NANA Benz**, the loincloth trade is much more than an economic activity, it is an inheritance passed down from generation to generation to their daughters. These women, affectionately known as the «**Nanattes**,» have mastered the art of the loincloth trade, and they are now preparing to conquer Africa once more.

The handover from **NANA BENZ** to their daughters is a crucial step in ensuring the continuity of their exceptional legacy. These successful women entrepreneurs have attached great importance to passing on their know-how and business to the next generation. This transition has been made with dedication and care, ensuring that the expertise and influence of NANA BENZ lives on.



Association of Nana Benz of Togo

The succession happens naturally, usually in favour of the first daughter or the one showing the most interest in the business. However, in all cases, a daughter of the family is appointed to carry on this priceless tradition.

This allows **NANETTES** to keep alive the tradition of excellence in the textile trade, both in Togo and throughout Africa. They are following their mothers' footsteps as successful entrepreneurs, while injecting their own touch of innovation and modernization into the family business.

The future of NANA BENZ through the new generation called NANETTES

The **NANETTES**, the worthy heirs of the **NANA BENZ**, have taken up the torch with passion and determination in the Wax loincloth trade. Among the emblematic figures of this new generation, we find women such as Yvette SIVOMEY, Jacquie ATANDJI, Maeva AZIANBLE, Marlène ADANLETE-DJONDO, to name but a few. They are driven by great ambitions for the future of the textile trade in Togo and Africa. These young entrepreneurs are determined to continue their elders' legacy of success while bringing innovation and fresh ideas to the sector. NANETTES aspires to promote «Made in Africa» by offering high-quality products, such as ready-to-wear loincloths and wax accessories, which are increasingly popular in the global fashion market. Their vision is to consolidate Togo's position as a leader in the textile trade in Africa and to continue to write the success story of **NANA BENZ** for future generations.



Yvette SIVOMEY
Daughter of Nana Benz



Marlène ADANLETE DJONDO
Granddaughter of Nana Benz



Jacquie ATANDJI
Granddaughter of Nana Benz



Maëva AZIABLE
Great-granddaughter of Nana Benz

MANATEX, WAX for the Family



Created in the 1960s by a Nana Benz, Manavi SEWOA AHIANKPOR, **MANATEX** is today an icon of Wax. This Togolese company, passed down from mother to daughter over four generations, now sees Maeva AZIABLE, the great-granddaughter, take the reins of the family business.



Mana AHIANKPOR ; Marguérite LAWSON



Nadou LAWSON ; Marguérite LAWSON ; Maëva AZIABLE



Manavi AHIAKPOR SEWOA
1st Generation of Nana Benz



Margu rite LAWSON
2nd Generation of Nana Benz



Nadou LAWSON AZIABLE
3rd Generation of Nana Benz



Ma va AZIABLE
4th Generation of Nana Benz

Added value to the textile trade introduced by the Nanettes

NANETTES brought significant innovations to the textile trade by introducing the concept of ready-to-wear loincloths «**Made in Africa**» and a range of loincloth accessories.



of African culture.

«**Made in Africa**» ready-to-wear loincloths is an exciting evolution of the traditional African loincloth. The **NANETTES** have modernized and adapted the colorful patterns and unique designs of the loincloths to create a range of ready-to-wear garments, ranging from dresses and shirts to skirts and suits. These garments embody the perfect marriage between African tradition and contemporary fashion. They are designed to meet the needs and preferences of the modern clientele while celebrating the richness





The «**Made in Africa**» loincloth accessories are another popular innovation of **NANETTES**. These accessories include handbags, scarves, hats, shoes, and even jewelry, all made from high-quality loincloth fabrics. They add a touch of elegance and color to any outfit, while showcasing African craftsmanship. These loincloth accessories have become very popular in the fashion market, both in Africa and internationally.

The **NANETTES** have succeeded in modernizing the traditional loincloth trade while preserving its cultural heritage. Their creativity and vision have helped position «**Made in Africa**» as a brand of quality and elegance, helping to strengthen Africa's reputation as a hub of fashion and innovation.



The digitalization of the textile trade

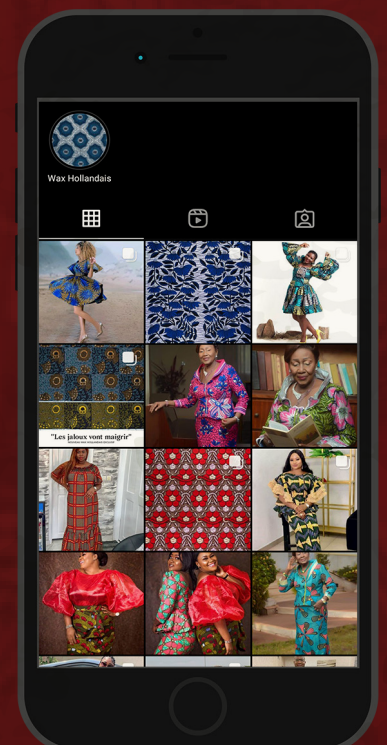


NANETTES have brought about a remarkable transformation in the textile trade by making effective use of the tools of digitalization. They understood that in order to reach a wider

