

**Working paper**

**273.**

**April 2024**

*Judit Kiss*

**THE DICHOTOMY OF SECOND-HAND-CLOTHING INDUSTRY:  
THE CASE OF KENYA**

**W P**

HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Institute of World Economics

Working Paper Nr. 273 (2024) 1-29. April 2024

# The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry: the case of Kenya

Author:

Judit Kiss

research professor, senior advisor

Institute of World Economics,

HUN-REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies

---

HUN-REN CERS, IWE Working Papers aim to present research findings and stimulate discussion. The views expressed are those of the author and constitute “work in progress”. Citation and use of the working papers should take into account that the paper is preliminary. Materials published in this series may be subject to further publication.

The contents of this paper are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of other members of the research staff of the Institute of World Economics, CERS HUN-REN.

---

ISSN 1215-5241

ISBN 978-963-301-730-2

# The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry: the case of Kenya

Judit Kiss<sup>1</sup>

---

## ***Abstract***

Kenya is one of the leading SHC importers in Africa, where the aborted import substitution industrialisation, the liberalization of the economy and the failure of domestic textile industry led to SHC trade surge which is the direct product of the global (ultra)fast fashion linear business model resulting in overproduction and forced overconsumption. While SHC industry is noticeably beneficial for the economy and the people of Kenya due to job creation, income and revenue generation, providing affordable clothing, one should not ignore the detrimental impact on the environment and local textile/fashion industry which might be the backbone of economic growth and social transformation. In order to keep the benefits and minimize the drawbacks of SHC industry, in the short run the supply side pressure should be eased via decreasing the quantity and increasing the quality of SHC inflow in order to minimize waste, while in the longer run the enhancement of domestic garment industry should be accompanied by the gradual decreasing/phasing out of SHC inflow.

***JEL:*** E2, F1, F6, O5

***Keywords:*** secondhand-clothing industry, waste colonialism, fast fashion, Kenya, mitumba

---

---

<sup>1</sup> research professor, senior advisor, Institute of World Economics, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, HUN-REN, Budapest. Email: [kiss.judit@krtk.hun-ren.hu](mailto:kiss.judit@krtk.hun-ren.hu)

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

## **Introduction**

Since the 90s, as a consequence of the rapid development of fast fashion, secondhand-clothing (SHC) trade has become an emerging industry, mainly in the less developed parts of the world. East Africa, especially Kenya is one of the fastest growing destinations, and export hubs at the same time. The main aim of this study is to a) reveal the main causes of SHC trade surge, b) highlight the major economic, social and environmental implications with special regard to the benefits and drawbacks, c) provide solutions to cope with the challenges, and d) outline the prospects in the case of Kenya.

This fashionomics paper is based on the concepts of waste colonialism/imperialism, consumer colonialism, the core-periphery asymmetrical power relationship, neoliberal transformation, trade liberalisation with unequal bargaining power and the (ultra) fast fashion linear business model.

Apart from relevant theories, the article is mainly based on secondary sources: academic literature, books and articles, descriptive statistical data and the reports of the *Mitumba Institute and Research Centre* (MIRC)<sup>2</sup> and the *Mitumba Consortium Association of Kenya* (MCAK)<sup>3</sup>. The author made numerous attempts to approach both institutions for conducting in-depth interviews with the stakeholders. Though the interviews were not materialised, the approach was not in vain, as in November 2023 the chairperson of the Mitumba Association, Teresia Wairimu kindly invited the author for a webinar where the latest Mitumba Report was launched and some occurring issues were discussed. We do hope that the above event and the thorough qualitative content analysis of academic sources with the triple bottom line sustainability method focussing on the economic, social and environmental impacts<sup>4</sup> would result in meaningful and conclusive research findings. Additionally, the author's life experience while working, living and travelling in Africa (Tanzania, Botswana, Namibia, Ghana, Togo, Benin, South Africa) might have a special value added.

## **Stylized/basic facts**

SHC by definition is the use/reuse of unused/used/pre-owned/discarded clothing and footwear. Since its widespread existence, different names have been used for covering the term: it is called *mitumba* (meaning bundles, bales as SHC arrives in bundles from the

---

<sup>2</sup> MIRC is an independent and academic-led research institute commissioned by the Mitumba Association of Kenya to investigate the economic, social and environmental effects of the second-hand clothing sector (known as *mitumba*) in Kenya and the wider African continent.

<sup>3</sup> MCAK was formed to protect the interest of its members and to promote and develop trading in SHC.

<sup>4</sup> Dissanayake and Pal, 2023.

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

West) which replaced the stigmatized term of *kafa ulaya* (clothes of the dead white man) in Kenya and Tanzania; *mivumba* (bundles) in Uganda, *mutunda* (bales) in Rwanda, *salaula* (selecting from a bale) in Zambia, *obroni wawu* (clothes of the dead white man) in Ghana, *mupedzanhamo* (where all problems end) in Zimbabwe, *okirika* (bend down boutique) in Nigeria, *sola* (to choose) in Congo (Brooks, 2015), *ukay-ukay* (to dig) in the Philippines or *túrkáló* (digging) in Hungary. As women in the North tend to buy much more clothing and discard it more often than men, the world supply of used women's clothing is at least seven times that of men's (Prashar, 2022).

Though SHC trade is only a tiny segment of officially documented (meaning legal) world trade in clothing<sup>5</sup> (around 0.6%) (Brooks and Simon, 2012, p. 1275), that is 2-4 million tons/year. Trade value has increased rapidly, from USD 0.4 billion in 1980 to 1.4 billion in 2000, 1.8 billion in 2006, 3.7 billion in 2016 (Brady and Lu, 2018) and to USD 4.2 billion in 2019 (UN Comtrade). Trade expansion has accelerated further in the 2020s: the trade value has increased to USD 36 billion by 2021 and expected to reach 77 billion by 2025 (Cobbing et al., 2022) and predicted to increase to US\$ 218 billion by 2026 (ThreadUP, 2022).

SHC data should be treated with reservations (Brooks and Simon, 2012), especially in the case of Africa. Due to the shortcomings of the African statistical, registration and border control systems, data are hardly accurate and complete. Apart from legal and registered imports, a significant part of SHC shipments is traded semi- or illegally (grey trade, smuggling, illegal import, illegal re-export) without any documents. Sometimes brand-new garments are registered as *mitumba* because of more beneficial customs treatment.

