



# Environmental Report

2024



**UFF**  
HUMANA  
PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

## **Environmental Report 2024**

This report is made by UFF-Humana  
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Cover picture: Ana Tonhã, employee at ADPP Guinea-Bissau

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# About UFF-Humana

Ulandshjælp fra Folk til Folk – Humana People to People (UFF-Humana) is a development and environmental organization that, since it was founded in 1977, has worked to help people in African countries. UFF-Humana was started by students and teachers from The Travelling Folk-highschool (Den Rejsende Højskole). The initial focus of UFF-Humana's work was "Fight against Apartheid."

Much has changed since, but UFF-Humana continues to work for the well-being of all people by ensuring that they have access to education, healthy and sufficient food, health services, and live in a more sustainable and secure world.



GLOBALT  
FOKUS



Today, UFF-Humana has around 30 employees and operate from two locations, one in Zealand and one in Jutland.

UFF-Humana also run second-hand stores in Copenhagen. It is also an association with a board of directors and more than 300 members.

Additionally, UFF-Humana is a member of Humana People to People, an international federation consisting of 29 independent organisations, working in 45 countries across five continents<sup>1</sup>.



Else Hanne Henriksen, Director of UFF-Humana

UFF-Humana's efforts are made possible through the collection and trade with used clothing. The revenue from this funds the organization's work, with our three main objectives<sup>2</sup>:

### 1) Development

UFF-Humana's goal is to help vulnerable people meet their basic needs. Therefore, the association supports efforts to achieve long-term, sustainable, and environmentally friendly development. UFF-Humana views all people as equals: everyone should have the same rights.



### 2) Environmental Protection

UFF-Humana aims to protect and improve the Earth's environment. This is done through clothing collection, which promotes reuse and recycling, as well as by encouraging greater environmental responsibility at all stages of the textile value chain.



### 3) Information

UFF-Humana has the objective to inform a wide audience about our work with development and the environment. We share stories of people fighting to improve their living conditions. Additionally, UFF-Humana informs the public about the environmental benefits of reuse. We publish various informational materials, both physical and digital, and host events featuring guest speakers from both Europe and Africa.



# 1. It's a Matter of Life



Green tree tops in Guinea-Bissau.

The Earth is a unique planet because it sustains life. One of the most advanced forms of life is the human being. However, through activities like overexploitation of Earth's resources, destructive pollution, and war, humans have become a threat to life on Earth. A clear indicator of this is Earth Overshoot Day<sup>3</sup>, which is moving closer to the beginning of the year with each passing year. In 2024, Earth Overshoot Day occurred on August 1st.

## Clothing Production Harms the Environment

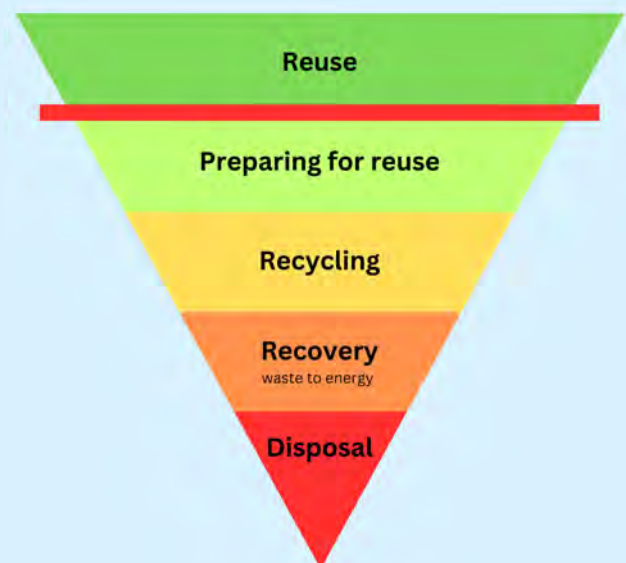
The European Environment Agency (EEA) has concluded that textiles are the fourth most environmentally damaging industrial sector<sup>4</sup>. The negative environmental impact of clothing production can be reduced by adopting more sustainable production methods, but this takes time. For now, producing less clothing would benefit the environment. This can be achieved by using clothing that have already been produced for longer: *reuse*.

## The Waste Hierarchy

The waste hierarchy shows which treatments are least harmful to the environment. Reuse, which replaces the production of new clothing, reduces harmful environ-

mental impact the most and is therefore at the top of the waste hierarchy. Everything below the red line is considered waste treatment.

