



TACKLING TEXTILE WASTE IN AFRICA

Empowering Activists to Take Action Against the Growing Crisis of Textile Waste










#Break Free From Plastic



Contents

Page

-  **Introduction..... 1**
-  **Fossil Fashion: What Is Textile Waste?.....2**
-  **Textile Waste Colonialism.....5**
-  **New Factsheet.....7**
-  **Textile Waste Case Studies From Africa..... 8**
-  **Take Action: How you can support the Campaign ... 15**
-  **Resources..... 18**

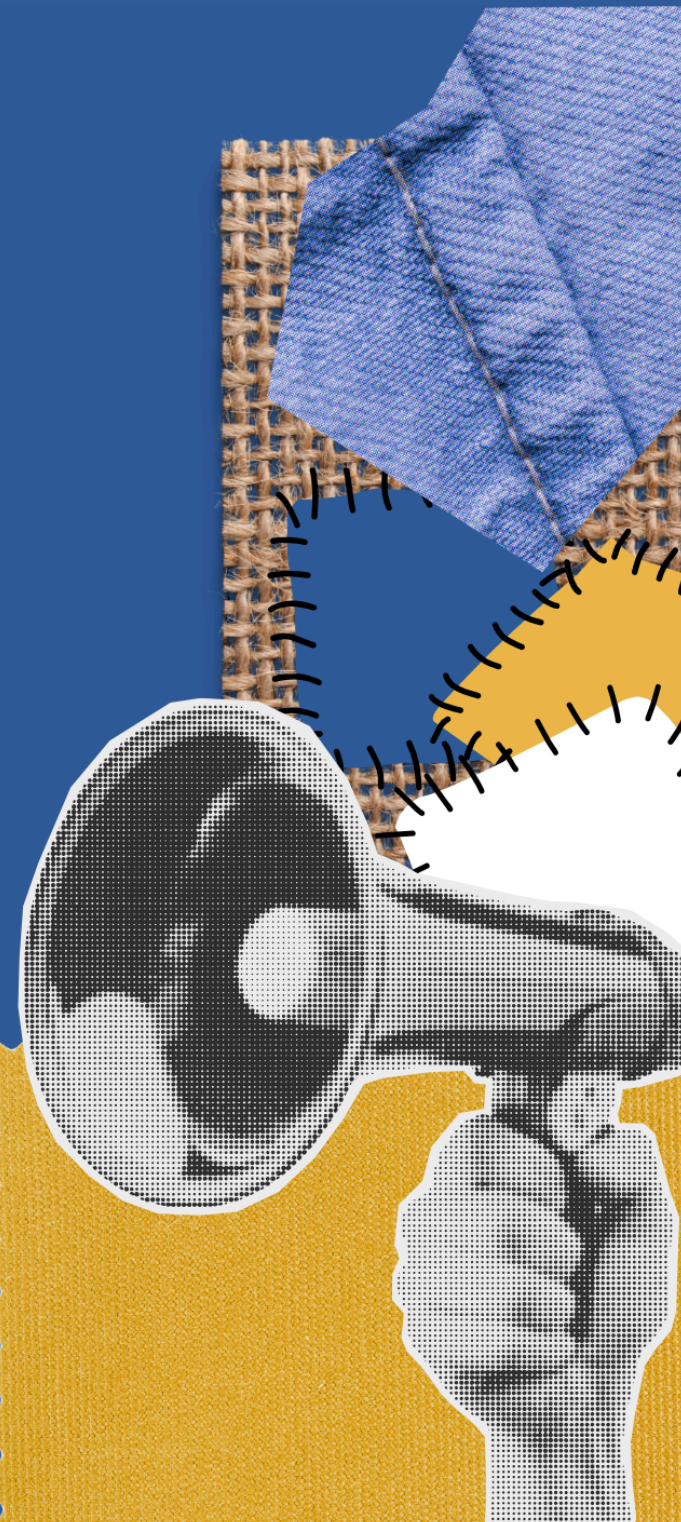




Photo By AICED, DRC

Introduction: What is an 'activist toolkit'?