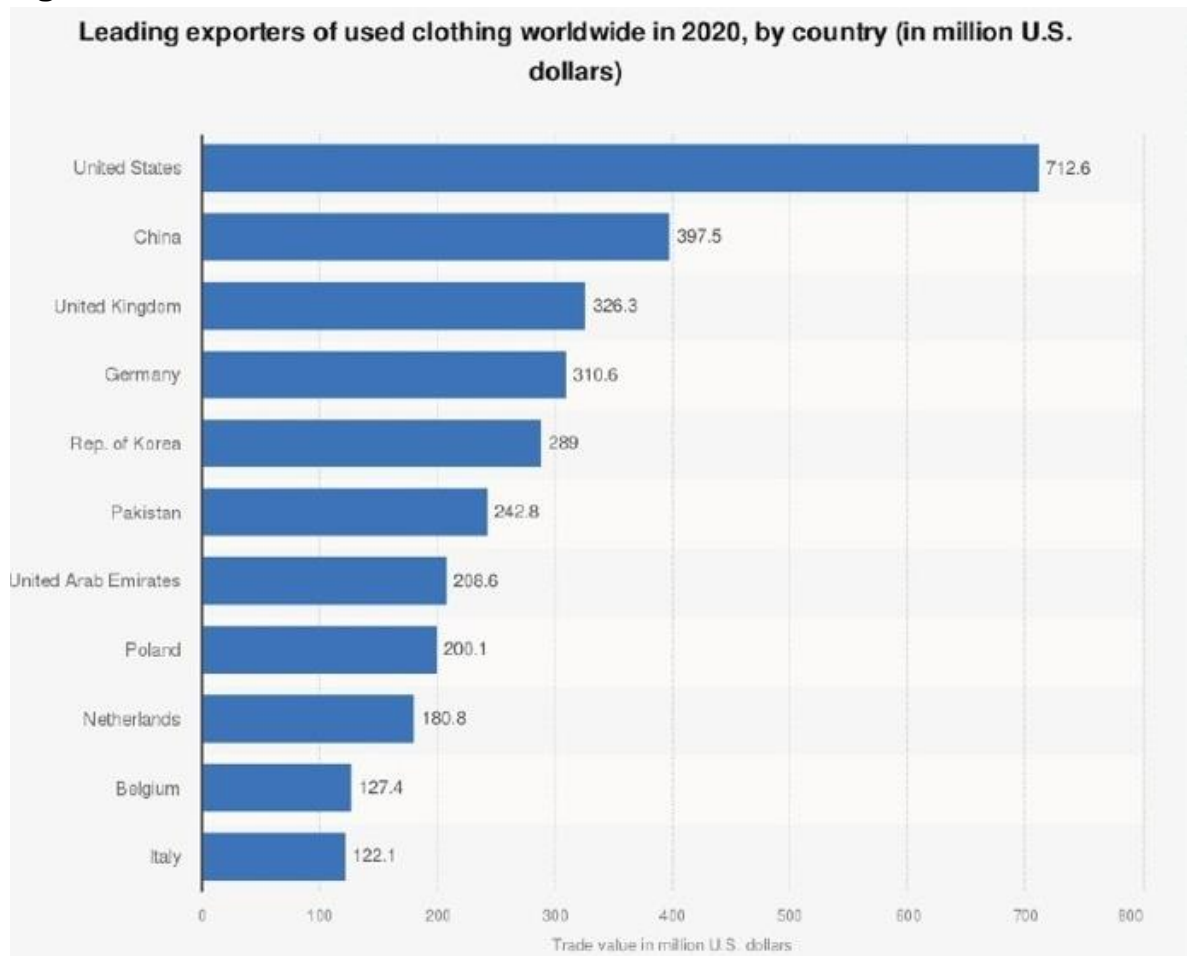
As the concept of SHC originates from donation, the main suppliers/exporters are basically the highly developed donor countries, namely the USA, UK, the EU, particularly Germany. In 2016 the USA and the EU accounted for 65% of world SHC trade (Brady and Lu, 2018). However, the centre of fast fashion industry has shifted towards the Far East and started to be practiced by the Asian Tigers in the 80s and followed by China in the 90s. These countries, and especially China became emerging SHC supplier: while in 2006 China's SHC export was USD 0.32 million only, by 2016 it has increased to USD 218 (!) million (Brady and Lu, 2018) and to USD 382 million in 2020, while in 2017 China banned the import of SHC because the country became richer, self-sufficient and a clothing exporter.

---

<sup>5</sup> In this article the term clothing, garments, apparel are used interchangeable, meaning men, women and children clothing, footwear and accessories. Code 6309 is used for SHC by UN Comtrade.

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

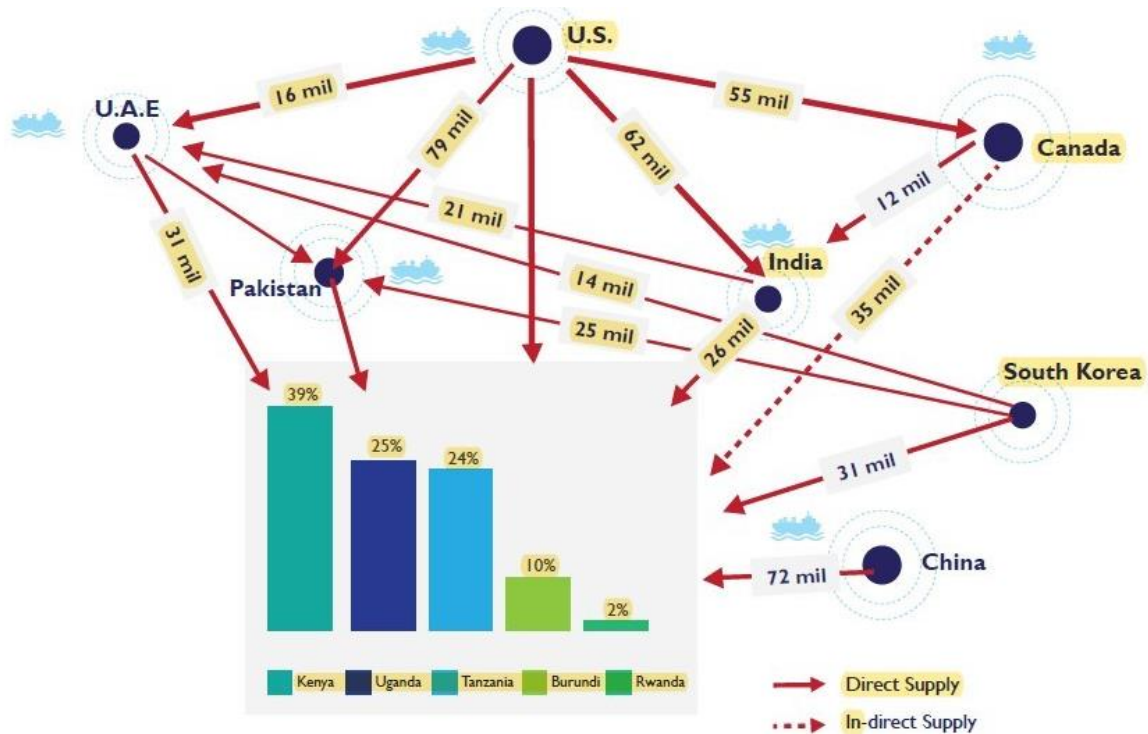
**Figure 1.**



Source: Prashar, 2022, p. 9.

Apart from direct export between the producer countries and the final destinations, there is an increasing global circulation of SHC: for instance, the USA exports SHC to Africa mainly indirectly, via Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and India (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Imports of SHC from the USA to Kenya (2012-2016)



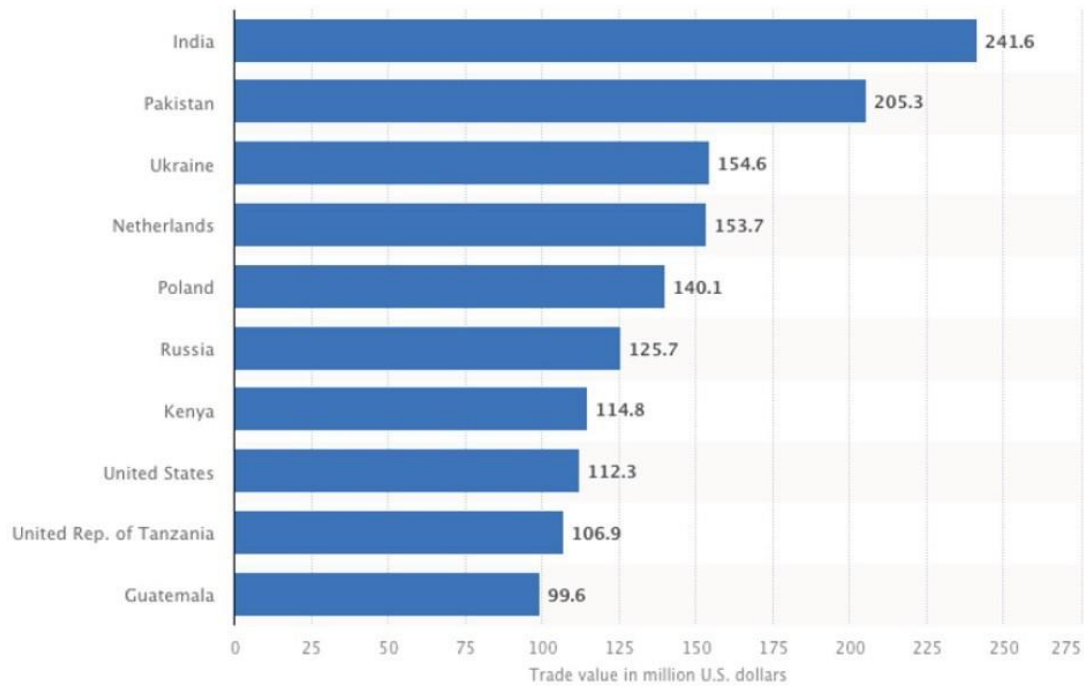
Source: Overview...2017, p. 7

Due to the nature of the phenomenon, the main markets of SHC are the less developed recipient countries. In general, above 20% of SHC export is directed to Sub-Saharan Africa (Fields, 2003), mainly to Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania, meeting a significant portion of effective demand for clothing. According to Prashar (2022) four-fifths of the African population wears second-hand clothes. As per Brookes and Simon (2012) in many African countries more than 50% of clothing demand is met by SHC in volume term: in Tanzania 540 million out of 720 million pieces (75%) of clothing consumed are SHC; in Ghana 90% of clothing used are SHC as Ghana is the second biggest SHC importer after Kenya; in Uganda the share is above 80%. According to the latest report of the Mitumba Institute and Research Centre, 4/5 of the population in East Africa wears second-hand clothes (Diamond, 2023b, p. 7).

