GHANA USED CLOTHING DEALERS ASSOCIATION

AN EVALUATION OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE SECOND-HAND CLOTHES TRADE IN GHANA

The Ghana Used Clothing Dealers Association is the representative of all used clothes, bags and shoes importers and dealers in Ghana.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> The industry has evolved into a dynamic ecosystem, providing affordable clothing options to consumers while also supporting a significant proportion of Ghanaian livelihoods, stimulating economic activity and fostering entrepreneurship.

The second-hand clothing (SHC) trade in Ghana serves as a cornerstone of the nation's retail landscape, deeply ingrained in its cultural and economic fabric. A vast majority of Ghanaians consume SHC, at least 95% of the population.[1] The industry has evolved into a dynamic ecosystem, providing affordable clothing options to consumers while also supporting a significant proportion of Ghanaian livelihoods, stimulating economic activity and fostering entrepreneurship. It is a noteworthy example of the circular economy in action; reducing waste, promoting resource efficiency and enabling sustainable consumption. An antidote to the detrimental effects of the global fast fashion industry which promotes exploitative labour practices, environmental degradation, excessive waste generation, and unsustainable consumption patterns. This report delves into the multifaceted nature of Ghana's SHC industry, exploring its economic contributions, demographic dynamics, and socio-environmental implications, while also highlighting opportunities for sustainable growth and development.

Internationally, the SHC trade faces perception challenges; it is viewed as a practice of unloading Western waste in developing countries such as Ghana. This media narrative has been growing in power and reach over the past few years leading to the second-hand clothes industry in Ghana and other African countries becoming synonymous with waste and clothes "dumping".

Our research finds that on average a maximum of **5%** of clothing in imported bales could be considered waste.

This report demonstrates that the prevailing international perception is not only wrong, but economically unsound and deeply patronising, It asks significant questions of the prevailing narrative and should lead international policy makers to interrogate some of the unhelpful assumptions they may be adopting about the ability of Africans to make informed choices and our agency in the SHC trade.

This research dismantles many of the negative perceptions of the SHC trade, while asking serious questions about how a misleading narrative on waste has been uncritically accepted and propagated globally.

This research, which for the first time talked directly to SHC traders, puts them and their experience and acuity at the centre of our understanding of the trade. It finds that “waste” items, i.e. clothing items that cannot be sold or reused, makeup on average 5% of imported bales at most, well below the figures propagated by activists and accepted by policy makers.

Our research with importers suggests strict processes and a customer focus that ensure the importation of quality goods in order to sustain brand and customer loyalty. By embracing the SHC sector, there is potential to enhance the sustainability of the sector and to support Ghana achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 13, 14 and 15.

The wider positive economic and social impact of the SHC trade in Ghana is significant. In 2022, the trade made substantial contributions to government revenues, surpassing allocations for key poverty alleviation programs.

The importation of SHC contributed an estimated

USD 29.5 million

to government revenues through direct import taxes (excluding levies and exemptions).[2]

This is more than double the amount the government spent on its key Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer programme for extremely poor and vulnerable households in 2022, which was a total of

GH¢ 162 million

(over USD 13 million).[3]

> “The biggest exporters to Ghana are the United Kingdom, China, and Canada.”

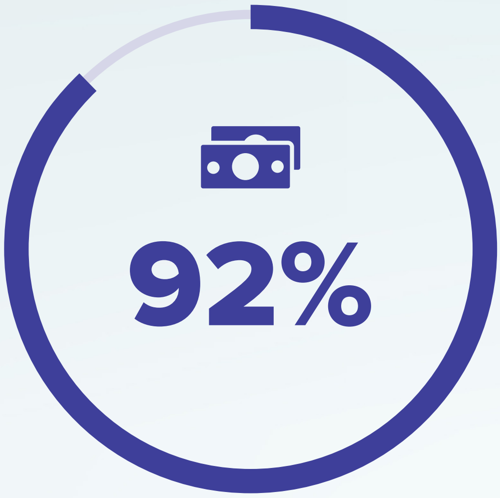
The biggest exporters to Ghana are the United Kingdom, China, and Canada. Ghana is a significant importer of used clothing, with imports totalling US $164 million in 2022, but it also exports used clothing too.[4] The distribution of SHC to neighbouring countries emphasises regional influence, reflecting a complex web of cross-border trade dynamics. This pattern not only points to Ghana’s role as a regional hub but also implies a positive socio-economic impact on both local and regional economies.

The Ghana Used Clothing Dealers Association boasts a membership of

2.5 million

traders across Ghana.

This suggests a huge economic contribution via employment opportunities by the SHC trade. Our research found that



of retailers rely on SHC as their primary income source.

The majority earn between GH¢ 500 and GH¢ 1,000 (c. US$ 40-75) per month, contributing significantly to livelihoods, given the relatively low cost of living in Ghana. The responsibility borne by retailers is substantial, with 88% serving as primary earners in their households.

As well as nurturing a gender diverse sector, with men and women actively participating as retailers, a youthful workforce, aged predominantly between 18 and 40, injects dynamism and enhances overall productivity.

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While the majority of operations are small-scale or local, the presence of medium-scale regional and large-scale national businesses underscores economic diversity within the sector. The consumer base spans various socio-economic backgrounds and professional sectors, highlighting economic inclusivity. The vast majority of consumers surveyed earn less than the national average income of GH¢ 30,000 (c. US$ 2,350),[5] but the majority of these consumers spent less than half of their annual clothing budget on SHC, suggesting that SHC consumers complement their clothing purchases from various sources.

In summary, the SHC sector, characterised by very low levels of waste, serves as a boon for Ghana, facilitating economic development, creating livelihood opportunities, supporting families, and fostering entrepreneurial endeavours.

To enhance the sector's sustainability credentials, recycling programs, community engagement, and collaboration between government bodies and industry stakeholders are vital. The SHC trade should be embraced as Ghana's commitment to a circular economy and a critical part of its approach to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.


GCB

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

"It operates within the circular economy model, where pre-owned clothing is collected, processed, and redistributed."

The second-hand clothes (SHC) industry is a segment of the broader global textile industry that deals specifically with used garments and footwear. It operates within the circular economy model, where pre-owned clothing is collected, processed, and redistributed.

The environmental benefits accruing from the circular nature of the SHC trade are especially important in the context of the doubling of clothing production between 2000 and 2015, primarily driven by the fast fashion phenomenon.[6]

The new apparel and footwear industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world. It accounts for about

10%

of global greenhouse gas emissions contributing to global warming

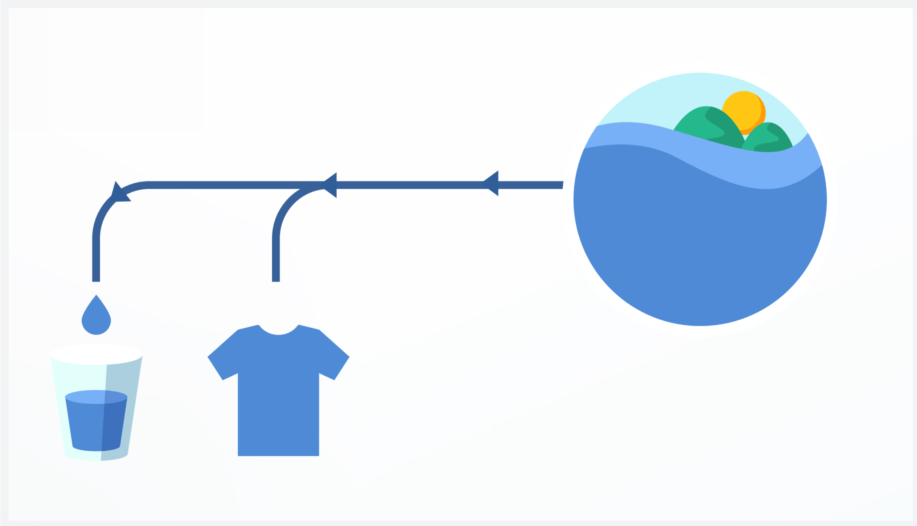
20%

of global water waste[7]

35%

of microplastics released into the environment[8]

Clothing production consumes enormous amounts of resources, including water and land.



To make a single cotton t-shirt, 2,700 litres of fresh water are required, enough to meet one person's drinking needs for 2.5 years.[9] The textile sector was the third largest source of water degradation and land use in 2020.[10]

Equally alarming is the substantial volume of textile waste generated by the industry, much of which ultimately finds its way into incineration facilities or landfills. It is estimated that globally 87% of clothing is landfilled or incinerated.[11] The practice of reusing clothing, rather than their immediate disposal when no longer needed, plays a pivotal role in significantly extending the lifespan of garments and reducing their speed to landfill or incineration. The biggest consumers of fast fashion are in Global North countries, buying new clothes seasonally and filling up wardrobe space quickly. Whereas wardrobe clearouts may have historically entailed simply throwing clothes away to make space for new items, environmental awareness is on the rise and so donating good quality clothing is recognised as socially useful and important.[12]

> “**It operates within the circular economy model, where pre-owned clothing is collected, processed, and redistributed.**”

Traditionally a sector that has predominantly shipped clothing from the Global North to the Global South, the second-hand clothing industry is in the midst of a global boom. Greater amounts of SHC are being sold within Global North countries.

The global trade in second-hand clothing grew tenfold between **1990** and **2004** to reach a value of around **$ 1 billion**

The market value of SHC in **2021** was **$ 36 billion**

It is projected to grow by **2025** to **$ 77 billion**

“

This report aims to take a closer look at the second-hand clothes trade in Ghana to ascertain the social, economic and environmental impact or benefits of the trade.

”

The US, the largest exporter of SHC, is expected to experience phenomenal growth with projections forecasting SHC to be a US $57 billion market by 2032, growing faster than the apparel market overall.[13]

This report aims to take a closer look at the second-hand clothes trade in Ghana to ascertain the social, economic and environmental impact or benefits of the trade, and to verify or challenge assertions that Ghana is a dumping ground for European clothes.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1.2 THE SECOND-HAND CLOTHES INDUSTRY IN GHANA

Ghana is a prominent economic force in West Africa with a diversified economy, however it is still an emerging economy with over a quarter of its circa 33 million strong population living in poverty.[14] The population is relatively young with the majority of people under the age of 25. The average income is US $2,380 which is low relative to global wealth, for example in the United States of America it is US $71,090.[15]

It is in this context, of being a developing economy with a young and relatively poor population, that Ghana is a major participant in the global SHC trade. A trade that offers employment opportunities and access to consumer goods that may otherwise be difficult to access. A vast majority of Ghanaians consume SHC, at least 95% of the population.[16]

> **The SHC trade provides employment opportunities and access to apparel and footwear that may not have been available otherwise.**

The growth of the SHC trade can be largely attributed to the opening of global markets in the 1980s. Whilst it is sometimes argued that SHC imports are likely to have played a role in undermining industrial textile/clothing production and employment in West Africa – which experienced a serious decline in the 1980s and 1990s – a closer look paints a different picture.[17] Increasingly cheap imports from Asia have competed with local production, while supply-side constraints undermined the efficiency of the domestic industry. These constraints include: unreliable and expensive infrastructure; the cost and availability of materials; outdated capital stock and lack of access to credit; and inadequate training and management skills. The SHC trade provides employment opportunities and access to apparel and footwear that may not have been available otherwise.

A key destination for the clothing that arrives in Ghana is the Kantamanto Market, located in Accra, the capital of Ghana. It is the home of second-hand goods, popularly called 'bend down boutique' by locals and generates between US $5 million to US $10 million in daily sales.[18]

The retail part of Kantamanto market alone covers over seven acres in the heart of Accra, and employs about 30,000 people. The import side of the business, which supports all of the retail operations, covers another 15 acres.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research aims of this report are to

1.	Present the current reality of the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana.
2.	Verify or challenge assertions in the global media that portray Ghana as a major dumping ground for European clothes.
3.	Provide recommendations for public and private sector stakeholders based on findings about textile waste.

2.1 METHODOLOGY

The research aimed to explore various dimensions of the second-hand clothing (SHC) industry in Accra, Ghana. Employing a mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to gain a comprehensive understanding of the import, retail, consumption, waste and waste picking practices related to second-hand clothing.

Study Design

- Mixed-methods approach: Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods for a holistic perspective.
- Sampling techniques: Stratified random sampling for importers, retailers, consumers and waste pickers; purposive sampling for qualitative interviewees.

Sampling and Participants

➔ Importers (10 respondents)

- 10 importers were selected based on their involvement in the SHC trade.
- In-depth interviews were conducted to understand the import process, challenges, and opportunities.

“The research aimed to explore various dimensions of the second-hand clothing (SHC) industry in Accra, Ghana.”

➜ Retailers (370 respondents)

- Kantamanto Market in Accra was chosen for sampling, targeting 350 retailers.
- Questionnaires were distributed, and 370 responses were obtained, capturing a diverse range of retailers in the SHC industry.

➜ Consumers/ General public (621 respondents)

- Sampling also took place at Kantamanto Market, targeting 600 consumers.
- Questionnaires were distributed to gather information on purchasing behaviour, preferences, and perceptions of SHC.

➜ Waste pickers (35 respondents)

- Sampling from various landfill sites, including Old Fadama, targeted 30 waste pickers.
- Questionnaires interviews were conducted to explore their activities, motivations, and challenges.

Data Collection Instruments

➜ Questionnaires

- Structured surveys were used for retailers and consumers, capturing quantitative data on various aspects of SHC involvement.
- In-depth interviews: Open-ended questions for importers, waste pickers, and qualitative interviews with key stakeholders.

Data Collection Procedure

- Retailers and consumers: Questionnaires were distributed and collected on-site at Kantamanto Market.
- Importers and waste pickers: In-depth interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants, ensuring a detailed exploration of their experiences.

Qualitative Aspect

➜ Key stakeholder interviews (10 participants)
In-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from key stakeholders, including:

1. Environment Protection Agency
2. District/Municipal Environmental Health Directorate
3. Customs, Exercise, and Preventive Services
4. Ghana Union of Traders
5. Landfill Operators/Caretakers

Two individuals from each group were interviewed to gather insights into the regulatory, environmental, and trade perspectives on SHC.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to refine the research instruments, identify potential challenges, and ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection tools.

Data Analysis

- Quantitative data: Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to analyse responses from retailers and consumers.

- Qualitative data: Thematic analysis was applied to the in-depth interviews, identifying patterns and themes within the responses.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

- Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study.

Project Limitations

- The study focused on Accra, and generalisation to other regions may have limitations.

- The sample size for waste pickers was relatively small due to the nature of their work.

3. WASTE IN BALES

In media reports there are two claims about the SHC industry in Ghana that dominate the narrative. One is that 40% of clothing items in imported bales are considered waste and almost immediately discarded, and related to this, the second claim is that second-hand clothes make up a large proportion of landfill waste and the waste polluting local waterways.

Our research findings suggest that the proportion of waste in imported bales is on average up to a maximum of

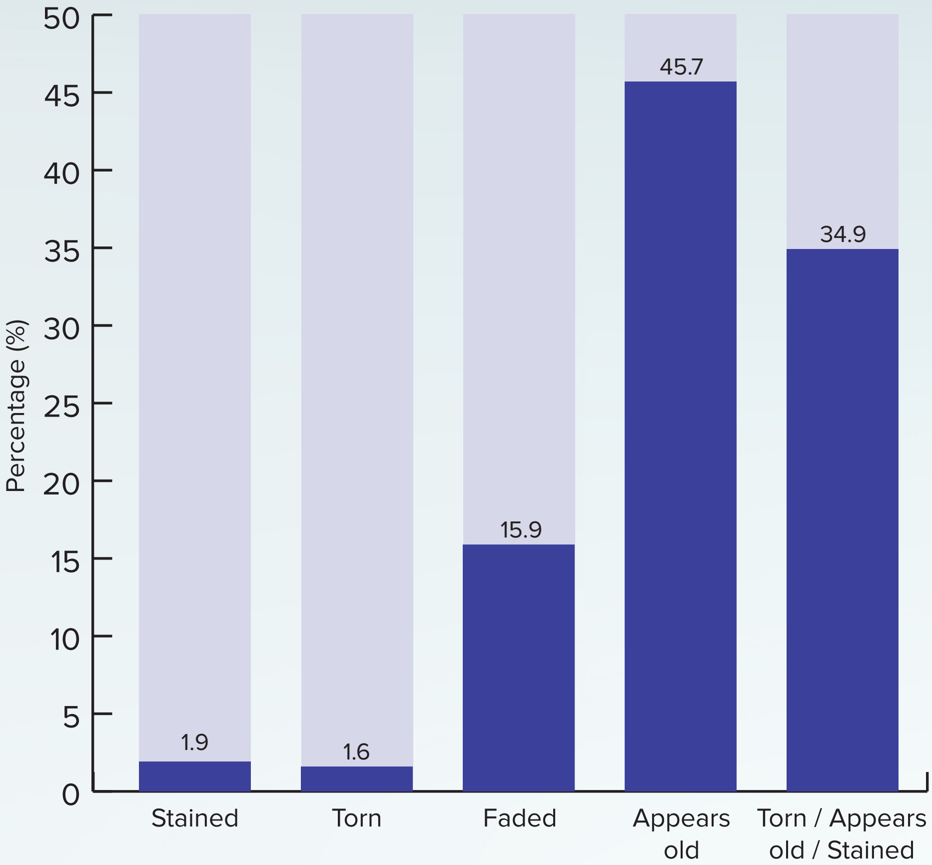
5%

Textile waste makes up just 1.7-2.2% of all waste in Accra (see section 5.1) and a small minority of that would viably be second-hand clothing.

An initial issue faced by those investigating or reporting on "waste" in the second-hand clothes trade is defining the term "waste". Prior research has shown that what is deemed low quality clothing can often be repurposed and sold to industry[19] which traders may refer to as "recycling", and this is not necessarily waste in terms of clothing that ends up directly in landfill. Prior to conducting the survey, respondents were informed that "waste" is defined as textiles that are discarded entirely i.e. not sold to trade or recycled, however, from the responses received, it was clear that the term waste was applied more broadly. Factoring this in, it is fair to assume that the true figures around waste i.e. those items that cannot be sold or recycled, may be lower than those depicted in this report.

> **This report aims to take a closer look at the second-hand clothes trade in Ghana to ascertain the social, economic and environmental impact or benefits of the trade.**

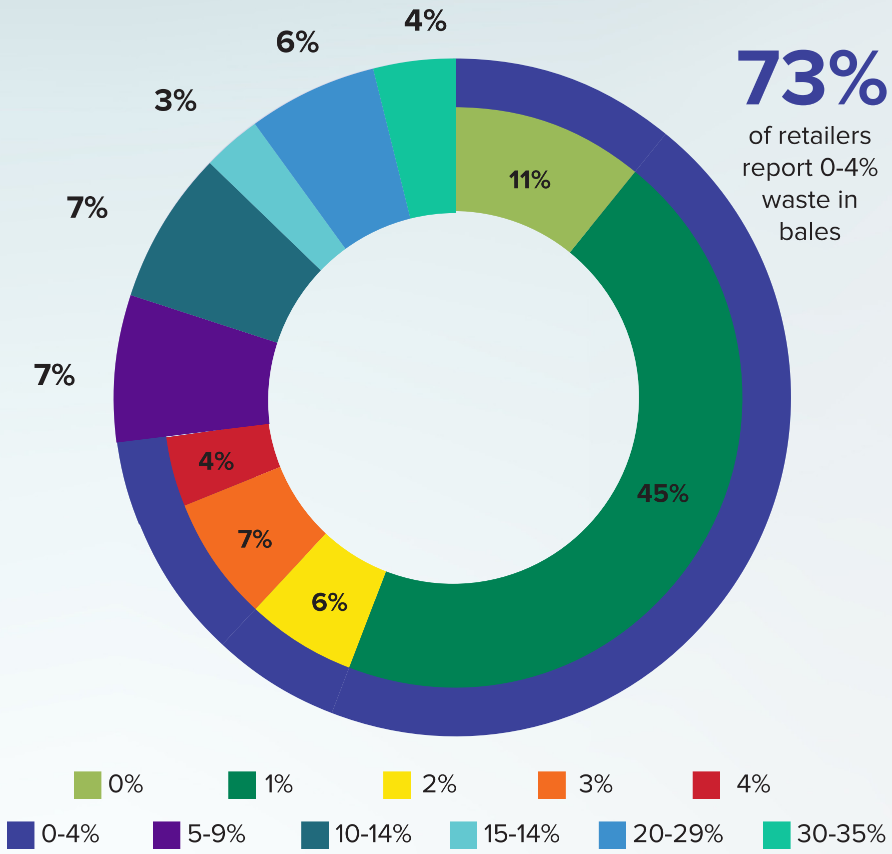
Figure 1: Identifying waste clothing items according to traders



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 1 outlines the criteria used by traders to determine when clothing in a bale is considered waste i.e. clothing items that are discarded entirely and not sold to trade or recycled. Respondents were able to select multiple criteria from the range of answers. A very small percentage of traders (1.9%) consider clothing in a bale to be waste when it is just stained. This suggests that visible stains detract from the resale value of the clothing and render it unsuitable for further use or sale but that it would be a rare occurrence where there would be an instance of a stain that cannot be removed. Similarly, a very small percentage of traders (1.6%) consider clothing in a bale to be waste when it is torn. Torn garments are likely deemed irreparable or unattractive for resale, leading to their classification as waste. A notable proportion of traders (15.9%) consider clothing in a bale to be waste when it is faded. Faded garments may appear worn-out or less visually appealing, diminishing their market value and suitability for resale. The largest minority of traders (45.7%) consider clothing in a bale to be waste when it appears old. This broad criterion encompasses various factors such as wear and tear, outdated styles, or general deterioration, rendering the garments unsuitable for resale or repurposing. A significant percentage of traders (34.9%), consider clothing in a bale to be waste when it meets multiple criteria, including being torn, appearing old, and/ or stained. This suggests a comprehensive assessment of garment condition, with multiple factors contributing to their classification as waste.

Figure 2: Percentage of waste in a retailers' bale



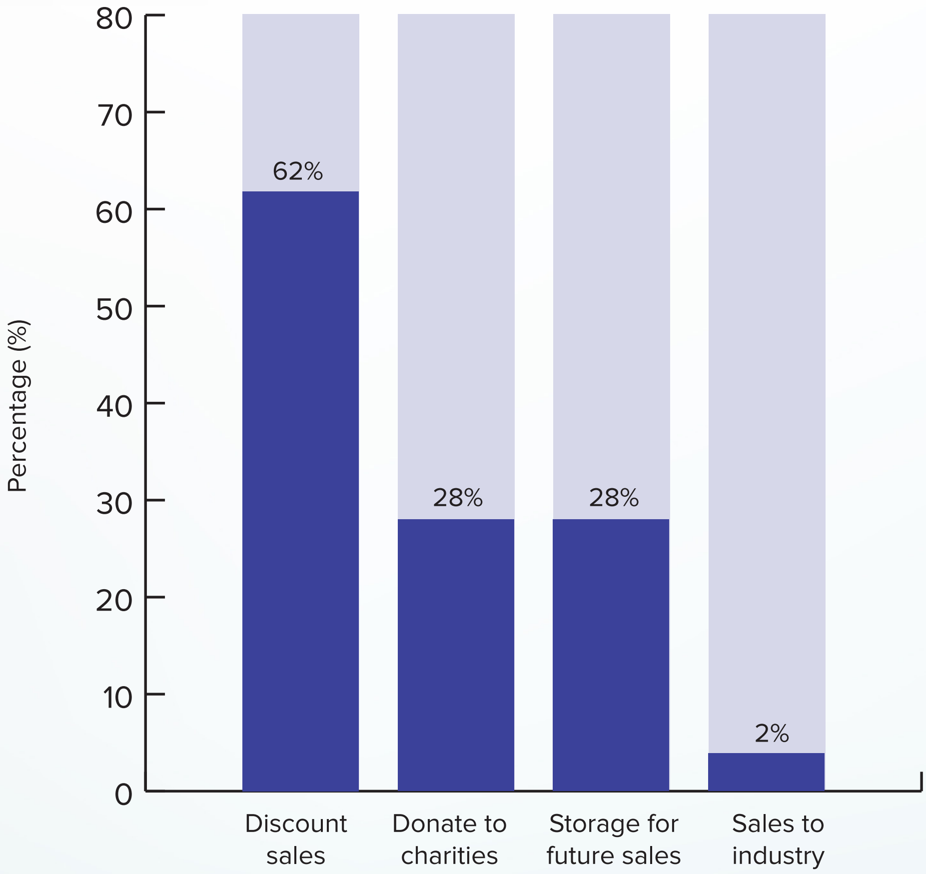
The majority of respondents, constituting 73%, reported encountering bales with a waste percentage ranging from 0% to 4%.

