

MCAK Press Release

Second hand clothes a lean, green money-making machine for Kenya

New study shows trade is low waste, climate friendly and profitable

On Monday 27th November, the Mitumba Consortium Association of Kenya hosted a webinar for the launch of their new report, *'The Quality of Second-Hand Clothes Imported to Kenya and the Associated Environmental Impacts'*.

The report assessed the economic and environmental impact of the second-hand clothes trade in Kenya and found that the sector contributes significantly to the economy of the country and also reduces overall textile waste while helping to cut carbon emissions and other environmental impacts of the textile sector.

Research was carried out by Nairobi-based Information Research Solutions, and the report was edited by Professor Patrick Diamond of Queen Mary University London. The report found that the second-hand clothes trade in Kenya provides 2 million green jobs and supports 20 million livelihoods. Across the EAC, the sector contributes \$400 million in taxes, over \$100 million in Kenya, in 2021-22 alone.

The report found that the vast majority of SHCs imported into Kenya meet quality standards, supported by a robust sorting infrastructure, and that the quality control and inspection processes overseen by the Government of Kenya ensures low levels of clothing waste and high level of compliance. This means that the proportion of waste generated by imported second-hand clothes into Kenya is estimated at less than 2%¹.

Teresia Wairimu, MCAK chairperson said:

“The wildly inaccurate misinformation circulating in Western media about the second hand clothes trade in Kenya have been deeply damaging to what this report demonstrates is an industry that by its nature is low waste and environmentally friendly.

While our association welcomes any improvements that can be made in this important sector. We hope the launch of this report begins to turn the tide of a false prevailing narrative that has demonised our trade and put millions of jobs and livelihoods at risk on the false altar of protecting the environment.

¹ This figure is based on a sample of traders and households in Nairobi, Kenya, and is corroborated by previous academic research that shows a similar figure for the quantity of waste generated by the importation of second-hand clothes.. A copy of the report is included with this press release.



This report is yet more evidence that, rather than being a threat to the environment, second-hand clothes are a crucial pillar in global endeavours towards reuse, a circular economy and sustainability in the textile sector. We are clear that the threat to our natural world is fast fashion and not the second-hand clothing sector.

Policy decisions affecting second-hand clothes should be based on robust evidence and involve listening to the industry and individuals whose livelihoods depend on this sector, and will be most affected. We would like to work with domestic and international stakeholders to address any concerns about the second-hand clothing sector.”

When assessing the overall environmental impact, the report found that by reducing overall textile waste, the second-hand clothes trade in Kenya has reduced CO2 emissions by around 6 million tonnes (equivalent to emissions of 1.3 million cars), lessened water consumption by 152 billion litres, cut the use of pesticides by 796 tons and decreased the release of plastics into oceans by approximately 4300 tons per annum.

Editor of the report, Professor Patrick Diamond of Queen Mary University of London said:

“This report shows that the Second Hand Clothes market in Kenya not only provides employment, economic growth and tax revenues for Kenya, but it does all this while cutting greenhouse emissions, reducing waste and lessening the impact on the environment of the global fashion industry.

“While there is always more you can do to drive down waste and increase reuse, the lean, green and profitable circular model demonstrated by the Second Hand Clothes trade in Kenya shows the very real and positive impact you can have with a well regulated and well run model that provides economic, social and environmental benefits.”

MCAK is the largest umbrella organisation representing stakeholders in the mitumba industry. Mitumba is the Swahili term for second-hand clothing.

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