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

**Figure 3.**

Leading importers of used clothing worldwide in 2020, by country  
(in million U.S. dollars)



Source: Prashar, 2022, p. 13

### **Theoretical background of SHC trade**

The original idea behind SHC trade was a noble gesture, namely to donate unused and/or used garments to charity shops and to distribute the staff free of charge among the needy, as it has happened in the Middle Ages, or even these days in the rural communities or within families<sup>6</sup>. As foreign aid, international assistance or development co-operation - as it is euphemistically called these days -, became a lucrative business for the egoist donors, in the mid-80s donation and free of charge distribution of clothing were converted into business, meaning that the collected garments were sold or in the country of origin in the case of the best staff (around 10-30%) and/or exporting the remaining 70-90% overseas<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For the century-old history of SHC see the famous book of Brook (2015), *Clothing poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes*.

<sup>7</sup> More than 70% of all UK reused clothing heads overseas (Cobbing et al., 2022).



*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

after sorting and grading<sup>8</sup>. Consequently, consignments directed to Africa as a less demanding market, generally consisted of “unwanted in the West”, less trendy, out-of-fashion, lower quality, worn, dumped, overused or unusable, discarded clothing and footwear. This is how the gift was “poisoned”, referring to the title of the German Greenpeace report entitled *Poisoned gift* by Cobbing et al. (2022). The respectable act of donation has been commercialised (monetised), the gift has been turned into a commodity and charity resulted in waste disposal disguised by donations. This is how *waste colonialism* has evolved where high-income nations use their power and privilege to exploit the least developed countries by overflowing the used clothes markets with cheap and poor-quality fashion items (Huang, 2022). Global North keeps on using Global South to finance and manage his textile waste disposal assignment under the disguise of donation and circular economy, discrediting the concepts.

The charge of waste colonialism can be proven by the poor quality, the composition and the environmentally harmful nature of SHC shipments from Global North to Global South. According to case studies (Cobbing et al., 2022) generally around half of SHC consignments can be (re)used and sold as garments or on the domestic market or in third countries. The remaining half is worthless due to poor quality, design, size, fabric etc., so they are pure waste. Waste disposal is now the responsibility and the burden of the African countries. Are they able to cope with the problem? (See later.)

The expansion of waste imperialism is the consequence of the rapid growth and global spread of *fast and ultrafast fashion linear business model*<sup>9</sup> leading to oversupply where profit is based on more and more production (Brooks, 2012, p. 54.); depressed prices are associated with depressed wages and with the avoidance of paying environmental costs. Oversupply and quest for profit result in forced and manipulated overconsumption meaning that we are compelled to buy more clothing than ever<sup>10</sup>, to purchase unnecessary goods, to follow the frequently changing fashion, to wear garments for a shorter time and throw away soon, even before getting worn out. In order to get rid of surplus production and generate new markets and clean existing ones for the new production - apart from a wide range of marketing means<sup>11</sup> -, exporting SHC to the less developed countries is an obvious solution.

In addition, the supply side pressure - based on the *centre-periphery* asymmetrical power *relationship* between North and South (Brooks and Simon, 2012, p. 21) - coincided with the neoliberal transformation of Africa. The Washington consensus and the World Bank's

---

<sup>8</sup> Around 1/3 of globally donated clothing is sold in Africa (Brooks, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Which is rightly called a „waste making machine” (Trashion, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> 60% more clothing has been bought than 15 years ago and has been worn for half as long (Why giving, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> One of the latest and most successful means has been the widespread use of online shopping accompanied by home delivery, especially during the years of COVID pandemics.

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

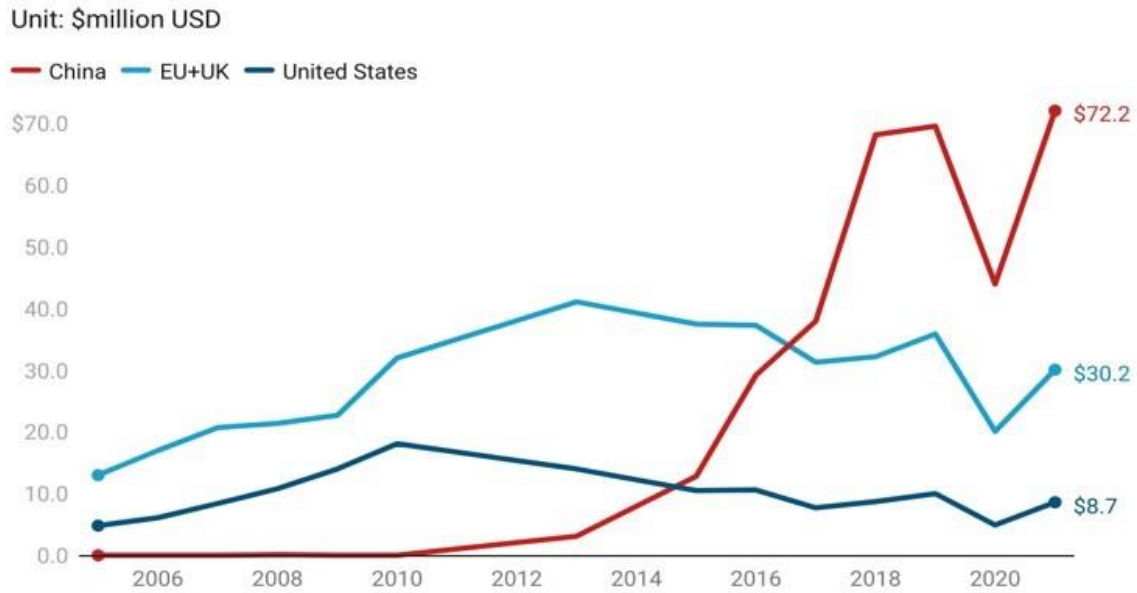
structural adjustment programs in the 80s-90s obliged the African countries to *liberalize* their economies and open their markets under the conditions of unequal trade terms and bargaining power. Consequently, trade liberalisation had detrimental impact on the just emerging domestic textile and garment industries which anyway were struggling with the symptoms of underdevelopment, such as lack of capital, shortage of energy, deficiency of infrastructure, lack of skilled labour and expertise. Consequently, they were not able to fully meet domestic demand, let alone to conquer export markets. The emerging market niche was discovered by the SHC industry. For a significant part of the population SHC became the primary affordable, cost-effective source of clothing (Wetengere, 2018, p. 18) due to the deteriorating economic situation and low standards of living. However, more affluent customers also opted for buying SHC due to the fashion's Western hegemony or "*white imperialism*" (Wetengere, 2018, p. 4). The demonstration effect transmitted via media, TV, FB, internet results in the preference and imitation of Western fashion, dress style, that is a sort of consumer colonialism.

### **Main features of SHC industry in Kenya**

Kenya is the biggest SHC importer in Africa and 8<sup>th</sup> biggest in the world (Hungary is the 15<sup>th</sup>). In 2021 the yearly import was 185 000 tons (= 8000 containers) and between 2005-2021 SHC import grew by over 500%, from USD 27 million to USD 172 million (see Figure 4), however it gives only 1% of total imports, while the sector contributes 7% to the country's export earnings (Diamond, 2023b, p. 20) as Kenya is a global hub due to its geographical position (Prashar, 2022). Kenya exports SHC mainly to the neighbouring countries (Uganda, Tanzania, Congo Brazaville, DRC, Somalia, Zambia and Lesotho).