UFF-Humana's goal is to take good care of our shared natural environment. We do this by collecting used clothing, shoes, and textiles and processing them for reuse.



The Waste Hierarchy<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Collection and Handling of Textiles

The EU's revised Waste Framework Directive requires all member states to introduce a separate collection of textiles<sup>6</sup>. Denmark's Climate Plan for a Green Waste Sector and Circular Economy addresses this requirement with Initiative II: "Increased and Streamlined Waste Sorting." Here, textile waste is defined as a waste category that all municipalities must collect<sup>7</sup>. The new EU directive and the Climate Plan aim to ensure, as much as possible, that textile waste is recycled and used as materials in new products instead of being incinerated. Denmark now collects used textiles in two streams: 1) the existing collection of clothing and textiles for reuse, and 2) the new collection of textile waste for recycling.

### Reuse or Waste?

Since its founding, UFF-Humana has collected used clothing and textiles for reuse, always striving to avoid waste, i.e., clothing not suitable for reuse. However, the adoption of the Climate



Containers for collection the two different streams.

Plan in 2020 made us reconsider this decision. In the end, UFF-Humana chose to contribute with our network and many years of experience to help solve the challenges that textile waste management entails.

Therefore UFF-Humana played an active role in the Danish Environmental Protection Agency's Textile Waste Partnership<sup>8</sup>, which began in 2022, to promote cooperation between companies and municipalities and to gain more knowledge about collected textile waste and its recycling possibilities.

UFF-Humana is registered as a waste collector with pre-treatment of textile waste and reports all textile quantities, qualities, and destinations to the Waste Data System, municipality by municipality.

Collecting textiles in two streams—one for reuse and one for recycling—is something we need to get used to. And what exactly is the difference between reuse and recycling?



**Reuse** is when, for example, a shirt is used again for the purpose it was produced for, namely as a shirt.

When the shirt is reused, it is a product, not waste.



**Recycling** is when the material the shirt is made of is used to create something else. For example, when the shirt is shredded and the fibers are mixed with new fibers to make

new clothing. Recycled textile fibers are often used as filling. Textiles for recycling are considered waste<sup>9</sup>.

# 3. Collection of Clothing for Reuse



The poster on the front of the container.



UFF-Humana container.

The collection of clothing for reuse is an established practice in Denmark. This tradition is driven by the willingness of Danes to donate their used clothes, shoes, and textiles, often for charitable purposes. UFF-Humana’s goal is not only to collect clothing for reuse but also to ensure that the process is as efficient and sustainable as possible. We are continuously implementing new initiatives to ensure environmentally friendly collection:

### Optimizing Collection of Clothing for Reuse

In 2024, UFF-Humana has set a goal to achieve "fewer kilometers driven per ton collected" compared to previous years. Therefore, we have initiated efforts to improve productivity and efficiency in clothing collection.

An efficient collection saves both time and resources. One of our initiatives is investing in sensors to monitor the clothing containers pla-

ced on locations very far from our warehouses. These sensors help optimize our collection routes. We are also continuously optimizing the collection by relocating containers to sites that yield more clothing.

### Use of Logistics Program

For planning daily collection routes, we use a web-based logistics program designed to optimize our drivers' routes, ensuring they drive the fewest possible kilometers while still collecting the same amount of clothing. In addition, our logistics program provides statistics on how much has been collected per container and collection site over the past six weeks. This gives us a detailed picture of collection patterns and emptying frequency, allowing further optimization.



## Efficient Handling of Clothing for reuse and Waste Sorting

Another environmental task that UFF-Humana is working on is optimizing the handling of the waste that comes in via our clothing collection. We continuously review the collection process. Here's how the clothing collection process works step by step:

Upon arriving at a clothing container, our driver performs two tasks (step 1 and 2) that are essential for the further processing of the clothing:

**1) Sorting out obvious waste.** This is the first screening of the clothing. The driver sorts out any obvious waste. By obvious waste, we mean items that the driver can see, feel, or smell—preferably without opening the bags in which the clothing were delivered. Waste in this context refers to material that is either unrelated to clothing, shoes, and textiles or is clothing, shoes, and textiles that are so contaminated or damaged that they cannot be reused or recycled.

**2) Packing loose clothing in plastic bags (provided by the driver).** This practice protects the clothing and preserves their potential for reuse or recycling.

