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Catwalks that Change Lives: Fashion can educate African women

Harambee and the COSO (Community and Society) Foundation, based in Valencia (Spain) held a design and fashion contest inspired by Africa, that highlights the culture of the continent and raises funds for scholarships to provide education for African girls.

03/07/2024

Color, music and dance came together at the Palacio de la Exposición in Valencia on November 21, with the celebration of a fashion show and an awards ceremony of the “Designs that Change Lives” contest, organized by the COSO Foundation and Harambee NGO.

This initiative, which combines fashion and solidarity, aims to put African women at the center, as it claims the right to education for women, since in this continent they often do not have the possibility of accessing it, with no choice but to work in the farm, take care of animals, or to sell the harvested produce in the market.

“Designs that change lives” opens a window to beauty and creativity through the design of garments with African motifs, as well as helping African women to be educated and thus be able to have a better future.

This catwalk is also a platform for fashion-design students to showcase their solidarity with this goal, by expressing it through fashion centered on the soul of African women, whose virtues and qualities are reflected in the prints and garments.

The discovery of the truth about how these women live in Africa and the beauty found in women has moved the designers working on this solidarity project not to be indifferent, and to manage to capture the values they have discovered by doing this work.

Some people inspired by the spirit of Opus Dei have been involved in this creative activity, and have helped in the project so that those persons who work in matters related to fashion - stylists, dressmakers, designers- do so with seriousness and a Christian sense of life, trying to make God

present in this work, which gives dignity to people and encourages them to be respectful with themselves and with others.

A “sold out” signpost

The event filled the capacity of the auditorium - more than 250 attendees -, among which were prominent public personalities in the world of fashion, music and art. For this third edition, the COSO Foundation had a top-level technical jury, that followed up the entire production process of the designers' proposals.

Among the names of people on the jury were the designers Presen Rodríguez and Dolores Cortés, the painter and professor Javier Calvo, the president of the African Union of Spain and migralogist Papa Balla Ndong, the stylist Elena Regadera

and the journalist and director of the Fashion Communication Specialist degree, Mapi Paricio.

17 scholarships for the future

With the donations from the entrance tickets to the fashion show, the NGO Harambee has been able to give scholarships to 17 African girls who will now be able to be trained professionally in Design and Dressmaking at the Agata Carelli School in Lomé (University of Togo). Since “Designs that Change Lives,” began, more than 100 scholarships have been given to promote the professional training of women and to help them improve their living conditions.

Harambee NGO is an international communication and solidarity project aimed at helping African initiatives, through direct cooperation with people living in those countries and raising

awareness about it in the rest of the world. It has collaborated in the development of 120 education, health and food security projects. These projects have benefited nearly one million vulnerable women and children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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(12/10/2025)