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

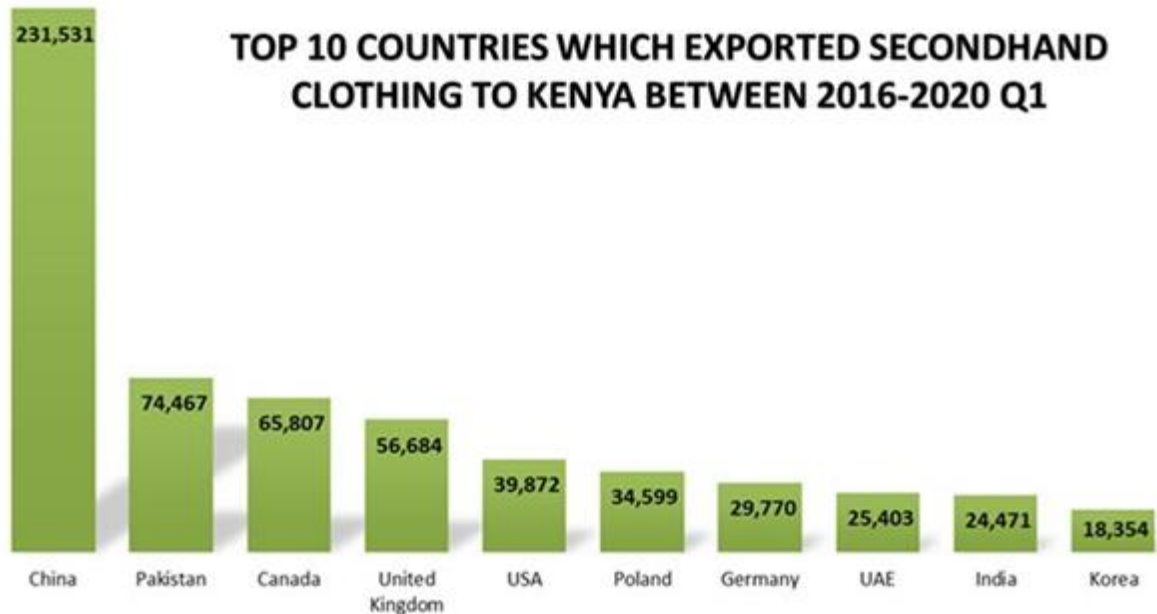
**Figure 4. SHC inflow to Kenya**



Source: <https://shenglufashion.com/2023/02/26/used-clothing-trade-debate-continues-in-kenya/>

The leading supplier is China followed by Pakistan, Canada and UK (see Figure 5). Between 2012-2016 the import of SHC from China increased from \$723,513 to \$28,757,351, that is almost 40 (!) times in 4 years (Overview...2017, p. 27), while in 2017 China banned the import of SHC as the country became richer and a clothing exporter. In 2021 the leading EU exporters to Kenya were Poland, Germany, the UK and Hungary. Nearly over 900 million SHC items were sent to Kenya from around the globe in 2021, nearly 150 million items came from the EU and the UK.

**Figure 5.**



Source: Bhanushali, 2021, p. 3.

## **SHC industry in Kenya: benefits and drawbacks**

### *a) Meeting domestic demand for affordable and trendy garments*

In 2019 2.5% of private income was spent on clothing and footwear in Kenya (Bhanushali, 2021, p. 7; The state of..., 2021, p. 4), meaning that clothing is not a top priority. In principle, there are four options to meet domestic garments demand: homemade apparel, locally manufactured garments, imported manufactured clothing and second-hand clothing.

Though Kenya is the most developed country in East Africa and has achieved significant development, still it is a low-middle income country with 2188 USD per capita GDP (2023); the standard of living is low, and poverty is widespread (36% of the population, that is almost 17 million people lives below the poverty line), mainly in the rural areas. Consequently, a significant part of the population, especially rural dwellers, low- and middle-income earners cannot afford to buy new garments, irrespective of the origin of the product. The only product segment they can afford to buy is SHC. So, for them buying SHC is not an option to locally produced and/or imported goods, it is a must and a necessity (Hansen, 2014): SHC is a staple, primary source of clothing (Wetengere, 2018). Though large SHC markets are in big towns (like Kigoma market in Nairobi), there are easily accessed SHC markets both in the urban and rural areas. As SHC-buyers are not

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

conscious consumers in the Western sense of the word, they do not have any nostalgia for old clothes (vintage, retro) and probably the term “circular economy” is unfamiliar to them, however, they also are attracted by well-known brands and international labels<sup>12</sup>.

As this segment of the population is basically price conscious<sup>13</sup>, they care less about the quality, fabrics, the design etc. They only go for affordable, acceptable quality, long lasting and fashionable products, preferable brands (Wetengere, 2018, p.8). However, there is a more affluent and cosmopolitan strata of the population which prefers to buy trendy, good quality, durable, unique and exclusive clothes, especially brands produced for more demanding western customers (Brooks, 2015; Hansen, 2000; Wetengere, 2018, p. 8), so they also do buy SHC instead of purchasing new, but less trendy, poorer quality and less durable domestic or imported, mainly Chinese garments. That is why many Chinese vendors deliberately “degrade” their brand-new products to SHC<sup>14</sup> or mix new clothing with SHC. Albeit the most demanding and affluent customers go for imported branded Western products. Sometimes they travel abroad for shopping or ask their relatives living abroad (the diaspora) to meet their desire for the latest fashion<sup>15</sup>.

b) *Job creation for the unemployed masses*

Though the official unemployment rate is not so high in Kenya: it was a bit above 5% in 2022, however, it was as high as almost 14% in the case of young people<sup>16</sup>, especially in urban areas due to outmigration from the rural areas. If we include underemployed, then unemployment rate is even higher, that is Kenya, like the other African countries is struggling with joblessness, especially among urban youth, so all industries with meaningful job creation is welcome and supported. From this point of view SHC industry seems rather valuable as it “employs” around 2 million people<sup>17</sup> (The state of..., 2021, p. 3) more than the entire local textile industry (Diamond, 2023b) and 10% of the total labour force (The State of...2021, p. 10), with high share of women<sup>18</sup>. Long chain of people is involved in the SHC business (Chalhoub, 2012; Imo and Maiyo, 2012) such as importers, exporters, clearing and forwarding agents, wholesalers, brokers, medium and small retailers, distributors, merchants, formal and informal traders, transporters, loaders,

---

<sup>12</sup> Herjanto et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive overview about the consumers’ behaviour towards SHC on the basis of 131 researches published over the years 1990–2014.

<sup>13</sup> In Kenya SHC is 3 to 5 times cheaper than brand new clothes and shoes (Katende-Magezi, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> The other, more tangible reason, is to pay less taxes (Brooks, 2015, p. 166.).

<sup>15</sup> When I was living in Tanzania and returned home for a holiday, I was always asked by the university staff – from the secretary till the faculty – to bring clothes from Hungary which was not a fashion country at that time, but was located in Europe.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/808608/unemployment-rate-in-kenya>

<sup>17</sup> Between 2013 and 2021 the number of jobs in Kenya’s SHC industry increased from 577 000 to 1,38 million (Diamond, 2023b, p. 10).

<sup>18</sup> Nearly 60% of the traders of used clothes are women in several African nations mainly because trade is accessible to anyone without formal training or initial capital, and thus entry barriers are low (Chalhoub, 2012).

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

sorters, market/street and food vendors, hawkers, security agents; value addition people who clean, dry, iron, tailor, sew, mend, alter, remake the clothes; helpers preparing tea and food for traders, and finally, *fagia* (waste textiles) workers and dumpsite waste pickers.

c) *Income and government revenue generation*

SHC industry is a lucrative business. As it provides job for around 2 million people and creates small businesses, consequently it contributes to the country's GDP, generates income for the participants and increases purchasing power. However, one should note that SHC business is quite risky due to currency fluctuation, instability of effective demand and the unpredictable content of the consignments. That is why sorting upon opening the bales is crucial. In the East African Community three quality levels, grades (*camera-s*) are applied: Grade A (first *camera*) – new or as good as new; Grade B (second *camera*) – stained, dripped strides, some bruises; Grade C – spoiled, serious bruises, holes, tears and stains (Katende-Magezi, 2017), while the rest is the *fagia*, meaning the lowest quality items destined for rags or fuel<sup>19</sup>.

Official income generation is modified by the fact that a significant part of the participants – being active/operating in the informal sector - are not registered employees, or they are self-employed, consequently they do not pay income taxes and their customers do not pay value added tax either<sup>20</sup>. In the rural areas trading is seasonal. However, formal/registered SHC industry does increase budget revenues in the form of customs duties, import tax, turnover tax, sales tax, value added tax, income tax, corporate tax, levies (import declaration levy), licencing and rental fees, business permits<sup>21</sup>. In 2021 SHC trade generated USD 112,5 million in government tax revenues (Diamond, 2023b, p. 20).

d) *Impact on domestic garment industry and African fashion*

The most controversial issue is the interplay between SHC industry and domestic textile industry<sup>22</sup>. There are two main strands in the literature. According to one of them the decline of domestic garment industry is mainly caused by the increasing inflow of SHC and cheap imports, largely from the Asian countries (Koyi, 2006; Majtenyi, 2010; Patel, 2004; Webster, 2003 cited by Brooks and Simon, 2012, p. 1284; Brooks, 2015; Frazer,

---

<sup>19</sup> For boiling water, washing clothing, drying and roasting peanuts at the mitumba market.

