Politics

**Second–hand first
(Minding my clothing business)**

RecyCOOL Lessons

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Second–hand first (Minding my clothing business)

Description of the lesson
In this lesson you will explore the complexity of factors influencing business. You will examine the situation in Kenya, Africa, which is the largest importer of second hand clothing in East Africa.

You will investigate the effects of political decisions and pandemics on the country's economic development. You will observe and note down the complexity of it in a mind map. Next, you will identify and consider what business, community and society opportunities would be arising from this situation.

Objective
Objective of this lesson is to explore the influence of local and international politics and society development on business in the country and to map the complexity of it in a visual diagram (mind map).

After this lesson you will be able to
– recognise main influences of the outside world on local business
– understand how second hand clothing business works in import countries (looking at a case study or an example in Kenya)
– be able to understand and seek opportunities to make change, that are arising from the situations we discuss

Tools and materials:
pen, paper

SECOND–HAND CLOTHING BUSINESS:
Businesses that second hand/worn clothing as a commodity for purchase or selling.

SECOND–HAND CLOTHING:
Clothes that were previously owned and worn by another person.

Secondhand clothing business is a complex chain of various stakeholders, relationships, influences, impacts and politics. Secondhand clothing itself used to be given to charities as a means of help to less fortunate people and countries. The majority of it was distributed to the Global South with the aim to support economically less developed places.

With the rise of fast fashion and an enormous increase of the number of the garments produced, sold and used – and also not used – along with the globalisation and changes in our society, the need for clothing with the charity purpose decreased. Instead, a new business opportunity was created. This was a second hand clothing business.

We perceive second hand clothing as a positive solution to the current overproduction and overconsumption of fashion. And yes, in many senses it is. We buy used clothes to save money and at the same time we save them from going to landfill – that way we keep them in the closed loop.

Still, secondhand clothing has many other impacts, mostly happening far away from us. So, when you donate your clothes to a textile collection point, it most likely travels to a sorting centre, where it's being forwarded to local charities, a small portion to recycling centres, but it is most likely that your garment will end up being exported as second hand clothing to one of the Global South countries.

Many major fashion brands and retailers have take-back schemes, where customers can drop-off their unwanted clothes (from the brand, though some also accept clothing from any brand) -- often in exchange for a shopping voucher.

The Global Fashion Transparency Index 2022, which has since 2017 evaluated 250 brands and retailers according to their level of public disclosure across various human rights and environmental indicators, finds that whilst 33% of brands surveyed have take-back schemes, just 26% are transparent about what happens to those clothes received.

It is clear that thousands of tonnes of clothing waste are found globally:in the depths of the ocean, on the shores of polluted beaches from the USA to Ghana, tangled and twisted among other waste, collecting in gutters increasing the risks of cholera and malaria and piling up in deserts.

Initially a means of support, secondhand clothes are now considered as a huge problem and are causing environmental and human rights issues. 'Dead white man's clothes' (as the clothing is called in Ghana) are being imported and then separated by its quality – from first selection (top quality) to fourth selection (complete trash). While only 18% is the top quality and goes for sale, most of the clothing ends up piled in landfills.

But it doesn't only cause environmental issues. The rise of secondhand clothing caused the local fashion industry to suffer – the locally made fashion cannot compete with cheap imported clothing.

And it doesn't end there. Increased poverty as a direct result of the imported clothing created a 'slaves of the system'. The kayayei, or kaya, are the young female head porters – they can be as young as 14 years old. They are used for carrying heavy bales of clothing as needed, anywhere between importer and retailer. Due to the heavy weight of these bales they are often injured or even die.

Secondhand evolution started with charity shops in the UK, when The Salvation Army opened the first charity shop in London in 1865. Throughout the time the term 'thrift shop' started to be used (as a US version). Continuing through flea markets and consignment shops, second hand clothing found its way to a red carpet too (Angelina Jolie wore a $26 thrifted dress on red carpet in 2008, or Livia Firth chronically known for her vintage outfits). With easy access to online shops, second hand clothing business was boosted in 2020 during the pandemic and is continuing to grow.
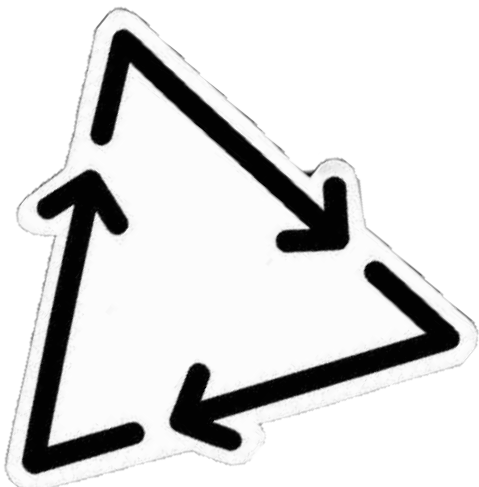
The world of business and its direction depends on many factors. **Can you name what influences the way the business is progressing?**

