Understanding the Second-hand Clothing Market and its impact on Ghana

(Case study on the Kantamanto Market)

Eric Agyare

Warabeba, Church of Bethesda Road, Anyaa - Accra, Ghana,
agyareeric@gmaill.com

Abstract: The global second-hand clothing (SHC) market has experienced rapid growth, fuelled by fast fashion, evolving consumer preferences toward sustainable fashion and economic affordability. Key drivers behind this growth include heightened environmental awareness, economic pressures, and the adoption of a "circular economy" mindset, where reusing goods is increasingly prioritised by many consumer groups over new single-use consumption. The SHC market creates avenues for increased access to affordable clothing for low-income communities, supports informal job creation in buying, selling, repairing, and altering garments, and promotes sustainable practices aligned with circular economy principles.

Research from the Swiss Academy for Development in 1997 indicated that over 95% of Ghanaians consume or patronise second-hand clothing, demonstrating its pivotal role in the apparel market. Similarly, a study by Oteng-Ababio et al. identified the Kantamanto Market in Accra as a central hub for the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana and neighbouring countries (Oteng Ababio, 2015).

This local study aims to develop a more robust understanding of how resale, repair, and preparation for reuse operate in Ghana and map the adverse impacts associated with the importation of second-hand clothing. The study also evaluates awareness of policy and regulation within the SHC industry.

This study was conducted through Project Rewear, initiated by Fashion For Good (FFG) and Circle Economy (CE) in partnership with The Revival Earth and Artdiction. Project Rewear focuses on the current and desired future state for resale end destinations like Kantamanto, per product archetype (Denim Jeans, Outerwear, T-shirts, Activewear, Sweatshirts or Jumpers) by looking at rewearable and low-value rewearables, and identifying the resale and repair potential of garments in four select European regions: Lithuania (Nordic/Baltic), the Netherlands (Western), Poland (Central-Eastern), and Spain (Southern Europe).

Keywords: Kantamanto, rewear, repair, resale, garment, bale, textile waste

1 Literature Review

A resale report by ThredUp (2023) revealed that the global second-hand apparel market could reach an estimated $350 billion by 2027. As of 2023, the global second-hand apparel market saw a growth rate of 28% at a value of $211 billion, although it was estimated to reach a rate of 24% at a value of $141B in 2022 (ThredUP Resale Report, 2022). Key drivers behind this growth include heightened environmental awareness, economic pressures, and the adoption of a "circular economy" mindset, where reusing goods is increasingly prioritised by many consumer groups over new single-use consumption.

For many Ghanaians, second-hand clothing provides high-quality and unique items at a fraction of the price of new garments. The industry supports local enterprises such as tailors and repair shops, which benefit from the demand for garment alterations and repairs, fostering a culture of repair rather than disposal.

A study by Oteng Ababio et al. identified the Kantamanto Market in Accra as a central hub for the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana (Oteng Ababio, 2015). Often referred to as the “bend-down boutique” by locals, Kantamanto Market offers an expansive array of used apparel, attracting consumers from diverse backgrounds.

In Kantamanto, approximately 100 containers are received weekly, with about 15 million used clothing circulated weekly. “Ghana has a population of 31 million people, so it is unlikely that all the 30 million garments that arrive every fortnight will be sold. The supply exceeds the demand (Kekeli Ahiable et al. 2021). The gap between demand and supply creates waste.

Recently, second-hand clothing traders have complained about the declining quality of imported bales, which is believed to be a key contributor to the textile waste crisis in Ghana. The city of Accra, which receives higher volumes of low-quality bales, has become a dumping ground for vast quantities of discarded clothing from the Global North. The second-hand clothing sent in from overseas includes a lot of clothing that may not be useful, hence ending up in landfills and the oceans as waste.

In addition to the above concerns, the SHC trader has a negative impact on the local textile industry in Ghana. By the year 2000, Ghana’s textile industry, once employing over 25,000 workers in the 1980s, had shrunk to fewer than 3,000 workers, with major factories like Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL) and Juapong Textiles scaling down or closing entirely (Quartey, P. 2006).

2 Methodology

This study focused on Ghana's Kantamanto Market in Accra, a primary hub for second-hand goods. Kantamanto Market is the largest second-hand clothing market in Ghana, serving as a central hub for importing, selling, and distributing second-hand clothing.