<sup>20</sup> About the informal sector – which “employs” 70% of the working population in Kenya - see Chalhoub (2012).

<sup>21</sup> That is why the Vison 2030 program of Kenya suggests the formalization of informal sector.

<sup>22</sup> In this paper the term apparel, textile, garment, clothing, fashion industry is used interchangeable, covering the production of yarn, fabric, manufacturing of clothing, garments (including shoes), research and development, design and distribution.

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

2008<sup>23</sup>; Wetengere, 2018). However, Prashar states that “it is a myth that the second-hand clothing industry weakens the domestic production” (Prashar, 2022, p. 2) as the two sectors can work together for mutual benefit.

The other strand states that local textile industry has anyway doomed to decline due to a great number of deficiencies such as lack of capital, raw materials<sup>24</sup>, inputs, skilled labour force, technical skills and management expertise; use of outdated technology due to expensive machinery imports (Hansen, 2004, p. 7-8) and unavailability of foreign currency; poor supportive infrastructure, unreliable energy supply; inefficient operation, poor management, low productivity; lack of tax and non-tax incentives, poor business environment (Diamond, 2023b; Mangieri, 2006; Wetengere, 2018). The truth seems to be somewhere in-between.

After independence Kenya, like many African countries, decided to industrialize the economy in order to reach higher level of development. In order to decrease dependence on external sources of supply, import substitution industrialization was a plausible option in the case of labour-intensive light industries, including textile and garment industries (Mangiere, 2006). Natural and economic endowments, like availability of raw materials (cotton), abundance of labour force, expanding domestic market were conducive to build up and develop these branches of manufacturing. In the 60s and 70s the process of industrialization has started, the contribution of manufacturing to GDP and employment has increased significantly as labour force has moved from the less productive agriculture to the more productive manufacturing and services sector. By the early 1980s, the textile industry (mainly traditional African print textile, *khanga* and *kitenge*, production) became Kenya’s leading manufacturing sector in terms of employment and size, involving over 200,000 households and 30% of the industrial labour force (Mangiere, 2006, p. 5).

However, in the late 80s and early 90s the structural transformation process has been halted by the oil price explosion, the deteriorating world economic situation, the debt crisis of the African countries leading to austerity measures, declining living standards and shrinking domestic effective demand. In addition, the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank further aggravated the situation due to the liberalisation of the economies, including foreign trade and the neoliberal industrial development model (Brooks, 2015). The inflow of more competitive import products started to weaken the position of the “premature” domestic industries, leading to the process of deindustrialization and decay of local industries (Kiss, 2017), so the two parallel,

---

<sup>23</sup> According to Frazer’s econometric model 1 percent increase in SHC imports resulted in 0.61 percent reduction in apparel production over the period 1981–2000 (Frazer, 2008, p. 1780). Consequently, used clothing imports have a negative impact on apparel production in Africa, explaining roughly 40% of the decline in production and 50% of the decline in employment (Frazer, 2008, p.1767 and 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Unavailability and/or shortage of cotton, raw hides and skins because 75-80% of the raw materials produced in the East African region is exported (Katende-Magezi, 2017).

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

simultaneous processes led to the decline of domestic garment industry and opened the way for garment imports.

In tandem with the increasing clothing imports, the inflow of SHC also accelerated (Mangieri, 2006), leaving few options for the Kenyan textile industry to recover as imports (new and SHC) outcompeted locally produced goods. In the mid-90's only 30% of domestic clothing demand was met by local production, while 20% by imports and already 50% by SHC<sup>25</sup> (Field, 2004; Imo-Mayo, 2012). So, by the 90s Kenya became a clothing importer (Hansen, 2009) due to the failure of industrialisation. Since then, the share of local production in meeting domestic demand decreased further<sup>26</sup>, all the more as larger textile firms owned by foreign (mainly American and Asian – Indian, Chinese) capital moved from impoverishing domestic to affluent export markets (Brooks and Simon, 2012, p, 1280; Mangiere, 2006) capitalizing on preferential trade agreements (like the multi-fibre trade agreement till 2005, or the AGOA (= African Growth and Opportunity Act) of the USA<sup>27</sup>).

Our conclusion is that *not* the inflow of SHC led to the failure of domestic textile industry as the decay of local garment industries has already started earlier (according to Brooks (2015, p. 61) even under colonialism as cotton and ginned cotton started to be exported to the UK as an input into early industrialization) and opened the way for SHC inflow which accelerated its decline. However, cheap import is a bigger challenge for domestic textile industry as in 2019 SHC represented 12.5% of the total imports of textiles, only (Diamond 2023a, p. 12).

Apart from the economic impact on the domestic garment industry, one should not ignore the subverting impact of SHC trade on *local fashion* and customers' behaviour. Imitating and giving preference to Western fashion crowd out traditional authentic fashion, design and natural fabrics<sup>28</sup>. Oversupply of SHC promotes the bad habit of fast fashion and wasteful consumption, plus it destroys and/or distorts native societies' own fashion<sup>29</sup>. Luckily not everywhere and not all the time. For occasions, like wedding, ceremonies, diplomatic or international events traditional African outfit reappears. It even happens

---

<sup>25</sup> In Zambia – where domestic textile industry was less developed than in Kenya – in the mid-90s already 75% of clothing demand was met by SHC.

<sup>26</sup> In the early 1990s there were 110 large-scale garment manufacturers in Kenya. By 2006 their number dropped to 55 and by 2016 to 15.

<sup>27</sup> The AGOA (2000-2015) provided duty- and quota-free access to the US market for apparel items from Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2015 the agreement was extended till 2025.

<sup>28</sup> In Ghana the authentic kente cloth made by traditional weavers (and costing a fortune) is getting to be crowded out by kente pattern typically mass produced in China.

<sup>29</sup> A good example is the clothing of Masai tribes in Kenya and Tanzania. Though they still wear their toga type traditional cloth, the „shukas” (sometimes made in China) over their shoulder, they wear it with plastic shoes and synthetic T-shirts. The most astonishing outfit I have ever met was in Tanzania in the 90s, when a young masai put in his cell phone to his pierced and enlarged ear lobe.



*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

that members of African high society wear luxurious, exclusive, sophisticated and graceful traditional garments abroad. While travelling to Ghana recently, I have met some young Ghanaians wearing beautiful, long, white silk robes (costing more than my airticket) with genuine patent leather shoes with matching suitcase (probable bought in Gulf-states).

e) *Environmental impact and health hazard*

The hottest debate is about the environmental impact of SHC industry at global and local level. SHC products arrive to Africa from long distance (USA or China) and circulate a lot before landing (see Figure 2). The transportation of low value but voluminous consignments has relatively high negative impact on the global environment. Supporters/advocates of SHC trade (Diamond, 2023b; Farrant et al., 2010; Katende-Magezi, 2017; The state of...2021, p. 4. and p. 27) argue that importing SHC is less harmful to the environment than producing garments locally<sup>30</sup> because of high water and energy consumption, pollution and high carbon emission<sup>31</sup>. As textile industry is one of the world's most polluting industries after food, housing and transport (Diamond, 2023b, p. 14), the highly developed, "environmentally conscious – meaning environmentally egoist" countries have replaced significant (most polluting) parts of their garment industry to the emerging countries, like China, Turkey, Indonesia, Bangladesh, where environmental standards are low, regulations are less strict and human life is cheap. The environmental impact of SHC industry is none of their business anymore. The other counterargument lies in the magnitude of SHC inflow: far more SHC is imported than needed or the market can absorb<sup>32</sup> or should have been replaced by domestic production.

In the case of Africa, the environmental implications of SHC-trade are caused by the quantity/volume, the quality and the decomposition of consignments. Though there is an increasing effective demand for SHC, it cannot keep pace with the oversupply of the linear business model of fast fashion production. Moreover, in order to reach higher profits by the salesmen, rapid stock turnover is needed. All the more as about half of the inflowing SHC is physically worthless (damaged, dirty, spotted, spoiled, ripped), unsaleable and unsuitable for wearing by Africans due to the style, design (dress length, tightness) (Hansen, 2014), non-compliance with African tradition, religion (culturally inappropriate style), size (different body shape) and fabric (not for hot and humid climate) etc. Consequently, every second item, 450 million out of 900 million items in Kenya, is a *textile waste*. As there is no organised waste disposal system in Kenya, half of second-hand

---

<sup>30</sup> "The purchase of 100 second-hand items of clothing would save ... 60 to 85 new garments" (The state of...2021, p. 4).