Source: Fieldwork

Figure 2 shows the percentage of waste encountered by traders/ retailers when opening a bale of second-hand clothing. The majority of respondents, constituting 73%, reported encountering bales with a waste percentage ranging from 0% to 4%. A notable percentage of traders, representing 11.1%, encounter no waste whatsoever when opening a bale and the largest minority, 45% of all retailers surveyed suggested finding 1% of waste in their bales. This suggests that a significant portion of the surveyed retailers receive bales with minimal waste content. Conversely, bales with higher percentages of waste are less common, with only 7% of respondents indicating waste percentages falling within the 5-9% and 10-14% ranges. The percentages decrease further for the higher waste brackets, with only a small fraction of respondents reporting waste of 15-35%. Overall, the data indicates a trend towards lower waste percentages in the imported second-hand clothes bales, with a notable concentration in the lower ranges. Absolutely no respondent indicated having waste of more than 35% in their bales.

The prevalence of low levels of waste, particularly with 73% of respondents reporting 0-4% waste, indicates several noteworthy aspects of the market for imported second-hand clothes in Ghana. Firstly, it suggests a potentially efficient sorting process at the point of origin. This efficiency could be attributed to improved sorting technologies or practices, ensuring that only clothing items in good condition are included in the bales destined for Ghanaian retailers. Additionally, it implies a high quality of merchandise being imported, which can positively impact the profitability and attractiveness of second-hand clothing businesses in Ghana. Moreover, low levels of waste signify minimal environmental impact, as less discarded material requires disposal, aligning with sustainable practices.

Figure 3: Management of remaining stock in inventory.
Respondents were able to select more than one option.



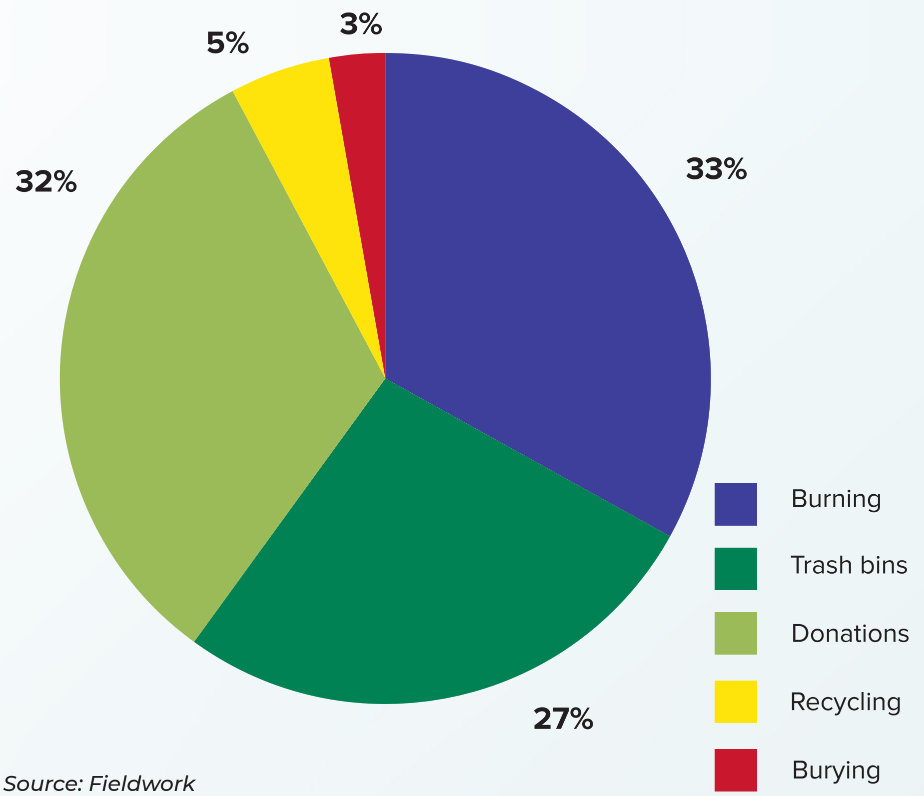
Source: Fieldwork

Understanding the full value chain of the second-hand clothes trade helps to gain a better understanding of the environmental impact, including the management of remaining stock.

Figure 3 shows how traders manage unsold goods in their inventory. A significant portion of traders (62%) opt to offer discount sales as a strategy to move unsold inventory potentially in bulk. This approach aims to attract customers with reduced prices, stimulating demand and clearing out stagnant stock. A considerable percentage of traders, accounting for 28%, choose to donate unsold goods to charities. This not only helps declutter the inventory but also fosters goodwill within the community and supports social causes. 28% of traders allocate space to store remaining stock for future sales, suggesting seasonal turnover. This approach allows traders to preserve inventory value and capitalise on potential sales opportunities in the future. A small percentage of traders (2%) engage in selling unsold goods to industry.

This may involve selling bulk quantities of items to textile recycling companies or other industries. A notable portion of traders (28.4%), employ a combination of these strategies. This multifaceted approach allows traders to diversify their management efforts and adapt to varying market conditions and inventory levels.

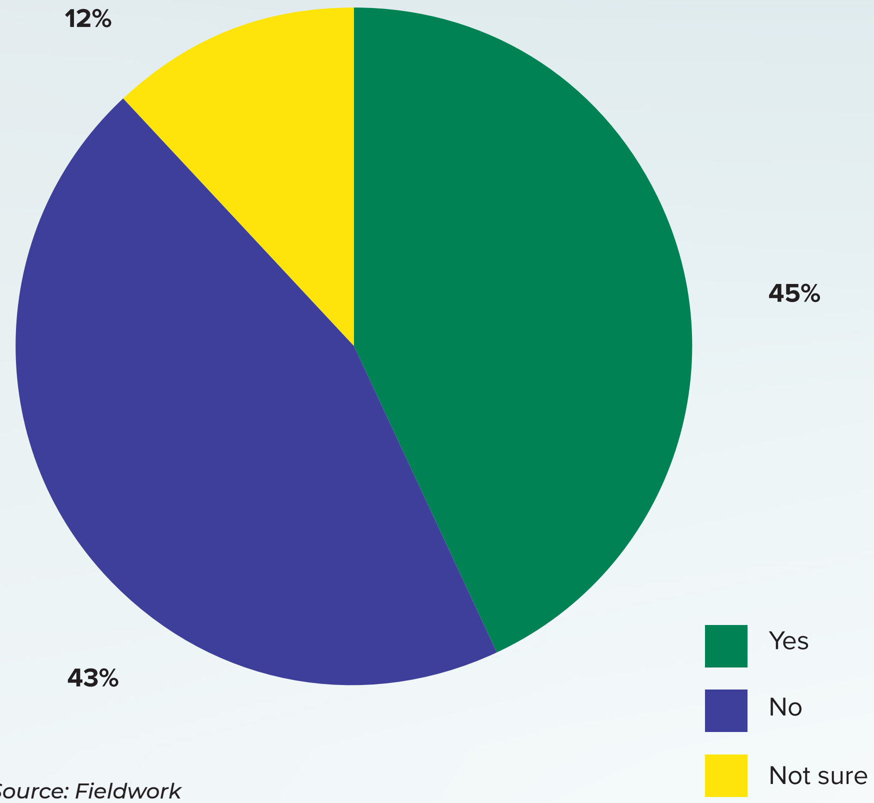
Figure 4: Best disposal method for waste clothing



Source: Fieldwork

The results regarding the preferred disposal method of waste clothing among second-hand clothes retailers provide valuable insights into their waste management practices and attitudes towards sustainability. Notably, a significant portion, constituting 33% of respondents, indicated a preference for burning waste clothing. This inclination towards burning may stem from a lack of more sustainable waste management infrastructure or awareness of the environmental impacts associated with incineration. This highlights the need for education and alternative waste disposal solutions. 32% of respondents expressed a preference for donating waste clothing. This indicates a commendable effort towards reusing and redistributing clothing items, potentially benefiting communities in need. Trash bins were cited as the preferred disposal method by 27% of respondents suggesting potential areas for improvement in waste management practices to promote more sustainable alternatives. Overall, the survey highlights both the challenges and opportunities in waste management practices among second-hand clothes retailers in Ghana. Educating retailers about the environmental impacts of different disposal methods and promoting more sustainable alternatives, such as recycling and responsible donation, could contribute to more environmentally friendly practices within the industry.

Figure 5: Willingness to partake in waste disposal programs



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 5 depicts the willingness of traders to participate in waste disposal programs. A significant portion of traders, comprising 44.9%, express willingness to partake in waste disposal. This suggests a positive attitude towards addressing waste management issues and a readiness to contribute to sustainable solutions.

A considerable percentage of traders, representing 43%, indicate a lack of willingness to participate in waste disposal programs. This may reflect various factors such as perceived inconvenience, lack of awareness, or scepticism about the effectiveness of such initiatives.

A minority of traders, accounting for 12.1%, express uncertainty or indecision regarding their willingness to participate in waste disposal programmes. This suggests a need for further information, education, or engagement to clarify perspectives and encourage participation.

4. THE CURRENT REALITY OF THE SECOND-HAND CLOTHES INDUSTRY IN GHANA

4.1 THE SHC TRADE

The World Bank describes trade as an engine of growth that creates jobs, reduces poverty and increases economic opportunity. International trade is a key part of Ghana's economy and the second-hand clothes trade, although small in comparison to Ghana's main imports and exports, has significance to Ghana's trade economy.

> The largest exporters of SHC to Ghana are the United Kingdom, China and Canada.

In 2022 the importation of SHC contributed an estimated

USD 29.5 million

to government revenues through direct import taxes (excluding levies and exemptions).[20]

This is more than double the amount the government spent on its key Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer programme for extremely poor and vulnerable households in 2022, which was a total of

GH¢ 162 million

(over US$ 13 million).[21]

The largest exporters of SHC to Ghana are the United Kingdom, China and Canada. The reduction in SHC imports in 2022 compared to 2021 may be due to a hike in import duties in the year 2022 (Table 2). As the figures for volumes of imported SHC are only available until 2019 at the time of publication, 2021 and 2022 figures depict the value of imports rather than volume. Volume and value figures cannot be compared directly due to how the value of exports/ imports are declared. Complex value thresholds used for determining customs values are not necessarily related to the real value of the clothes imported and so will not represent volumes.

Examining export data provides valuable insights into the origin of clothes entering the country; however, complexity arises from the frequent cross-border trade of clothes during the collection and sorting process before ultimately being exported to Ghana. In the same way, Ghana is also sometimes another step in the trading process, with a proportion of the exports arriving into Ghana, being exported on to other West African countries (see Table 4).

Table 1: Overview of Ghana's international trade in second-hand clothing trading in 2022

Exports	Ghana exported $585k worth of used clothing in 2022.
	Used clothing was the 187th most exported product.
	Key destinations for used clothing from Ghana included Benin ($242k), Côte d'Ivoire ($173k), Niger ($72.7k), United States ($20.1k), and United Kingdom ($16.5k).
	The most rapidly growing export markets for Ghana between 2021 and 2022 were Benin ($170k), United States ($18.1k), and Angola ($10.3k).

Imports	
	Ghana is a significant importer of used clothing with imports totaling $164M in 2022.
	Used clothing was the 26th most imported product to Ghana.
	Major sources of Ghana's used Clothing imports were the United Kingdom ($64.7M), China ($40.8M), and Canada ($10.6M).
	The fastest-growing import markets for Ghana between 2021 and 2022 were Lithuania ($458k), Malaysia ($311k), and United States ($239k).

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity

Table 2: Top 10 countries exporting SHC to Ghana in 2022 and 2021

Rank	Country exporting	2022 value (USD millions)	2021
1	United Kingdom	64.7	80.8
2	China	40.8	41.6
3	Canada	10.6	15.2
4	Netherlands	7.5	9.3
5	Poland	6.2	9.6
6	United States of America	5.5	5.3
7	Germany	5.12	8.1
8	Republic of South Korea	5	8.6
9	Italy	1.9	3.3
10	Belgium	1.6	3.1

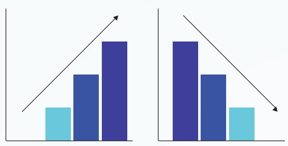
Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity

Table 3: 5-year Ghana SHC imports and exports in kilograms (kg)

Year	Trade	Volume in kg (millions)	% exported
2019	Import	131.7	
	Export	11.3	8.5%
2018	Import	134	
	Export	18.3	13.7%
2017	Import	126.2	
	Export	9	7%
2016	Import	124	
	Export	26.6	21.4%
2015	Import	113.9	
	Export	34	30%

Source: Comtrade

Table 4: Ghana's export dynamics (2021 - 2022): Growth and decline

<table>
<tr>
<td>Fastest Growing Export Markets for Ghana (2021 - 2022):
1. Benin: $170K (236%)
2. United States: $18.1K (918%)
3. Angola: $10.3K (1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fastest Declining Export Markets for Ghana (2021 - 2022):
1. Côte d'Ivoire: -$15.7M (-98.9%)
2. Burkina Faso: -$560K (-100%)
3. Niger: -$133K (-64.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td colspan="3">Ghana's role in the global trade of used clothing is marked by substantial growth in specific export markets, coupled with significant import levels, establishing the country as a crucial participant in this sector.</td>
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Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity

The distribution of SHC to neighbouring countries emphasises regional influence, reflecting a complex web of cross-border trade dynamics. This pattern not only points to Ghana's role as a regional hub but also implies a positive socio-economic impact on both local and regional economies.

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE

1. Export Sector Contribution

Ghana's export of used clothing amounted to $585k in 2022 and $972k in 2021. While not massive figures, they represent a tangible contribution to the country's export earnings. Used clothing held the 187th most exported product in 2022 and 140th most exported product in 2021, indicating that it plays a role in diversifying the export portfolio.

2. Destination Market

Burkina Faso, Niger, Kenya, Benin, the United Kingdom and the United States were key destinations for Ghanaian used clothing in 2021 and 2022. This demonstrates the importance of regional trade, with neighbouring countries being significant customers, as well as international markets like the UK and the US.

3. Export Market Growth

The growing export markets for Ghana in Africa signal an increasing demand for used clothing, potentially opening up opportunities for further market expansion.

4. Import Sector Dominance

Ghana is a significant importer of used clothing, with imports totalling $164M in 2022 and $214M in 2021. This signifies a substantial reliance on second-hand clothing to meet domestic demand and consumer preferences.

5. Import Sources

In 2022 and 2021 the major sources of Ghana's used clothing imports were the United Kingdom, China, Canada, Poland, and the Netherlands.
The dependence on a diverse set of countries for imports reflects the global nature of the second-hand clothing trade

6. Socio-economic Impact

The second-hand clothing trade contributes to the overall economic activity in Ghana by creating employment opportunities in the collection, sorting, and distribution processes as well as ancillary jobs.
It provides affordable clothing options for consumers, especially in lower-income brackets, contributing to poverty alleviation and improved living standards.

Conclusion

It is clear that the second-hand clothes trade brings economic benefits to Ghana. The second-hand clothing trade in Ghana is economically significant, contributing to both export earnings and meeting domestic consumer demand. There is now an opportunity to enhance the economic advantages with sustainable practices in the industry.

Ghana could explore opportunities to add value to the second-hand clothing sector by engaging in activities such as recycling and upcycling.

4.1.1 Assessing the dynamics of second-hand clothing importers: Quality control and regulatory engagement

4.1.1.1 Importing SHC

The vibrant tapestry of Ghanaian culture is interwoven with a rich history of trade, commerce, and the unique fashion choices that reflect the nation's diversity. Within this narrative, the importation of second-hand clothing has emerged as a significant facet, shaping both the economic landscape and the everyday lives of Ghanaians. This section delves into the world of importers of second-hand clothing, unravelling the complexities of this trade and examining the diverse factors that contribute to its evolution. The importation of second-hand clothing, colloquially known as "bend down boutique" or "obroni wawu," is synonymous with accessibility and affordability making it an integral part of the Ghanaian fashion scene, catering to a broad spectrum of consumers across various socio-economic strata. Ghana's second-hand clothing market is a dynamic arena shaped by a myriad of factors, including international trade policies, consumer preferences, and economic considerations. Importers play a pivotal role in this ecosystem, acting as conduits that bridge the gap between global suppliers and local demand. This section seeks to shed light on the strategies employed by these importers, the challenges they face, and the impact of their operations on the Ghanaian economy and society at large.

> **Ghana's second-hand clothing market is a dynamic arena shaped by a myriad of factors, including international trade policies, consumer preferences, and economic considerations.**

There are various bodies and agencies that oversee various aspects of international trade in Ghana. The Ghana Standards Authority, an agency of the Ministry of the Trade and Industry, is responsible for establishing and promoting standards to ensure that goods and services manufactured or imported into Ghana are of the highest quality and are safe for consumers. Ghana Shippers Authority is the government regulator overseeing the importers of used clothing, its role in regulating SHC imports is integral for industry oversight. Anyone wanting to join the trade must therefore register with the Authority as an importer.

> The steps to ensure quality control within this process are important to all those involved to ensure that goods that are imported are desirable, sellable and profitable for retailers.

While retailers such as those in Kantamanto market are the ultimate proprietor of the contents of the bales imported into Ghana, the bales themselves go through an importation process which means that they pass through many hands before reaching the ultimate owner. This distance between the exporter and the ultimate owner of the bale involves importers and middle men which means that there need to be strong processes to ensure high-quality goods. Retailers may not want to – or have the funds to – cover the cost of importing a whole bale, and so pay to have the first pick of clothes from a bale instead. Retailers have to then be present at the opening of the bales. The steps to ensure quality control within this process are important to all those involved to ensure that goods that are imported are desirable, sellable and profitable for retailers.

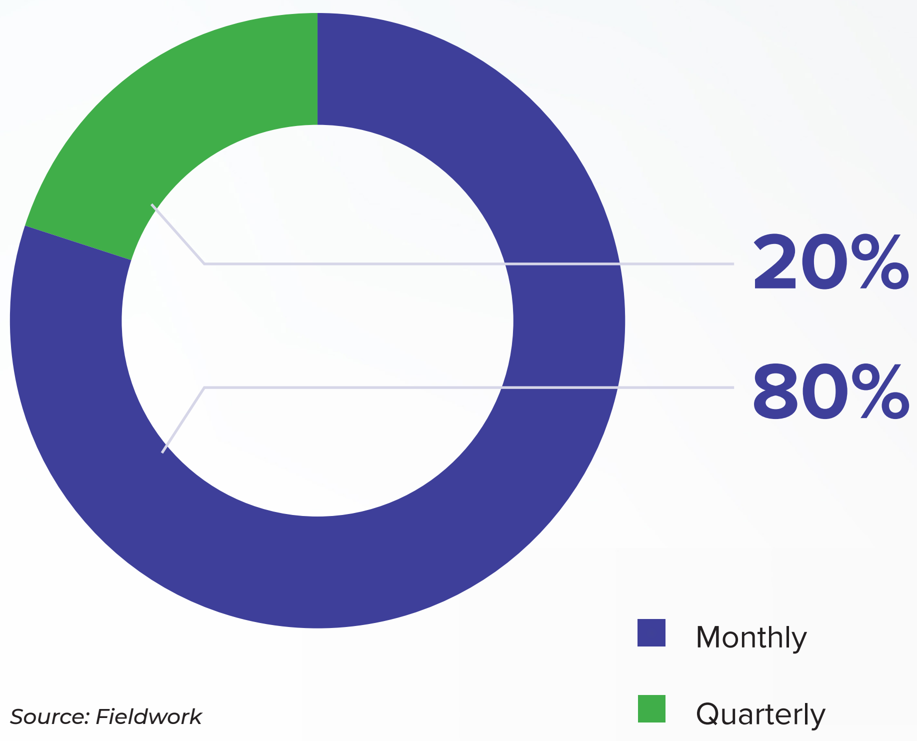
Field worker interviewing a SHC trader

4.1.1.2 Importers

Figure 6 shows the frequency of new imports of second-hand clothing, with the majority of importers (80%) reporting a monthly reception and a smaller proportion (20%) receiving bales on a quarterly schedule. The fact that 80% of importers receive new shipments on a monthly basis suggests a high level of regularity and frequency in the importation process. This could be indicative of a demand-driven supply chain or a business strategy that involves more frequent and smaller shipments to meet market demands and trends. The 20% of importers opting for a quarterly import frequency may have a different business model or operational strategy. Quarterly imports might be associated with considerations such as bulk purchasing, longer planning cycles, or a deliberate effort to manage inventory and reduce operational costs. The contrast in import frequencies highlights the flexibility within the second-hand clothing industry. Importers can tailor their strategies to align with market dynamics, consumer preferences, and their own operational capacities. Monthly imports may allow for quicker adaptation to changing trends, while quarterly imports might provide cost efficiencies and strategic planning advantages.

"The fact that 80% of importers receive new shipments on a monthly basis suggests a high level of regularity and frequency in the importation process."

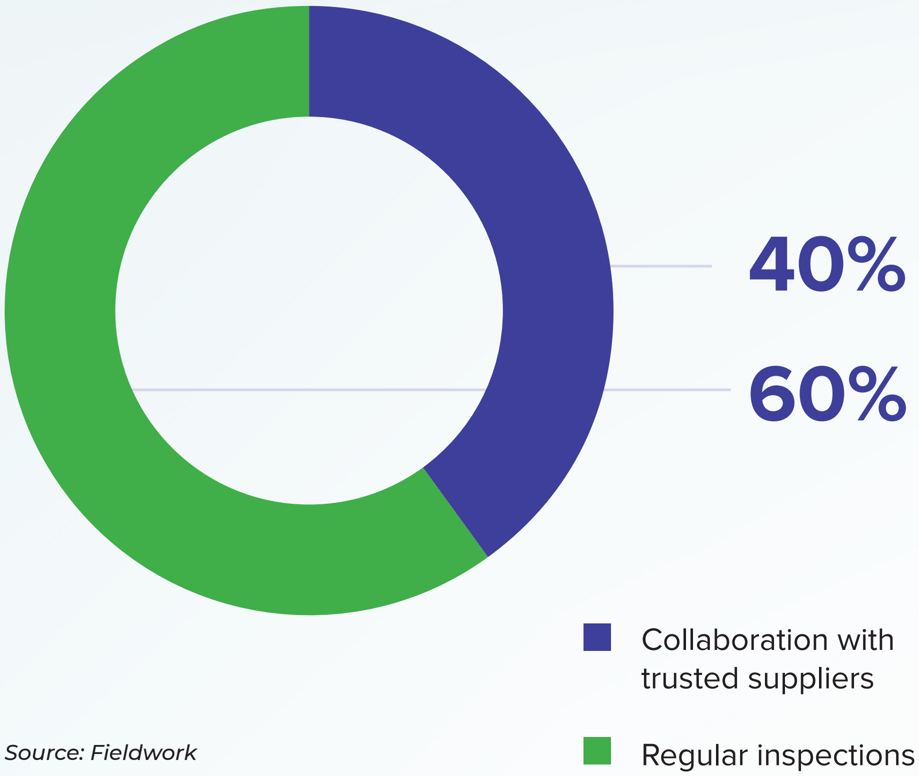
Figure 6: Frequency of SHC shipments according to importers



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 7 presents the methods employed by importers to ensure quality control in the imports of second-hand clothing. The two identified approaches are collaboration with trusted suppliers (40%) and regular inspections (60%). Collaborating with trusted suppliers is a strategic approach that emphasises building strong and reliable partnerships within the supply chain. This method indicates that a significant portion of importers place a premium on establishing long-term relationships with suppliers who are known for delivering high-quality second-hand clothing. The prevalence of regular inspections as a quality control measure suggests that a majority of importers prioritise hands-on evaluation and assessment of the goods. Regular inspections may involve thorough checks for factors such as garment condition, cleanliness, and adherence to specific quality standards.