The data collection began on October 18 and ended on December 3, 2024. This period was a peak season for traders as customers rushed in to shop for the end-of-year festivities. The study provides a comprehensive investigation into the complex dynamics of this market, including a detailed analysis of stakeholders, infrastructure, key activities, product quality, repair practices, pricing structures, textile waste disposal methods, and the flow and management of the second-hand clothing trade.

Table 1 outlines the various research methods used in this study, detailing the target stakeholders, sample sizes, and the specific purpose of each approach.

Method	Target / Stakeholders	Size	Purpose
Desktop Research	Local and international reports in connection with the study location and type	N/A	Analysis of secondary data (Existing data/reports).
Survey	Wholesale/retail traders selling product archetype.	107	Gather general trade data… Infrastructure and activities, SHC Market, Repair culture, quality, pricing and others
Observation	Selected traders according to the product archetype	10 stores	Repair and sorting processes with a focus on product archetype
Sorting	Collection of textile waste for sorting. 1.33 tonnes of waste clothes	2,473 garments	Independent sorting of textile waste for material composition and condition.
Interview	Accra Metropolitan Assembly, Environmental Protection Agency, Kantamanto Second-hand	8	Focus on regulations and policies, interventions, infrastructural support, and others

	Clothing Association, Repair Traders, Upcycling organisation and Importers.		

Table 1
Defining the data per the Methodology

2.1 Data Collection Methods

2.1.1 Surveys and Trader Engagement

Six trained data collectors engaged directly with traders and retailers to gather detailed information such as:

- Duration of involvement in the second-hand clothing business.
- Profitability and economic viability of their trade.
- Country of origin of their stock and procurement processes.
- Cost of goods and pricing structures.
- Policy awareness

One hundred and seven (107) traders were engaged, and their responses were submitted via a Google form. Traders were selected and engaged according to the product archetypes.

2.1.2 Observations Method

Observation activity focused on selected traders within the market. Researchers examined the handling and selling specific product archetypes, including denim, outerwear, t-shirts, and sweatshirts. Data was collected based on product quality, repair practices, waste management culture, price and consumer interactions with these items.

Figure 1.
Sorting activity with the research team

2.1.3 Waste Collection and Sorting

Traders were asked to bring in their textile waste, for which they were compensated. 1.33 tonnes of garments were collected. The collected waste was sorted and classified according to the market's grading.

2.1.4 Interviews and Stakeholder Engagement

To gain deeper insights into trade challenges and opportunities, interviews were conducted with stakeholders, such as long-term market participants, local authorities, importers, etc.

A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants and archetypes, ensuring diverse representation across trader types and product categories. The study used a qualitative and quantitative approach better to understand the actual state of the Kantamanto SHC market. It attempted to consider all the stakeholders in the ecosystem

and other external players relevant in finding a sustainable solution to the textile waste crisis.

3 Findings

3.1 The Kantamanto Ecosystem

Kantamanto has developed a unique support system that contributes to the resilient nature of the business. Kantatmanto market is spread across 20,000 acres of land for over 30,000 traders (Nelson C.J. Okayafrica, 2024). Kantamanto is home to over five thousand (5000) used clothing sellers, according to Mr Michael Oppong, the chairman of the Kantamanto Used Clothing Sellers Association (KUCSA). Figure 2 illustrates the current players within the market.