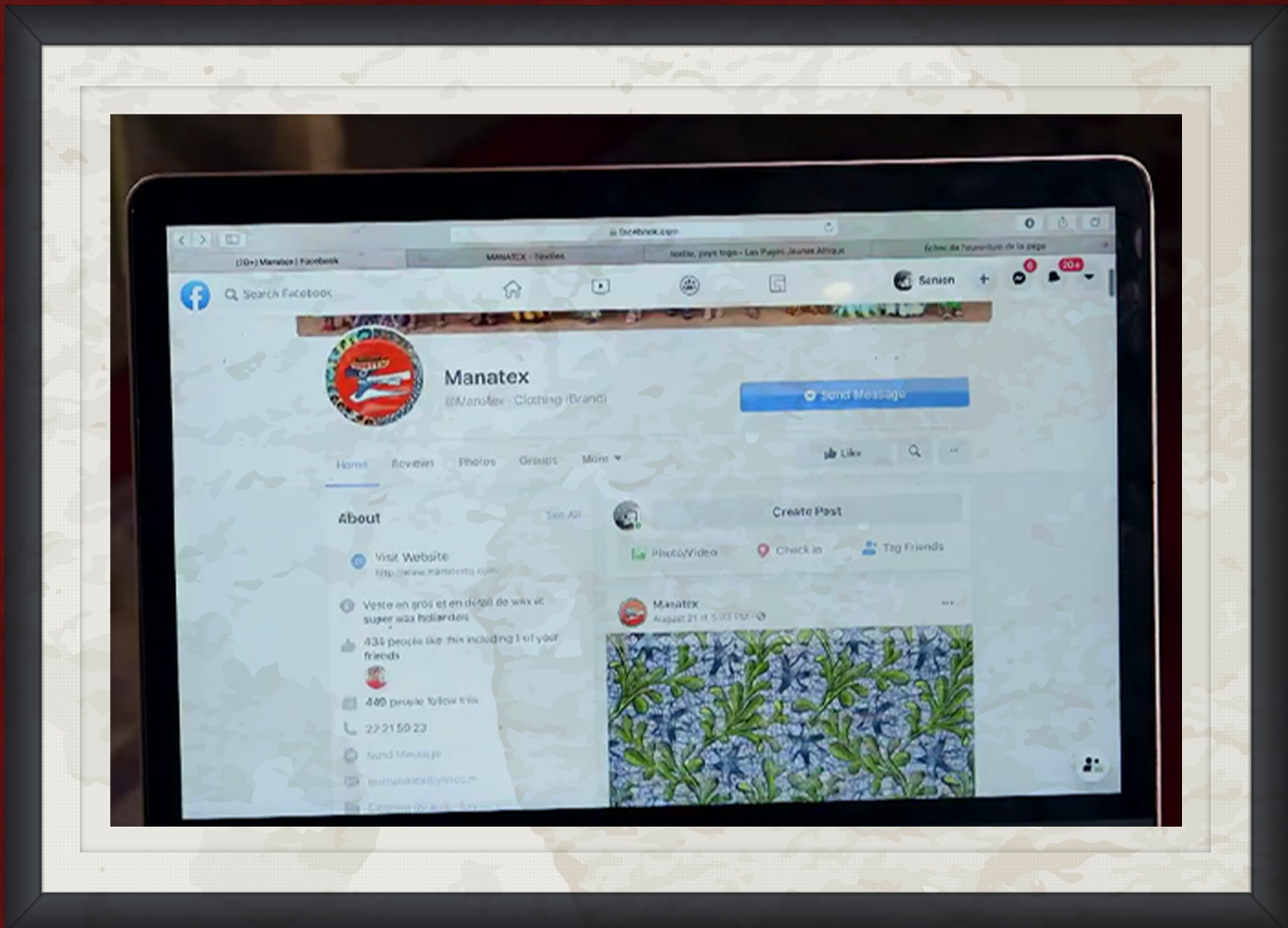
audience, they had to embrace modern technology. As a result, they have created a strong online presence by using social media and setting up e-commerce websites.

Social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, have become essential platforms for **NANETTES**. They allowed them to share their products, unique designs, and story with a global audience.

In addition, **NANETTES** have created e-commerce websites that allow customers to easily browse their product range, place orders online, and track delivery. This approach has significantly expanded their customer base, providing greater convenience to both local and international buyers. In addition, **NANETTES** have embraced digital payment methods, including online credit card payments and mobile money transfers.



Digitalization has allowed **NANETTES** to stay in direct contact with their customers, collect their feedback and respond to their needs quickly. This builds customer trust and loyalty.



African Expansion through AfCFTA Facilitation





The expansion of **NANETTES**' activities across Africa is greatly facilitated by the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** and the establishment of the African Common Market. This landmark initiative removes tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade between African countries, promoting the free flow of goods and services. This trade opening offers **NANETTES** the opportunity to export their high-quality textile products to a larger number of African countries. In addition, it fosters collaboration and partnership between **NANETTES** and other stakeholders in the textile sector across the continent, thereby strengthening their influence and contributing to the development of the textile sector in Africa. In conclusion, the AfCFTA plays a critical role in the successful expansion of **NANETTES**' activities across the African continent.



Conclusion

The **NANA BENZ** have left a unique legacy in the history of Togo. Their success in the textile trade has had a huge impact on the country's economy, and their influence extended to culture, politics, philanthropy, and education.

Their role in the emancipation of women in Togo is also remarkable. The **NANA BENZ** have not only paved the way for other women in business, but they have also contributed to the fight for gender equality in the country.



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