<sup>31</sup> 10% of all global carbon emissions is generated by textile industry (Diamond, 2023b, p. 14) "Every 1 kilo of fabric produced generates 23 kilos of greenhouse gases" (Diamond, 2023b, p. 15).

<sup>32</sup> Every week around 15 million items of SHC from Western countries arrive to Ghana, where the entire population is only 30 million. [www.cbsnews.com/news/ghana-fast-fashion-environmental-disaster](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ghana-fast-fashion-environmental-disaster)

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

clothing imports ends up in landfills, dumpsites<sup>33</sup> or rivers<sup>34</sup> causing contamination, water and air pollution because most of the materials are oil-based, non-biodegradable synthetic materials full of harmful and toxic substances: the phenomenon is rightly called *toxic colonialism* (Trashion, 2023).

In Kenya 1 out of 3 pieces of SHC (300 million pieces out of 900 million) is made of synthetic, plastic fibres (mainly polyester) with hazardous chemicals (Trashion, 2023)<sup>35</sup>. In order to get rid of the textile waste, they are burnt with detrimental air pollution effect due to methane and harmful greenhouse gas emission causing various cancers, birth defects, lung and respiratory diseases, stroke, cardiovascular diseases, allergies, skin problems. The paradox is that Africa used to export natural raw materials, like cotton, skins etc. for the garment industry in the global North and finally, a significant part of its population has no choice than to wear unhealthy clothing made of non-natural materials, bath in contaminated rivers, inhale smoke from the burning synthetic clothes and suffer of various health hazards (Wetengere, 2018).

In sharp contrast with the above findings, according to the latest report of the Kenya Mitumba Association (Diamond, 2023a) textile waste is *negligible* in Kenya as “waste in imported SHC in the retail trade is no more than 2%” (?) (ibid p. 9), that is “4-12 pieces of clothing of SHC out of 350-600” (ibid p. 9) is waste. This incredible low minimal clothing waste is explained by the fact that “SHC imported into Kenya meets the required quality standards” (ibid p. 8) as importers follow a series of quality control processes and measures (like sample inspection at the sorting centres) to ensure that they import only suitable and quality items. In addition, the sporadically occurring textile waste (that is 1-2% of total SHC inflow) is recycled (used as cleaning rags, stuffing, patching etc.). The findings of the report are in full contradiction with the visible reality and the arguments are rather weak as they are based on personal interviews with importers and retailers, who are the major stakeholders interested in continuing SHC business. The other source of evidence are the household surveys according to which “textile waste accounts for approximately 0.39% of the total household waste generated in east Nairobi” (ibid p. 10). The problem is that textile waste is actually “created” in the supply chain *between* the importers/retailers and the households and unsold/unusable items are never landing in the households, instead in the landfills and riverbanks. The final argument for mitigating the harmful environmental impact of SHC industry is the well-known incorrect reasoning, namely that the import of SHC replaces the environmentally harmful production of new

---

<sup>33</sup> In the case of Ghana, 40% of SHC arriving to the country ends up in landfills.

<sup>34</sup> Nairobi river – which passes Gikomba market – is full of textile waste.

<sup>35</sup> Synthetics are the backbone of fast fashion industry as they account for 69% for all the production (Trashion, 2023).

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

clothing. This is a nonsense as the Africans never would and never could purchase such a huge volume of new clothes which are flowing into the country as SHC.

### **Solutions – for shorter and longer terms**

The strong presence of SHC industry in Kenya is due to the interplay of two reinforcing sets of factors, namely a) the pressure of (ultra) fast fashion overproduction, the unsustainability of overconsumption and the accumulation of clothing waste in the North, and b) the increasing demand for affordable and trendy garments in the South, let alone the job creation and income generation effects. However, one should not ignore the negative consequences of the phenomenon, that is the increasing dependence on the North, the delayed structural transformation and postponed re-industrialisation in Africa, the unfavourable impact on local fashion, and the ever-increasing environmental degradation.

a) *Short term remedies: to ease supply pressure*

Due to the high profitability of fast fashion industry, the oversupply of SHC and the escalating waste issue in the North, it is not probable that supply side pressure will significantly subside in the coming decades because of the unequal North-South power relationship. However, there are some options in Kenya for easing supply pressure via curbing the SHC inflow:

- i) The most obvious and widely debated option is to *ban SHC import*. All the more as banning is not without precedent in Sub-Saharan Africa: Zimbabwe prohibited SHC imports from 2015-2017, but later abandoned the ban as local textile industry could not meet the demand; Nigeria also had some bans in place; in 2016 there was a ban proposition by the East African Community for boosting domestic textile industry and for health reasons, but the idea was abandoned; there are only two countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where SHC import ban is in force: Rwanda and South Africa.

In Kenya. SHC import was banned between the 1960s and early 1980s when the government pursued import substitution industrialisation (Mangieri, 2006). In the 1980s, SHC were allowed into Kenya as long as they were donations for refugees from neighbouring countries, which gradually led to trade in SHC. From the early 1990s, the government lifted the ban on SHC because of trade liberalization and export promotion. By 2000, most of the domestic textile companies had collapsed due to increased competition from SHC and Asian imports. As a result, there have been calls from the private

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

sector and government to reintroduce the ban. Between March 2020 till mid-August Kenya banned SHC import to prevent the potential spread of coronavirus. However, the high reliance on SHC by the majority of the citizens as affordable clothing and income for stakeholders has prevented the government from extending the ban. Currently, the government considers eliminating SHC import progressively over a longer period, however, there are serious reservations.

It is obvious that banning would be an unpopular measure among the consumers and all the beneficiaries as it would negatively impact the supply of affordable clothing, the income of the 2 million stakeholders (mainly traders) and the livelihood of many, let alone government revenues (tax and tariff losses). Furthermore, unilateral banning – even if it is justified - is against the free trade principle of the envisaged African Free Trade Area and the preferential trade agreements (AGOA and the Economic Partnership Agreements of the EU) and implies a risk of loose preferential treatment<sup>36</sup> and resistance from the parties concerned. In addition, the main uninvited beneficiaries would be the low-cost Asian textile exporters, primarily from China. Lastly, import ban can hardly be effective amidst loose customs control, fraudulent practices, malfunctioning registration systems, high level of corruption and widespread informal sector, and would lead to illicit trade and smuggling. That is why in case of introducing ban, it is vital to put in place firm *border control* for curbing uncontrollable, illegal, informal inflow of SHC and smuggling.

- ii) A more feasible option is a *slow, progressive phasing out* of SHC imports (over a 5–10-year period) (Wetengere, 2018) by imposing a gradual ban or on all SHC or *selectively* (Katende-Magezi, 2017), meaning that first the poorest quality (Grade C and B) products will be banned. These measures in the transition period should be accompanied by subsidizing local apparel, textile and leather industries (Brooks, 2016) which would boost domestic production, generate jobs<sup>37</sup> and incomes while maintaining a reasonable degree of SHC import till the emerging local industries would be capable of meeting a part of domestic demand.
- iii) Another possibility is to introduce *import quotas, quantitative restrictions* and/or *voluntary export restraints* in order to moderate the volume of SHC

---

<sup>36</sup> In Rwanda AGOA has been suspended after banning SHC import (Brady and Lu, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Kenya textile industry once employed 500 000 people, now it has only 20 000 workers (Brooks, 2016).

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

imports<sup>38</sup> because the problem is not with the inflow of SHC *per se* – as it meets real effective demand and provides livelihood for a wide range of people, – but with the unregulated, sometimes illegal, massive inflow of poor quality and worthless foreign garments (i.e. waste). To introduce *waste ceiling threshold* and/or *ban waste import* would be desirable, while it is impossible to separate useable clothing from waste as they arrive in the same closed containers and bales – not by chance.

- iv) To *increase tariffs/tax* either on all SHC and/or only the best items (Grade A) (Katende-Magezi, 2017) and/or on the environmentally most harmful clothing (plastic tax) (Trashion, 2023) is also an option with the main objective to restrict SHC import<sup>39</sup>. However, it would increase the price of SHC, making it less affordable and less competitive vis-à-vis imports and/or domestic production. Furthermore, unilateral tariff increase is against the stipulations of preferential trade agreements and might cause protest and countermeasures of signatory parties<sup>40</sup>.
- v) In order to enhance the quality of SHC inflow and to decrease the share of waste, strict *quality inspection* and thorough, tailor-made *pre-sorting* prior to uploading the consignment should be applied. While the Mitumba Association agrees with the pre-sorting principle, they would prefer to do the job in Kenya, after arrival. In the pre-shipment activity migrants working abroad at the sorting hubs might be very helpful as they know the composition of local effective demand as far as style, size, fabric, design, shape etc. are concerned. A well-organized pre-sorting for quality and suitability at the place of departure might moderate the volumes of shipments, increase the quality of goods, reduce waste (if for instance synthetic, plastic clothing would be sorted out) and meet domestic demand better via avoiding mismatch. In order to reduce *waste* and *environmental* pollution, the inflow of dumped, unusable, unsaleable, toxic garments should be minimized and the compliance with sanitary requirements should be ensured.