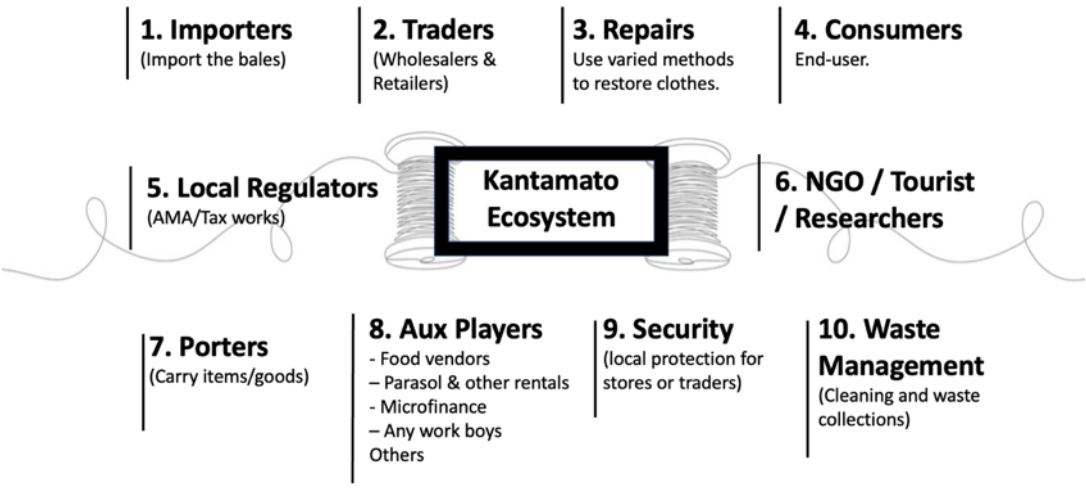

Figure 2.
Kantamanto Ecosystem

1. **Importers** facilitate the entry of second-hand clothing into the Kantamanto market. They procure large bales from global suppliers. According to the study, they are sometimes involved in sorting the bales from the sending country and sometimes re-sorting them locally.

2. **Traders (Wholesalers/ Retailers)** purchase bales from importers and sell them to market traders or directly to consumers. Some wholesalers also sell in other markets across Ghana.
3. **Repair Specialists**: These were tailors, cobblers, and other players who used special techniques to restore or upcycle second-hand items.
4. **Consumers**: This includes individuals seeking affordable clothing and those purchasing for resale.
5. **NGO/Tourist/Researchers**: These were individuals, stakeholders, and local and international organisations with diverse interests in Kantamanto and beyond. Since the recent media spotlight on Kantamanto's trade in second-hand clothing and textile waste, the market has received several visits from local and international players seeking firsthand knowledge of the waste crisis and what they could do with their findings.
6. **Auxiliary Players:** These are very important players in the market's daily operations. They include food vendors, "Kayaye" (female head porters) who carry goods for traders and consumers, parasol and other essentials rental agents, microfinance agents, work and others.
7. **Security:** Kantamanto used clothes stores to have ten lanes with the gates at both ends. There are specific times the gates are opened for trading in the morning and closed in the evening. There are no official security players who are knowledgeable about traders and how they keep their stocks in their sheds/stores. They also play diverse roles based on the time of day.
8. **Waste Management**: Kantamanto lacks a robust waste management structure. Independent waste collectors go around to collect waste at a fee. The waste is not segregated according to the materials—textiles mixed with rubber and organic waste, etc. Organisations like the Or Foundation and The Revival Earth periodically call for textile waste. However, the volume of the textile waste collected by these organisations is a fraction of the total textile waste generated daily.

On January 2, 2025, the entire Kantamanto market was burned to the ground. This devastating occurrence affected our research and caused a huge setback in improving the infrastructure gap and the working conditions of the traders. Individuals, organisations, the government, and friends (at home and abroad) have supported the market's rebuilding.

The study team made the following observations:

There was no unified approach to rebuilding a sustainable market. Over 10,000 traders were eager to revive their shops and livelihoods. Some groups have received funding from philanthropists and the government, executing their plans independently instead of adhering to a collective relief plan for the entire ecosystem. The lack of a cohesive

relief plan has raised concerns that marginalised groups, including elderly traders aged 65 and over, head-porters, and traders with disabilities, have been overlooked in the various relief opportunities.

3.2 What is textile waste?

After various surveys, interactions and observations, waste can be described as any material that is no longer of value to the user. That is to say that a trader may discard an item as waste, but another user may have a use for it and consider it valuable. Hence, the definition of waste depends on whose possession it is in. Our waste collection and sorting data revealed that not all the items the traders had gathered as waste were waste to others. In fact, we had scenarios where traders went around the market to collect items others had discarded. Yet, after our sorting exercise, we found that a generous percentage still had value (Grades A and B) and other things that could be repurposed. This confirms that there are diverse options on what is qualified as textile waste, even from the sending country. However, the study classifies an item as waste (textile waste) when it is not sellable and profitable.

