

Nigeria's Leather Industry Reclaims Its Identity in Luxury Fashion

Published on 26 Sep 2025 | By IFI Correspondent



Lagos, Sept. 2025 — For decades, Nigeria's prized leather has quietly powered the global luxury market. Exported in semi-finished form to Europe and Asia, it has been transformed into handbags, shoes, and wallets carrying the logos of **Gucci, Prada, Ferragamo, and Louis Vuitton** — with little recognition of its Nigerian origins.

Now, a new generation of designers and entrepreneurs is determined to change that.

At the forefront is **Isi Omiyi**, a 56-year-old Lagos-based designer, who has built her high-end brand around Nigeria's heritage hides. Her boutique showcases wallets, shoes, and handbags — some priced as high as \$1,500 — proudly stamped with a **"Made in Nigeria" identity**. "Leather is part of our heritage," Omiyi says. "I can't just stand by and watch others receive all the credit for work that we started here."

Kano: The Cradle of Tanneries

Northern Nigeria's **Kano State**, home to 11 tanneries, remains the epicentre of leather production. Modern facilities like **Ztannery**, founded in 2010, process hides sourced from Nigeria and neighbouring countries. These semi-finished leathers, often shipped abroad through intermediaries, supply the biggest fashion houses. "This is where the process goes from 'Made in Nigeria' to 'Made in Italy' or 'Made in China,'" explains Abbas Hassan Zein, Ztannery's owner.

Yet, local access remains limited. While advanced tanneries demand large, foreign-currency orders, many Nigerian designers rely on traditional hubs like **Majema tannery**, operating since 1932, where hides are still dyed and treated by hand.

A Movement to Reclaim Nigerian Leather

The push to reposition Nigerian leather isn't just individual. In 2017, **Femi Olayebi**, founder of *FemiHandbags*, launched the **Lagos Leather Fair** — a platform showcasing local designers, artisans, and suppliers. "We needed to demonstrate that Nigerians, with their own resources, can create world-class leather goods," she explains. The fair now draws over 100 participants annually.

Public-private initiatives are also gaining traction. In August, the Lagos State government opened a leather goods factory in Mushin, aiming to create **10,000 jobs** and boost domestic production. Meanwhile, international investors from India, China, and Europe are eyeing Nigeria as a potential manufacturing hub.

Beyond Fashion: Heritage and Identity

For many brands, leather is more than material — it's a **story of heritage**. "Customers are looking for timeless expressions of identity," says **David Lawal** of Morin.O, a Lagos-based label. "When a bag or wallet is crafted here, by

Nigerians, it carries our history and culture in every stitch.”

Nigeria’s leather exports already generate **\$600 million annually**, but its future value may lie in storytelling, craftsmanship, and proudly local luxury. As Olayebi puts it: “With better machines, training, and access to high-quality Nigerian hides, there’s no limit to what we can achieve.”

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