This toolkit aims to empower activists to take action against the growing crisis of textile waste. Filled with campaign strategies, compelling facts, real-world case studies, and creative ideas, it serves as your essential guide to challenging fast fashion's environmental impact and drive meaningful change.

Fossil Fashion

What is Textile Waste?



Textile waste commonly refers to any discarded material that was originally made into textiles—this includes clothing, fabric scraps, home furnishings, and industrial textile by-products and is often categorised into:

- **Pre-consumer waste:** Leftover fabric, offcuts, or defective products from manufacturing.
- **Post-consumer waste:** Used clothing and household textiles that are thrown away by consumers.

However, the lifecycle of textile waste begins the moment fossil fuels—such as oil and gas—are extracted. The global textile industry is heavily reliant on these resources, primarily through the mass production of synthetic fibers like polyester and nylon. Derived from petroleum and natural gas, these materials have become the main ingredient in modern fashion due to their low cost, durability, and versatility—fueling overproduction and accelerating waste. **Synthetic fibers account for approximately 69% of all materials used in textiles, a figure projected to reach nearly 75% by 2030, with polyester alone comprising 85% of this share (Changing Markets Foundation, 2024).**



Pictured by Suradech14 via CANVA

Key contributing sources of textile waste include:

- *Fast fashion overproduction*
- *Unsold or damaged retail stock*
- *Consumer disposal (often after very short use)*
- *Industrial production processes (e.g., garment manufacturing)*

The impacts and injustices of textile waste manifest at each stage of its lifecycle. Upon examining extraction, production, use and disposal of textiles, health and environmental impacts occur at every stage. Once fossil fuels are extracted, infrastructure, including pipelines, transports raw materials to refineries or directly to the market and can release hundreds of toxins during pumping and piping feedstocks which can cause a wide range of health and environmental effects.



Pictured by bdsprn via CANVA

Pictured by Kwangmoozaa via CANVA



Producing synthetic fibers is highly energy-intensive and a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. **In 2022, polyester production alone released an estimated 125 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent—more than any other textile fiber** (Textile Exchange, 2023). The industry's emissions are projected to rise by 60% (UNFCCC, 2018), and this figure excludes emissions from textile waste in landfills, public spaces, and incineration—suggesting the true impact is even greater. Textile production was also responsible for the third largest source of water degradation and land use in 2020 and an estimated 20% of water pollution from dyeing and finishing products (European Parliament, 2020).

Additionally, major fast fashion corporations aren't recognising the negative impacts of microplastics released from synthetic textiles and focus too much on promoting end-of-pipe solutions rather than reducing the source of these fibres- fossil fuel extraction. (Changing Markets Foundation, 2021).

Synthetic textiles continue to be a significant source of microplastic pollution, with fibers making up the vast majority of anthropogenic particles found in marine species. Recent studies have detected these contaminants in the edible tissues of seafood sold at retail, highlighting potential exposure to microplastics through human consumption and the need to address pollution along the supply chain. (Brander *et al.*, 2024).

Microplastics have also been increasingly detected in numerous parts of the human body, including the lungs, digestive system, brain, mother's placentas, and even reproductive organs. **Fibres that shed from synthetic fabrics such as polyester and nylon have been associated with hindered lung healing and aggravated respiratory conditions like COVID-19, alongside triggering chronic inflammation.** This type of inflammation is linked to several serious health issues, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma, diabetes, gastrointestinal disorders and increased risk of strokes, heart attacks, and early mortality (Changing Markets Foundation, 2024).