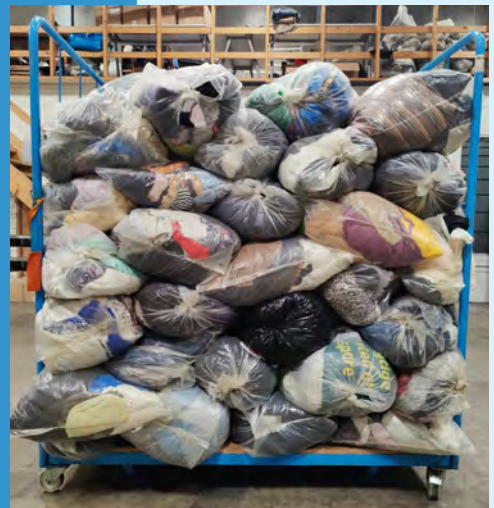
**3) Manual unloading of the van.** When the drivers return to UFF-Humana's warehouse after collecting, they unload the van manually. This provides another opportunity for screening, where obvious waste can be removed.

**4) Clothing for reuse gets packed in big bags.** During this process, the warehouse worker has a final opportunity to remove any remaining waste. Each big bag is weighed on a certified industrial scale, which determines the weight of the clothing for reuse, collected from each collection point.

**5) Sorted waste is distributed into different waste categories:** glass, metal, electronics, cardboard, plastic, paper, and residual waste. These various waste categories are collected by the waste and environmental company Marius Pedersen. Items for flea markets, such as teddy bears and toys, are packed in cardboard boxes and donated to local second-hand shops and flea markets.



The driver empties his van.



Collected clothing in plastic bags.



Bigbags with clothing for export.



Textile Transparency Reports from 2021, 2022 and 2023. All reports can be found on UFF-Humanas website, uff.dk

## Documentation

In 2023, UFF-Humana sorted a total of 50,686 kilos of waste through the rough sorting described on page 9. The waste includes clothing, shoes, and textiles that are heavily contaminated or wet, as well as non-textile materials such as plastic, paper, and cardboard. The amounts of waste found during the rough sorting process are recorded in our logistics program. This enables us to document the quantities of waste found in each municipality and at each collection site. Collecting this type of data allows us to provide the statistics requested by our partners.

The consulting firm Mepex Consult A/S monitors how the clothing collected by UFF-Humana are divided into categories: reuse, recycling, and

waste, and where the clothing is sent. Based on this, a Textile Transparency Report is prepared, which forms the basis for UFF-Humana's reporting to municipalities, recycling and waste companies, housing associations, and other partners.

The report also outlines where the clothing is sent after sorting in Europe. For example, the report shows that clothing exported to Africa are exclusively for reuse, while clothing sent to Asia are divided between reuse and recycling. Clothing sent to European countries are for reuse, recycling, and waste treatment.

In 2023, UFF-Humana collected **2,496,000 kg of used clothing and textiles** for reuse, recycling, and waste processing. Each kilo of collected clothing represents a CO<sup>2</sup> saving of 6.1 kg, which is equivalent to the emissions from driving 55 km in an average Danish car

# 4. Pre-sorting of Textile Waste



The pre-sorting set-up.

In Denmark, we have become good at donating used clothing for reuse. However, municipal collection of textile waste is relatively new, and there are still many mistakes. Our experience shows that the collection contains many recyclable textiles, as intended. However, it also includes reusable clothing that should have been placed in the first collection stream for reuse. A significant portion of the textiles is contaminated, for example with paint or oil, or they are wet or moldy. This type of textile waste must be incinerated and should have been discarded with residual waste.

UFF-Humana receives textile waste from several municipalities and manually pre-sorts it for reuse, recycling, and incineration to achieve optimal utilization of all textiles with minimal environmental impact, in accordance with the Waste Hierarchy.

All plastic bags collected from the textile waste are delivered to the company; Dapofa A/S in Havdrup, who recycles the bags