3.3 What is a quality garment?

The opinions on quality garments vary within the Kantamanto market, but the factors determining quality remain similar. These include the texture of the material/fabric, condition of the item (if there are damages, it looks new, can be repaired/upcycled, etc.), if it fits the climate of the receiver, current fashion trends, market demands, origin of the product, size, and brand. If the factors are favourable for the trader and he or she makes a profit, the garments/bales are of good quality. The study developed the grading deck based on interactions with traders (wholesalers and Retailers) and observations during the sorting exercise per the product archetype (Table 2).

Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D
Items that are saleable and do not have any damages. These items are generally new/never used or almost as good as new.	Items are also saleable and in excellent condition. Clothes in this category are typically smaller (baby clothing, XS, etc.) or larger (X, XL, XXL, etc.).	These are items that are neither new nor clean. They have damages but can be sold. To make them saleable, they may require repairs or are sold at a reduced price.	These items ultimately become waste. They hold no value, cannot be worn, and are entirely useless.

Table 2
Defining quality per grade for SHC

3.4 Reuse and Repair Methods.

The study highlights the commonly used methods for repairing garments in Kantamanto: screen printing, dying, patching, ironing, sewing, deep washing, neatening, and stitching. According to the study, long-operating craftsmen specialise in reviving clothes regardless of their condition in the market. They use old traditional methods (tie and dye, stitching, ironing) with little interest in investing in new techniques. Sometimes, clothes are relabelled to make them trendy.

From observation and a keen look at the Kantamanto ecosystem, repurposing methods like upcycling are the least used. Most of the repairers are not familiar with modern techniques in the industry. During an interview, Stephen Ackah, a repairer and upcycler in the market, disclosed that he lacks the funding to purchase a cutter, which would boost his efficiency and productivity. Hence, he has to use scissors, which have many shortcomings. (personal communication, November 2024)

Reuse and repair practices at the Kantamanto Market exemplify a circular economy approach in action. They sustain livelihoods, minimise textile waste, and promote creativity. However, addressing challenges like waste disposal and inadequate infrastructure is crucial for enhancing these practices' long-term sustainability. These challenges can be discussed further by expanding the operations and space for repairers/upcyclers in the market, which will significantly increase the volume of upcycled textile waste daily. Policymakers and stakeholders could further support these efforts by empowering third-party organisations/NGOs like The Revival Earth and OR Foundation. They can also provide training programs, financial support for new technology/equipment, financial incentives for repair services, and import regulations to reduce the influx of unusable clothing.

3.5 What are the Price Factors, and What Influences Them?

During the research, the team recorded countless reactions from traders who mentioned that the trade was not as profitable due to the increasing percentage of textile waste. The team further conducted an observation study that focused on the factors that influence the prices of the research archetype. It is important to note that the traders were selected based on the archetype, not their clothes' quality.

There were instances when a coat with no damage was priced at GHS100.00, and similar coats with damage were priced at GHS10.00. This example clearly illustrates that damaged clothes are at a disadvantage to sellers. Ghanaian shopping culture in public markets like Kantamanto offers customers bargaining opportunities. This means there is no fixed price, and the customer and the trader have the free room to negotiate. Traders are always at a disadvantage when their clothes are damaged, are not in trend, etc.

The study also reveals other factors influencing importers' prices: the exchange rate, Freight cost, and import tax duty. Ghana has significantly increased import tax duties on second-hand clothing over the years.

The Ghanaian currency has been consistently depreciating, so if a bale costs EUR 450.00 at GHS 5,922.00 on January 1st, 2024, the same bale will cost GHS 6,871.50 on November 1st, 2024.. Post-COVID-19 has brought many economic difficulties, and the government of Ghana has introduced various forms of taxes (COVID-19 levy, E-levy, etc.) to increase its internal revenue, pay off loans, and run the country simultaneously. According to the Ghana Statistics Service, inflation for clothing and footwear rose to 41.9% in December 2022, and reduced to 24.5% in March 2024. In 2021, there was a massive increase due to these elements: Cumulative import taxes, including VAT (15%), NHIL (2.5%), GETFund levy (2.5%), and the ECOWAS levy (0.5%), brought the total tax burden on second-hand clothing to approximately 40% of the declared value. (Ghana Revenue Authority, 2021)

Importers are very aware of this unpredictable financial cycle. To stay profitable, they pass on every increase to their clients. Importers seem aligned with the sorting categorisation from the sending countries, as they are sometimes included in the processes. The interview with David Adams (Importer) was very insightful, as he plays a dual role as an importer and is also involved in the operations of seven SHC stores on behalf of his family in Kantamanto. He admits the importation process needs regulations to reduce the increasing percentage of waste. Figure 8 shows that 52.9% of 104 valid responses indicate the quality of the bales has declined.