The above agenda, however, cannot be accomplished without the consent and the action of the North. The “addiction” of the North to the (ultra) fast fashion linear business model and mega-consumption (Brooks, 2015, p. 33), the consumption arms race (Brooks, 2015,

---

<sup>38</sup> According to Frazer (2008, p. 18) less than 0.1 kg per capita SHC import do not have detrimental impact on the receiving countries.

<sup>39</sup> It should be noted that the present tariff rate (35%) is rather high, and in principle could discourage SHC legal (documented) import.

<sup>40</sup> In 2016 the East African Community intended to increase the Common External Tariff (CET) rate for SHC from USD .20/kg to USD .40/kg or 35%, whichever is higher. The USA immediately questioned the further eligibility of the AGOA (Overview...2017).

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

p. 42) should be abandoned. Fewer, though better quality, long lasting, repairable and reusable clothes should be produced. In addition, take-back systems and services to maintain, repair and share clothing items should be established. Slow fashion would reduce production leading to less oversupply and less pressure on consumers to purchase more and change their wardrobe frequently. Consequently, less excess waste would accumulate. As African countries are still victims of asymmetrical power relationships, they will not be the first beneficiaries of any paradigm shift. Only *fair fashion* might provide a pleasing remedy.

b) *Medium term solution: enhancing domestic clothing and fashion industries*

Even the regulated, controlled, restricted and upgraded SHC industry is not meant to substitute domestic garment industry, rather it is supposed to supplement it as the two industries target different consumer groups. It is beyond doubt that SHC imports meet the effective demand of the less affluent segment of the society and can generate jobs, income and revenues, however, it cannot contribute to the diversification, the structural transformation and development of the economy as it has not been integrated into the domestic economy and lacks backward and forward linkages, though it is linked to transport, finance, insurance, warehouses (*godowns*). Furthermore, it is not capable to decrease asymmetrical dependence. In case of revitalizing and enhancing, modernizing domestic textile and garment industry, the country may contribute not only to meeting the other, more affluent part of domestic and export demand for garments, but may profit on backward and forward linkages, the spill-over effects (Diamond, 2023b) on agriculture, on agro-processing (cotton and skin producers); may take advantage of available raw materials and labour force; may reach technological development, increase GDP, diversify the economy, create jobs, generate budget and export revenues.

As the main constraint to enhance domestic textile and garment industry is the lack of capital, so the inflow of foreign investment is welcome, however this is an ambiguous process. Foreign capital, mainly Chinese capital is primarily interested in producing not only for the domestic market with limited purchasing power, but for regional and Sub-Saharan African market, let alone overseas destinations in order to capitalize on the opportunities of the planned African Free Trade Area and on Kenya's preferential trade agreements. Moreover, there is an intricate interplay between the development of domestic textile industries, SHC trade and preferential trade agreements. SHC exporters are keen on maintaining the present status quo – irrespective of its detrimental impact -, so any ban or restriction on SHC inflow would risk the further eligibility for preferential treatment as it has happened in the case of those countries which has banned SHC import (Rwanda). As duty and quota free excess to foreign markets is a significant competitive advantage, without their existence any export attempt is jeopardized and the interest of

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

foreign capital toward Kenya's textile and clothing industry would decline or vanish. Consequently, the industrial modernization project is rather vulnerable.

The other issue is whether domestic textile industry will be capable of developing under the conditions of free trade, without applying protectionist trade measures and controlling unfair competition as the re-emerging local textile industry should compete not only with SHC imports but cheap imports of new clothes, too. That is why Wetengere (2018) idealistically suggests the "banning of new but cheap products from Asia and the creation of conducive and competitive business and investment environment through which the intended industries would grow" (ibid. p. 121).

According to the *Vision 2030* program of Kenya<sup>41</sup> domestic manufacturing – which is taken as an instrument for economic growth and social transformation - should be enhanced in order to reach 15% of the GDP (The state of...2021, p. 6). The "Buy Kenya, build Kenya" slogan of the Big Four agenda is based on a protectionist industrial and trade policy principle which does not exclude the ban of SHC imports, which would be pretty counterproductive. However, the gradual phasing out of SHC import is not inconceivable (Wetengere, 2018), provided that domestic cotton, leather, textile and apparel industries have reached a certain level of development. It should be a gradual process in order to keep the "well-being" effect of cheap clothing without killing the re-emerging domestic garment industry. For a while, the two sectors – domestic textile industry and SHC industry - must work together for mutual benefit (Diamond, 2023b).

Idealistically, the revitalization of local textile and garment industry might provide an impetus to local fashion designers whose products are better suited to African circumstances, like tradition, religion, climate, physical body, social expectation concerning style. Returning back to authentic African fashion and identity might lead to increasing self-respect and might even attract foreign customers. I remember, while living in Tanzania, I was a frequent visitor at a boutique-type shop, called "Nyumba ya Sana" in Swahili (House of arts), where Europeanized traditional clothing made from traditional African fabrics (like *kitenge* or *khanga*) were sold. These dresses were more pleasant to wear in Africa than clothing originated from Europe. Even in Europe they became my beloved garments, especially amidst global warming. Nowadays, there are promising signs that African designers are getting to be known in Europe and other parts of the world.

---

<sup>41</sup> This is Kenya's development program, launched in 2008 with the objective of transforming Kenya into a middle-income country, providing a high-quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030.

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

c) *Handling environmental issues and health hazards*

Even if the above-mentioned regulating measures and industrialization strategies were realized, the African countries still should face the environmental impact of SHC inflow. While the paradigm shift of global fashion industry brings the first results, countries of global North do their utmost to protect their environment of disposed SHC (Wetengere, 2018) and continue to forward waste to the SHC importer African countries which remain dumping grounds. We do agree with Diamond (Diamond, 2023a; Diamond, 2023b) that dumping is not *intentional*, however it is “consequential”, it is the product of fast fashion linear business model. A slight change can be expected from raising the producers’ and consumers’ awareness about the environmental impact of fast fashion and limitless consumption. The producers’ responsibility would be to decrease the share of clothing made from plastic, synthetic fibres, as even in 2030 73% of clothing are expected to be made from synthetics (Cobbing et al., 2022; Trashion, 2023). However, this change is a double-edged sword, as producing and transporting natural (organic) raw materials (like cotton by the present SHC importers) is not without environmental consequences (depleting water reserves<sup>42</sup>, use of chemicals for dyeing, deforestation, biodiversity loss). The consumers’ responsibility would be to abandon overconsumption, to turn more sustainable and eco-friendly patterns (self-made clothing, eco-design, downcycling<sup>43</sup>, recycling<sup>44</sup>, upcycling<sup>45</sup>, reuse, repair, remake, repurpose) and finally to accomplish ethical consumption.

As all the above idealistic expectations are beyond the African countries’ control/authority, the only option left is to minimize and/or decrease the waste which has already flooded the country. One of the possibilities is *upcycling, restyling, refashioning* (Dissanayake and Pal, 2023, p. 10) that is to turn better quality waste SHC to valuable new garments via repairing, mending, cleaning, ironing, tailoring, transforming, altering, remaking, decorating, redesigning, that is to use old clothes in new ways (Brooks, 2015, pp. 210, 212), as it happens nowadays in some European countries. One of the latest Hungarian good practices is the *Hint of Africa* managed by the Hungarian *Close to Africa Foundation*, where SHC or any other used items, unwanted clothing (like T-shirts, jumpers, denims, dresses etc.) are transformed into new ones by decorating them by

---

<sup>42</sup> 11 000 litre water is needed to produce 1 kg cotton (Brooks, p. 29).

<sup>43</sup> Downcycling means the transformation of recycling textiles into products of lower value or utility compared to the original item. For example, use of SHC as wiping rags, stuffings, raw materials for other industries or fuel.

<sup>44</sup> A good example is the case of the South African PEPCO retail chain operating in Europe which nowadays offers t-shirts made from recycled fabric under the label „beloved”.