## Experiences with Pre-sorting

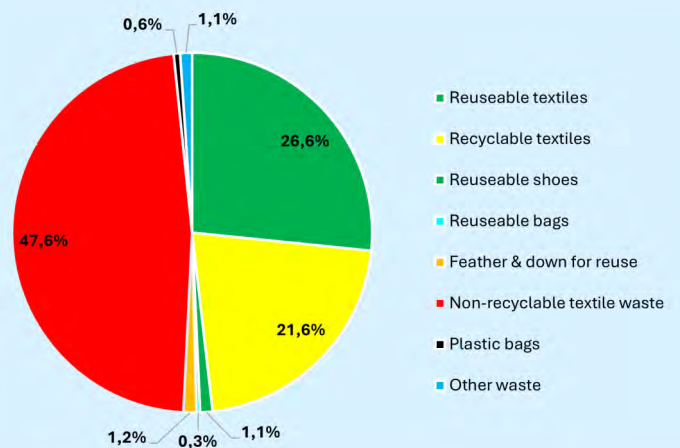
The more textiles collected, the more of everything we receive—both good reusable clothing and contaminated textile waste. Yet, you can only determine the type and value, and make the most of the economic and environmental potential, when the textiles are sorted.



The set-up of UFF-Humana’s pre-sorting. The category ”Reusable & recyclable textiles” is sent for professional manual sorting in Europe.

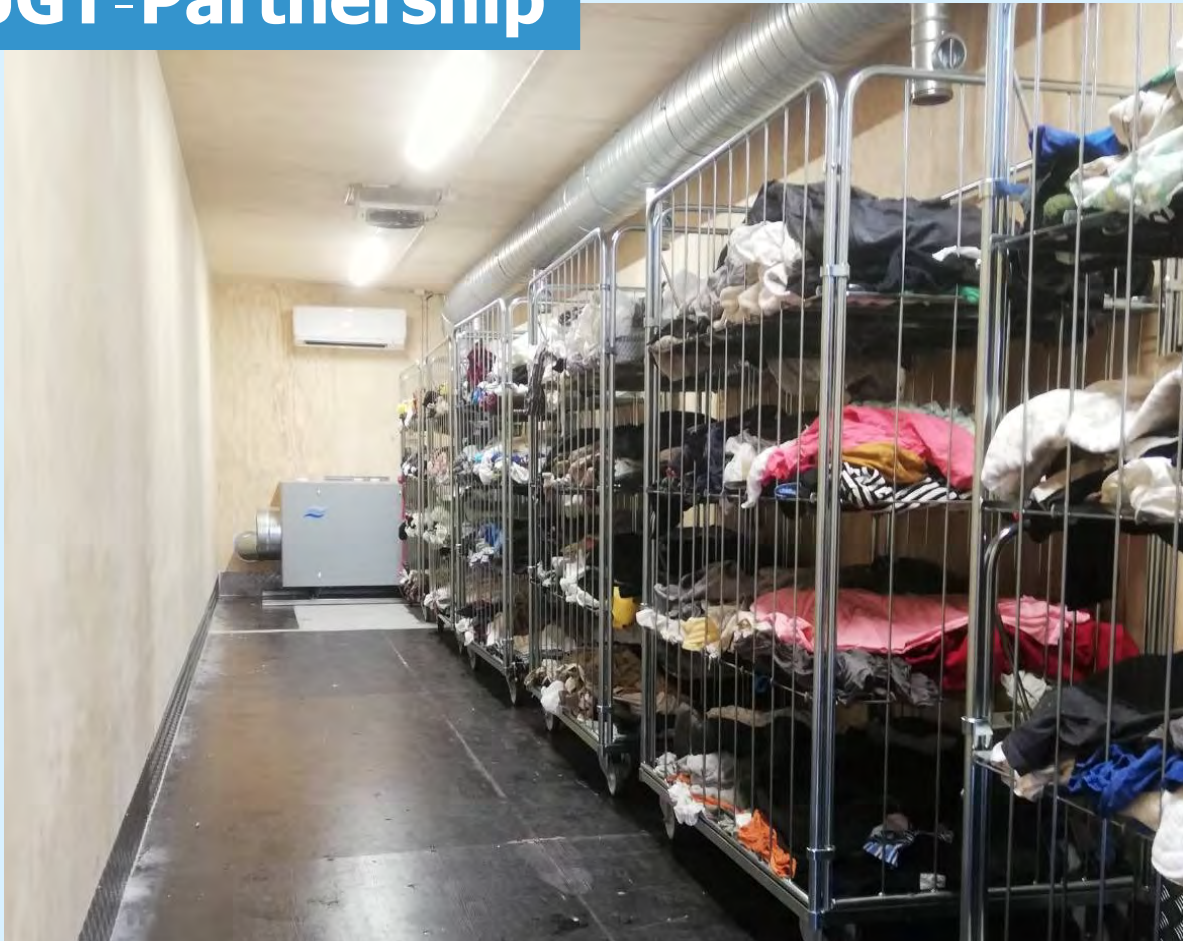
## Composition of the Two Textile Streams

The collection for reuse has been in place for decades and is therefore nearly optimal in terms of composition. The collection for recycling has only existed for a couple of years and has not yet had enough time to function optimally. Approximately half of the collected textile waste is immediately found to be either reusable or recyclable textiles. This mixture is sent for professional manual sorting. About one-third of the textile waste is only suitable for incineration.



