

# Linda Khumbanyiwa celebrates Malawi's culture and craftsmanship through fashion



By Ntandokazi Ntozakhe

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Lynne Kayenne Studio, founded by Linda Khumbanyiwa, is a Malawian brand that designs environmentally friendly-womenswear inspired by traditional and cultural influences.



Source: Supplied

A philanthropic brand focused on women empowerment, youth empowerment and environmental initiatives, Lynne Kayenne Studio stands out as a label that places impact over profit in the home country of the founder, Malawi.

Born in the East African nation to a diplomat father, Khumbanyiwa was fortunate enough to live both in Ivory Coast and Tunisia and to go to both Huddersfield and Manchester Universities where she earned a Master's Degree in Human Resources Management.

Prior to starting Lynne Kayenne Studio, she worked as a model, blogger and stylist for some of the biggest fashion brands around the world. Using her background in the fashion industry, she wanted to create a brand that would convey the culture and heritage of her birth country.

An interaction she had with someone about Malawi inspired her first collection. Malawi had only one association in the person's mind: poverty and Madonna. This ignited Khumbanyiwa's passion for creating collections that showcase the beauty of her country.

**■ Linda, why and how are you using Lynne Kayenne Studio to change perceptions of Malawi?**

This is an incredible question! As you are aware, the western media too often presents a negative image of Africa but this is far from the reality of the situation especially when it comes to Malawi. Malawi is beautiful; it has beautiful landscapes, people, food, culture and heritage.

At Lynne Kayenne Studio, everything we do is driven by our community and the need to promote our culture and heritage from a position of pride. We do not hold back on who we are – a Malawian fashion brand! We want to leverage and maximise our culture and heritage by using fashion to transport people into our world.



Source: Supplied

■ ***Were there any other motivations for you to start your own business?***

If I am completely honest with you, I believe it was all a part of God's plan. I have always loved the fashion industry and have worked in the industry to a capacity. I started off as a commercial model doing shoots and ads whilst still in school, I dabbled in retail, blogging, styling as well as PR for an African multi-brand called [lalibella.co.uk](http://lalibella.co.uk) - Made in Africa.

Whilst working there, I was commissioned to do a small capsule collection. The deal fell through which at the time was heartbreaking, but this gave me the drive to try and tell my African fashion story, using my Malawian heritage culture and craftsmanship in a fresh way to appeal to an international audience.

In 2020, I was having a conversation with a friend who shared with me that Malawi was only known for its associations with Madonna and poverty. This lit a fire in my bones and was the motivation for me to birth Lynne Kayenne Studio with the desire to build a socially impactful contemporary African-inspired womenswear label – made in Africa for the world.

■ ***You launched Lynne Kayenne Studio in the middle of a pandemic, what was that like?***

There have been many challenges and setbacks involved in launching a fashion brand in a pandemic, especially in Malawi where our Malawian fashion industry is in its infancy, but this has also been an opportunity to create our own template. I don't let these difficulties define me, I have a vision for Lynne Kayenne Studio, we use what we have and let our vision drive us.



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### ■ ***Your clothes incorporate African prints but are trendy. Are you trying to send a certain message to the world?***

This is a great question! I know I keep repeating this but it's important. How the brand came to be was me in conversation with a friend who made mention that my country Malawi is known for its associations with Madonna and poverty, so from the outset I knew that whatever we would create would showcase Malawi in the brightest light. I knew that we would tap into our culture, heritage and showcase our warmth, vibrancy, richness and wealth whilst opening our doors and inviting the world to pop into our world. It's a welcome, not so much a message.

### ■ ***What is the best and what is the hardest part about having your own fashion line?***

I view the best things that have happened as well as the challenges as part of the process of building, I try not to have an attachment to the 'best' or the 'challenges' as they are both leading me to the same destination. I put it into the universe that I wanted to share my heritage and culture with the world by utilising fashion as that vehicle, and from the outset I have had clarity.

I have said this and will continue to say this: culture and heritage in the only thing the world cannot steal from us as Africans so sharing Malawian stories has been incredible and I am really grateful for all the support and everything that has been happening at Lynne Kayenne Studio, but there is more that I would like to do personally as well collectively as a fashion ecosystem in Malawi.

### ■ ***How do you market your business?***

We market Lynne Kayenne Studio via social media, newsletters, and we have also been lucky to be featured in some international publications which further spreads the word about what we are doing on African soil.

### ■ ***Tell us more about your passion for women empowerment?***

Our community is the cornerstone and the reason why we do what we do. We plough resources back into our community to empower women and help lift them out of poverty via the Microloan Foundation as well as youth in the creative sectors.

I asked myself the question: What is a community without women? They are the backbone of our nation. The youth are the future and both women and the youth cannot live on the planet if it's rife with deforestation. So our partnership with Ripple Africa to plant trees and protect forests through forest conservation projects was a no-brainer. Through our work with the Microloan Foundation rural women and empowered by providing them with grants and financial literacy training to lift them out of poverty.



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### ■ ***What advice would you give to young women who want to become entrepreneurs?***

Start where you are. Use what you have!

### ▀ ***What are your plans for the future and what do you wish for Lynne Kayenne Studio?***

Ten years from now, we are a successful socially impactful business with a culture that is unlike any fashion company serving more women across the world sharing Malawian beauty and fashion across the world. In 10 years' time, the goal is to let our customers lead and really fall in love with the customers and provide products that they need in their wardrobe that assist in their day-to-day lives, products that make them feel their most confident, more beautiful.

In 10 years, the goal is to empower more women, youth in our community and continue to plant more trees across Malawi through our partnership with Ripple Africa.

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