Figure 7: Methods to ensure quality control in second-hand clothing imports

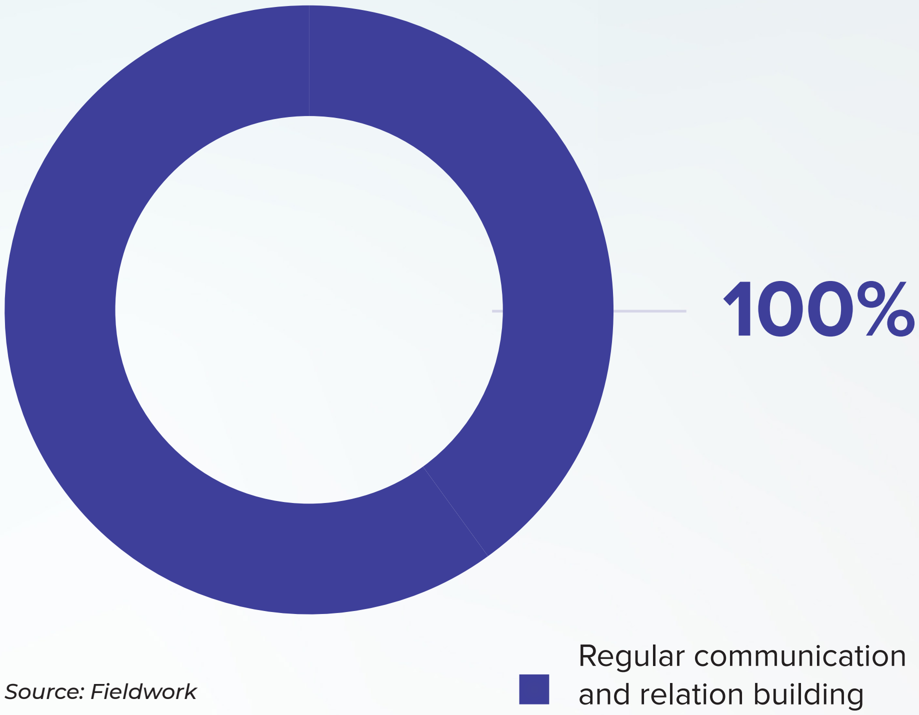


Source: Fieldwork

Figure 8 highlights how all importers surveyed rely on regular communication and relationship building as the primary means to maintain trust with their suppliers over other means such as performance-based incentives.

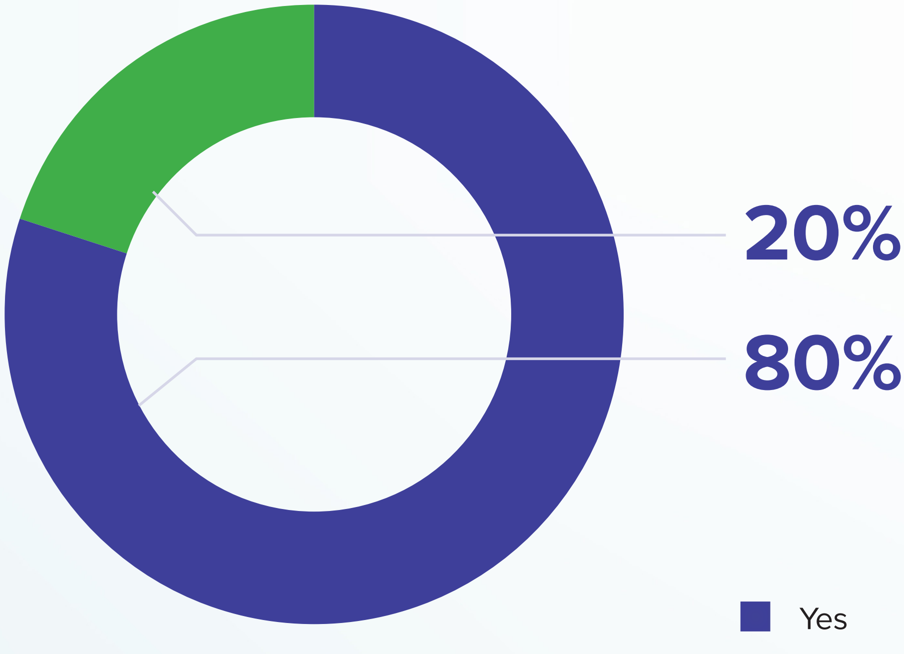
The exclusive emphasis on regular communication and relationship building signifies a strategic approach deeply rooted in interpersonal dynamics and collaborative partnerships.

Figure 8: How importers maintain trust with suppliers



Source: Fieldwork

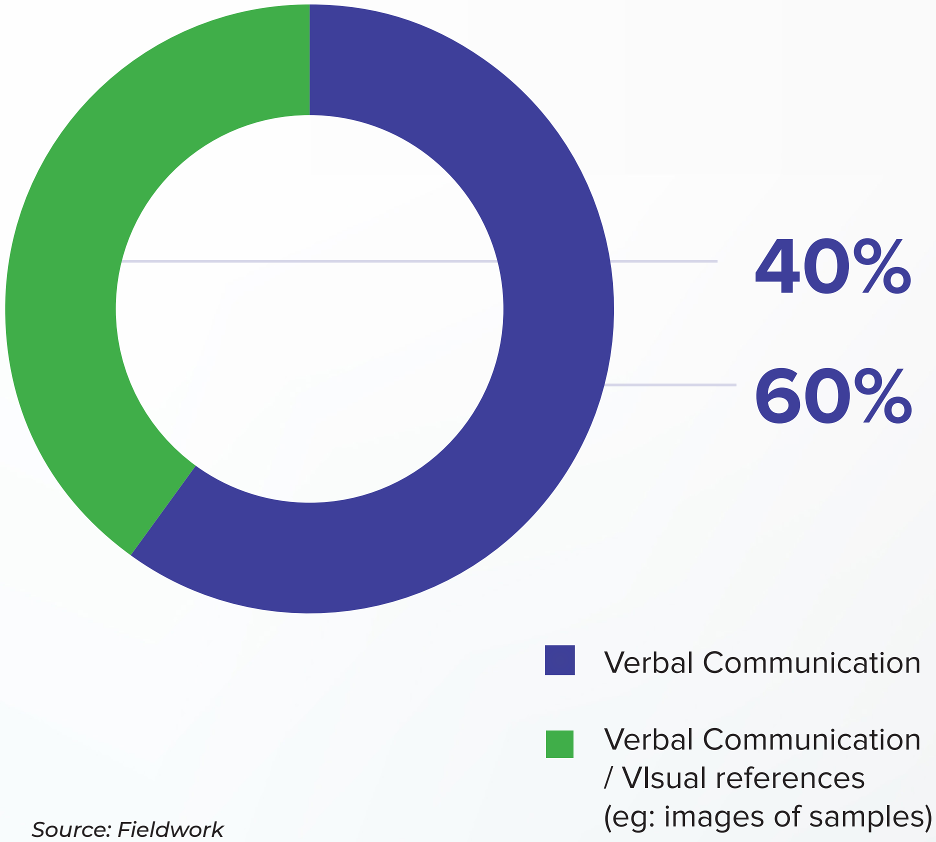
Figure 9: Percentage of importers following industry specific quality standards or certifications in import process



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 9 shows that 80% of importers surveyed follow industry-specific quality standards or certifications in their import process, while 20% do not. The majority of importers prioritising adherence to industry-specific quality standards or certifications underscores a commitment to ensuring the quality, safety, and ethical sourcing of second-hand clothing. Following established standards can enhance the credibility of importers, instil consumer confidence, and contribute to the overall integrity of the supply chain. The 20% of importers not following industry-specific quality standards may have various reasons for this approach. It could be a strategic decision based on specific market niches, cost considerations, or a perception that existing standards are not aligned with their business model.

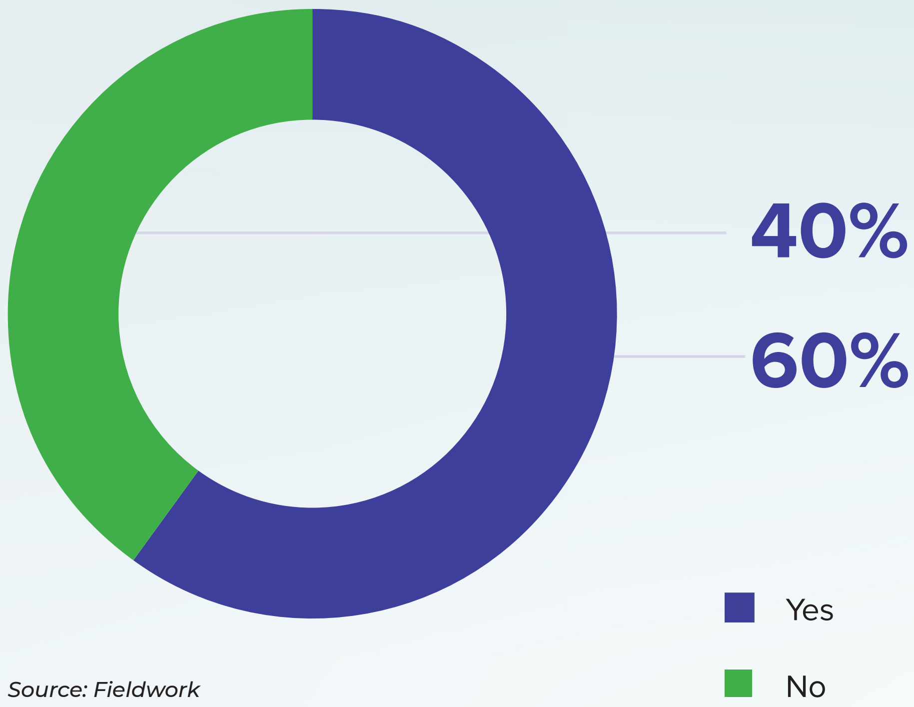
Figure 10: How importers specify clothing requirements to suppliers



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 10 highlights a dual approach among importers when communicating specific requirements to suppliers: 60% opt for traditional verbal communication, while 40% employ a combination of verbal instructions along with visual references, such as images of samples. None utilise detailed written guidelines. The prevalence of verbal communication underscores the importance of real-time interaction for the majority of importers. While this method allows for immediate dialogue and discussion, it also introduces the challenge of potential misinterpretation or ambiguity. Importers adopting a combined strategy recognise the power of visual aids in enhancing the precision of their instructions. The integration of visual references, such as images of samples, adds a tangible layer to the communication process, providing suppliers with a clearer understanding of the desired outcome.

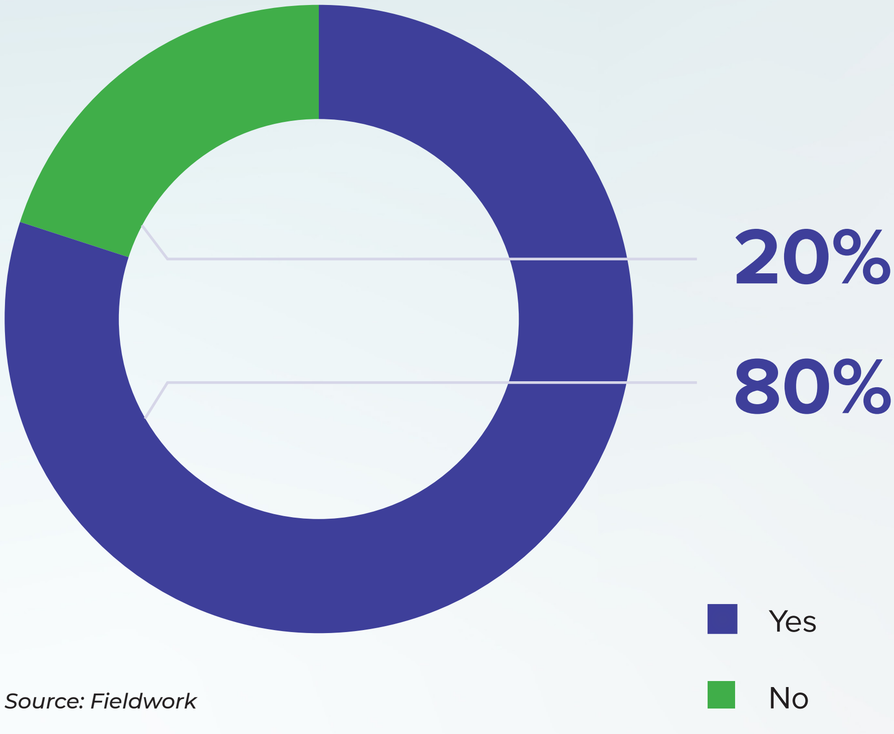
Figure 11: Percentage of importers registering complaints with suppliers regarding quality of goods supplied



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 11 indicates that 60% of the surveyed importers have filed complaints with suppliers regarding the quality of goods received, while 40% have not. The fact that 60% of importers have filed complaints indicates a proactive stance toward quality management. Importers in this group prioritise holding suppliers accountable for meeting specified quality standards, demonstrating a commitment to delivering high-quality products to consumers. Filing complaints can serve as a mechanism for importers to communicate their expectations clearly and seek corrective actions when deviations from agreed-upon quality criteria occur. This proactive approach contributes to maintaining the integrity of the supply chain and protecting the importer's brand reputation.

Figure 12: Percentage of importers that have implemented measures after experiencing quality issues



Source: Fieldwork

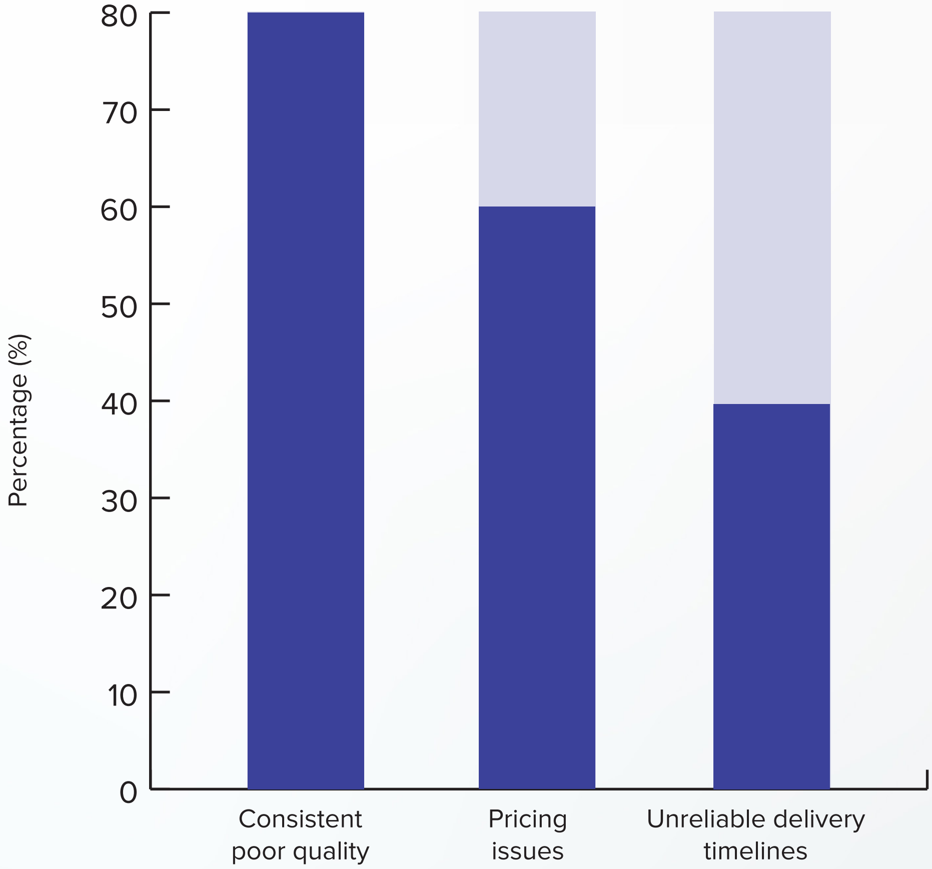
Figure 12 indicates that 80% of the importers surveyed have implemented measures to prevent similar issues after facing challenges with the quality of imported goods, while 20% have not. The majority of importers actively addressing and implementing measures following challenges demonstrates a proactive and forward-thinking approach to quality management. The 20% of importers who have not implemented measures may have various reasons for this approach. It could be due to a perception that the issues faced were isolated incidents, confidence in the effectiveness of existing quality control measures, or other strategic considerations.

Figure 13 outlines the circumstances under which importers would consider switching to a different supplier. A significant majority of respondents, at 80%, cited consistent poor quality as a primary reason for contemplating a switch. This finding underscores the critical importance of product quality in the second-hand clothing trade. Importers rely on receiving garments of acceptable quality to maintain customer satisfaction and reputation. Consistently poor-quality items not only impact immediate sales but also erode trust and may lead to long-term damage to business relationships. Pricing issues emerged as a concern for 60% of respondents. While second-hand clothing is often sought after for its affordability, importers must balance competitive pricing with quality. Pricing issues could include inflated costs, unfavourable payment terms, or inconsistent pricing structures, all of which can strain importer-supplier relationships and impact profitability.

Another notable factor cited by 40% of respondents is unreliable delivery timelines. Importers rely on suppliers to meet agreed-upon delivery schedules to ensure inventory availability and meet customer demand. Delays in delivery can disrupt operations, lead to stock shortages, and result in lost sales opportunities.

Overall, these results highlight the complex dynamics at play. Importers must navigate various challenges, including balancing price competitiveness with quality, managing supply chain logistics, and maintaining consistent product standards. Importers prioritising quality assurance may find it untenable to maintain a relationship with suppliers who consistently fall short of expected standards thus ensuring a level of accountability and commitment to quality.

Figure 13: Reasons importers would consider switching suppliers - *Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer.*



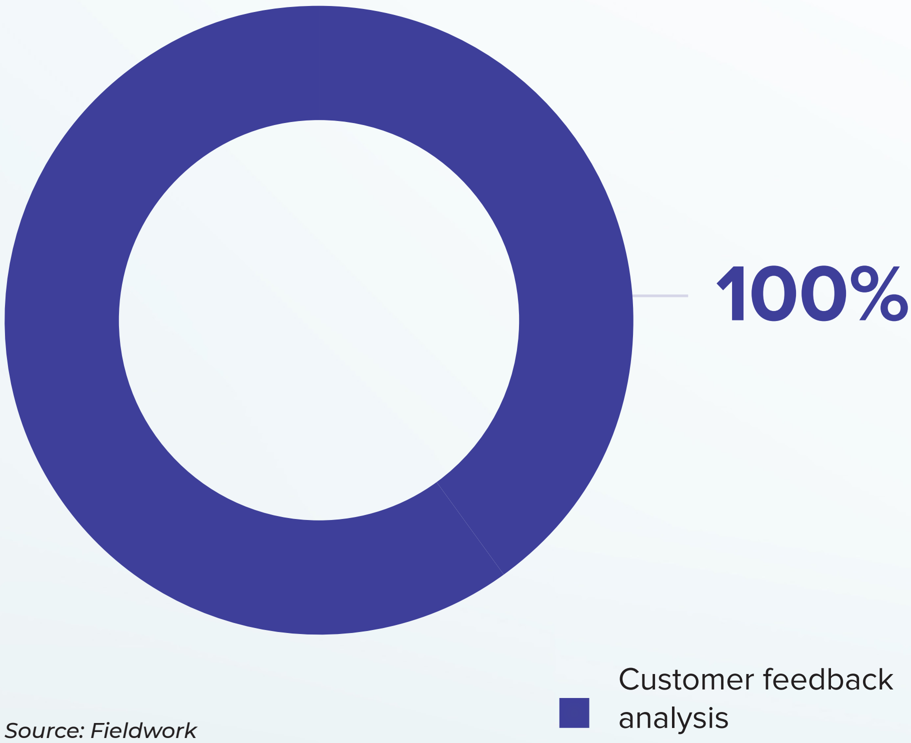
Source: Fieldwork

The combination of consistent poor quality, unreliable delivery timelines, and pricing issues (40%) suggests a holistic evaluation approach by a significant portion of importers. Importers in this category recognise that supplier performance encompasses multiple facets, and issues in one area can have cascading effects on the overall supply chain.

Figure 14 shows that importers rely on customer feedback analysis as the primary method for continuously improving their quality control processes, with 100% adopting this approach versus alternatives such as supplier performance reviews or employee training.

The unanimous adoption of customer feedback analysis highlights the paramount importance that importers place on understanding and responding to the experiences and perceptions of their customers.

Figure 14: Importers' approach to improving quality control processes

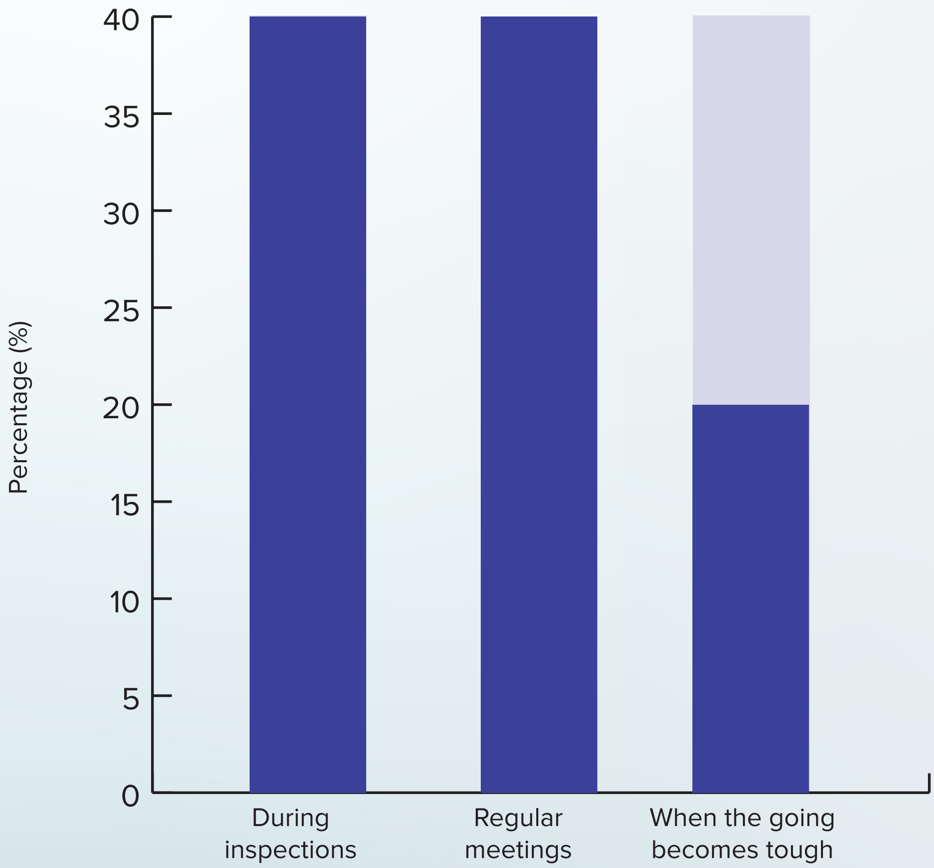


Source: Fieldwork

Figure 15 reveals various points at which importers engage with regulators/authorities regarding their import activities, with 40% citing during inspections, another 40% mentioning regular meetings, and 20% indicating engagement when facing challenges e.g. "when the going becomes tough". The 40% of importers engaging with regulators during inspections demonstrate a proactive approach to compliance and regulatory adherence. These interactions likely occur during routine inspections conducted by relevant authorities to ensure import activities align with established regulations. The 40% of importers engaging with regulators through regular meetings exemplify a proactive and ongoing dialogue with authorities.

Regular meetings may involve discussions on compliance updates, changes in regulations, and collaborative efforts to enhance the effectiveness of import activities. This approach signifies a strategic commitment to staying informed about regulatory changes and maintaining a strong, communicative relationship with authorities. The 20% of importers engaging with regulators when facing challenges may adopt a reactive approach to regulatory interactions. This could involve seeking assistance or clarification during challenging situations, such as unexpected regulatory changes or difficulties in meeting compliance standards.

