

# Role of Charity Societies in Recycling Clothing Waste

Subjects: Others

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Clothing waste is one of the key wastes that societies discard in general, the Saudi society in particular. This increases environmental and visual pollution if necessary measures are not taken to reduce these pollutants.

Keywords: fashion ; used clothes ; fashion and textile ; charity societies ; clothing waste ; clothing recycling

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## 1. Sustainability and Fashion

Sustainability is defined as “fulfilling the needs of present generations without harming future generations and their needs”<sup>[1]</sup>. The concept of sustained fashion appeared for the first time in the sixties when consumers became aware of the effect created by the clothing industry on the environment and they demanded the change of its practice<sup>[2]</sup>. The fashion and clothing industry instilled a strong desire in consumers for renewal and change<sup>[3][4][5]</sup>, whether or not this is necessary<sup>[6]</sup>. It is a phenomenon known as “consumerism”<sup>[7]</sup>; an expression of the continued consumption of clothes by owning, using and disposing of them<sup>[8]</sup>. In recent years, globalization has led to the consumption of high quantities of contemporary fashion products throughout history. In USA alone, the volume of consuming textiles and increasing waste reached 40% from 1999 to 2009. Moreover, the production and consumption of clothing and fashion deplete natural resources and generate uncontrollable solid waste<sup>[9][10]</sup>. Clothing accounts for 5–26% of total household water use, and up to 14% of total household waste, as well as between 7% and 10% of environmental effects, according to the country's approach<sup>[11][12][13]</sup>. In addition, on average, the buying, using and disposing of clothes generate 0.8 tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from each household per year, or 8000 bags full of carbon dioxide<sup>[14]</sup>. Clothing also contributes to other environmental problems, such as excessive use of groundwater, soil, and air in its production, distribution and consumption. Sustainable fashion is part of the slow fashion movement that has been developed over the past decades and used interchangeably with green environment and ethical fashion<sup>[15]</sup>. Slow fashion is defined as a socially conscious movement that moves consumer minds from quantity to quality, encouraging people to buy high-quality clothing more often<sup>[16]</sup>. The concept of slow fashion can be dealt with from the perspective of production and consumption<sup>[2]</sup>. These fashions require a more holistic vision by taking into account production and consumption<sup>[2]</sup>. This is because sustainable production could become unsustainable when clothes made of environmentally friendly materials are worn only a few times and are quickly disposed of<sup>[17]</sup>. Additionally, large quantities of clothing consume natural resources and generate solid waste that harms the environment<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 2. Clothing Waste Recycling and Management

So, a recycling process is of great significance in reducing environmental harm. Ref. <sup>[18]</sup> defines this process as “a practice to reshape a useless thing into a useful one” without wasting any raw materials or exhausting non-renewable resources. This is considered a practical solution to reduce wastes and avoid the depletion of resources. Finding out methods to limit clothing waste is of great significance; thus, a recycling process is one of the solutions to limit wastes, which achieves more sustainability for them<sup>[19]</sup>. Many people are unaware of what happens to their clothes after they are discarded and donated to charity societies. They think that it is a suitable way to dispose of unwanted clothes and believe that they are given to the poor in society<sup>[20]</sup>.

According to the current literature, the recycling of clothing waste can be confined to three methods. The first is via the Internet, which has emerged recently as one of the new channels for recycling clothes<sup>[21]</sup>. This is done when consumers apply for recycling processes through applications and web sites. Those in charge of these applications and sites undertake the responsibility of collecting clothing waste<sup>[22]</sup>. One of the advantages of this method is comfort and speed<sup>[23]</sup>. This research explicated that online clothing donors in Saudi Arabia account for 7% of total waste collection. It may be the most effective way by the time. The second method is recycling by means of trademarks, which are interested in the process of recycling in two methods. They are as follows. Method one: Trademarks create channels for recycling and executing related trade works, in addition to reusing recycled clothes. For example, H&M<sup>[23]</sup> recycles used jeans to make