Textile Waste Colonialism

The term 'waste colonialism' refers to the practice of wealthier nations, particularly in the Global North, dumping their waste—often disguised as 'donations' or destined for 'recycling'—to lower-income countries in the Global South. This practice disproportionately affects African nations who are ill-equipped to handle this waste and is an unjust form of environmental racism. It places the burden of toxic waste on the environment, communities, and these countries' informal waste sector. Ghana and Kenya in particular have become a dumping ground for low-quality second-hand clothing largely from Global North countries. In 2019 alone, the European Environment Agency (EEA) reported that 46% of their second-hand textiles are exported to Africa. The United Kingdom is another example of a major contributor to this issue, exporting over 12 million plastic-based clothing items to Kenya annually. These items, often from multinational brands like H&M and Nike, are typically non-recyclable and exacerbate the social and environmental burden (Changing Markets Foundation, 2023).

Ghana's Kantamanto Market in Accra, one of the largest second-hand clothing hubs on the continent, receives around 15 million garments each week—yet nearly 40% of these items are immediately deemed waste (Greenpeace, 2024). These unsellable garments often end up in informal dumpsites or are incinerated in public areas, leading to severe air, soil, and water contamination.

In Kenya and Tanzania, these second-hand textile imports are known as 'mitumba' which means 'bale' or 'bundle' in Kiswahili as the imports typically arrive this way. **While these imports are marketed as charitable donations or affordable clothing options, a large proportion—between 30- 40%—is unsellable and quickly becomes waste (Greenpeace, 2022) .**

In Kenya, this equates to an estimated 55,500 to 74,000 tonnes of textile waste per year). This waste often accumulates in landfills like Dandora in Nairobi, or has been found to clog the Nairobi river, where it poses serious health and environmental hazards (Greenpeace Africa, 2023). In addition to the health impacts and environmental burden of the Global North's textile waste, exports to African countries come in competition with local African textile industries. In Kenya, fewer than a third of the country's textile factories remain active, and those that are still running operate at under half their full capacity (The East African, 2024).





NEW FACTSHEET!



Check Out Our New Resource on Textile Waste in Africa!

GAI Africa and Greenpeace Africa have partnered to develop a powerful new resource that breaks down the key facts, impacts, policy issues and recommendations surrounding textile waste across the continent.

[Download Here](#)



Textile Waste Case Studies From Africa

Weaving Change: African Perspectives on Textile Waste



Credit: @Greenpeace Africa

Fishermen of Jamestown Beach

"We go fishing but catch a lot of textile waste and when we cast the net, it doesn't come back with much fish. When you cast the net, it comes back full of garbage, so the fish will swim away and not enter the net. We want to say [to the West] that they should stop exporting unusable clothing from abroad. When they bring these clothes, they become a burden for us. Textile Waste is a problem for us on our seas and beaches." - **Abraham, Fisherman.**



©Kevin McElvaney/ Greenpeace



©Kevin McElvaney/ Greenpeace

"I have been working [as a fisherman] for about 18yrs, ever since I was young. Now I am 46 years old. The textile waste has been a problem for a long time. At times, the government sends people to clean it up, but the waste still comes back after a while." - **Eric, Fisherman.**



©Kevin McElvaney/ Greenpeace

Fish Sellers in Jamestown

"The waste disturbs us. When we go to the beach, there is waste all over and when you walk on the beach, it does not feel good. At times, when fishermen go fishing, they come back with fish mixed with plastic and textile waste. We have to then remove all the garbage. If you look at this, I have removed some, as you can see." - **Beatrice.**



©Kevin McArdle / Greenpeace



©Pictures taken from Greenpeace Africa's investigative research trip in Accra, Ghana.

Traders in Kantamanto Market

"I opened two bails today and the selection I was supposed to get in the bale, I did not get. These are all bad. Sometimes it's the faded colours, customers don't like things like this. When you open the bale and see things like this, nobody buys it." - **Elizabeth**



"The bad ones are plenty. So when you open a bale with 300 pieces, you will get 200 bad ones and then 100 good ones. You have to select the best ones and then throw the bad ones away." - **Joyce**.

"We want good quality material, the fabric should be good so that we can sell them and take care of ourselves and our family. But as it is now, we are losing money." - **Georgina**.