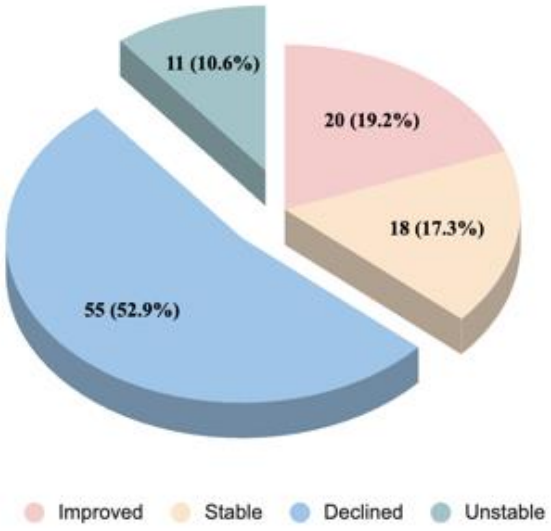

Figure 3.
Response on the quality status of the bales

Per the input from Michael Oppong (Chairman of Kantamanto Used Cloth Sellers Association), "Traders are compelled to accept the cost of bale set by the importer with no opportunity to confirm if the quality of the garments meets the trader's expectation. Some importers who do re-sorting usually offer free consultations to their clients. Other than that, traders buy the bales on the importer's condition and hope to profit from them. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that price increases since the COVID-19 pandemic have not correlated with the quality of goods. The major contributors are rampant tax adjustments and currency exchange rate volatility in Ghana.

3.6 Textile waste analysis concerning materials, damages and brands.

As part of the study's objective to collect insight on damages per project archetype, it was agreed to execute a sorting exercise for grade C and D garments. The research team called for garments in Kantamanto, and traders delivered 1,332.1kg, containing 2,474 garments. The grade C and D garments were stored and sorted within two weeks. Figure 12 shows the top ten categories of brands received during sorting. Eight hundred

forty-one (841) brands were recorded, and 24.7% of the garments were without labels. The research recorded H&M as the highest brand in the sorting exercise.

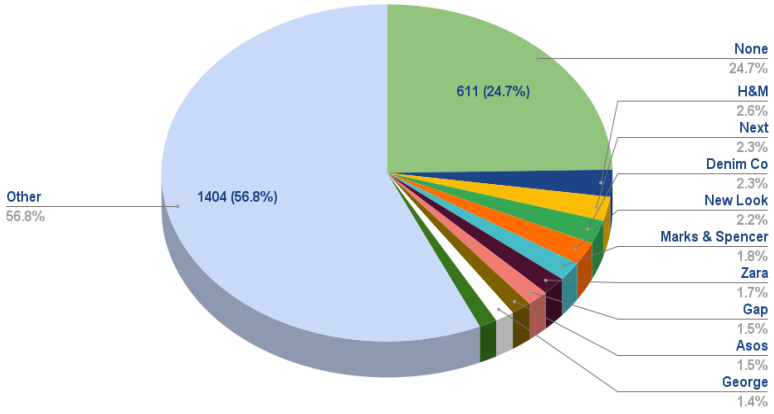

Figure 4.
Brands Collation per top 10 categories

Most garments received were C and D grades, which reflect the grades communicated during the call-out. This insight confirms that traders may be aligned with the research grading system.

The sorting activities revealed the following material types.

- Natural Fibres: Cotton and wool dominate, especially in categories like T-shirts, denim, and outerwear. These materials are biodegradable but require careful handling to avoid environmental impact.
- Synthetic Fibres: Polyester and nylon items found in activewear and outerwear contribute significantly to non-biodegradable waste.
- Blended Fabrics: Items combining natural and synthetic fibres present challenges in recycling due to mixed composition.