Figure 15: Importers' level of engagement with regulators or authorities

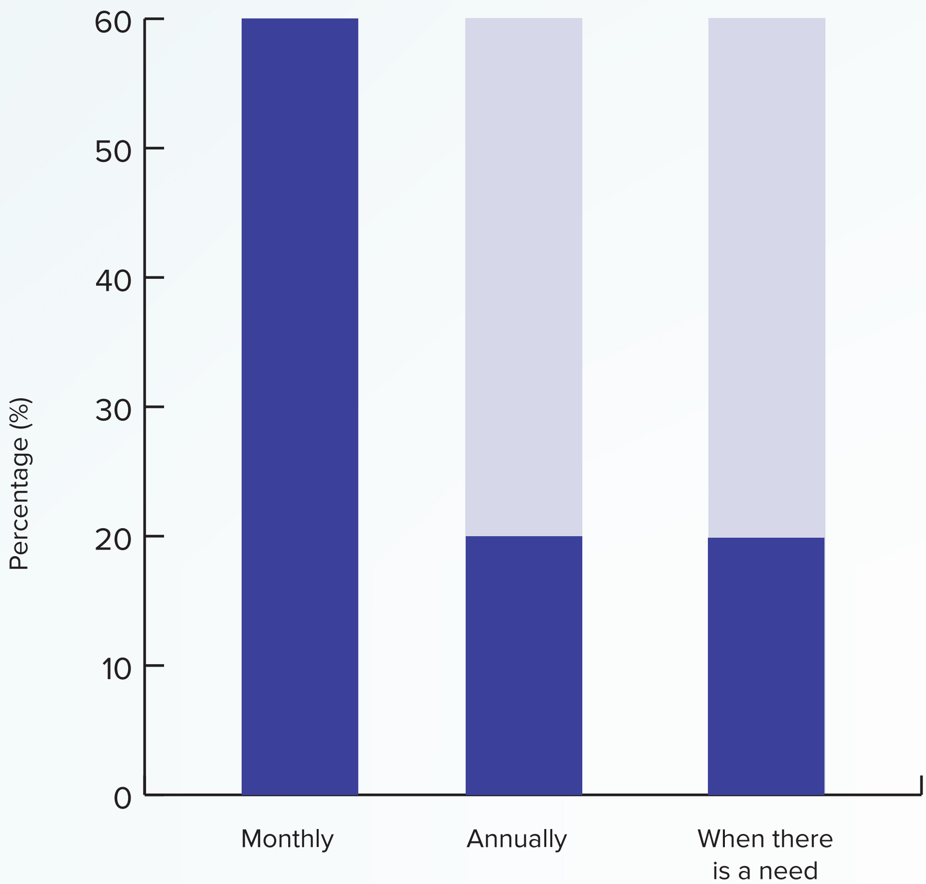


Source: Fieldwork

Figure 16 presents the differing frequencies at which importers engage with regulators/ authorities regarding their import activities, with 60% indicating monthly engagement, 20% annual engagement, and another 20% engaging when there is a specific need. Importers engaging with regulators on a monthly basis (60%) demonstrate a high level of proactivity and a commitment to regular communication with regulatory authorities. Monthly engagement suggests a systematic approach to staying informed about regulatory updates, addressing compliance matters promptly, and fostering an ongoing collaborative relationship. Importers engaging with regulators on an annual basis (20%) likely approach regulatory interactions as part of a scheduled, periodic review.

Annual engagement may involve comprehensive discussions, updates, and reviews of compliance matters, allowing importers to address any emerging issues or changes in regulations. The 20% of importers engaging with regulators only when there is a specific need suggest a more reactive approach to regulatory interactions. This approach may involve reaching out to authorities in response to challenges, unexpected changes, or specific issues that require clarification or resolution.

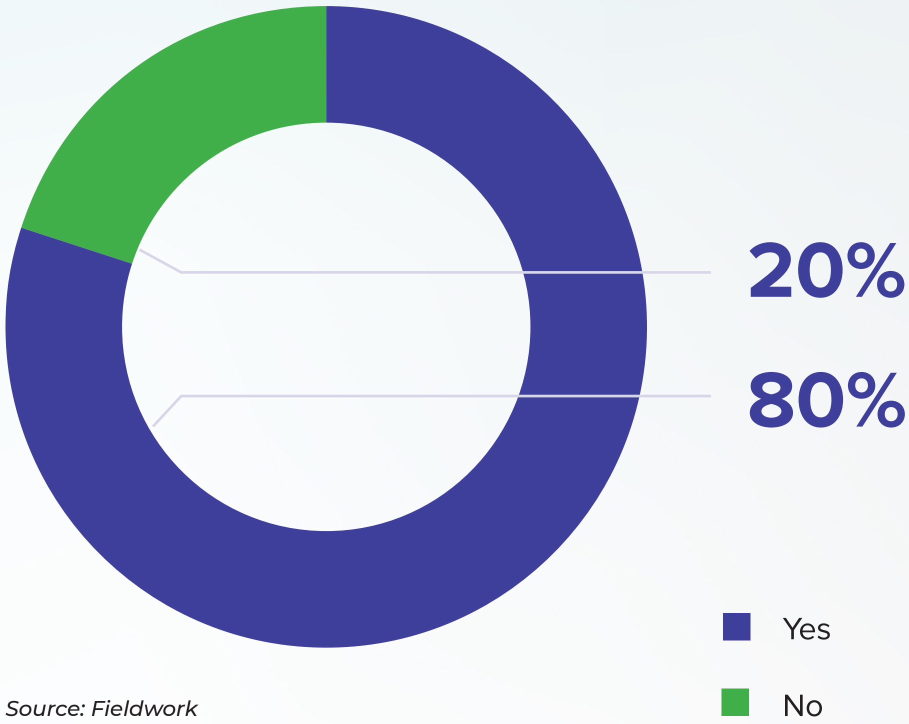
Figure 16: Frequency of engagement with regulators/ authorities regarding import activities



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 17 shows that 80% of importers have received complaints from retailers/ traders regarding the second-hand clothing they supply, while 20% have not. The majority of importers acknowledging receipt of complaints from retailers/ traders demonstrate a recognition of the importance of customer feedback and the challenges faced by the downstream partners in the supply chain. The 20% of importers who have not received complaints may view this as a positive indicator of their supply chain's efficiency and the satisfaction of retailers/traders with the provided second-hand clothing.

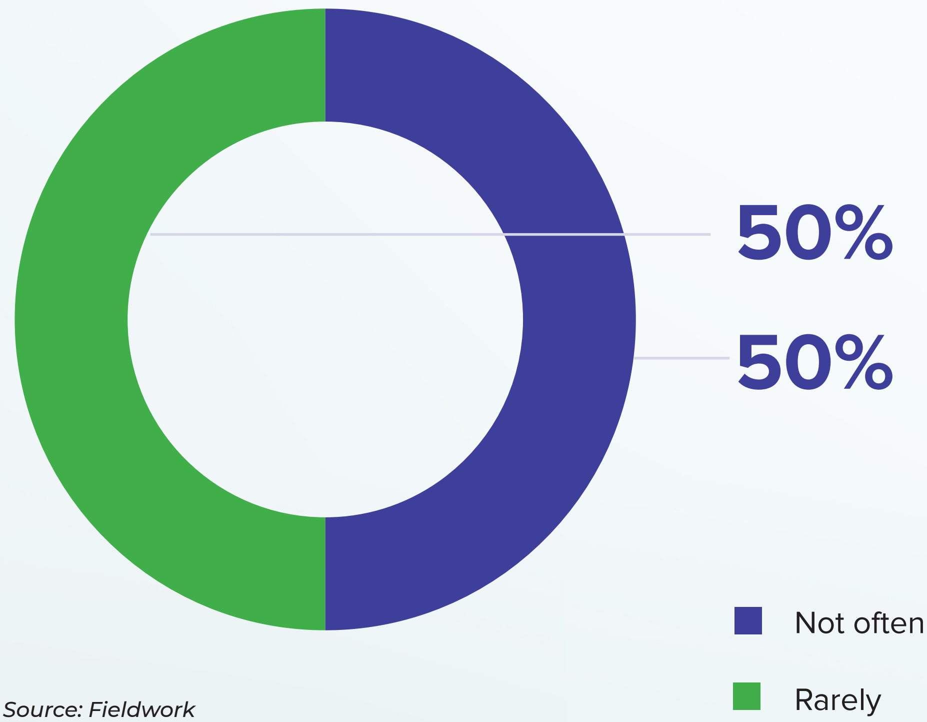
Figure 17: Percentage of importers that have received complaints from retailers/ traders regarding supplied SHC



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 18 indicates that importers experience complaints with varying frequency, with 50% noting that complaints are not often received, and another 50% stating that complaints are rare with no importers selecting very often or often. This may be indicative of a well-established and efficient supply chain, where products generally meet the expectations of retailers/ traders. The high percentage of "rarely" responses suggests a generally smooth and effective importation process, with a low incidence of concerns raised by retailers/ traders. Overall, combining the results of figures 17 and 18, we can see that while the majority of importers have experienced complaints, the recurrence of these are very low.

Figure 18: Frequency of complaints received by importers

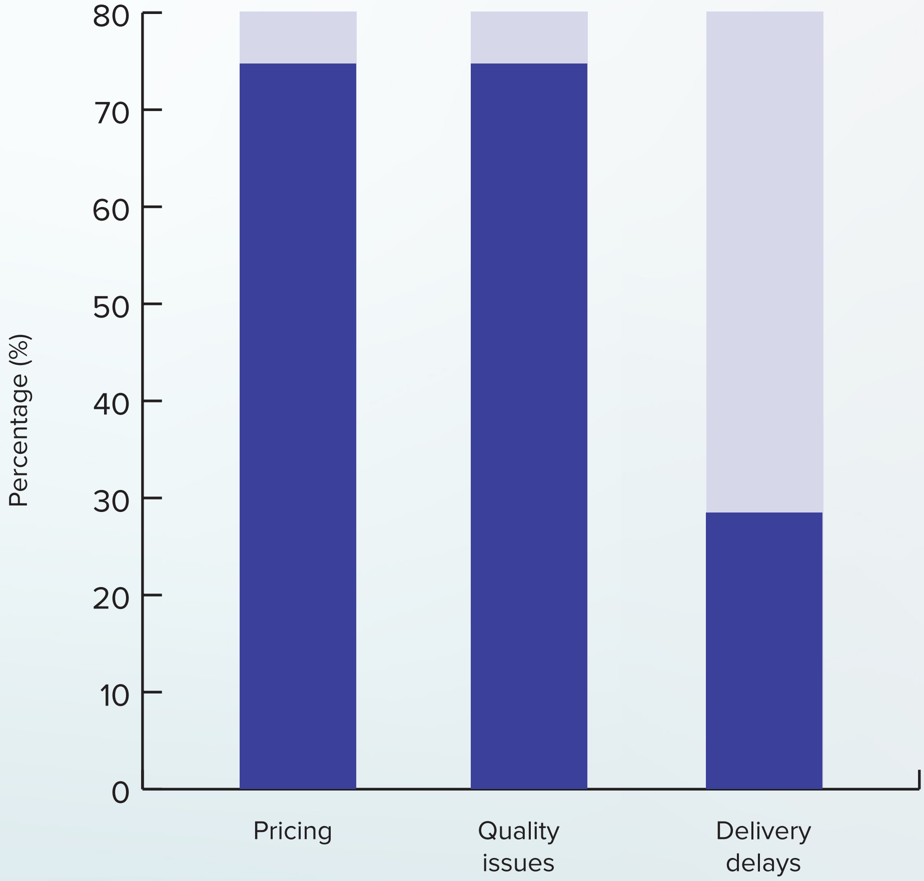


Source: Fieldwork

Figure 19 shows that the nature of complaints received by importers is diverse. A significant majority of importers, at 75%, reported receiving complaints related to quality issues. This finding underscores the critical importance of maintaining high-quality standards throughout the supply chain. Pricing emerged as another significant concern, with 75% of importers reporting complaints in this regard. Pricing issues could encompass various factors, including inconsistent pricing structures, uncompetitive pricing, or unexpected cost increases. Retailers and traders expect fair and transparent pricing from importers to ensure profitability and competitiveness in the marketplace. 28% of importers cited delivery delays as a source of complaints from retailers or traders. Delivery delays can disrupt retail operations, lead to stock shortages, and ultimately impact customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Overall, these results highlight the multifaceted challenges faced by importers of second-hand clothes in meeting the expectations of retailers and traders. However, as per figure 18, the instances of such complaints are not frequent and so likely not persistent issues in the SHC trade.

Figure 19: Nature of complaints received by importers



Source: Fieldwork

Overall, our analysis underscores the comprehensive approach undertaken by importers within the second-hand clothing trade in Ghana to uphold quality standards throughout the importation process. Through effective communication channels established with suppliers, regulatory authorities, and discerning customers, importers navigate the intricate web of trade dynamics with skill and precision. By leveraging these multifaceted strategies, importers not only ensure the integrity of their merchandise but also fortify trust and reliability within the marketplace. This commitment to quality control not only safeguards consumer satisfaction but also bolsters the sustainability and resilience of the SHC industry in Ghana for years to come.

4.1.1.2 Retailers/ traders

Retailers/ traders are often not the ones importing clothes themselves and so are reliant on the supply chain to deliver the quality of goods they need.

Traders confirmed that they ascertain the quality of SHC by:

1. Feeling the texture of the fabric
2. Assessing whether the item is new (e.g. a factory reject)
3. Checking for any tears
4. Assessing longevity, for example by checking whether it is faded.

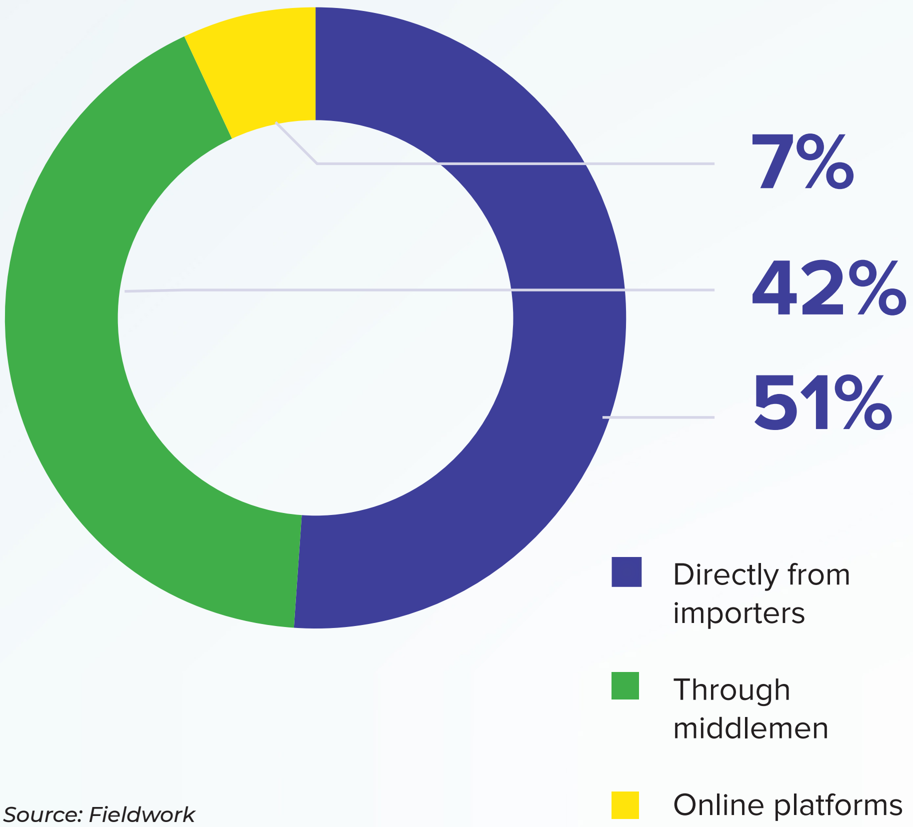
The grading system and assessment of clothes as per the above checklist allows the traders to set a price point to match its potential use and longevity.

A trained field officer Interviewing a SHC trader at Kantamanto

Figure 20 shows the primary sources through which traders procure bales of second-hand clothing for their stores. The majority of traders (51.4%) purchase bales of second-hand clothing directly from importers. This suggests that a significant portion of traders prefer to establish direct relationships with importers, potentially enabling them to access a wider selection of merchandise and negotiate better terms. A substantial percentage of traders (42.2%) opt to procure bales through middlemen. This indicates that intermediaries play a significant role in facilitating transactions between traders and primary suppliers, potentially offering convenience, affordability through not having to purchase whole bales, or specialised services to traders.

A smaller but still noteworthy percentage of traders (6.4%) utilise online platforms as a source for purchasing bales of second-hand clothing. This suggests a growing trend of digitalisation within the industry, with traders leveraging online marketplaces or online communications to access a broader range of suppliers and streamline procurement processes.

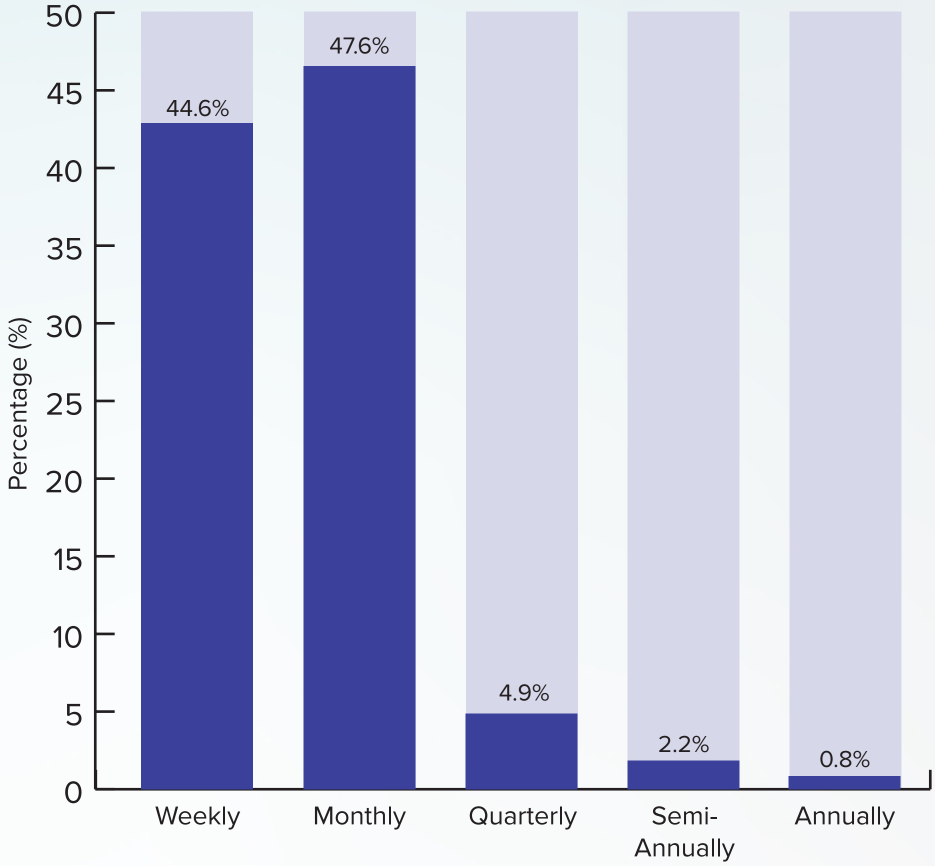
Figure 20: Primary source of second-hand clothing bales



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 21 reveals the frequency at which traders purchase bales of second-hand clothing for their businesses. A significant proportion of traders (44.6%), purchase bales of second-hand clothing on a weekly basis. This suggests a high turnover rate within the industry, with traders regularly replenishing their stock to meet ongoing demand from customers. Nearly half of the traders (47.6%) purchase bales of second-hand clothing on a monthly basis.

Figure 21: Frequency of bale purchases

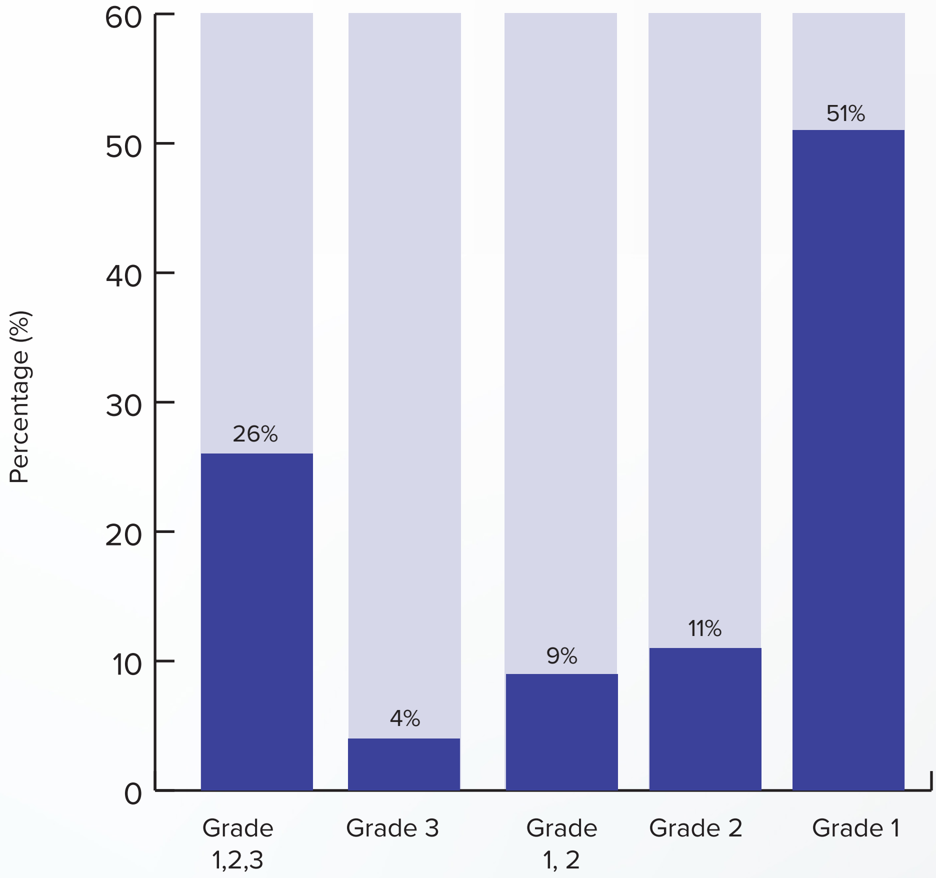


Source: Fieldwork

This indicates a consistent procurement schedule, allowing traders to maintain a steady inventory flow while managing operational logistics. A small percentage of traders, representing 4.9%, purchase bales on a quarterly basis. This suggests a less frequent procurement pattern, potentially influenced by factors such as inventory management strategies or market demand fluctuations. A minority of traders, accounting for 2.2%, purchase bales of second-hand clothing semi-annually. This indicates traders with possibly lower sales volumes or specialised market niches. A very small percentage of traders (0.8%), purchase bales of second-hand clothing on an annual basis. This suggests a rare procurement pattern, potentially indicative of niche market operators or seasonal businesses.

Figure 22 provides insight into the classification of clothing within bales purchased by traders for their second-hand clothing businesses. The majority of traders, (51.1%) classify clothing in bales as Grade 1. This category likely includes high-quality, gently used items that are in excellent condition and suitable for resale without the need for any repairs or alterations. A smaller proportion of them, representing 11.1%, classify bale contents as Grade 2. This category may include items that are still wearable but may exhibit minor flaws, such as slight wear and tear or minor stains, requiring some level of refurbishment before resale. A minority of the traders, comprising 3.5%, classify their bales as containing Grade 3. This category likely consists of items that require more extensive repairs or refurbishment due to noticeable damage or significant wear and tear, making them suitable for sale at lower price points or in bulk lots. A minority of the traders (8.6%) classify bale contents as a mix of Grade 1 and Grade 2. This indicates a mix of high-quality and slightly flawed items within the same bale, offering traders a range of merchandise to meet diverse customer preferences and price points. 25.7% of traders classify bale contents across multiple grades, including Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, and waste. This suggests a diverse assortment of clothing items within the bale, ranging from premium-quality items to damaged or unsellable pieces that may be discarded or repurposed. It is noteworthy that in total, 71% of traders are stating that their bales contain just the highest two grades of clothing. When looking at the 26% of traders that say their bales contain a mix of everything including waste, combining this view with the responses in section 3.1, we can see that even when waste is present in bales, it is at exceedingly low levels. For a deeper discussion on the low levels of waste encountered by traders, see section 3.1.

Figure 22: Classification of clothing in bales by traders



Source: Fieldwork

In summary, this section has highlighted the importance of robust processes that ensure the entry of quality second-hand clothing into Ghana's markets. By maintaining relationships with suppliers and regulators, and by addressing concerns such as delivery delays, pricing issues, and quality control, importers are not only safeguarding consumer satisfaction but also bolstering the reputation and sustainability of the SHC trade in Ghana. The outcomes of this effective management and adherence to stringent standards are evident in the responses of the retailer and traders that report high levels of quality goods.

Field worker interviewing a SHC trader

4.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Today, the second-hand clothing market represents a complex ecosystem encompassing a diverse array of stakeholders, including wholesalers, retailers, street vendors, and consumers. From bustling marketplaces in major cities like Accra to remote villages in rural areas, second-hand clothing has become an ubiquitous feature of Ghanaian life, catering to a broad spectrum of clientele spanning various socio-economic strata. One of the defining characteristics of Ghana's second-hand clothing trade is its remarkable resilience and adaptability.

> **One of the defining characteristics of Ghana's second-hand clothing trade is its remarkable resilience and adaptability.**

Despite facing regulatory challenges, competition from the fast-fashion industry, and occasional stigma associated with used garments, retailers and traders have demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in navigating these obstacles. Through innovative marketing strategies, efficient supply chain management, and a deep understanding of consumer preferences, they have sustained the market's growth trajectory, contributing significantly to the country's economy. Furthermore, the second-hand clothing sector plays a multifaceted role in Ghanaian society beyond its economic implications.