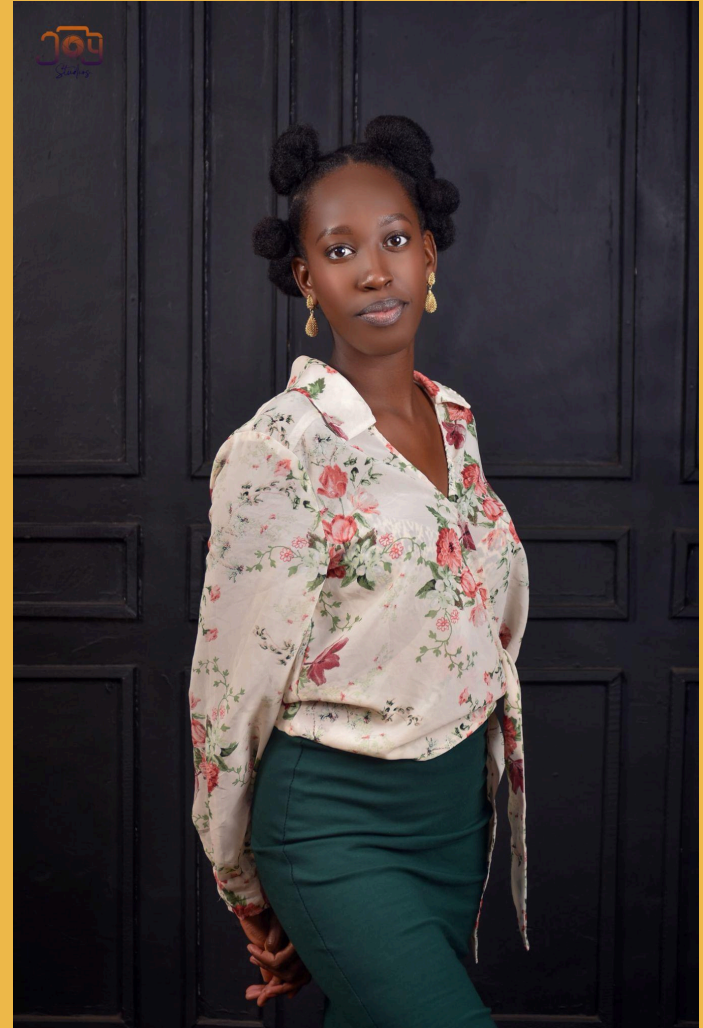
Janet Chemitei, A fast fashion key influencer from Kenya

"With the influx of textile waste through second-hand clothes in countries like Kenya where I was born and raised, I see an opportunity to create spaces where we meet, make, mend and chat about how we can collectively move away from a toxic fashion industry that is fuelled by overproduction and overconsumption.

Clothes have a lot of stories to tell; and ending up in landfills is not one of them.

I'm inspired by movements that are popping up focused on not only building communities of conscious citizens, but are prioritizing clothing attachment through repair and other forms of slow fashion like swapping, renting, buying second-hand, sewing your own clothes and supporting slow, sustainable and ethical fashion brands - who design their clothes with the end of life in mind.

Conversations centred around fashion should be about reflecting our relationship with clothes, and this will then allow us to be critical of how governments and big brands must act to change, and take accountability for what this linear fashion system harms communities and the environment in the Global South."



Follow her on Instagram! @Chemitei | Slow Fashion

Upcycle It Ghana



“Upcycle It Ghana, emerged in response to the escalating textile waste crisis in Ghana, particularly at Accra’s Kantamanto Market, one of Africa’s largest secondhand clothing hubs. Each week, tons of secondhand clothing arrives in the market from the Global North. Large quantities of unsold clothes that become waste, overwhelm local waste management, fueling open-air burning and polluting the environment and marine life.

In response, we work to transform waste into value by training young people and artisans to creatively repurpose discarded textiles into bags to serve as alternatives to single use plastic bags and break free from plastics. Through workshops, school programs, and community sensitizations, we promote circular thinking and green job creation.

Under our *Prevent the Smoke Project*, we launched flagship initiatives such as the Going Green Festival, a celebration of sustainable fashion and upcycling, and the Eco-Innovations Cohort, which builds the capacity of young changemakers with practical upcycling skills and leadership for zero-waste action.