<sup>45</sup> Upcycling means the transformation of worn-out or old clothing items into higher-value products or garments.



*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

colourful or printed African fabric. All designs are for sale and the revenue supports African women via the foundation.

The other possibility is *reuse* or *recycling*<sup>46</sup> when the unusable, worthless SHC is used as an input for producing other goods than clothing. There are already some promising examples in Africa: in Tanzania, Anne Kiwia, under the motto “Every Queen deserves a Crown”, designs headbands from second-hand textiles; in Kenya a bag company makes bags from SHC. In the case of reuse, textile lives are multiplied without causing any harm to the nature and environment, while recycling is less environmentally friendly as it might generate carbon emission and requires resources (Diamond, 2023b). The circular production model in the case of clothing industry might lead toward climate resilient economy.

Health hazard is the other unwanted consequence of SHC import. In Kenya health certificate issued by health authority in the country of origin should accompany the consignment which should be packed in transparent materials with a weight ceiling.

## **Conclusion**

Kenya is one of the leading SHC importers in Africa, where the aborted import substitution industrialisation, the liberalization of the economy and the failure of domestic textile industry led to SHC trade surge which is the direct product of the global (ultra)fast fashion linear business model resulting in overproduction and forced overconsumption.

It is beyond doubt that SHC industry is noticeably beneficial for the economy and the people of Kenya due to job creation, income and revenue generation, providing affordable clothing, however, one should not ignore the detrimental impact on the environment and local textile/ fashion industry which might be the backbone of economic growth and social transformation.

In order to keep the benefits and minimize the drawbacks of SHC industry in Kenya, that is not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, in the short run the supply side pressure should be eased via decreasing the quantity and increasing the quality of SHC inflow in order to minimize waste, while in the longer run the enhancement of domestic garment industry should be accompanied by the gradual decreasing/phasing out of SHC inflow.

However, even the less radical changes in the SHC industry of Kenya cannot be accomplished without a paradigm shift in the business model of global fashion, from

---

<sup>46</sup> Recently not more than 1 percent of new clothes are recycled into new clothes.

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

(ultra)fast fashion towards less fast and later slow and sustainable fashion, meaning smaller volume, better quality, more durable, reusable, repairable, recyclable products plus shorter supply chains in order to produce less waste and lower environmental implications. The changing business model of production (slow fashion, sustainable and socially responsible fashion, circular economy) should be accompanied by shifting pattern of consumption from overconsumption towards ethical, responsible consumption and finally post-consumption (Brooks, 2015), that is responsibility should be equally taken by the producers and consumers.

Even if all the above idealistic changes were to take place, the African countries will not be the first beneficiaries of any paradigm shift as they are still the victims of asymmetrical power relationships. Only *fair fashion* (the equal distribution of the benefits of technological development and economies of scale, the minimization of waste production, handling environmental implications on the spot and not exporting to third countries etc.) might provide a pleasing remedy.

## References

- Baden, Sally and Barber, Catherine (2005). *The impact of the second-hand clothing trade on developing countries*, Oxfam, 37 p.
- Bhanushali, Manali (2021): Kenya's import of second-hand clothing and accessories between 2016-2020: an overview of mitumba market in Kenya, May 26, 2021 | Country Report, In-Depth Analysis, Market Reports
- Brady, Shannon and Lu, Sheng (2018). Why is the used clothing trade such a hot-button issue? [just-style.com/analysis/why-is-the-used-clothing-trade-such-a-hot-button-issue](https://www.just-style.com/analysis/why-is-the-used-clothing-trade-such-a-hot-button-issue)
- Brooks, Andrew (2015): *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes*, London: Zed Books Ltd, 298 pp
- Brooks, Andrew (2016): East Africa's ban on second-hand clothes won't save its own industry, *The Guardian*, 4 May 2016
- Brooks, Andrew and Simon, David (2012): Unravelling the Relationships between Used-Clothing Imports and the Decline of African Clothing Industries, *Development and Change* 43(6): 1265–1290. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01797.x
- Chalhoub, Hailey (2012): *From Recyclers to Risk-Takers: the Social, Economic and Political Challenges of Selling Second-Hand Clothes in Kenya*, Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. 1387. SIT Graduate Institute, 61 pp

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

- Cobbing, Madeleine – Daaji, Sodfa – Kopp, Mirjam – Wohlgemuth, Viola (2022): *Poisoned gifts. From donations to the dumpsite: textile waste disguised as second-hand clothes exported to East Africa*, A Greenpeace Germany Report, Hamburg
- Diamond, Patrick (2023a): *The Quality of Second-Hand Clothes Imported to Kenya and the Associated Environmental Impacts*, Information Research Solutions – Nairobi, 54 pp
- Diamond, Patrick (2023b) *The Second-Hand Clothing Industry in the East Africa Community*, Nairobi: Kenya Mitumba Association, 23 pp.
- Dissanayake, Kanchana and Pal, Rudrajeet (2023). Sustainability dichotomies of used clothes supply chains: a critical review of key concerns and strategic resources, *The International Journal of Logistic Management*, Volume 34, Issue 7, pp. 75-9  
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/0957-4093.htm>
- Fields, Simone (2003), The beneficial nature of the second-hand clothing trade in Sub-Saharan Africa, 8 pp.
- Farrant, L., Olsen, S. I., and Wang, A. (2010). Environmental benefits from reusing clothes. *The International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment*, 15(7), 726-736
- Frazer, G. (2008). Used-clothing Donations and Apparel Production in Africa, *Economic Journal* 118(532): 1764–84.
- Hansen, Karen Tranberg (2000): Other people's clothes? The international second-hand clothing trade and dress practices in Zambia. *Fashion Theory*, 4(3), 245–274.
- Hansen, Karen Tranberg (2004): Helping or hindering? Controversies around Second-hand clothing trade, *Anthropology Today*, 20(4), 3-9.
- Hansen, Karen Tranberg (2014): The Secondhand Clothing Market in Africa and its Influence on Local Fashions, *DRESSTUDY*, Vol.64, 2014 Autumn, pp.
- Herjanto, Halimin – Scheller-Sampson, Jean – Erickson, Elisabeth (2016): The increasing phenomenon of second-hand clothes purchase: insights from the literature, *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Kewirausahaanmk*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Maret 2016, 1–15, DOI: 10.9744/jmk.18.1.1–15
- Huang, (2022): What is waste colonization? [https://remake.world/stories/what-is-waste-colonization/#:~:text=5A LEGACY OF WASTE COLONIALISM&text=5Coined in1989%2C the term, group through waste and pollution](https://remake.world/stories/what-is-waste-colonization/#:~:text=5A%20LEGACY%20OF%20WASTE%20COLONIALISM&text=5Coined%20in%201989%20the%20term,group%20through%20waste%20and%20pollution)
- Imo, B. E. and & Maiyo, R. C. (2012). Lessons from thriving second-hand clothing businesses for Kenya's fashion industry. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences*, 3(1), 32.

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

- Katende – Magezi, Esther (2017): *The Impact of Second Hand Clothes and Shoes in East Africa*, Geneva: CUTS International, Geneva
- Kiss, Judit (2017): Fejlődik, vagy csak növekszik Afrika gazdasága? In: Biedermann Zs, Kiss J (szerk.) *Szubszaharai Afrika gazdasága a 21. században*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2017. pp. 96-126.
- Mangieri, Tina (2006), *African Cloth, Export Production, and Secondhand Clothing in Kenya*, Department of Geography University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, manuscript, 23 pp.
- Overview of the Second-hand Clothing Market in East Africa: Analysis of Determinants and Implications* (2017), USAID
- Prashar, Anuja (2022): *The global production networks of the second-hand clothing industry, Impact on Africa*, Mitumba Institute and Research Centre of Kenya, Nairobi, 40 pp
- Rodgers, Lucy (2015). Where do your old clothes go? BBC 11 February 2015
- Trashion: The stealth export of waste plastic clothes to Kenya*, 2023, Changing Market Foundations
- ThredUP (2022), ThredUP resale report, available at: <https://www.thredup.com/resale/>
- The State of Second-Hand Clothes and Footwear Trade in Kenya*, 2021, Nairobi, Institute of Economic Affairs, Mitumba Association of Kenya
- Wetengere, Kitojo Kagome (2018). Is the Banning of Importation of Second-Hand Clothes and Shoes a Panacea to Industrialization in East Africa? *African Journal of Economic Review*, Volume VI, Issue I, January 2018, pp. 119-141

*Judit Kiss / The dichotomy of second-hand-clothing industry:  
the case of Kenya*