The second-hand clothes trade serves as a vehicle for sustainable consumption practices, promoting the reuse and recycling of clothing items, thus mitigating environmental impact by reducing the need for the production of new clothes. Additionally, it fosters a sense of community and cultural identity, as evidenced by the vibrant social interactions that occur within marketplaces among traders and consumers alike.

The economic significance of the SHC trade is evident in its multifaceted contributions to Ghana's economy. The sector serves as a substantial source of employment, engaging approximately 2.5 million people, as well as ancillary jobs created for potters, tailors, and drivers. Additionally, the trade generates income for the government through weekly taxes paid by importers and retailers.

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Second-hand clothing plays a significant role in the economic development of Ghana. It provides employment opportunities along the value chain, from importation and distribution to retail and informal trading. Additionally, the availability of affordable clothing options allows consumers to allocate their disposable income to other essential needs, thereby stimulating domestic consumption and supporting local businesses. Moreover, the second-hand clothing trade fosters entrepreneurship and small-scale enterprise development, empowering individuals to generate income and contribute to poverty alleviation efforts.”

Representative,
Environmental Protection
Agency (EPA)

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4.2.1 Employment opportunities

The Ghana Used Clothing Dealers Association's membership totals around 2.5 million people across the country. This suggests that the SHC trade provides employment opportunities to at least 2.5 million people directly in the trade. Many of the market traders and hawkers would have limited alternative livelihood options to sustain themselves and their families. Beyond those directly employed in trading activities, the SHC industry creates ancillary jobs and economic opportunities such as for potters, tailors, drivers, and others.

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The SHC industry creates ancillary jobs and economic opportunities such as for potters, tailors, drivers, and others.

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In a country which suffers from high youth unemployment, the SHC sector offers a variety of opportunities to the most vulnerable and least educated people that may be locked out of other jobs. The employment opportunities are vast and varied in the SHC value chain from importation through to retailing and repair or upcycling of clothes. The impact is not just the economic opportunity presented to those employed through the trade, but also family members that are supported by those able to earn an income.

> Innovations within the SHC industry, particularly upcycling, present opportunities for economic diversification.

The SHC trade's growth over the years has spawned supplementary businesses. Unsold clothes may be used for other purposes such as cleaning, dusting and filling. Thus, the SHC trade has driven the growth of other businesses e.g., SHC traders will sell fabric to pillow makers for the filling of their pillows. Dusters are made from cotton fabric from SHC and this trade has created employment for a number of people, working as makers and sellers.

Innovations within the SHC industry, particularly upcycling, present opportunities for economic diversification. Upcycling is gaining popularity among many fashion enthusiasts. This practice entails modifying SHC by removing sections and incorporating African prints, transforming it into a usable garment that might not have been functional in its original state. Understanding the collaboration dynamics between SHC traders and upcycling businesses could help catapult the potential for the industry's adaptability to sustainable practices.

4.2.1.1 Importers

Table 5 presents a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics and key business aspects of the importers involved in the second-hand clothing trade in Ghana. The majority of importers are male, constituting 80% of the sample. The age distribution of importers indicates a diverse range, with a significant proportion falling within the 35-44 years age group (50%) suggesting that importers are generally experienced operators.

Table 5: Demographic characteristics of importers

Variable	Frequency (n=10)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	8	80.0
Female	2	20.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**
Age group		
25-34 years	1	10.0
35-44 years	5	50.0
45-54 years	3	30.0
55-64 years	1	10.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork

Variable	Frequency (n=10)	Percentage (%)
Educational level		
Tertiary	10	100.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**
No. of dependants		
3-5	2	20.0
More than 5	8	80.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**
Type of business		
Partnership	4	50.0
Sole Proprietorship	6	60.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**
Years of business		
4-6 years	2	20.0
More than 10 years	8	80.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**
Sources of second-hand clothing		
Asia	6	60.0
Europe and Asia	2	20.0
North America	2	20.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**
Annual import volume		
10-30 tons	2	20.0
31-50 tons	4	40.0
51 tons or more	4	40.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**
Annual income		
Less than 30,000 cedis	6	60.0
100,001 - 150,000 cedis	2	20.0
More than 150,000 cedis	2	20.0
Total	**10**	**100.0**

All the surveyed importers possess a tertiary level of education, reflecting a high educational attainment within this group. This could have positive implications for the industry's adaptability to changing market trends and business strategies. The data indicates that the majority of importers (80%) have more than five dependents, while a smaller proportion (20%) have three to five dependents. The high percentage of importers (80%) with more than five dependents suggests a higher level of financial responsibility.

The data reveals a balanced distribution between partnership (40%) and sole proprietorship (60%) as the types of business structures among importers. This diversity in business models could impact decision-making processes and the overall resilience of the industry. The majority of importers (80%) have been in the second-hand clothing trade for more than 10 years, indicating a seasoned and experienced group. This suggests a certain level of stability and resilience in the face of industry challenges.

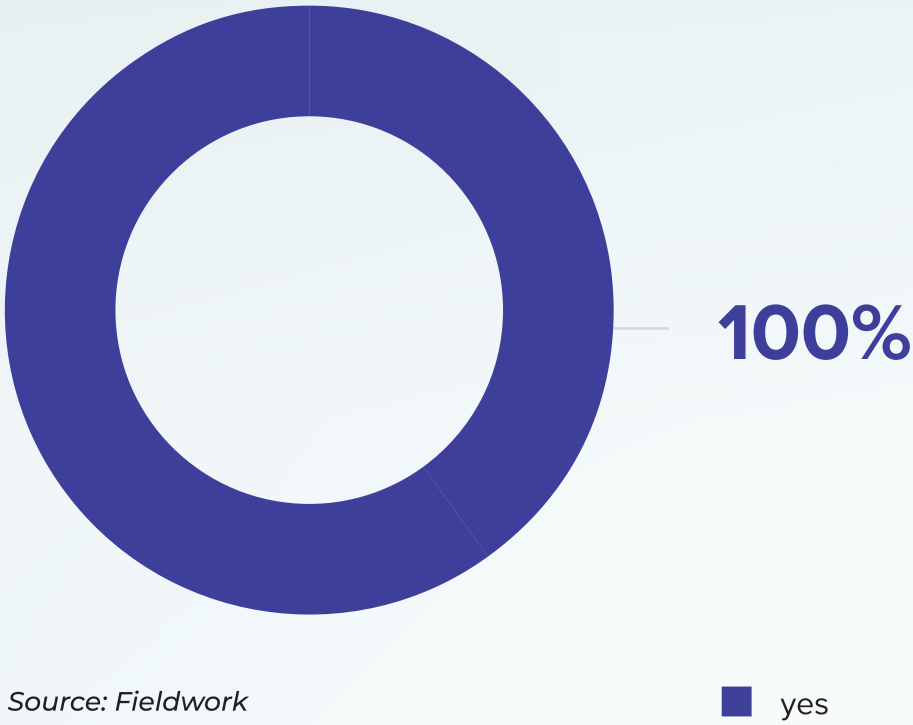
The majority of second-hand clothing is sourced from Asia (60%), followed by a combination of Europe and Asia (20%) and North America (20%). This diversity in sourcing locations highlights the global nature of the industry and the importers' ability to tap into different markets. The annual import volume is spread across various categories, with 40% of importers handling 31-50 tons and another 40% dealing with 51 tons or more. This suggests a substantial scale of operations among a significant portion of importers.

"The majority of second-hand clothing is sourced from Asia (60%), followed by a combination of Europe and Asia (20%) and North America (20%)."

A notable portion of importers (60%) report an annual income of less than GH¢ 30,000 (USD 2,350). The remaining 40% is distributed between the income ranges of GH¢ 100,001-150,000 (USD 7,600-11,400) and more than GH¢ 150,000. This distribution highlights the income diversity within the industry, with a significant number operating on a lower income scale

Figure 23 shows that 100% of the surveyed importers rely on second-hand clothing as their main source of income. The unanimous agreement among importers that second-hand clothing serves as their main source of income reflects a specialisation in this specific market segment. This suggests a focused business strategy and a significant commitment to the second-hand clothing trade.

Figure 23: Percentage of importers stating that SHC is their main source of income



Source: Fieldwork

4.2.1.2 Retailers/ traders

The demographic characteristics of retailers/ traders engaged in the second-hand clothing market in Ghana provide valuable insights into the composition of this segment of the economy. Table 6 indicates a relatively balanced gender distribution among retailers, with 52.7% being female and 47.3% male, highlighting the inclusive nature of the second-hand clothing trade. The majority of retailers fall within the age range of 18-40 years, comprising 64.5% of the sample. This reflects a relatively youthful workforce in the trade, with individuals in their prime working years dominating the sector. The data also suggests that this is a trade that is relatively accessible to young people and requires little to no experience. It is noteworthy that there is representation from older age groups, albeit in smaller proportions.

"The data also suggests that this is a trade that is relatively accessible to young people and requires little to no experience."

The educational attainment of retailers varies, with a significant portion having completed either primary or junior high school (32.7%) or senior high school (37.8%). This indicates that while formal education is prevalent among traders, a considerable proportion may lack higher education qualifications. A minority has attained tertiary education (12.2%). A vast majority of retailers (91.9%) identify second-hand clothing as their primary source of income. This underscores the economic significance of the sector as a livelihood option for many individuals, particularly those who rely solely on the revenue generated from their trading activities. The data reveals that the majority of retailers earn between GH¢ 500 and GH¢ 1,000 per month (c. USD 40-75) from their second-hand clothing business (73.2%). While this income range may be modest, it reflects the substantial contribution of the sector to the livelihoods of traders, especially considering the relatively low cost of living in Ghana.

A significant proportion of retailers (88.1%) serve as primary earners in their households, indicating the pivotal role of the second-hand clothing trade in sustaining families and supporting dependents financially. The majority of retailers (60.0%) have one to two dependents, highlighting the responsibility placed on traders to provide for their families. A small percentage (12.2%) report having no dependents which may reflect the proportion of youthful traders. The data reflects a varied level of experience among retailers, with a significant portion (56.8%) having one to three years of experience in the second-hand clothing business. This indicates a relatively high turnover rate within the industry, with a constant influx of new entrants alongside more experienced traders. The majority of retailers operate on a small-scale/ local level (77.3%) highlighting the prevalence of informal trading practices within the sector. However, there are also notable proportions of medium-scale/ regional (16.5%) and large-scale/ national (5.4%) businesses, indicating a diverse range of enterprise sizes and scope within the second-hand clothing market.

Table 6: Demographic data of surveyed retailers/ traders

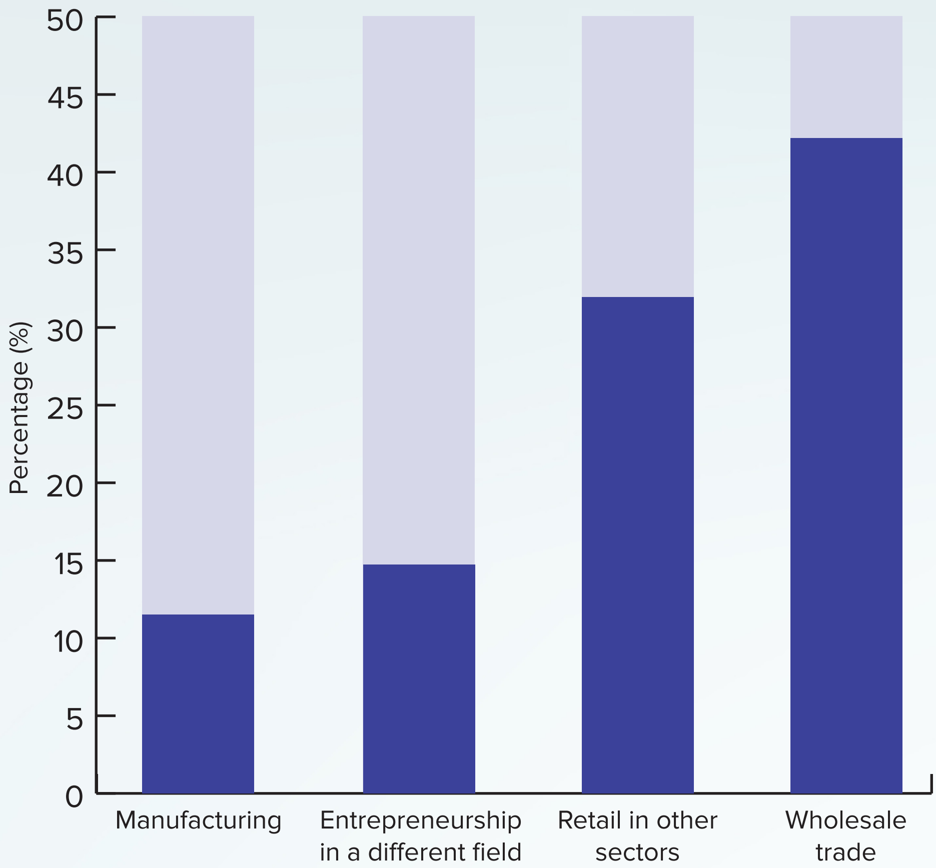
Variable	Frequency (n=370)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	175	47.3
Female	195	52.7
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Age group		
18-30 years	111	30.0
31-40 years	128	34.5
41-50 years	89	24.1
51-60 years	37	10.0
Above 60 years	5	1.4
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Educational level		
No formal education	64	17.3
Primary/HS	121	32.7
SHS	140	37.8
Tertiary	45	12.2
Total	**370**	**100.0**
is second-hand clothing your primary source of income?		
Yes	340	91.9
No	30	8.1
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Approximate monthly income from second-hand clothing business		
Less than GH¢ 500	16	4.3
GH¢ 500 - 1,000	271	73.2
GH¢ 1,001 - 2,000	50	13.5
GH¢ 2,001 - 3,000	22	5.9
More than 3,000	11	3.1
Total	**370**	**100.0**

Variable	Frequency (n=370)	Percentage (%)
Are you a primary earner in your household?		
Yes	326	88.1
No	44	11.9
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Number of dependants		
1 - 2	222	60.0
3 - 4	81	21.9
5 or more	22	5.9
None	45	12.2
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Years of experience in second-hand clothing business		
Less than 1 year	17	4.6
1 - 3 years	210	56.8
4 - 6 years	78	21.1
7 - 10 years	33	8.9
More than 10 years	32	8.6
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Size and scale of second-hand clothing business		
Small-scale / local	286	77.3
Mediim-scale / regional	61	16.5
Large scale / national	20	5.4
International	3	0.8
Total	**370**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork

Figure 24 presents the alternative work options that traders would pursue if they were not able to work in the second-hand clothes trade. The majority of traders stated they would work in retail or wholesaling, suggesting that there are potentially limited alternative options available to them.

Figure 24: Alternative work options available to SHC traders



Overall it can be seen that the SHC sector's contribution to employment is multifaceted, supporting livelihoods for millions directly and creating a ripple effect of opportunities in related sectors.

4.2.2 Government revenues

The SHC sector contributes to government revenues through a variety of taxes and import duties. In 2022 the importation of SHC contributed an estimated USD 29.5 million to government revenues through direct import taxes (excluding levies and exemptions).[22] This is more than double the amount the government spent on its key Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer programme for extremely poor and vulnerable households in 2022, which was a total of GH¢ 162 million (over USD 13 million).[23]

A further contribution is made to government revenues through sales taxes when SHC is sold. The industry's double taxation – during importation and sale – generates meaningful revenue for local authorities.

"The industry's double taxation – during importation and sale – generates meaningful revenue for local authorities."

In addition to the significant duties paid by importers, retailers also contribute taxes to local authorities in various markets within which they operate. The taxation that is paid in different forms at different points of the value chain not only bolsters government finances but also underscores the economic importance of the SHC trade and raises questions about its fairness and potential impacts on consumer pricing. This is especially true in Ghana where high import duties have affected the importation of, and in turn, sales of SHC.

4.2.3 Consumption

Second-hand clothing is the primary clothing option accessible to the majority of the Ghanaian population, especially lower-income individuals who would not be able to afford brand new clothes. The variety of choice that SHC offers to suit all occasions from casual to formal wear at an affordable price point, means that less privileged individuals are able to access a range of clothing that would normally be closed off to them. For many Ghanaians, shopping for second-hand clothing is not just about affordability, it is a chance to explore eclectic styles, discover hidden treasures, and express individuality in a way that transcends conventional fashion norms. But beyond the thrill of finding a perfect fit at an unbeatable price lies a deeper significance. By embracing second-hand clothing, consumers in Ghana actively contribute to sustainable fashion practices, reducing waste and minimising the environmental impact associated with the production of new garments. Moreover, the second-hand clothing trade fuels a vibrant informal economy, providing livelihoods for countless individuals and fostering community resilience.

Our research shows that second-hand clothes are generally perceived to be ubiquitous and easy to come by. While some consumers travel to the main market centres to purchase SHC, others buy from the comfort of their homes through door-to-door hawkers. This highlights how the convenience of obtaining SHC is a significant factor for consumers. However, consumer perceptions of SHC extend beyond mere accessibility.

Table 7 presents insights into the demographic characteristics of clients as identified by surveyed traders/ retailers of second-hand clothing in Accra. The data reveals that there is a significant gender disparity among customers, with 52.4% of traders indicating the majority of their customers are male, 27.8% indicating the majority are female, and 19.7% having evenly distributed clients.

The majority of customers fall within the age range of 18-34 years, with 44.3% aged between 18-24 years and 32.2% between 25-34 years. This highlights the youthfulness of the client base. However, there is also notable representation across other age groups, albeit in smaller proportions, suggesting a diverse age distribution among clients.

“**Our research shows that second-hand clothes are generally perceived to be ubiquitous and easy to come by.**”

Table 7 illustrates that traders/ retailers believe that the majority of their clientele are students (50.3%) or office workers (28.1%), and a notable minority are believed to be entrepreneurs (14.6%).

The high percentage of students possibly reflects their desire to have the latest trends at an affordable price, reflecting the accessibility of second-hand clothing.

The high levels of office workers and entrepreneurs suggests a broad appeal for second-hand clothing across various socio-economic backgrounds.

Overall, a diverse and dynamic consumer base is evident in the second-hand clothes market.

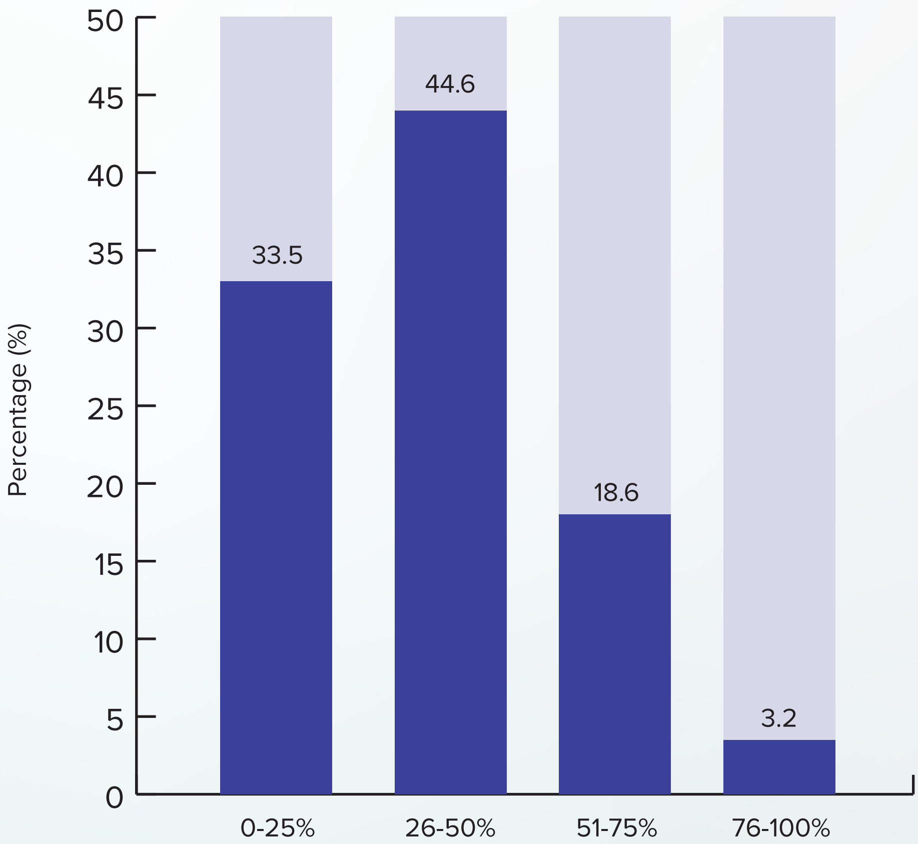
Table 7: Retailers/ traders' perceptions of demographic characteristics of customers

Variable	Frequency (n=370)	Percentage (%)
Gender distribution		
Majority are male	194	52.4
Majority are female	103	27.8
Evenly distributed	73	19.7
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Age group		
Under 18 years	18	4.9
18-24 years	164	44.3
25-34 years	119	32.2
35-44 years	59	15.9
45-54 years	5	1.4
55-64 years	2	0.5
60 years and above	3	0.8
Total	**370**	**100.0**
Occupations / Industries of Clients		
All occupations	14	3.8
Entrepreneurs	54	14.8
Laborers	12	3.2
Office Workers	104	28.1
Student	186	50.3
Total	**370**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork

Figure 25 indicates that a significant portion of clients frequenting traders/ retailers of second-hand clothing are recurring customers. Approximately 33.5% of surveyed retailers/ traders suggested that their customers are occasional, possibly making sporadic purchases. However, nearly half of those surveyed (44.6%) suggested they have somewhat regularly recurring customers, with between 25-50% of their client base being returners. Notably, over 20% of retailers/ traders suggested that over 50% of their client base are recurring customers. These high levels of returning customers suggests that even in a busy, bustling market like Kantamanto, consumers seek out and frequent the same vendors possibly due to building a level of trust and rapport. This data underscores the importance of building strong relationships with customers and providing quality products and services to foster loyalty and repeat business

Figure 25: Percentage of recurring customers

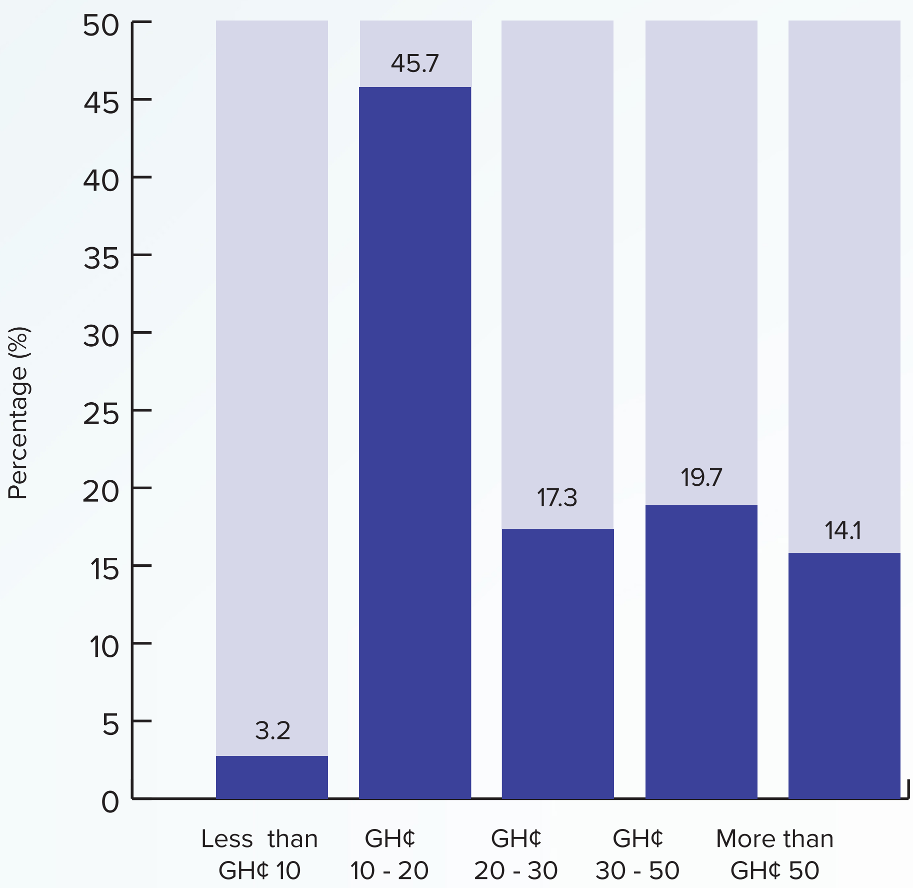


Source: Fieldwork

Figure 26 reveals the average amount customers spend on one shopping trip when purchasing second-hand clothing from traders/retailers in Ghana. A small percentage of customers, accounting for 3.2%, spend less than GH₵10 (under USD 1) on average per shopping trip. This suggests that there is a segment of price-conscious customers who make smaller purchases.

