

Faro: making quality fashion accessible and combatting textile waste in Africa

Africa is the dumping ground of the global fast-fashion industry. Discarded second-hand clothing from Europe and North America is typically sold to textile merchants in countries like Kenya and Ghana, where it is then resold to low-income communities who can't afford new clothing.

According to a Greenpeace report, roughly 70% of African consumers rely on the second-hand market or cheap synthetic imports that lack durability. Almost 40% of the imported clothing – dubbed 'obroni wawu' (dead white man's clothes) in Ghana – arrives in an unusable state. Bales are stuffed with shredded garments and torn, stained items that are beyond repair.

What happens next is an environmental disaster. In Kenya alone, the textile waste amounts to around 200 tonnes a day, much of which is dumped in landfills, rivers and drains.



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Enter Faro, a pioneering 're-commerce' startup with a bold vision: to make fashion affordable and combat textile waste across Africa. Founded in June 2023, Faro partners with global fashion brands to source high-quality unsold clothing for resale in Africa, disrupting the inflow of problematic textiles by giving customers a sustainable alternative.

‘Our commitment to the circular economy goes beyond waste prevention; we’re dedicated to addressing the existing problem,’ says Faro co-founder David Torr. This dedication has given rise to Faro Impact, a textile recycling initiative. ‘For every kilo of high-quality sustainable clothing we sell, Faro Impact will recycle an equivalent kilo of textile waste.’

Faro’s leadership team – comprising David Torr, Michelle Sibanda, Amber Penney and William McCarren – boasts a wealth of experience in building and promoting ventures in Africa. Torr emerged as a key figure in South Africa with his co-founding of UCook, an online food retailer, and his involvement with the African cosmetics brand Lelive.



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Sibanda worked in top marketing and media firms before joining Faro to drive its innovative marketing strategy. Penney has held leadership roles in prominent African tech ventures like Reflective Learning. McCarren, equipped with experience at Amazon and Jumia, co-founded and built ZUMI, Africa’s largest B2B platform for clothing with a mission to reduce textile waste.

It was during his time at Zumi, which at its peak sold three million garments every month, that McCarren realised that more needed to be done to tackle the problem: ‘We spent three years trying to reduce waste in the second-hand clothing market, but people wouldn’t change their ways. To fix the problem, I knew we had to build a new supply chain.’



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Embracing the need to disrupt the status quo, Faro has partnered with the Bestseller group, whose fashion brands include Jack & Jones, LMTD, Only, Vero Moda, Vila and Noisy May, to bring its unsold brand-new stock directly to the South African market, where it will be sold at up to 70% off retail prices.

Thanks to one of the largest pre-seed funding rounds in South Africa, Faro is embarking on a rapid store roll-out, with the first outlet scheduled to open in Mitchell’s Plain on the Cape Flats in October 2023. Five more bricks-and-mortar stores are

set to open at different locations within eight months, with twenty stores planned over the next year and a half.



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These stores have the potential to improve environmental outcomes, with the projection that one purchase can prevent up to 30 g of waste and 2,13 kg of carbon emissions. 'The roll-out could have incredible environmental implications,' says McCarren. As the startup grows, and with it the opportunity for more stores, more waste will be diverted.



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Furthermore, each store will act as a distribution hub for a network of retail agents. 'Every store will double up in function, trading to customers directly like a traditional retail establishment but also acting as a depot for micro merchants, who will be given discounts on items they buy for resale in the market,' Sibanda explains. 'This gives Faro deeper penetration into peri-urban markets, but, more importantly, it means that every store directly enables the township economy and the entrepreneurs who trade within it.'

Equipped with a multi-layered sense of purpose, Faro presents a smart and stirring solution that has the potential to radically transform the fashion economy on the continent by providing African consumers with a high-quality, sustainable alternative.

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