The study recorded 2140 damaged garments, 86.5% of the total (2474) received. Common Issues include frayed fabric, faded clothes, loose fabric, loose neck, etc. Repair Feasibility: Minor issues like tears and fading are often repaired, while severe damage may render items suitable only for upcycling or disposal.

As mentioned in the methodology, the damages were recorded for only the grade C and D garments. This analysis is meant to enlighten traders, importers, and textile industry players on how these damage types influence the grading quality and prices of garments locally. This information also guides sending agents in the Global North, who hope to find a collective grading matrix.

It is crucial to emphasise that the research market lacked sufficient storage facilities. The team had to carry out sorting activities in an open shed under the blazing sun, which is common in a bustling market like Kantamanto. The area does not have a storage management system, which hinders traders from tracking their items.

3.7 Waste Management Culture in Kantamanto

Over seven thousand people go about their daily routines in the Kantamanto market, which generates various forms of waste, ranging from food and organic waste to textiles and paper. Unlike in other advanced public spaces in Ghana, the market struggles to collect and segregate waste. Instead, all forms of waste are collected as one.

The Accra Metropolitan Assembly collects sanitation levies daily, which are believed to address waste and hygiene issues in the market. Sadly, this act has not significantly impacted the fight against waste in the market. Yayra Agbofah of the Revival Earth mentioned that formal and independent waste collectors help manage waste, but they are not well coordinated. The market lacks a waste management strategy. Evidently, the volume of textile waste is significantly more prominent than other forms of waste and poses a significant challenge due to inadequate infrastructure and a poor waste management culture.

As captured in the research interviews, “The Kantamanto Joint Traders’ Association, in collaboration with the OR foundation, helps collect textile waste periodically. Organisations like The Revival Earth also contribute by taking some of the waste for recycling. Yayra Agbofah emphasised that the volume of textile waste upcycled is insignificant compared to the daily volume of textile waste. This is also because Revival Earth is currently the only upcycle entity producing upcycled products and educating and collaborating with traders within Kantamanto.

Disposal Methods

- Organised Dump Sites are facilities dedicated to receiving and treating waste. According to Engineer Nii (AMA), there are very few waste management sites, and the existing sites dedicated to textile waste are not well-equipped and well-funded enough to handle the waste properly.
- Improper Dumping: These are independent waste collectors and individuals who find other convenient ways to dispose of waste. Mixed waste is disposed of at the wrong sites, such as gutters, open parks, farms, backyards, etc. Although the law does not permit these practices, they have become a negative social behaviour due to the absence of education, unsatisfactory or unreliable waste management services, and enforcement of such unlawful waste disposal practices, primarily in urban areas.
- Reuse Initiatives: Few organisations and agents currently build a business model around specific waste. Organisations like Revival Earth focus on repurposing textile waste. Many of these initiatives have their collection methods, but they do not collect significant volumes compared to the waste generated.

3.8 Understanding the Gap between Local and International Regulations and Policies

In conversation with Leticia Abra-Kom Nyaaba, Ag. Director of Ghana National Cleaner Production Centre (GNCPC) -EPA, the Environmental Assessment Regulations, 1999 (LI 1586), is a key legal framework in Ghana. This legislative instrument ensures exporters and importers have guidelines that regulate and prevent Ghana from becoming a dumping ground. Ghana's waste crisis is partially due to a lack of infrastructure, systems, etc. However, a more significant 'root' cause is excessive volumes from high consumption elsewhere, exported to Ghana. This makes it a shared responsibility to manage the burdens of these waste materials dumped into Ghana from the Global North. Furthermore, this act illustrates the unfair distribution of external textile waste, making it difficult for the country to find an independent solution.

The following are a few identified strategies that could help curb the textile waste crisis.

- International Regulations: Exporting countries often impose restrictions to ensure high-quality goods are donated or sold as second-hand. Receiving countries are not involved in determining the qualification, which has local resonance. Michael Oppong, chairman of KUCSA (Oppong, M, personal communication, October 2024), expressed interest in engaging sorting agents

in sending countries to work closely to develop a guide and a framework to enforce.

- Policy Enforcement: Ghana has weak local regulatory frameworks that allow unacceptable practices under international norms. The study highlighted concerns about implementing the existing LI 5686 and other initiatives in line with protecting our environment. The researcher believes it is a matter of prioritisation by the lawmakers and enforcers. Ghana, in collaboration with all stakeholders, can curb textile waste just as they did in the e-waste initiatives. The LI would have to be reviewed to reflect today's concerns and draw up an implementation roadmap, committing stakeholders and enforcers.