The majority of customers (45.7%) spend between GH₵ 10 and GH₵ 20 on average per shopping trip. Approximately 17.3% of customers spend between GH₵ 20 and GH₵ 30 on average per shopping trip. Another notable segment, constituting 19.7%, spends between GH₵ 30 and GH₵ 50 on average per shopping trip. This indicates that there is a demand for higher-priced items or larger quantities among some customers. A smaller but still significant percentage of customers (14.1%) spend more than GH₵ 50 on average per shopping trip. This suggests that there is a segment of customers who are willing to invest more in premium or specialised second-hand clothing items. The data reflects a diverse range of spending behaviours among customers, with a significant portion opting for moderately priced items in the GH₵ 10-20 range, while others are willing to spend more for higher-priced or premium items.

Figure 26: Customer spend on SHC in one shopping trip

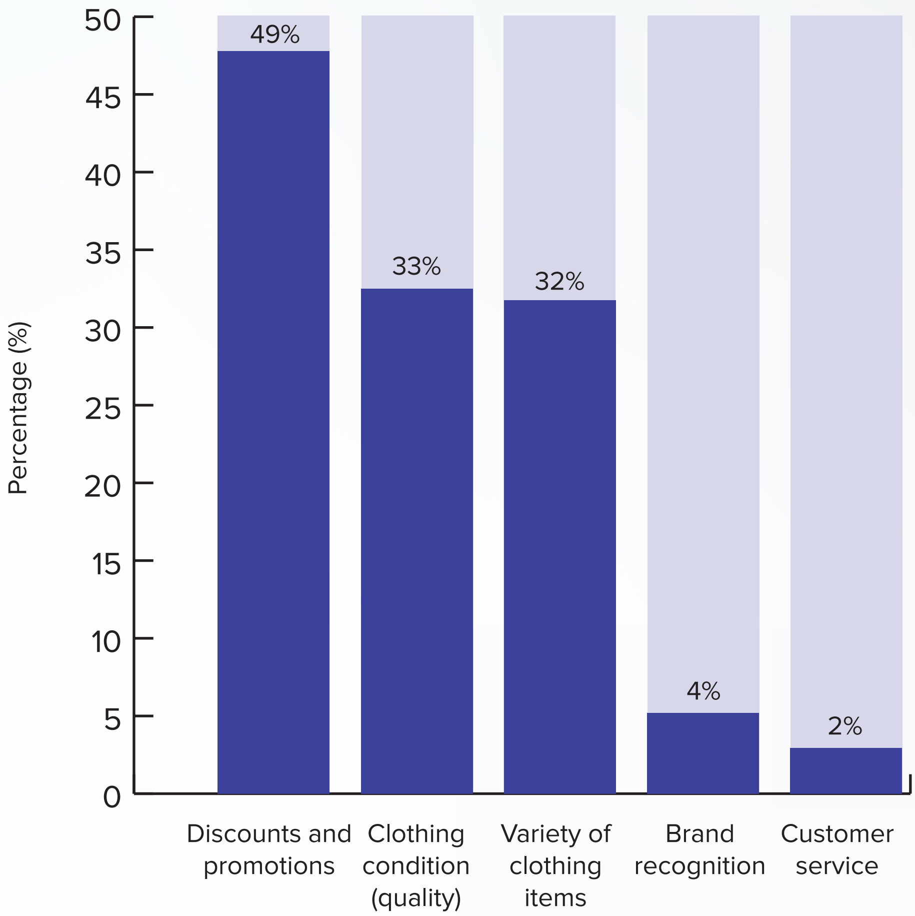


Source: Fieldwork

Figure 27 depicts the factors that traders/ retailers believe influence consumer spending in their stores or stalls. Notably, discounts and promotions emerged as the most influential factor, with 49% of retailers citing it. This finding underscores the importance of price sensitivity among consumers in the second-hand clothing market. Given the value-conscious nature of many shoppers, discounts and promotions serve as powerful incentives that drive purchasing decisions. The condition of clothing was identified as a significant factor influencing consumer spending, with 33% of retailers highlighting its importance, but notably discounts and promotions appear to outweigh clothing quality in perceived importance.

The variety of clothing items was cited by 32% of retailers, underscoring the importance of offering a diverse selection of styles, sizes, and categories to cater to the varying preferences and needs of consumers. Customer service and brand recognition were identified as relatively less influential factors, with only 2% and 4% of retailers citing them, respectively. While these factors may still play a role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences, they appear to have less direct impact on purchasing decisions compared to other factors such as pricing, quality, and variety.

Figure 27: Factors that retailers believe influence consumer spending on SHC



Source: Fieldwork

In addition to surveying retailers/ traders of SHC, this study also surveyed SHC consumers. Table 8 shows that the majority of consumers surveyed were female, making up 63.2% of the sample. This is a snapshot in time and conflicts with the data in Table 7 which showed that retailers/ traders had stated that the majority of their customers are male.

The surveyed sample were relatively young with 18-40 being the largest age bracket making up 73.5% of the sample. Occupational diversity and educational levels of consumers highlight how widely attractive and accessible the SHC market is. It is a market that attracts full-time employees, students, high school graduates and bachelor degree holders indicating a broad spectrum of consumers with diverse preferences.

Table 8: Demographic characteristics of surveyed SHC consumers in Kantamanto, Accra

Variable	Frequency (n=612)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	225	36.8
Female	387	63.2
Total	**612**	**100.0**
Age group		
Below 18 years	11	1.8
18-30 years	207	33.8
31-40 years	243	39.7
41-50 years	116	19.0
51-60 years	27	4.4
60-70 years	7	1.1
Above 70 years	1	0.2
Total	**612**	**100.0**
Occupation		
Employed (full time)	193	31.5
Employed (Part time)	99	16.2
Self-employed	172	28.1
Student	109	17.8
Retired	6	1.0
Unemployed	33	5.4
Total	**612**	**100.0**

Variable	Frequency (n=612)	Percentage (%)
Educational level		
Less than high school	67	10.9
High school graduate	211	34.5
Some college/ vocational training	131	21.4
Bachelor's degree	181	29.6
Master's degree or higher	22	3.6
Total	**612**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork

Table 9 provides a valuable insight into the economic drivers that influence SHC consumers. It is clear that the vast majority of the sample earn under the national average. This suggests a popularity of second-hand clothing among households with more limited financial resources. The presence of people from higher income brackets suggests a broad appeal, but it is clear that the main consumers are those on lower incomes. Whereas lower income frequenters may purchase SHC out of necessity, the higher income frequenters may be driven by such considerations as sustainability, thriftiness, or unique fashion finds.

The annual spend on SHC further reinforces the focus on economic factors influencing purchasing decisions and habits. 83.1% of those surveyed report spending below GH¢ 1,000, emphasising the modest budgets for clothing purchases among SHC consumers. As the spending budget increases, the percentage of consumers declines, with only 1.8% spending GH¢ 5,000 or more annually on clothes. The majority of those surveyed commit less than half of their clothing budget to second-hand items. Less than 1% state that they purchase almost exclusively second-hand, which suggests that the SHC market complements other sources of clothing for consumers.

In terms of purchasing frequency, a fair majority (60.9%) buy second-hand clothing monthly, while 20.3% do so weekly. Considering that the majority of consumers do not commit large proportions of their clothing budgets to SHC, the relatively high frequency of purchases suggest possible frequent low-cost purchases.

The majority of those surveyed (73.9%) buy SHC from Kantamanto market, known for its extensive offerings. But a significant minority also buy from local thrift stores (18.8%) possibly influenced by factors like accessibility and reliability.

Table 9: Consumer spending on SHC

Variable	Frequency (n=612)	Percentage (%)
Monthly household income		
Below GH¢ 500	73	11.9
GH¢ 500 - 999	208	34.0
GH¢ 1,000 - 1,999	221	36.1
GH¢ 2,000 - 3,999	79	12.9
GH¢ 3,000 - 4,999	16	2.6
GH¢ 5,000 - 9,999	4	0.7
GH¢ 10,000 or above	2	0.3
Prefer not to say	9	1.5
Total	**612**	**100.0**
Location		
Rural	161	26.3
Suburban	58	9.5
Urban	393	64.2
Total	**612**	**100.0**
Amount spent on clothes per year		
Less than GH¢ 100	59	9.6
GH¢ 100 - 499	260	42.5
GH¢ 1500 - 999	190	31.0
GH¢ 1,000 - 4,999	92	15.0
GH¢ 5,000 - 9,999	9	1.6
GH¢ 10,000 or above	2	0.3
Total	**612**	**100.0**
Percentages of money spent on second-hand clothing		
0-25%	214	35
26-50%	297	48.5
51-75%	98	16.0
76-100%	3	0.5
Total	**612**	**100.0**

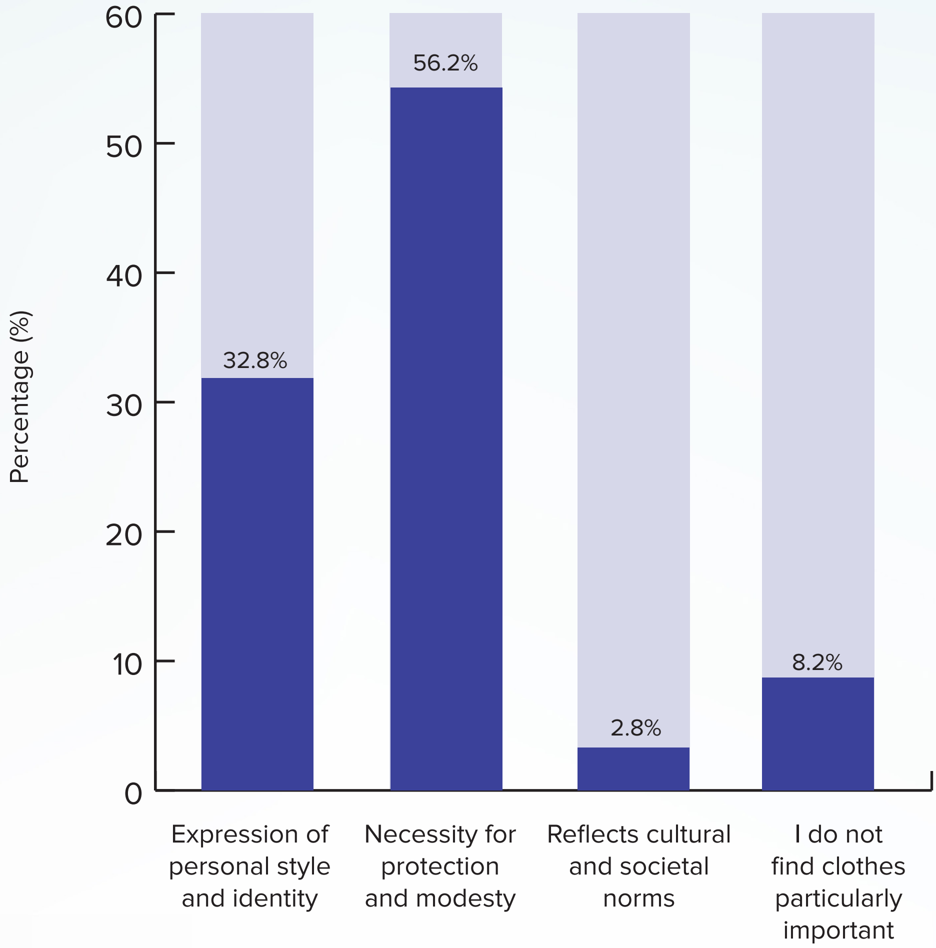
Variable	Frequency (n=612)	Percentage (%)
Places where second-hand clothes are purchaesed		
Kantamanto market	452	73.9
Local thrift stores	115	18.8
Online second-hand platforms	44	7.1
Hawkers	1	0.2
Total	**612**	**100.0**
Frequency of second-hand clothing purchases		
Daily	12	2.0
Weekly	124	20.3
Monthly	373	60.9
Quarterly	87	14.2
Bi-Annually	7	1.1
Annually	9	1.5
Total	**612**	**100.0**

Source: Fieldwork

4.2.3.1 Buying behaviour

Figure 28 shows that the majority of consumers (56.2%) view clothes primarily as a necessity for protection and modesty. This indicates that for many consumers, clothing serves a functional purpose of covering and safeguarding the body, aligning with cultural and societal expectations regarding modesty and decency. A significant minority (32.8%) perceive clothes as a means of expressing personal style and identity. This suggests that for these individuals, clothing choices go beyond mere functionality and serve as a form of self-expression, allowing them to showcase their unique tastes, preferences, and personality.

Figure 28: The significance of second-hand clothing to consumers



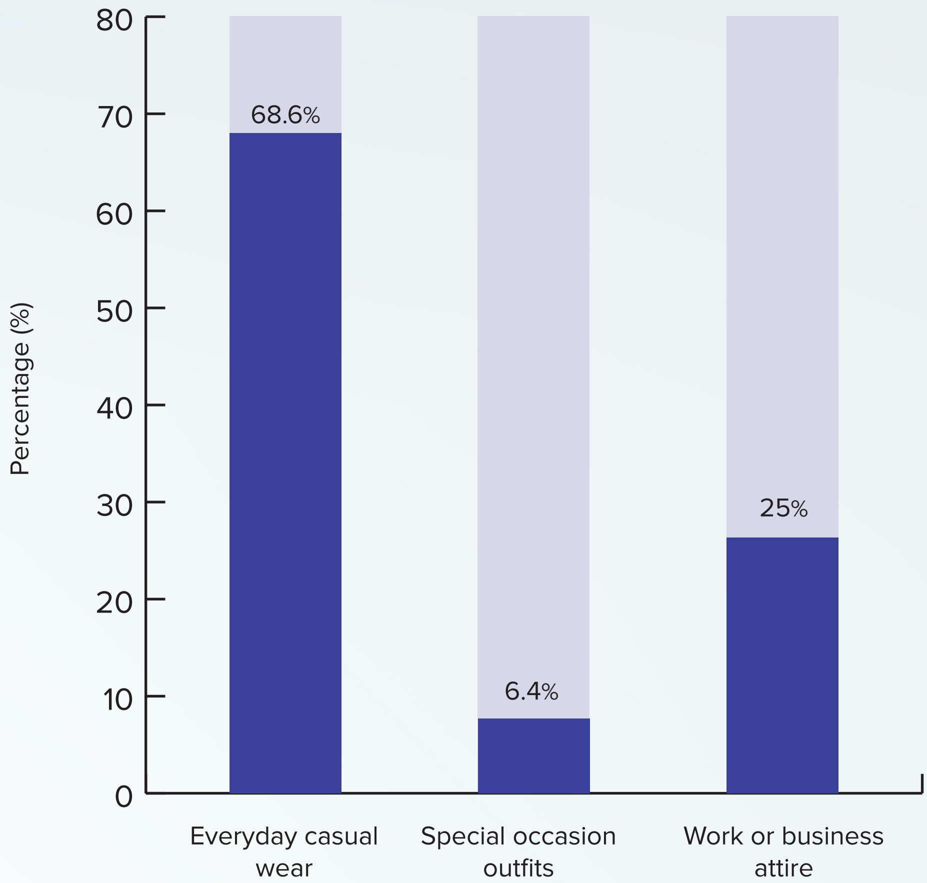
Source: Fieldwork

Figure 29 reveals that:

- The majority of consumers (68.6%) use second-hand clothes primarily for everyday casual wear.

- A significant minority of consumers (25%) use clothes for work or business attire.

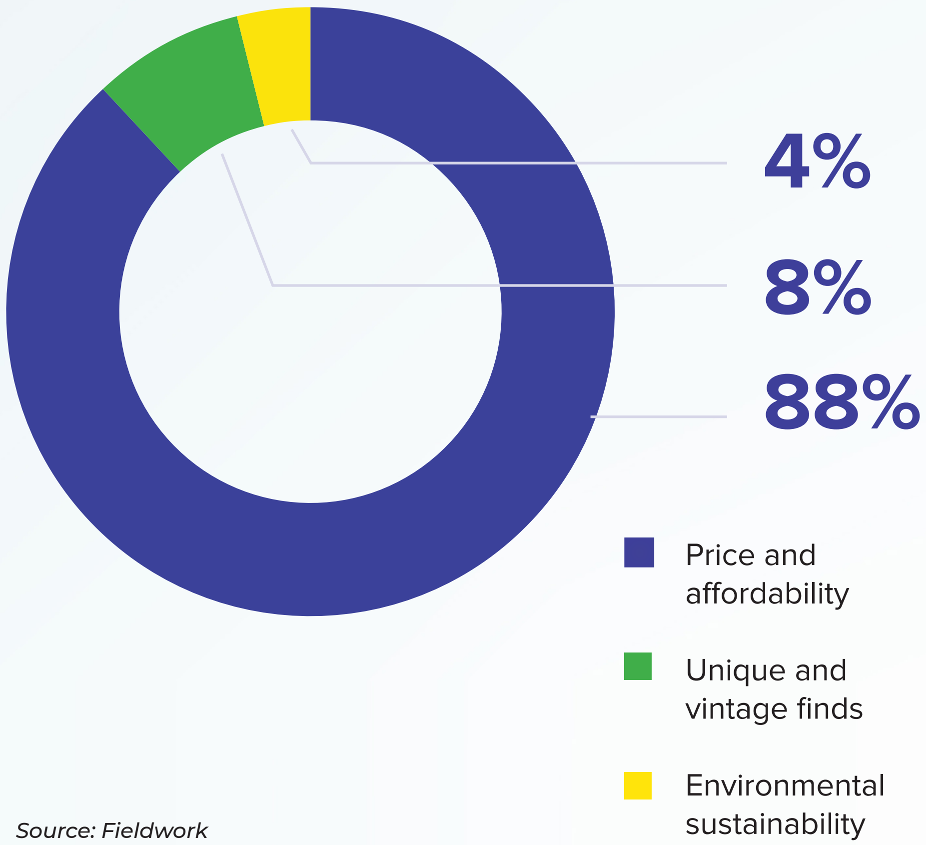
Figure 29: Types of SHC purchases made by consumers



Source: Fieldwork

In line with the views of the retailers and traders, **figure 30** shows that an overwhelming majority of consumers (87.9%) are influenced by price and affordability when purchasing second-hand clothing. This reflects the perception that second-hand items offer a cost-effective alternative to buying new clothing, allowing consumers to stretch their budgets further and potentially access better value for money in terms of quality versus price. A small yet notable percentage of consumers (7.7%) are motivated by the prospect of finding unique and vintage items when buying second-hand clothing. This suggests that some consumers are drawn to thrift shopping for the thrill of discovering one-of-a-kind pieces, retro styles, or items with historical significance that may not be readily available in mainstream retail stores. A minority of consumers (4.4%) are influenced by environmental sustainability considerations when purchasing second-hand clothing. This may indicate a nascent but potentially growing awareness among consumers regarding the environmental impact of fast fashion and the benefits of extending the lifespan of clothing through reuse and recycling.

Figure 30: Factors that influence consumers to buy second-hand clothing



Source: Fieldwork

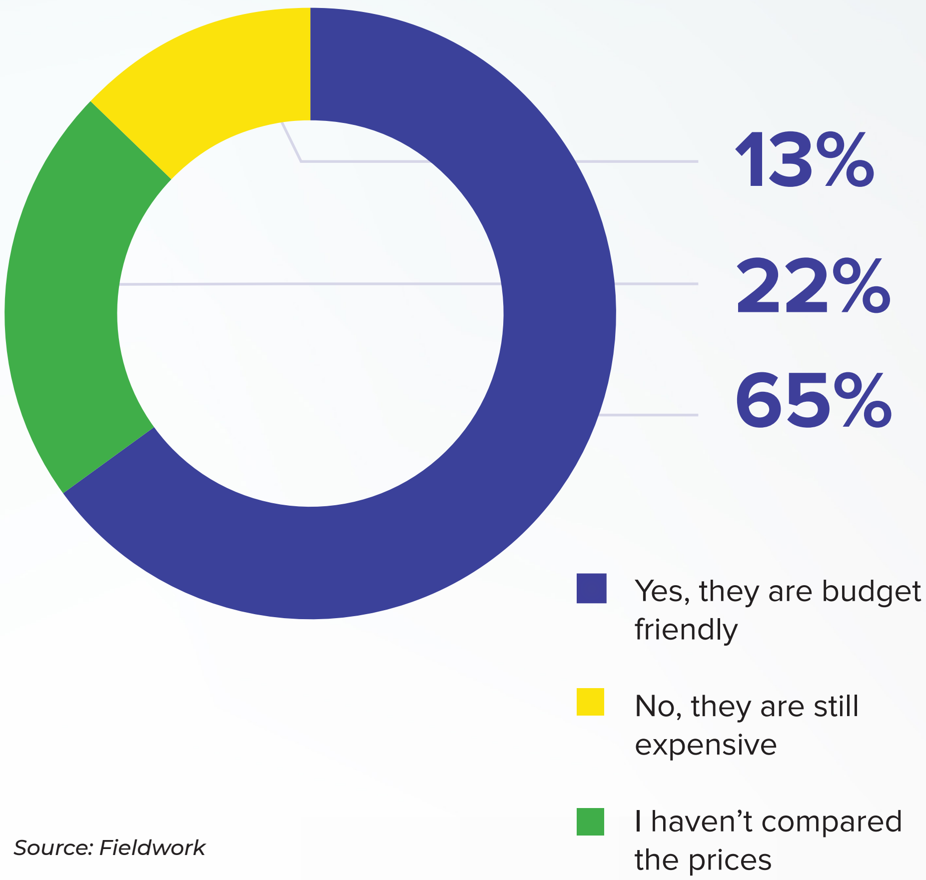
4.2.3.2 Buyer perceptions

Figure 31 reflects consumers' perceptions regarding the affordability of second-hand clothes.
The majority of consumers (65.4%) believe that second-hand clothes are budget-friendly.

- This perception indicates that many consumers view SHC items as offering cost-effective options that align with their financial constraints or preferences for frugal shopping.

- A minority of consumers (12.9%) perceive second-hand clothes as still being expensive, perhaps reflective of their lower-socioeconomic status.

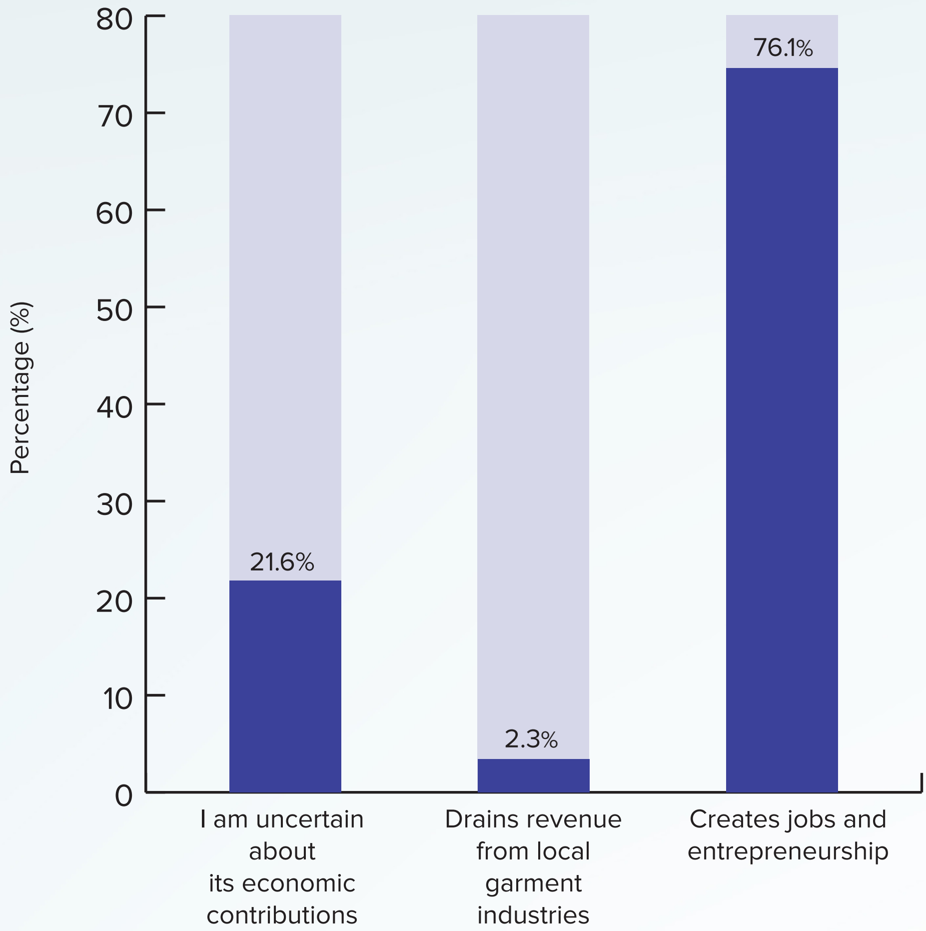
Figure 31: Perceived affordability of second-hand clothes



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 32 provides insights into the perceived economic contribution of the second-hand clothing trade. The vast majority of consumers (76.1%) recognise the economic contribution of the second-hand clothing trade in creating jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. This suggests an awareness of the employment opportunities provided by various aspects of the industry, including collection, sorting, retailing, and upcycling of second-hand garments.