Composition of textile waste. Week 1-36 2024.

## 5. FUGT-Partnership



Inside the dehumidifier build for UFF-Humana to use during the FUGT-Project.

The FUGT Partnership (Functional Drying of Recyclable Textiles) was established with the aim of exploring treatment options for textiles collected through the new household textile waste collection system. The partnership investigates innovative solutions for sustainable alternatives to incinerating damp/wet textiles, such as using dehumidification technology.

### UFF-Humana's Role in the FUGT-Partnership

- 1) Pre-sorting textile waste collected in the Municipality of Copenhagen.
- 2) Removing textiles that are wet/damp but clean.
- 3) Drying these damp, clean textiles in a dehumidifier.
- 4) Sorting the dried textiles into reusable, recyclable, and unusable categories.

By comparing the sorting results with the dehumidifier's energy consumption, it is now possible to assess whether it is worth "elevating" unusable textiles up the waste hierarchy by drying them, making them suitable for recycling or reuse. The results of the FUGT project will be compiled in a report for further use by municipalities and other stakeholders.

### Participants in the FUGT-partnership

- Københavns Kommune
- Polarkøl A/S
- Condair A/S
- Revaluate I/S
- Amager Ressource Center (arc)
- UFF-Humana

## 6. Export of Used Clothing

The collected reusable clothing is packed in big bags (see p. 9) and then sold to professional sorting centers in Europe. At these centers, employees have extensive knowledge of which types of clothing are suitable for different parts of the world.

The clothing is sorted, often into hundreds of categories, and then sent where there is a market for them. Some remain in Europe (often under the "trend and vintage" category). It is also from these professional sorting centers that UFF-Humana Second Hand stores in Denmark get their goods. A portion of the clothing is sold to markets in Asia and Africa<sup>10</sup>.



Second Hand Store operated by ADPP-Guinea-Bissau.



Clothing Market in Malawi.

### Why Export Used Clothing?

In Denmark, around 47,500 tons of textiles are collected after use by charitable organizations and private actors for reuse<sup>11</sup>. The majority is reused or recycled abroad, with a much smaller portion reused in Denmark. A requirement that textiles remain in Denmark would have the following consequences:

- 1) People in Denmark would need to reuse more than twice as much clothing as we currently do.
- 2) Denmark would need to recycle at least 20 times more textiles than we do now.

The alternative, if textiles are to remain in Denmark, would be to send them for incineration, which conflicts with the Waste Hierarchy. Exporting reusable clothing ensures that the garments are used for longer, thereby reducing the need for new clothing production. The transportation of the clothing accounts for only 11% of the environmental impact—the majority (80%)<sup>12</sup> comes from the production of the clothing. Furthermore, an insufficient supply of used clothing, for example in Africa, could potentially create a larger market for cheap "fast fashion."



Sellers of used clothing, Malawi.

## Second-Hand Clothing: A Valuable Resource in African Countries

The attention regarding export of used clothing has prompted industry associations involved in the second-hand clothing trade to speak out. Industry associations in Kenya (MCAK) and Ghana (GUCDA), representing 4.5 million clothing traders<sup>13</sup> combined, highlight the significant economic and social potential that the clothing represents for the two countries and their populations. For them, second-hand clothing is a valuable resource. Ghanaians trading in second-hand clothing contributes with approximately 29.5 million USD annually in direct import taxes to the state<sup>14</sup>, while for Kenya, the figure is 100 million USD<sup>15</sup>.

The trade in used clothing creates employment and income opportunities, particularly for women and especially in the informal sector. With relatively modest start-up capital, one can buy a bale of used clothing and start a business. This trade allows individuals to afford a dignified livelihood, support themselves and their families, and send their children to school.

### Does It End Up as Waste?

Waste management systems in many African countries are generally inadequate. All waste ends up in landfills, including textiles. Studies from Ghana's largest landfill show that about 2% of the waste there is textile waste<sup>16</sup>.



Second Hand Seller in Malawi.