While our impact is growing, we face barriers like inadequate infrastructure, weak regulation of secondhand imports, and little support for informal waste workers who play a vital role in textile recovery. We advocate for stronger policies, greater investment in local circular economies, and continental collaboration to stop the dumping and reposition Africa as a beacon of sustainability and innovation.”

Thomas Daniel Baba,
Executive Director, Upcycle It Ghana.



TAKING ACTION!

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN



Read Our Factsheet

Discover and Share Our New Resource on Textile Waste in Africa! GAIA Africa and Greenpeace Africa have partnered to develop a powerful new resource that breaks down the key facts, impacts, and policy issues surrounding textile waste across the continent. 📄 Use this factsheet to inform yourself—and take the next step by using it to draft a letter to your local decision-makers urging action. 🗣️ Share widely and help drive change.

LEARN MORE



Google Map on Textile Waste

Check out our Google Map on Textile Waste in Africa **comprising of:** textile waste legislation in Africa, second-hand textiles arrival points, hotspots where textiles end up in Africa and textile markets. *Got intel to share or a spot to pinpoint? Reach out to Andrea Dixon, our Africa Programs Associate (andi@no-burn.org).*

LEARN MORE



Textile Waste in Africa Toolkit Appendix

May 2024

Last updated by Andrea Dixon

Purpose: This document will function as a way to collate all resources for further reading regarding textile waste in Africa. Furthermore, it will serve as a living document, continuously updated with resources from our team and members to assist in campaign efforts against textile waste in Africa.



Resources on Textile waste

Contribute to Our Living Resource on Textile Waste in Africa!

Help strengthen our collective efforts to tackle textile waste across the continent. This evolving appendix spreadsheet is regularly updated with key reports, articles, data sources, and tools to support campaigning, advocacy, and awareness-raising. 📄 Add your contributions and explore the latest resources to stay informed and take action.

LEARN MORE



[Watch Buy Now: The Shopping Conspiracy](#) | Now Streaming on Netflix

This eye-opening documentary pulls back the curtain on the manipulative tactics brands use to fuel endless consumerism—from fast fashion to planned obsolescence. *Buy Now* exposes the hidden costs behind our shopping habits and reveals the true impact on people and the planet.

Social Media Campaigning Ideas.

For more information, reach out to careen@no-burn.org



#MyTextileStory: Voices from Africa

- ★ **Concept:** Share a short video or photo story from impacted communities across Africa (like “Meet John Doe in Kenya”) highlighting personal experiences with textile waste and how it affects their communities, livelihoods, and environment.
- ★ **Execution:** Post stories using the hashtag #MyTextileStory, tagging and collaborating with @africaforzerowaste along with your community and sharing how textile waste impacts their daily lives or what actions they’re taking.
- ★ **Goal:** Humanise the issue, amplify local voices, and build a sense of pan-African solidarity.

Textile Waste Fact Fridays

- ★ **Concept:** Every Friday, post a striking fact or infographic from our toolkit (e.g., links between textiles, plastics, and pollution, facts about waste colonialism)
- ★ **Execution:** Use bold visuals and concise captions to educate our audience.
- ★ **Goal:** Raise awareness, drive engagement, and encourage followers to download and use the toolkit

#WasteColonialism Unpacked: Africa Speaks Back

- ★ **Concept:** Launch a storytelling series that spotlights the concept of waste colonialism by inviting impacted communities to share how imported textile waste impacts their communities, environment, and sense of justice.
- ★ **Execution:** Feature short interviews or quotes from *activists, impacted groups etc.* across Africa. Encourage your community of followers to submit their perspectives or creative responses using the hashtag #WasteColonialism and tag **@africaforzerowaste**.
- ★ **Goal:** Spark critical conversations about global waste flows, empower African voices to reclaim the narrative, and drive home the message that Africa is not a dumping ground but a continent of solutions and resilience.