3.9 Critical Infrastructure Gaps

Several infrastructural gaps hinder the efficient functioning of circular ecosystems in the second-hand clothing business in Ghana:

3.9.1 Lack of Recycling Facilities

- Insufficient recycling infrastructure: The total number of recycling plants and facilities in Ghana cannot be confirmed. However, it is evident that they are insufficient. For instance, in the Greater Accra region, with the highest population in Ghana, there are only two major facilities: the Accra Compost and Recycling Plant (ACARP) and the Integrated Recycling and Compost Plant (IRECOP). (acarp.com) This limited capacity leads to operational challenges for waste management companies. For instance, firms like Zoomlion and smaller waste collectors often struggle to adhere to collection schedules. The scarcity of processing facilities means that waste trucks sometimes cannot be emptied for days, causing delays in waste collection from residences and establishments. (myjoyonline.com)
- Lack of effective waste management systems: A well-structured waste management system is organised and efficient. However, there are no efficient waste management systems. For instance, in Kantamanto, like most typical institutions in Ghana, there are few or no waste collection points, and the waste is not segregated.
- Absence of centralised waste collection and sorting points within markets: Most markets in Ghana have few or no centralised waste collection points. As a result, people dump waste wherever they find it convenient. For our study, it was noticed that there were no designated bins at Kantamanto, and a dumping site was hardly visible.

3.9.2 Limited Repair and Upcycling Centres

- Few dedicated spaces for professional repairs or creative upcycling: Given the vast population of Accra (approximately 5.5 million, Ghana Statistical Services—2022), there are too few upcycling facilities to tackle the waste output. Within the Kantamanto community, even the repairers are fewer than the traders and always have a considerable workload. Due to that challenge, the repairers always work longer hours to increase their efficiency and meet the traders' demands for repairs and upcycling.

Repair workshops often lack modern tools. In interactions with selected repairers and observations during our research, we noted that most repairers do not possess the appropriate or advanced tools to work efficiently. Many attributed this challenge to the high cost of equipment and a lack of support from the local government. They also emphasised that the work was not profitable enough to justify procuring modern equipment.

3.10 Social and Environmental Impact

3.10.1 Social Impact

Employment Opportunities: Based on observations and interviews with the chairman of the Used Clothing Sellers Association, it is clear that Kantamanto and the SHC market possess a considerable workforce and significant potential for job creation. This sector includes a diverse range of trades and roles, emphasising the opportunities available. There are various avenues for job creation, including property rentals, savings and loans, security services, and thrifting, among others.

Affordable Clothing: Second-hand trading offers low-cost alternatives, making clothing accessible to low-income populations. In countries like Ghana, where the majority of the population is within the middle-to-low class income range, the majority cannot afford new clothing regularly from luxury shops and malls, as clothes are very expensive. Second-hand trading offers affordable options for the average Ghanaian.

3.10.2 Environmental Impact

Positive Environmental Impacts

Reduction in Textile Waste: Second-hand clothing extends the lifecycle of garments by adopting reuse and recycling methods. Some damaged SHC may be suitable for downcycling into materials like Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF), sofas, etc. This aligns

with the principles of a circular economy, which prioritises sustainability over waste. It encourages a circular economy culture and helps address textile waste.

Lower Resource Consumption: Reusing existing clothing will lower the demand for new clothing production, reducing the consumption of resources like water, energy, and raw materials.

Decrease in Carbon Footprint: Industrial clothing production releases greenhouse gases, especially in energy-intensive processes like dyeing. In Ghana, over 60% of clothing sold is second-hand, impacting the demand for locally produced clothing and textiles (Brooks 2013). The decreased demand means lower industrial production, reducing the rate of carbon emissions.

Negative Environmental Impacts

Waste Challenges: Inadequate waste management pollutes land and waterways. Archetypes like activewear and outerwear contain a high percentage of synthetic materials, which contribute to non-biodegradable waste. When such items are discarded, they take years to decompose, releasing microplastics into the environment. These items also contribute to air pollution due to open-air incineration.