Clothes Sellers waiting for new stock.

Looking at a piece of textile in a landfill in Ghana, you can't tell if it arrived as new or second-hand, or how long it was used before ending up there.

# 7. Environmental Management Certification

In June 2024, UFF-Humana was certified according to the ISO 14001 environmental management system, which is the international standard for environmental management. This certification func-



ISO 14001-certificate

tions as an internal management system focused on creating a structure through which we can implement various environmentally improving initiatives.

By using the system, UFF-Humana can reduce its environmental impact by minimizing factors such as pollution, waste generation, and other undesirable emissions. Additionally, the environmental management system improves the organization's use of resources by optimizing energy consumption, which can help reduce operational costs.

## UFF-Humana's current objectives:

1. To reduce the amount of textile waste sent for incineration and increase the recycling rate.
2. To optimize our energy consumption for heating and electricity.
3. To reduce the volume of clothing returned from our stores.
4. To optimize our clothing collection for reuse.

### A Continuous Commitment

ISO 14001 helps UFF-Humana identify, manage, and control our environmental impact while continually improving our environmental efforts. At the same time, ISO 14001 is a continuous certification, where we are audited annually and must be re-certified every three years. This means we are constantly evaluating our environmental activities and making improvements.

### Our Workflow

In our ISO 14001 environmental management system, we have outlined our processes and improved all work procedures, educating employees to identify environmental aspects in their daily tasks. The system sharpens UFF-Humana's focus on the environment, and everyone contributes to identifying areas for further environmental consideration.

# 8. UFF Humana Second Hand

UFF-Humana operates two Second Hand stores in Copenhagen. The primary purpose of these stores is to contribute to the funding of UFF-Humana's development projects and reduce environmental impact by promoting the reuse of clothing.

The stores sell second-hand clothing, shoes, and bags. In this way, UFF Humana Second Hand contributes to a more circular textile and fashion sector and helps raise awareness among Danes about the potential of second-hand clothing. A shift towards more circular production and consumption is one of the key factors in reducing the negative environmental impact of the textile industry.

### Functions of Second-Hand Clothing

It makes a difference when second-hand shops are made accessible and attractive to consumers. Ideally, second-hand clothing should re-

place new clothing, rather than merely supplement a steadily increasing consumption of newly produced clothing. Since a large portion of a garment's environmental footprint (80%) comes from production, it makes sense to focus on extending the life of the clothing as long as possible. This is true even if it involves the

clothing "traveling around the world" during this extension process, as transport only accounts for a smaller part of the environmental footprint (11%)<sup>18</sup>. The quality of the clothing is a crucial factor for it to be used repeatedly—whether by people in Africa, Asia, or Europe.



UFF-Humana works to clarify the environmental benefits of buying second-hand clothing instead of new. The stores are included in UFF-Humana's ISO certification, and therefore continuously work on optimizing their environmental impact in store operations.



UFF Humana Second Hand, Nørrebrogade.



UFF Humana Second Hand, Vesterbrogade.



# 9. Projects with Environmental Benefits

When others are in need, we must help—that is the core ethic guiding UFF-Humana's operations. We support people in developing countries by fulfilling basic needs such as food security, education, and health. Environmental improvement, the organization's second main objective, is also reflected in the types of development projects UFF-Humana supports.

In 2023 UFF-Humana donated 2,1 mil. dkk for development projects in Africa

## Climate Adaptation Projects

UFF-Humana supports projects focused on climate adaptation. Examples include "Building community-led resilience through climate change adaptation"<sup>19</sup> in the Makoni district of Zimbabwe and "Farmers Club"<sup>20</sup> in Oio, Guinea-Bissau.



Women are harvesting crops in their model garden in the Farmers' Club project in Guinea-Bissau.

In both projects, farmers are organized into clubs of 50 people, where they can exchange experiences, knowledge, and practices.

They receive training in sustainable and modern farming methods and gain practical experience by applying these methods in model gardens.

Afterwards, they can implement what they have learned in their own farms and vegetable gardens. These projects contribute to better food security for the farmers and their families, while also improving their economy, as they can sell their crops. This makes them more resilient to climate change and prepares them to take better care of the environment in their agriculture.

## Teacher Training and the Environment

UFF-Humana supports teacher training in Guinea-Bissau. The college trains teachers specifically to work in rural areas<sup>21</sup>.



ADPP Teacher Training College in Casheu, Guinea-Bissau.