As a sample you can pick the second hand clothing business in your own country. What do you think – what influences the way secondhand clothing is perceived, and how it operates as a business in your country? How do political, economic, social, technical and legal factors influence it? Try to find one example for each factor.

Support questions

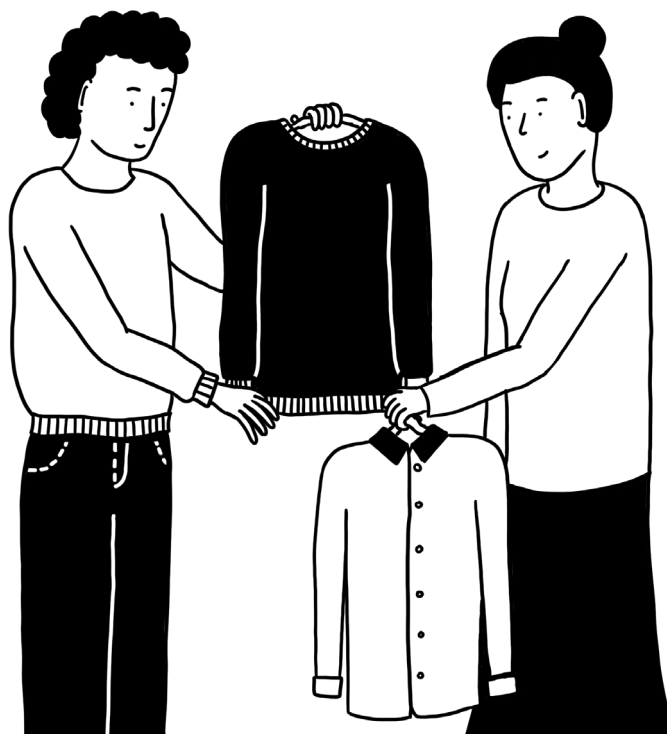Do we have second hand shops in my country?
Where is the secondhand clothing in my country imported from?
Does my country collect textile waste?
Do we have textile waste collection points or places for textiles charity in my country?
Who manages these collections?

Make a mind map of your ideas about second hand clothing in your country.

Now you will read this article about the secondhand clothing business in Kenya. While reading, make a mind map of the content and what strikes you as the main influences on its development in recent years and now in the present day.

Try to determine as many relationships and connections between the main points of this business and the whole situation around it. After reading it, you should have a mind map where you will record as much of its complexity as possible.

While making a mind map, consider (apart from anything you will find) as well for example:

- Second hand business
- Local designers
- Banned importation
- Local government approach and reactions
- Consequences of pandemic
- Influence of international politics
  etc...

Article below and as well ready for students <u>here</u>

Take your mind map from the beginning of this lesson and the one from the activity about Kenya.

Compare them and try to answer the following:

• What are the biggest differences in your perception of the secondhand clothing business in your country and in Kenya?

• Did you discover new areas or factors influencing this business while making this activity?

• And this is a hard one – could you identify the biggest opportunities (for business or others) in the situation similar to those you identified in the current economic climate and state of second–hand business in Kenya?

If you work in groups, you can compare your mind maps. Depending on time capacities you have, you can focus on discussion of only one question of these three. Or you can work in groups and each group can discuss different question.

Resources

Abdi Latif Dahir. Used Clothes Ban May Crimp Kenyan Style. It May Also Lift Local Design. 2020. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/world/africa/kenya-secondhand-clothes-ban-coronavirus.html

Attachments:

If you wish to learn more about how bales of clothing are handled, priced and sold, you can find more information on this
specific study – a case study of a bale of jeans.

Or check OR FOUNDATION

Or watch this video about Ghana secondhand clothing market

Read more about secondhand business here

Discussion on solidarity in the Secondhand Supply Chain by Fashion Revolution (English)

Read Overview of the Used Clothing Market in East Africa

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