Figure 32: Perceived economic contribution of second-hand clothing trade



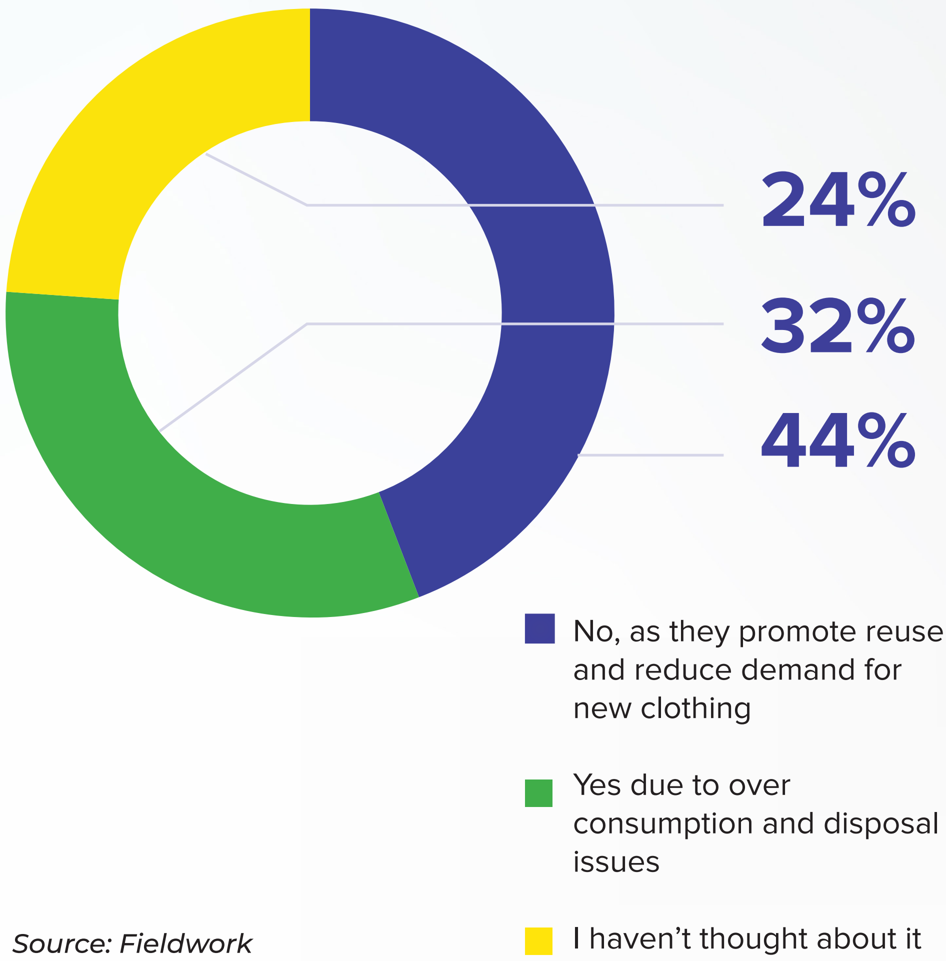
Source: Fieldwork

4.2.3.3 Consumer perceptions of waste

Figure 33 shows that:

- A large percentage of consumers (43.8%) believe that imported second-hand clothing does not represent a source of waste, and instead the trade promotes reuse and reduces the demand for new clothing, thus contributing positively to sustainability efforts by extending the lifespan of garments.
- A further (24.5%) state that they have not thought about whether imported second-hand clothing serves as a source of waste. Which suggests that a majority (68.3%) believe that second-hand clothing waste is not an issue.
- As per Table 8, those surveyed are mostly urban, working and educated people which would suggest that they are possibly culturally aware and informed people. The majority do not see or believe that second-hand clothing waste is an issue in Accra.

Figure 33: Percentage of consumers that believe imported second-hand clothing is a source of waste



Source: Fieldwork

4.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The SHC trade operates within the circular economy model, thereby helping to address the deeply negative environmental impact of the global fashion industry. However, until recycling solutions are more prevalent globally, most clothes around the world will eventually reach their end of life. This report shows that fears about clothes are being shipped from the Global North to South to be "dumped" are overblown. Various studies have shown that textile waste as a whole is low in Ghana, and second-hand clothing waste would be a small percentage of overall textile waste. Our estimations suggest that used clothing waste is 0.7% of all waste at most.

The country's sanitation framework is grounded in the Environmental Sanitation Policy, initially adopted in 1999 and revised in 2010. While this policy comprehensively addresses various facets of environmental health and sanitation management, encompassing aspects like liquid waste, solid waste, medical waste, hygiene promotion, institutional arrangements, financing, and monitoring and evaluation, it notably omits any reference to clothing or textiles. Since the Ghanaian government has no policy specifically for textile waste, it may not view the issue as a major concern or priority area. With no governmental policy and few industrial waste or recycling solutions for end-of-life textiles, it is inevitable that their disposal will have some environmental impact - just as with other types of waste - however, the prevalence of SHC waste is low. A number of studies (see section 3.2) have shown that textile waste as a percentage of overall waste in various contexts across Ghana, is very low. Used clothing would be a minor portion of all textile waste. Our research shows that the public are receptive to complying with new waste management programs, however a concerted effort from the government is needed to address any waste issues. From improved waste and recycling infrastructure, to supporting citizen behaviour change, there is room to improve how waste is handled in order to reduce any negative environmental impact of the SHC trade in Ghana.

> **The production and disposal of clothing items contribute to environmental degradation at various stages of the supply chain, from raw material extraction to manufacturing, transportation, and end-of-life disposal.**

But overall, the trade should be viewed as playing a crucial role in mitigating the deeply negative environmental impact of the fashion industry while simultaneously contributing to the circular economy. The fashion industry is rightly under scrutiny for its significant environmental footprint, including issues such as resource depletion, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. The production and disposal of clothing items contribute to environmental degradation at various stages of the supply chain, from raw material extraction to manufacturing, transportation, and end-of-life disposal.

One of the primary environmental benefits of the second-hand clothing trade is its role in extending the life cycle of garments. By giving pre-owned clothing items a second chance, the trade reduces the demand for new clothing production, thereby conserving resources and minimising the environmental impacts associated with textile manufacturing. Reusing 100 pieces of clothing prevents the need to produce 65-85 new items.[24] This aspect aligns with the principles of the circular economy, which aims to maximise resource efficiency, reduce waste, and promote sustainable consumption and production patterns.

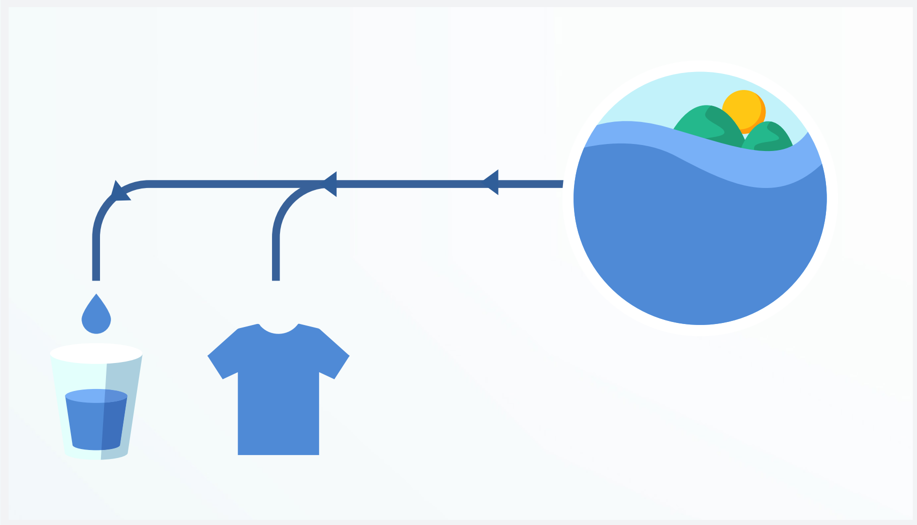
The accounts for about

of global greenhouse gas emissions contributing to global warming

of global water waste[25]

of microplastics released into the environment[26]

Clothing production consumes enormous amounts of resources, including water and land.



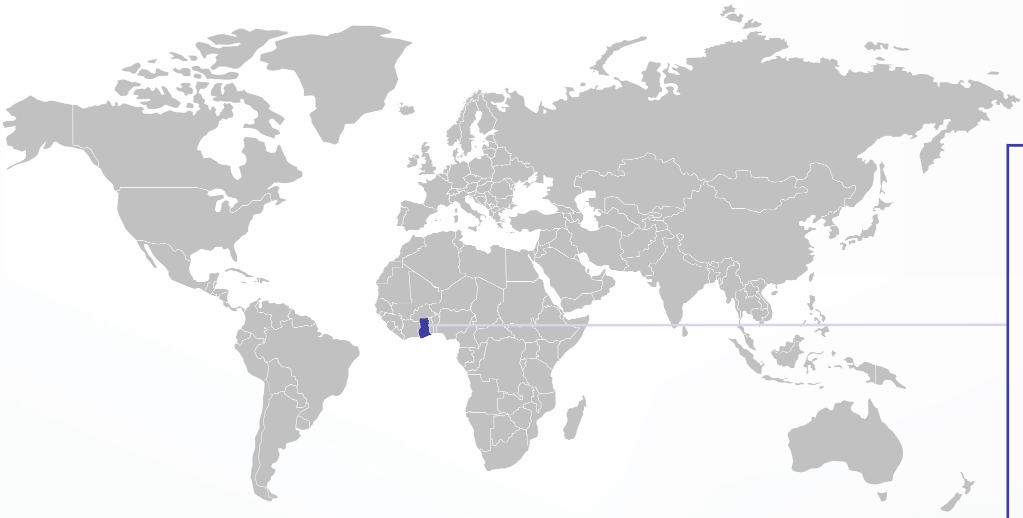
To make a single cotton t-shirt, 2,700 litres of fresh water are required, enough to meet one person's drinking needs for 2.5 years.[27] The textile sector was the third largest source of water degradation and land use in 2020.[28]

> **The second-hand clothing trade helps reduce the volume of textile waste ending up in landfills and the need to produce new clothes.**

The second-hand clothing trade helps divert textiles from landfills, where they would otherwise contribute to pollution and waste accumulation. It is estimated that globally 87% of clothing is landfilled or incinerated.[29] Textiles are notorious for their slow decomposition rates and the release of harmful chemicals during degradation, posing significant environmental and public health risks. By keeping clothing items in circulation for longer periods, the second-hand clothing trade helps reduce the volume of textile waste ending up in landfills and the need to produce new clothes, thereby mitigating these adverse impacts. Moreover, the second-hand clothing trade fosters a culture of reuse, repair, and recycling, promoting sustainable consumption behaviours among consumers.

Overall, the importance of the second-hand clothing trade cannot be overstated in the context of addressing the environmental impacts of the fashion industry. By promoting reuse, reducing waste, and fostering sustainable consumption patterns, the trade offers a viable alternative to conventional retail practices, aligning with broader efforts to transition towards a more sustainable and circular economy. Embracing and supporting the second-hand clothing trade represents a tangible step towards achieving environmental sustainability in the fashion industry.

Environmental benefits of SHC



Ghana

2019

Total Population:
32 million

Tonnes imported:
131,690

Tax revenues:
$18,352

Value, USD*1000:
72,181

USD/kg
0.55

Production of new clothes avoided

98,800

Textile waste from production of new clothes avoided/

15,000

tonnes [30]

CO_2 emissions avoided

3,260,000

tonnes [31]

Disbursement of micro plastics to the oceans avoided

2,270

tonnes [32]

Consumption of water avoided

81 billion

litres [33]

Harmful and dangerous chemicals avoided

Colour dyes

170

tonnes [34]

Synthetic fertilisers

7,510

tonnes [35]

Pesticides & Insecticides

1,090

tonnes [36]

5. TEXTILE AS WASTE

5.1 TEXTILE WASTE IN CONTEXT IN GHANA

In waste management, waste is normally defined as either liquid or solid waste. Solid waste encompasses waste discarded by households, commercial, and industrial sources, including items ranging from food, packaging, and furniture to bottles and batteries. Ghana's urban areas are a priority in terms of waste management in the country with waste disposed of by open dumping, open burning, controlled burning and tipping at dumpsites.[37]

> **The city's annual growth rate is more than 3%, among the highest for capital cities in Africa, and it is projected to reach 2,913,124 in 2030.**

Accra's population grew from 1,659,000 in 2000 to 1,849,000 in 2010.[38] The population in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) accounts for 17% of the population of Ghana. The city's annual growth rate is more than 3%, among the highest for capital cities in Africa, and it is projected to reach 2,913,124 in 2030.[39] The city of Accra alone generates nearly 900,000 metric tonnes of solid waste annually and approximately 2,200 metric tonnes of waste per day, with a waste generation rate that has increased since 2000 from about 0.5 kg/person/day to around 0.74 kg/person/day in 2015.[40] Overall, in Ghana the volume of solid waste produced has increased with population growth over the years, while the total population of Ghana increased by about 54% between 1984 and 2000, the total solid waste generation grew 69.5%[41] within the same period. The table below highlights the efforts to adapt waste management strategies to the country's growing demands and challenges.

Impact of population growth on waste management infrastructure and procedures in Ghana

Pre-1985: Incinerators as Primary Technology	Before 1985, incinerators were the primary waste management technology in Ghana's urban centres. Economic hardships in the early 1980s led to the abandonment of incinerators due to financial constraints and a lack of technical expertise

1985: Establishment of Waste Management Department (WMD)	In response to indiscriminate dumping, the Waste Management Department (WMD) was established in 1985 with support from the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). Initial waste collection in Accra involved animal-drawn carts serving high-income residential areas.
Post-GTZ Project Era (1985 Onward)	The GTZ project significantly improved waste management. After the GTZ exit, service quality and coverage deteriorated, necessitating further decentralisation.
Responsibility Shift and Legal Framework (1988 Onward)	The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) initially responsible for waste management became decentralised in 1988. Local assemblies were mandated by the legal framework to collect, recycle, and discard solid waste. The 1996 National Building Regulations required buildings to have proper waste disposal facilities
1990s: Emergence of Private Sector Initiatives (PSI)	Private Sector Initiatives (PSI) emerged in the early 1990s, expanding to cities like Kumasi, Takoradi, and Tamale in subsequent years. By 2006, competitive bidding for waste management contracts became common, with 18 waste companies in Accra and 6 in Tema.
Population Growth and Waste Escalation	As Ghana’s population grew, solid waste generation increased, especially in Accra. Solid waste in Accra surged from 750-800 tonnes per day in 1994 to 2,200 tonnes per day in 2010.

Diverse Disposal Methods and Emerging Challenges (1990s - 2010)	Disposal methods included uncontrolled dumping, controlled dumping, sanitary landfilling, composting, and incineration. Challenges emerged, such as open refuse dumps, insufficient covering in landfills, and environmental hazards.

Source: (Danso-Manu, 2011; Oduro-Kwarteng, 2011).

> **The involvement of private companies and competitive processes in waste management contracting may have introduced efficiency and innovation into the sector.**

The historical evolution of waste management policies in Ghana has a direct impact on the management of waste, including the evidenced small amount of second-hand clothing waste in the country. The initial centralised control in the 1960s, marked by the Criminal Code emphasising individual responsibility for waste disposal, set the stage for a top-down approach to waste management. The shift towards decentralisation and increased private sector involvement, particularly with the introduction of the National Procurement Act in 2003 and the 2008 Environmental Sanitation Policy, has implications for the handling of second-hand clothing waste along with all other types of solid waste. The involvement of private companies and competitive processes in waste management contracting may have introduced efficiency and innovation into the sector. However, the lingering influence of the central government suggests a balance between decentralisation and centralised control. Overall, the evolution of policies has shaped waste management in Ghana by influencing the level of private sector involvement, introducing competition, and impacting the autonomy of local initiatives in dealing with different types of solid waste.

“

In Ghana, there are overarching policies governing waste management, encompassing various sectors including textiles. These policies are structured to address critical environmental concerns and ensure sustainable practices across the country. Among these directives is the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) comprehensive guideline on waste segregation, aimed at facilitating the proper sorting and disposal of different types of waste materials, including textiles. Additionally, Ghana’s regulatory framework includes provisions for conducting environmental impact assessments (EIAs), which are instrumental in evaluating the potential environmental consequences of textile waste management activities. Through these policies, Ghana endeavours to promote responsible waste management practices, mitigate environmental degradation, and safeguard public health and well-being

Environmental Health Officer, Municipal Environmental Health Directorate

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Table 10: Historical trajectory of waste management policies in Ghana

Era	Key Policies and Initiatives	Government Involvement	Challenges and Influences
1960s	The 1960 Criminal Code emphasised individual responsibility for waste disposal. Prohibition of unapproved placement of refuse.	Central Government influence was dominant, providing about 90% of the Waste Management Department’s budget.	Limited autonomy for local assemblies. Centralised control posed challenges for independent operations.

Era	Key Policies and Initiatives	Government Involvement	Challenges and Influences
1980s-1990s	Local assemblies designated as owners of all generated waste, with the authority to collect, recycle, and discard.	Central government continued to support waste management budgets, maintaining significant influence.	Struggle for local assemblies to operate independently. Limited funding diversification and dependence on central funding.
2003	The National Procurement Act of 2003 mandated competitive bidding for waste management contracts.	Shift towards regulatory mechanisms and competitive processes in waste management contracting.	Increased involvement of private companies in waste management. Emphasis on transparency and fair competition.
2008	Introduction of the 2008 Environmental Sanitation Policy, aiming to control environmental sanitation, reduce pollution, and enhance private sector participation.	Central government still played a substantial role in waste management. Private sector participation encouraged.	Efforts to decentralise control and enhance private sector involvement. Ongoing challenges in breaking free from centralised governance.

Sources: Oduro-Kwarteng (2011); Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (2010); Adarkwa (2005)

There have been a number of studies across Ghana that have measured the composition of solid waste. Textiles have consistently been identified as one of the lowest types of waste. **Table 11** shows the results of studies from: Accra including households, commercial and industrial sites; just households across Ghana; and market waste in Kumasi. As might be expected, the waste from markets shows higher levels of textile waste than households, but the study does not highlight used clothing as a main source, but rather describes the composition of textile waste being "largely post-consumer discarded clothing, carpet, curtains, residual worn-out clothing from the sale of imported used clothing, and pieces of unwanted fabric obtained from dressmaking and apparel alteration".[42] When a small increase in textiles is observed in the dry season this is attributed to a rapid consumption of fabrics and tailor/ hand-made clothing due to religious festivities and the reopening of educational institutions, a period during which students purchase locally-tailored articles including dresses, curtains, bedsheets, napkins, etc.[43]

Table 11: Summary of results from studies measuring solid waste across Ghana

	Waste in Accra in 1999 (Waste management department of AMA quoted in Osei et al, 2011)	Waste in Accra (Kramer et al, 1994 cited in Boadi and Kuitunen, 2003)	Household waste in all of Ghana (Miezah et al, 2015)	Market waste in Kumasi (Addae, G. et al, 2021)	Waste in Kumasi in 2010 (JICA, 2013)
Type of waste	% of total waste				
Organic	65	73.1	61	59.6	40
Paper	6	6.6	5	8.3	7
Plastic	3.5	3.3	14	11.4	20
Textiles	1.7	2.2	2	5.3*	7
Glass	3	1.5	3	1.8	1
Metals	2.5	2.1	3	2.1	2
Inert	17.1	10.5	6	4.7	21
Other	1.2	0.7	6	6.9	2

** Rises to 7.3% in dry season*

Ghana's textile industry produces a range of fabrics e.g. Ghanaian wax prints, Kente, batik and tie-dye, for use by the garment industry and for the export market.

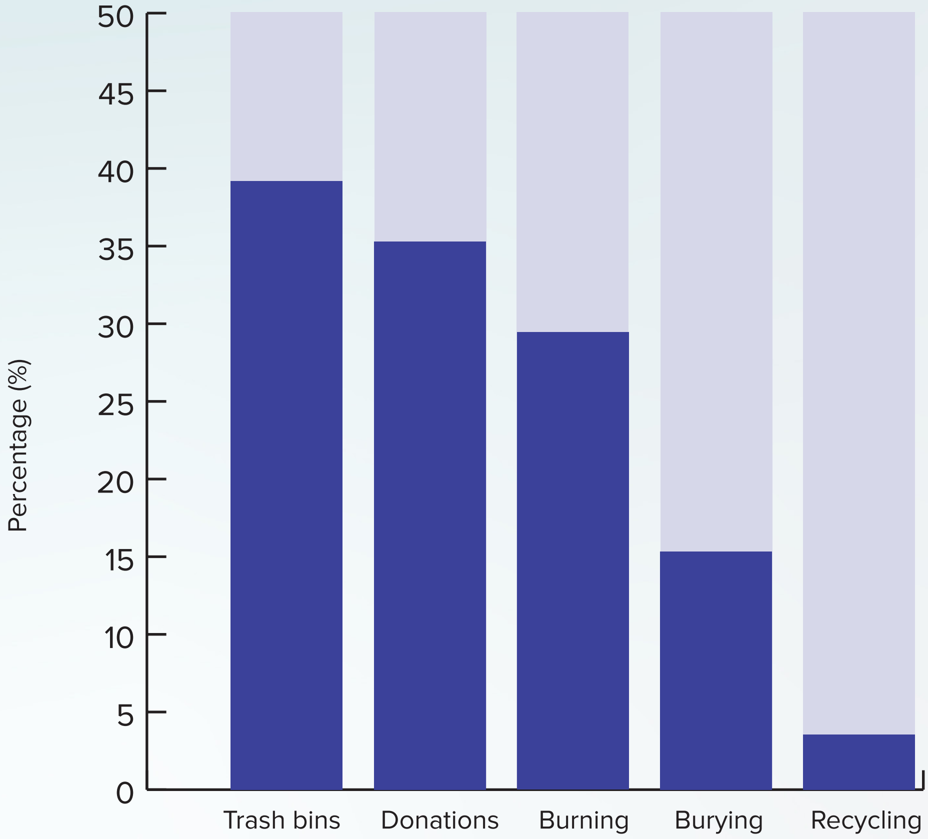
A significant concern highlighted in academic studies is the impact of the local textile industry rather than the SHC trade. Ghana's textile industry produces a range of fabrics e.g. Ghanaian wax prints, Kente, batik and tie-dye, for use by the garment industry and for the export market.[44] Waste from the industry has been identified as causing the pollution of river bodies, contamination of food, choking of drainage systems and the destruction of fauna by the dyes and chemicals.[45] One recent study uncovered the dangers to the environment, ecology, agriculture, aquaculture and public health posed by the unregulated activities of cottage textile dyers and printers due to their use of diverse textile chemicals which are environmental pollutants.[46]

Overall, it can be seen that textile waste is low in Ghana and especially in Accra, and of that, used clothing would be a small proportion. As per Table 3 in section 4 of the report, 131,690 tonnes of second-hand clothes were imported into Ghana in 2019. If 5% of imported bales are waste, then 6,585 tonnes per year would be considered waste. Accra alone produces 900,000 tonnes of solid waste per year. 6,585 tonnes of SHC waste as a percentage of Accra's total annual waste would be less than 1% (0.7%).

5.1.1 Consumer textile waste management

Proper end-of-life waste management for clothes is crucial to minimising environmental impact, reducing landfill overflow, and promoting sustainable practices. This is true for all clothes including new and second-hand clothing.

Figure 34: Methods of disposal for end-of-life clothing by consumers. Respondents were able to select more than one option.