As teachers, the students are expected to contribute significantly to their local communities. They introduce practical activities, workshops, excursions, and topics relevant to building resilience against climate change. Health, nutrition, culture, pedagogy, and administration are all part of their work as teachers.

# 10. Future Perspectives on Textile Management



The EU's Waste Framework Directive lays the foundation for how waste is managed within the EU. It dictates that all member states must create plans for waste prevention and management, as well as introduce mandatory separate collection of textile waste. The waste hierarchy and the "polluter pays" principle are among the concepts defined in the Waste Framework Directive<sup>22</sup>.

## **The Future of the Scandinavian Model**

In the summer of 2024, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers adopted several amendments to the Waste Framework Directive, including a provision that used textiles collected separately are considered waste upon collection. This change challenges the Scandinavian model, where the individual who disposes of used clothing determines whether it is waste or reusable (i.e., not waste), and where

local civil society organizations collect reusable clothing to support charitable causes. The Scandinavian model is based on trust in Scandinavians' good judgment and supports the desire to do good for both people and the environment. The persistent awareness efforts by collection organizations have helped Scandinavians become very skilled at distinguishing between reusable clothing and textile waste. With the mentioned changes to the Waste Framework Directive, there is a risk that this valuable knowledge will be lost.

## **Think Globally**

The textile sector is highly globalized. Raw materials and finished products are traded across international borders, and much of the clothing we use in Europe is produced in Asia. Textiles can only become circular if the global nature of their lifecycle is recognized and used as the ba-

sis for strategies and practices. People in Asia and Africa form a significant part of the foundation for Europe's environmental performance. Europeans' used clothing is exported to Africa and Asia, where the ultimate use of the clothing takes place, fully aligned with the intent of the waste hierarchy.

Here, people make the necessary efforts to ensure that the clothing enjoys a long period of use, after which it is recycled in ways that make practical and economic sense. In Europe, we are doubly dependent on people in Africa and Asia: they produce our clothing cheaply, and they also ensure it is reused and recycled when we no longer want to use it.

Banning the export of used clothing to poor countries in Africa hinders the circularity of textiles. Of course, unusable textile waste should remain in Europe, where we have a good

infrastructure for waste management. But reusable clothing, non-waste, should be reused as long as possible to achieve the greatest environmental benefit, if not here, then elsewhere. The transport of used clothing does not represent the greatest environmental burden: the production of the clothing does. Banning exports does not automatically increase reuse at home. Instead, there is a risk that it will lead to the recycling or incineration of reusable clothing — in direct conflict with the waste hierarchy.

Separate collection of all textile waste places large and new demands on all types of actors in the textile sector's value chain. There are still no solutions for everything; there is a lack of sorting capacity and sustainable recycling methods. To implement the Climate Plan it is important that those who are capable, take action. The ball is in our court.



Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home, Zimbabwe

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# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Humana People to People website

<sup>2</sup> UFF-Humana website

<sup>3</sup> Earth Overshoot Day is the day in a calendar year when it is estimated that the Earth's population has used up the amount of resources that the planet can regenerate in one year. If the entire global population lived like we do in Denmark, Earth Overshoot Day in 2024 would have already been on March 16th.

<sup>4</sup> European Environment Agency (2024)

<sup>5</sup> The Danish Environmental Protection Agency A: Waste Hierachy

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2023)

<sup>7</sup> Regeringen (2020)

<sup>8</sup> The Danish Environmental Protection Agency B: Tekstilaffaldspartnerskabet

<sup>9</sup> The Danish Environmental Protection Agency C: The Danish Environmental Protection Agency has created informational materials that clearly and simply show which types of textiles should be sorted into each of the two streams.

<sup>10</sup> Textile Transparency Report 2023

<sup>11</sup> The Danish Environmental Protection Agency(2023)

<sup>12</sup> European Environment Agency (2022)

<sup>13</sup> Odonkor, Stephen (2024) og Mitumba Association

<sup>14</sup> Odonkor, Stephen (2024)

<sup>15</sup> Mitumba Association (2023)

<sup>16</sup> Odonkor, Stephen (2024)

<sup>17</sup> Forcecertification.com

<sup>18</sup> European Environment Agency (2022)

<sup>19</sup> DAPP-Zimbabwe

<sup>20</sup> ADPP-Guinea-Bissau A

<sup>21</sup> ADPP-Guinea-Bissau B

<sup>22</sup> European Commission (2023)





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