

The story of your T-shirt

Lagos, Nigeria – Yaba market is busy, hot and dusty. People are looking around the second-hand shops, picking through piles of old clothes, and they're all hoping for bargains. The clothes for sale are from America and Europe and they usually sell out fairly quickly. They are called 'mitumba' or 'dead white men's clothes' – people in Africa can't believe that a living person has thrown these clothes away. 'These clothes make people's dreams come true,' says Abeke, a shop owner. 'Everyone wears them, from poor people to politicians. When they put them on, you can't tell the difference between rich and poor.' At the front of Abeke's store is a plain cotton T-shirt with the slogan 'Get Real'. It's picked up by a young man who examines it carefully. He tries it on and smiles – it fits him and it looks good. It's a simple T-shirt, but it has a complex story.

20 A few years ago, the T-shirt started life in a cotton field in Uzbekistan. The cotton was watered every day and harmful pesticides were used in the field. As the cotton grew, a young woman called Feruza picked it. She worked in the field for ten 25 to twelve hours every day in temperatures of over 30°C, but she was paid very little. Sometimes the pesticides hurt her eyes.

Next, the cotton was flown to India. The T-shirt was made in a tiny sweatshop in Mumbai. 30 There were twenty adults in the shop, five children and no air conditioning. The adults made the T-shirts and the children checked them. Ten-year-old Roshan checked our T-shirt that day. Although he worked long hours (from 35 6 a.m. to 4 p.m.), he was only paid a few rupees, but it helped to buy food for his family.



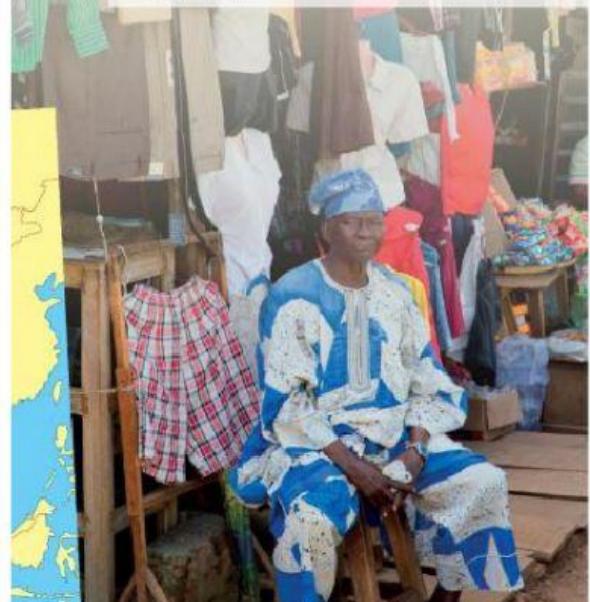
The finished T-shirt was sent to a huge discount shop in the UK. The people who shopped there didn't know where the clothes came from. They didn't want to spend a lot of money, but they wanted to be fashionable and to look good. The T-shirt was cheap and it was bought by fifteen-year-old Ryan who liked the slogan. It was washed, worn and ironed and, after a few months, Ryan threw it away. His mum took it to a charity shop with some other old clothes, which were sold to an export company. A few weeks later, the T-shirt made its way to Yaba market in Nigeria.

40 Back at the market, the young man takes off the T-shirt and looks at the \$3 price tag. He offers Abeke \$1.50 because that's all the money he's got. Abeke shakes her head. As she hangs up the T-shirt at the front of the shop, the charity shop's price tag is still on the back: 25p.

45 The journey of a T-shirt tells many stories. Stories about people, countries and cultures. Stories about farmers and factory workers. Stories about sweatshops and shopping centres. But most of all, it's a story about choices, and our choices can make a difference. Do you really need another T-shirt? Do you care where it's from? What's the cost to the environment? What's the human cost? Think about it, because our choices could start a new story.

Did you know?

- Ten thousand litres of water are used to make one T-shirt.
- A 200-gram T-shirt can use up to 5 tonnes of resources.
- 3.4 billion T-shirts are sold in the USA every year.
- Children as young as seven work in cotton fields and sweatshops.



3 Read the text again and choose the correct answers.

- 1 Why are the clothes called 'mitumba'?

 - a Because they make people's dreams come true.
 - b Because Africans think they come from dead people.
 - c Because they are cheap second-hand clothes.
- 2 Why do Africans like Western clothes?

 - a Because they are not expensive.
 - b Because only rich people wear them.
 - c Because everyone looks the same in them.
- 3 Why does Roshan work long hours?

 - a Because he's paid very well.
 - b Because he has to help his family.
 - c Because he only works one day a week.
- 4 Which sentence best describes people in the discount clothes shop?

 - a They buy a lot of expensive new clothes.
 - b They often know where clothes are made.
 - c They don't pay much for the clothes.
- 5 Why doesn't the young man buy the T-shirt from Yaba market?

 - a Because it's the wrong size.
 - b Because he hasn't got enough money.
 - c Because the charity shop is cheaper.
- 6 According to the writer, shoppers ...

 - a don't care how T-shirts are made.
 - b can't stop sweatshops.
 - c could change the T-shirt's story.