Carbon Emissions: The global trade of second-hand clothing often involves long shipping distances, contributing to carbon emissions, especially for exports to developing countries.

Overburdening Developing Countries: As revealed in the early parts of this report, import volumes are high, exceeding demand (in the case of Ghana). This overburdens our waste systems, as infrastructure and technology are limited.

Conclusion

This study acknowledges that Ghana's textile waste crisis results from both internal and external factors. However, due to the scope and research context, the focus was placed on external contributors, particularly the importation of second-hand clothing (SHC) from the Global North. These imports have become a significant and traceable source of waste, as traders report an increasing volume of unusable garments in imported bales. This makes the issue of SHC imports central to understanding and addressing the broader textile waste problem in Ghana.

The findings reveal critical gaps in policy enforcement, such as the ineffective application of existing regulations like LI 1586, and the lack of a coordinated national framework to monitor and control SHC imports. Moreover, weak infrastructure, limited financial investment, and poor public awareness continue to hinder effective waste management. The underdeveloped recycling industry and reliance on a single waste contractor (Zoomlion) further compound the issue, leading to environmental degradation and health risks due to open dumping and burning.

To mitigate the crisis, the study recommends strengthening institutional collaborations and international collaborations. This includes engaging relevant agencies such as AMA, GSA, Ghana Customs Service, and the EPA to review, expand and implement LI 1586 as a comprehensive framework. International cooperations should also be fostered to secure financial and technical support for infrastructure development. The introduction of mechanisms such as bale verification tags, proposed by the EPA, could improve quality control and reduce waste at the point of entry.

Furthermore, the government is encouraged to promote a circular economy approach, support private sector participation, and create incentives for recycling and upcycling initiatives. Widening partnerships with waste management companies, launching public education campaigns, and developing sustainable market practices are crucial steps towards creating a responsible waste management culture.

Ultimately, addressing Ghana's textile waste crisis requires a multi-stakeholder, systems-based approach that combines policy reform, international collaboration, public awareness, and investment in sustainable solutions.

Acknowledgement

Sincerest gratitude to all who contributed in any way to make the completion of this research report a success. Special thanks to: Yayra Agbofah (Founder – The Revival Earth), Valerie Asiedua Akoto (Project Manager – Artlife Matters), Ghana Upcycle Department (managed by The Revival Earth), David Adams, (SHC Importer), ING Nii Noi, (Director for Waste Management at AMA), Leticia Abra-Kom Nyaaba, (Ag. Director of Ghana National Cleaner Production Centre (GNCPC) – EPA), Michael Oppong, (Chairman of KUCSA), Stephen Ackah, (Repairer), Mary Adomaa, (Repairer), and Mohammed, (Screen printer).

References

[1] Accra Compost and Recycling Plant. (n.d.). About us. Accra Compost and Recycling Plant. https://acarpghana.com

[2] Ahiable, K., & Triki, C. (2021). Tackling Ghana's textile-waste challenge. African Circular Economy Network. https://assets.ctfassets.net/75ila1cntaeh/7KAW4FCm3xNDrdMZllUiwV/611d53aa5102e633ad1ce113aa5bcdb5/Tackling-Ghana-s-Textile-Waste-Challenge.pdf

[3] Brooks, A. (2013). Clothing poverty: The hidden world of fast fashion and second-hand clothes. Zed Books.

[4] C.J., N. (2025, January 8). Here's how you can help traders in Kantamanto. OkayAfrica. https://www.okayafrica.com/ghana-kantamanto-fire-taders/

[5] Ghana Statistical Service. (2022). Statistical bulletin - Consumer Price Index.

[6] MyJoyOnline. (2025, January 19, 11:17 PM). Optimising Ghana's waste management and recycling value chain in a 24-hour economy. MyJoyOnline. https://www.myjoyonline.com/optimizing-ghanas-waste-management-and-recycling-value-chain-in-a-24-hour-economy

[7] Oteng-Ababio, M., et al. (2015). The journey to sustainability: The role of the informal sector in Ghana's waste management landscape.

[8] Quartey, P. (2006). The future of African textile industries: A Ghana case study. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ghana/50247.pdf

[9] ThredUp. (2022). Annual resale report 2023. https://www.thredup.com/resale/2022