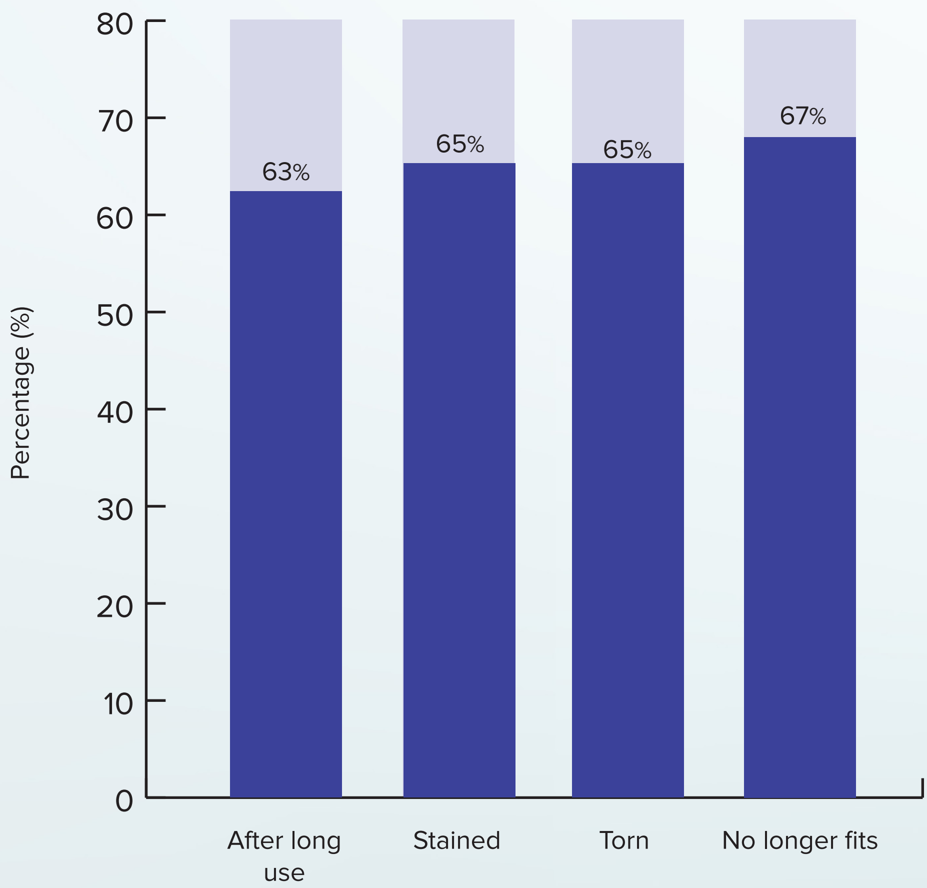
Source: Fieldwork

A substantial portion of respondents, accounting for 39%, indicated a preference for disposing of clothes in trash bins. This finding suggests a prevalent lack of awareness or accessibility to more sustainable disposal methods among consumers. Equally concerning is the high proportion (30%) of respondents who reported burning clothes at the end of their life. This practice can have severe environmental consequences and it underscores the need for education and awareness campaigns to promote alternative, less harmful disposal methods. On a more positive note, a considerable number of respondents (35%) expressed a willingness to donate clothes at the end of their life. Donations offer a sustainable way to extend the life-cycle of clothing items and benefit communities in need. Encouragingly, this suggests a willingness among consumers to engage in socially responsible behaviours.

Overall, the survey highlights a need for targeted efforts to raise awareness about sustainable disposal practices among consumers for all types of clothing. Education campaigns and improved access to recycling facilities could help shift consumer behaviour towards more environmentally friendly choices for dealing with all of their textile waste, not just second-hand clothing.

Figure 35 reveals when consumers consider their clothing to have reached the end of its use. Notably, the top reason cited by respondents at 67%, is when the clothing item no longer fits. This finding underscores the importance of practical factors that determine consumers' decisions to retire clothing items. Equally significant is the high percentage of respondents, at 65%, who consider clothing items torn or stained as reaching the end of their life. This suggests that visible signs of wear and tear significantly influence consumers' perceptions of clothing longevity. Similarly, a substantial percentage (63%) of respondents indicated that clothing reaches the end of its life after long use. It is notable that no respondents indicated clothing items being out of trend or outdated as being a reason for discarding. This suggests the respondents are practical or utilitarian consumers. They prioritise the functionality and practicality of clothing over its fashion appeal. They may seek durability, comfort, and versatility in their clothing choices rather than following trends and so keeping their clothes for as long as possible.

Figure 35: Point at which consumers consider clothing ready to be discarded

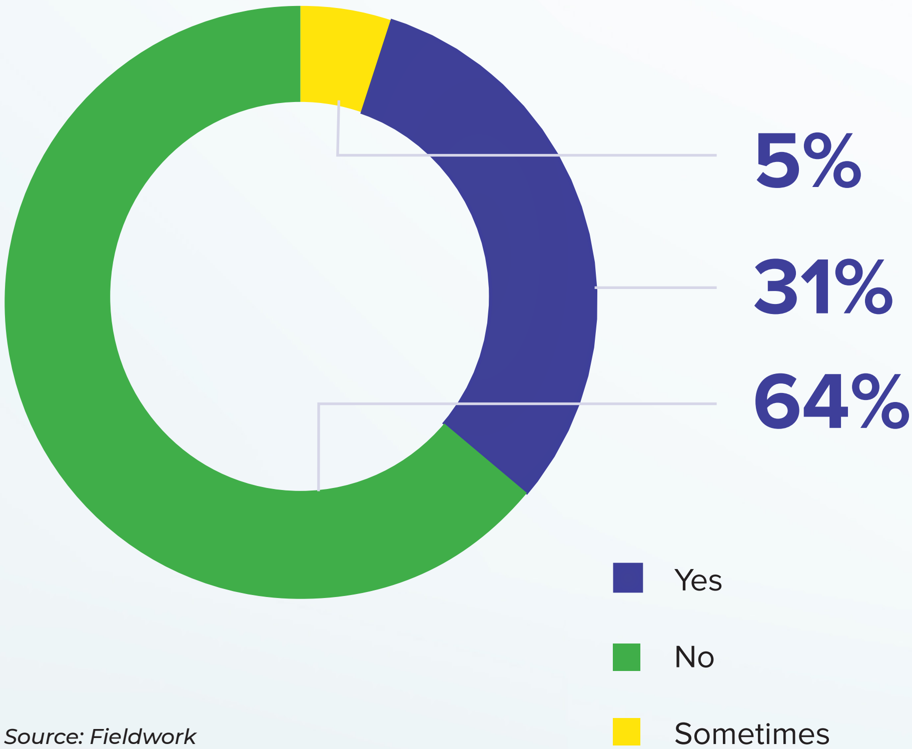


Source: Fieldwork

A trained field officer interviewing a consumer of second-hand clothes

Figure 36 highlights the low prevalence of textile waste in the local community. The majority of consumers (63.7%) indicate that they do not see waste clothing in their community. A minority (30.9%) do report seeing waste clothing in their community, potentially indicating challenges with waste management or disposal practices for public services. A limitation of the survey was the inability to capture perceived levels of waste seen, but from complementary research in this report, it can be deduced that second-hand clothing waste is not viewed as a major concern for the general public.

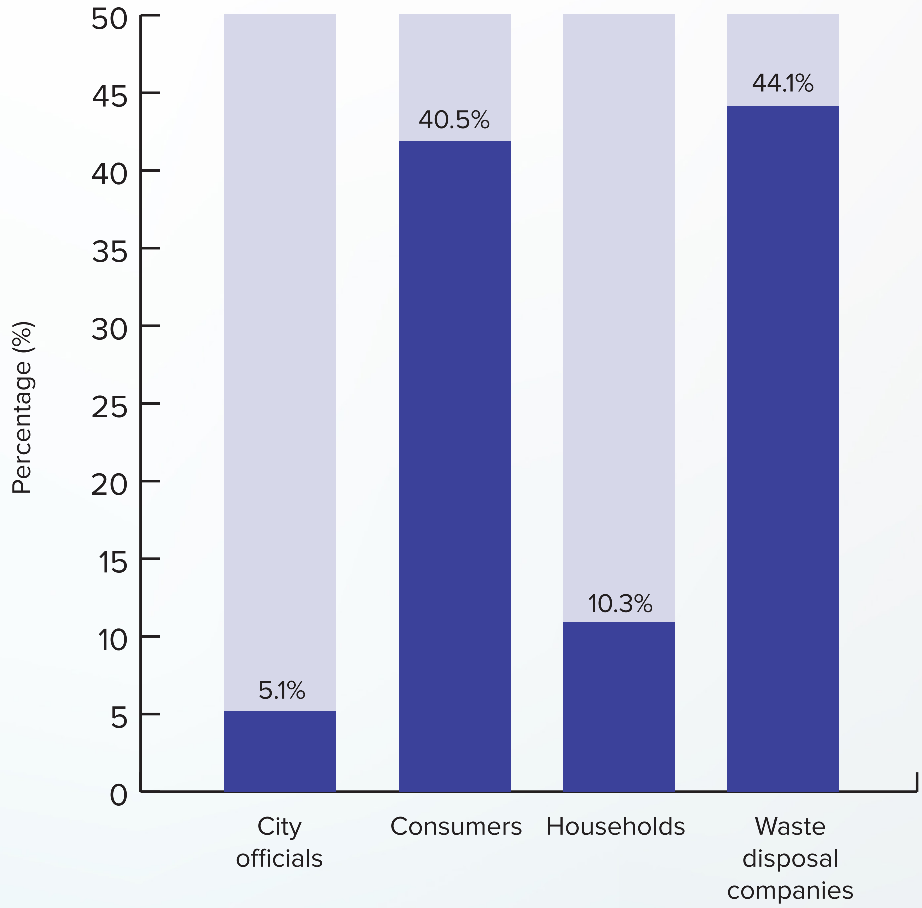
Figure 36: Percentage of consumers that have seen waste clothing in public places



Source: Fieldwork

Figure 37 shows a large minority of consumers (44.1%) consider waste management companies responsible for waste disposal. This suggests an expectation that specialised entities or services bear primary responsibility for collecting and disposing of waste. Another large minority (40.5%) view consumers themselves as responsible for waste disposal. This indicates recognition of individual accountability in managing waste generated from personal consumption habits and daily activities.

Figure 37: Consumer perceptions of waste disposal responsibilities



Source: Fieldwork

Overall we can see that consumers do not view waste from second-hand clothing as a major issue as the majority of those surveyed have not seen such waste in public. However, it is clear that there is scope for public sector bodies and waste management companies to enhance waste management and recycling practices, for all waste including textile waste. Through robust policies, regulations, and infrastructure investments, the public sector can facilitate the establishment of efficient collection, sorting, and recycling systems for textile waste. By implementing comprehensive waste management strategies, including public awareness campaigns and incentivising recycling initiatives, governments can encourage citizens to participate actively in waste reduction efforts.

One of the lead researchers speaking with a waste picker at Old Fadama

5.1.2 Waste picker perspectives from landfills

Nestled within the dynamic markets and bustling streets of Ghana lies a distinctive economic landscape centred around the trade of waste. This sector pulsates with activity as waste pickers navigate through mounds of discarded items, each with a story to tell and a livelihood to pursue. In this exploration of Ghana's waste pickers, we aim to gain an understanding of the waste they see on a daily basis and whether textiles or second-hand clothing are as prevalent as the international media have portrayed.

Figure 38 represents waste picker responses regarding the types of materials found on landfill sites in Ghana. Respondents were asked to rank four materials in the order of prevalence found. Plastic was the most commonly found material followed by paper, metal, and finally clothing as the least commonly found material.

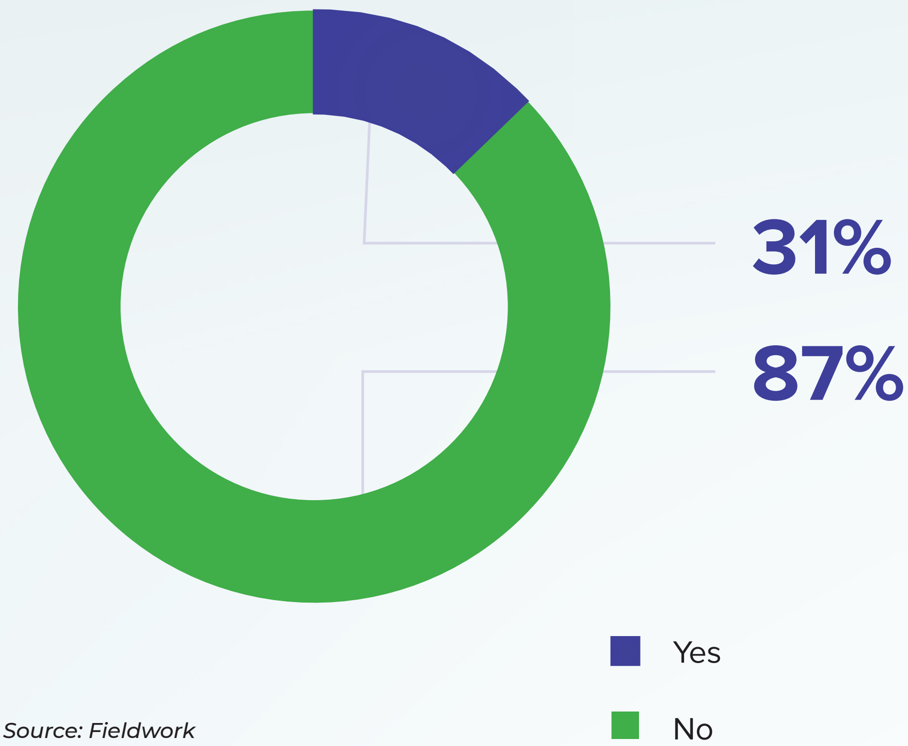
Figure 38: Types of materials found on landfill sites

An image showing materials found on the landfill site at Old Fadama.

Old Fadama was named in the media as a primary site for the dumping of second-hand clothing, however, our research team and the waste pickers that work at the site on a daily basis, found little evidence of the apparent mounds of textile waste.

Figure 39 reveals that the vast majority of waste pickers (86.8%) do not collect second-hand clothing. This suggests that there may not be enough product to find. A minority of waste pickers (13.2%) report collecting second-hand clothing, totalling just five individuals.

Figure 39: Percentage of waste pickers that collect second-hand clothing



Source: Fieldwork

Of the five waste pickers that hunt for second-hand clothing, four report finding fewer than five items per day which suggests that the prevalence of second-hand clothing on waste picking sites is low.

5.1.3 Stakeholder perceptions of waste

Table 12 summarises key themes from stakeholder interviews conducted with representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, District Environmental Agency, Customs, Ghana Union Traders Association and landfill operators. Interviewees suggest that while waste from the importation of second-hand clothing is low, there is much scope within Ghana to make the trade more sustainable through investment in waste management facilities and greater collaboration between stakeholders such as vendors of SHC, consumers, waste management companies and government agencies.

Table 12: Summary of key themes from stakeholder interviews

Concept	Themes	Sub-Themes
Environmental Impact and Considerations	Evaluation of cloth quality, textile recycling, and sustainability initiatives	Educational sustainability Initiatives, community well-being contribution
	Methods to assess environmental impact of the second-hand clothing trade	Waste management practices, sustainable initiatives
	Perception of the quality of second-hand clothes	Affordability and budget-friendly, quality and uniqueness, sustainability appreciation
	Policies and standards implemented to regulate textile waste recyeling and management	Emphasis on recycling, reduction of landfill waste, establishment of standards, growing awareness, waste reduction targets, guidelines for waste segregation, incentives for sustainable practices, transition towards circular economy, minimisation of environmental impact

Concept	Themes	Sub-Themes
Waste Disposal	Percentage of waste in imported second-hand clothing	Absence of precise data
	Environmental concerns with the second-hand clothing	Transportation emissions, packaging waste, disposal of unsold/damaged items, textile recycling challenges
	Waste Disposal Practices in the Second-Hand Clothing Industry	Donations to charities, textile recycling, promotion of recycling initiatives
Economic Impact of the Second-hand Clothing Market	Contibution of second-hand clothing to economic development	Employment opportunities, stimulating commerce, positive impact on household budger, income generation and economic stability of of local businesses, allocation of resources to other aspects of life, access to fashionable items for a wide range of consumers
	Second-hand clothing industry trends in the next five years sustainable growth steps	Surge in Online Platforms

Concept	Themes	Sub-Themes
	Collaboration among stakeholders in establishing sustainable and responsible waste managenent framework	Policy implementation, community education and awareness, collaboration across stakeholders, partnerships with artisans and designers, circular economy practices, fair labour practices collaborative consortium, stakeholder engagement, public-peivate partnership, waste management task force, awareness campaigns, incentive-based programs, multi-stakeholder platform

Stakeholders in the SHC industry bring diverse perspectives on environmental impact, waste disposal, and economic implications. Recognition of the industry's role in providing budget-friendly options, unique fashion choices, and sustainable alternatives highlights a nuanced understanding among stakeholders.

> "Improving waste management in the used clothing industry needs teamwork. That means the government, NGOs, businesses, and local communities all need to join forces to come up with good plans and make them happen. Some important steps we can take include improving how we collect and sort waste, creating more places to recycle, and promoting eco-friendly practices in our businesses. By working together, we can make sure we're protecting the environment and our communities, both in Kantamanto and across the country."
>
> **Trader, Ghana Union of Traders Association**

The recurrence of sustainability as a theme in stakeholder discourse, identification of policies and a proposed commitment to community education, alongside collaboration across various stakeholders, showcases a commitment to building an environmentally and economically sustainable SHC sector. Continuous evaluation and adaptation are essential to address emerging challenges and opportunities for long-term sustainability.

6. CONCLUSION

This report has highlighted the significant and positive socio-economic impact of the second-hand clothes trade. It is a trade that is a significant source of employment, it provides revenues to the government to aid public programs and livelihood opportunities to millions of people, and has environmental promise too. The level of second-hand waste in bales has been established as being on average at most 5%. 73% of traders receive 0-4% of waste in their imported bales. 11% claim to never receive any waste at all. Textile waste in Accra has been established by various studies as being between 1.7 and 2.2% of all waste, of which used clothing would be a minor share. Rather than being an environmental concern, the trade should be embraced as Ghana's commitment to a circular economy.

This report has utilised primary data collected from a range of stakeholders including traders, importers, consumers, waste pickers, and government officials alongside secondary data and a comprehensive literature review to provide a full picture of the second-hand clothes trade. From a strict import process relayed by importers, through to self-reporting on waste by traders, combined with perceptions from consumers, we can see that the image of the second-hand clothes trade portrayed in the media does not reflect the lived experiences of those involved in the trade as buyers or sellers.

The economic impact of the second-hand clothing market is multifaceted, contributing significantly to employment opportunities, stimulating commerce, and positively impacting household budgets. Stakeholders acknowledge the trade's role in providing budget-friendly options, unique fashion choices, and sustainable alternatives to fast fashion. Policies and standards play a pivotal role in regulating textile waste recycling and management, emphasising recycling, reducing landfill waste, and growing awareness.

> **The economic impact of the second-hand clothing market is multifaceted, contributing significantly to employment opportunities, stimulating commerce, and positively impacting household budgets**

The second-hand clothing industry in Ghana could play a crucial role in advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 13, 14, and 15, emphasising climate action, life below water, and life on land, respectively. Through a sustainable approach to fashion consumption, the industry actively contributes to reducing the carbon footprint associated with the production of new clothing (SDG 13). By extending the life of garments, the sector aligns with SDG 14 by indirectly mitigating microfiber pollution and protecting marine life. Furthermore, efforts in salvaging usable parts from clothing items contribute to SDG 15, aiming to conserve terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity.

Recommendations for further aligning the second-hand clothing industry in Ghana with SDGs 13, 14, and 15 include promoting recycling programs, community engagement initiatives, consumer education campaigns, government and industry collaboration, and the further enhancement of circular economy principles. These measures aim to enhance the positive environmental impact of the industry, reduce carbon emissions, protect marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and foster responsible consumption and waste management.

6.1 SUSTAINABILITY IN GHANA'S SECOND-HAND CLOTHES SECTOR: RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has established that waste from the second-hand clothes industry is low in Ghana. To further enhance the sustainability of the SHC trade and to address textile waste more broadly, beyond just second-hand clothing, the following recommendations are proposed.

The EU

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility for a product is extended to the post-consumer stage of a product's life-cycle. The EU has recently been updating its EPR stance towards textiles however, this does not yet extend to other countries. As second-hand products are exported from the EU to Africa for reuse, the EPR fees paid by producers to support waste management costs at their end-of-life too often fail to follow them.[47] Funds raised through EPR schemes should be diverted into supporting solutions such as establishing textile recycling facilities in importing countries such as Ghana for end-of-life textiles. This is especially important for countries such as Ghana where public funds are limited. While the focus has been on products such as used electronics and vehicles, a similar focus on textiles is crucial to ensuring greater fairness in the SHC trade. All proposed EPR schemes should meet the basic requirement that reuse is at the top of the environmental sustainability hierarchy emphasising waste prevention and reuse of textile garments and footwear wherever possible.

Avoid restrictions on the export of textiles for reuse and recycling: A deeper understanding of the SHC trade in Ghana shows that levels of waste in imported bales are low and the trade is central to supporting circular economy principles. Such restrictions would hinder the flow of valuable resources to African countries such as Ghana, where the demand for affordable clothing is high, and where the SHC trade plays a vital role in generating income, creating jobs, and promoting entrepreneurship. By facilitating the export of textiles for reuse and recycling, the EU can contribute to economic empowerment, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability in African communities. Additionally, promoting the circular economy through cross-border cooperation allows for the efficient utilisation of resources and reduces the environmental impact of textile waste. Rather than imposing restrictions, the EU should focus on promoting responsible trade practices, investing in recycling infrastructure, and supporting capacity-building initiatives to ensure that the export of textiles to Africa benefits both economies while advancing sustainable development goals.

National government

Avoid punitive import taxes or regulations on SHC imports: Burdensome taxes and regulations could have adverse consequences on both the economy and the livelihoods of many individuals within the trade. Instead, the government should focus on fostering a conducive environment that supports the sustainable growth of the trade. By reducing financial barriers the government can alleviate the burden on importers, freeing up resources for enhancing product quality and expanding market reach. Simplified regulations ensure higher compliance while encouraging business expansion, creating new employment opportunities and stimulating innovation.

Develop and enforce national textile end-of-life policies: The government has been criticised for not enforcing existing waste management policies, which hinder private sector and local government investment in innovation or better management. As well as enforcing existing waste management policies, the government should formulate and enforce comprehensive policies detailing the end-of-life processes for textiles. This would apply to all textiles including from local production and new imports, but would help SHC traders and consumers to contribute to more sustainable practices. This initiative should cover segregation, disposal, recycling, and upcycling of textile waste, contributing to a more sustainable waste management system. To incentivise sustainable practices, the government can provide tax incentives or subsidies, encouraging businesses to adopt environmentally friendly approaches.

Support private sector initiatives: The government should provide support to the private sector for research initiatives focused on developing a circular textile economy, for example strategically focusing on utilising byproducts from recycled materials. Additionally, it should encourage and facilitate recycling and upcycling initiatives within the private sector to drive sustainable practices and innovation, especially in the technologies needed to process and recycle textile waste. This will not only maximise the value of SHC imports and end-of-life textiles but also create new green job opportunities. Such initiatives could partially be funded by ring fencing funds from the income generated through taxing imports of SHC.

SHC traders

Explore upcycling opportunities: Upcycling of imported SHC already takes place, however, there is potential for much more activity in this space. Exploring further upcycling opportunities can add a creative and sustainable dimension to the business. Traders can establish collaborations with local artisans and designers, fostering partnerships that support local businesses and create unique, upcycled products.

Local government

Improve waste collection: Research has consistently shown that residents have limited access to good waste and recycling facilities, and this is true for market traders too. All businesses will experience a certain level of waste and it is imperative that suitable recycling and waste facilities are accessible. Establishing collection centres is crucial for effective textile waste management. Local governments can set up easily accessible collection points and collaborate with local businesses to utilise existing infrastructure and expand collection capabilities. This strategy increases convenience and enhances waste collection efficiency.

Promote awareness campaigns: Promoting waste segregation is just as important as ensuring there are accessible recycling and waste facilities. Local governments can conduct educational campaigns on the importance of segregating textiles from other waste, improving the effectiveness of textile waste recycling. Integrating textile waste segregation into existing recycling infrastructure ensures a comprehensive approach to waste management.

View of the Korle lagoon and Old Fadama

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