new clothes and products. Method two: Recycling companies show the public where the clothing waste will go to increase their confidence. An example is the plan proposed by Madewell (Blue Jeans Go Green) to take jeans waste and reuse it as an insulating material <sup>[23]</sup>. The third method is the recycling process undertaken by governments by setting policies and procedures for the recycling and reusing of clothing waste <sup>[24]</sup>, as in the European Union (EU) (Waste Classification System) <sup>[25]</sup> and (Circular Economy Plan) <sup>[26]</sup>; in France (EPR for Textile Management) <sup>[27]</sup>; Tokyo (A City Free of Waste) <sup>[28]</sup>; China (Requirements for Importing Waste) <sup>[29][30]</sup>; and Korea (The Law of Green Growth). Hence, the problem of waste management is one of the most important environmental problems encountered currently by Saudi Arabia due to the increasing amount of waste and its impact on health, environment and economy <sup>[31]</sup>, in addition to the absence of an integrated management system of waste, the non-availability of sufficient regulations and legislations to limit its production, the lack of an appropriate infrastructure and its management according to its types, and non-availability of documented data on its quantities, types and characteristics, which represents a challenge facing its management <sup>[32]</sup>.

### **3. Market of Clothing Waste**

What happens to the used clothes, which charity societies cannot locally sell, is that they are sold in international markets to factories concerned with the recycling of clothes. They are huge factories that sort and recycle clothes <sup>[33]</sup>. A number of charity societies in Chinese cities set up boxes (containers) for recycling clothing waste to give to public care organizations <sup>[34]</sup>. Ref. <sup>[27]</sup> explained the practices of recycling clothes in France and the collecting of clothing waste in containers, classifying them as clothing waste to be delivered to charity societies to donate, sell and export them. The current research made clear through a questionnaire that those charity societies in Saudi Arabia collect clothing waste in containers; they sort out and distribute good ones to needy families, as well as selling the surplus in local markets first, then in markets abroad. These charity societies are following the example of similar societies abroad. Moreover, studies affirm that clothing waste is an existing trade which charity societies turn into commodities for sale in international markets under the framework of environmental protection <sup>[35]</sup>. Few people are aware that clothing waste is a profitable business for those societies in terms of its value, volume and impact. Both <sup>[36][37][38]</sup> explicate that the value of the international trade in used clothes. reached USD 2.97 billion in 2010, with an increase of 13% over 2009. According to officials in those societies, studies affirmed that they sell clothing waste in international markets. The current research makes clear that societies in Saudi Arabia sell the surplus of this clothing waste and achieve material gains, the proceeds of which go back to these societies by making charitable investments to support needy families. The study <sup>[34]</sup> makes clear, through literature reviews, that clothing waste donated by consumers is affected by a number of factors, among which are the low quality of clothes, abundance in the markets and fast development of fashion. All of them are factors that contribute to the rapid disposal of clothes and the increase in clothing waste. Additionally, Ref. <sup>[6]</sup> states that fashion companies create new fashions that increase consumers' interest, which, in turn, leads to an increase in consumption at alarming rates. Study <sup>[27]</sup> explains that by applying the European Production Recycling Policies in France, recycling rates have tripled since 2006. Ref. <sup>[39]</sup>, in a study, mentioned that consumers are tempted to buy recycled clothes if they look creative.

### **4. Charitable Organizations and Their Role in the Community**

The study of <sup>[40]</sup> emphasized that clothing donors to charity societies are highly educated people who have a positive role in preserving the environment against pollution and waste <sup>[41]</sup>. Some donors like charity work and wish to donate their clothes to charity organizations. Some charity enterprises offer a door-to-door collection service for recycling used clothes that they collect. On the other hand, some charity societies assign boxes for collecting unwanted clothes in strategic places, such as residential neighborhoods or shopping centers, to facilitate for the donors the discarding of clothes and their recycling to help the poor <sup>[40]</sup>. During the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, containers of surplus clothing drew the attention of consumers to the issue of clothing waste and resulted in massive donations <sup>[42]</sup>. In 2008, charity societies collected about 26,000 tons of textiles and used clothes for the purpose of donating them to Africa and East Europe <sup>[43]</sup>, which can extend the life of their use and, thus, reduce significantly the environmental impact caused by clothing waste <sup>[42]</sup>.

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