Resources

[Textile Waste Hotspots in Africa Google Map](#)

[Textile Waste 2024 Resource Library](#)

[Textile Waste in Africa Presentations](#)

[BLOG: Africa's identity crisis amidst global corporate interests](#)

[Textile Waste in Africa Photo Gallery](#)

Social Media Infographics |

[Textile Waste: Did You Know Fact Series](#)

[Textile Waste Hotspots in Africa](#)

[Why is Textile Waste a Major Issue in Africa](#)

[How to collect textile waste in cities](#)

Reports

1. Changing Markets Foundation, 2021. *Synthetics Anonymous: Fashion brands' addiction to fossil fuels*. [online] Available at: <https://changingmarkets.org/report/synthetics-anonymous-fashion-brands-addiction-to-fossil-fuels/> [Accessed 2 May 2025].
2. Textile Exchange, 2023. *The Future of Synthetics*. [online] Available at: <https://textileexchange.org/knowledge-center/reports/the-future-of-synthetics/> [Accessed 2 May 2025].
3. Changing Markets Foundation, 2021. *Synthetics Anonymous: Fashion brands' addiction to fossil fuels*. [online] Available at: <https://changingmarkets.org/report/synthetics-anonymous-fashion-brands-addiction-to-fossil-fuels/> [Accessed 2 May 2025].
4. European Environment Agency, 2024. *Plastic in textiles: towards a circular economy for synthetic textiles in Europe*. [online] Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/waste/resource-efficiency/plastic-in-textiles-towards-a/> [Accessed 2 May 2025].
5. European Parliament. (2020). *The impact of textile production and waste on the environment (infographics)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20201208ST093327/the-impact-of-textile-production-and-waste-on-the-environment-infographics> [Accessed 12 May 2025].

6. Traylor, S.D., Granek, E.F., Duncan, M. and Brander, S.M., 2024. *From the ocean to our kitchen table: anthropogenic particles in the edible tissue of U.S. West Coast seafood species*. *Frontiers in Toxicology*, 6, p.1469995. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/ftox.2024.1469995/full> [Accessed 19 May 2025].
7. UNFCCC. (2018). *Fashion Industry, UN Pursue Climate Action for Sustainable Development*. [online] UN Climate Change. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/news/fashion-industry-un-pursue-climate-action-for-sustainable-development> [Accessed 12 May 2025].
8. European Environment Agency. (2020). *EU exports of used textiles in Europe's circular economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/eu-exports-of-used-textiles/eu-exports-of-used-textiles>
9. Changing Markets Foundation. (2023). *How Fast Fashion is using the Global South as a dumping ground for textile waste*. Retrieved from <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/53333/how-fast-fashion-is-using-global-south-as-dumping-ground-for-textile-waste/>
10. Greenpeace. (2024). *Fast Fashion, Slow Poison: The Toxic Textile Crisis in Ghana*. Retrieved from <https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/press/56381/fast-fashion-slow-poison-new-report-exposes-toxic-impact-of-global-textile-waste-in-ghana/>
11. Greenpeace. (2022). *How Fast Fashion is Using the Global South as a Dumping Ground for Textile Waste*. Retrieved from <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/53333/how-fast-fashion-is-using-global-south-as-dumping-ground-for-textile-waste/>
12. Greenpeace Africa. (2023). *Fast Fashion, Slow Poison: New report exposes toxic impact of global textile waste in Ghana*. Retrieved from https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-africa-stateless/2024/09/925601ff-fastfashionslowpoison_reportbygreenpeace.pdf
13. Economic Policy Research Centre. (2023). *Are second-hand clothes stagnating Uganda's textile industry?* [online] Available at: <https://eprcug.org/blog/are-second-hand-clothes-stagnating-ugandas-textile-industry/> [Accessed 12 May 2025].
14. Ambani, B. (2024). *Kenya second-hand clothes imports from China rise 86pc*. *The EastAfrican*. Available at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/business-tech/kenya-second-hand-clothes-imports-from-china-rise-86pc-4600298> [Accessed 12 May 2025].