



A BRA ABROAD

Spare lingerie embarks on a journey from England to Senegal under a drive to share fabric wealth with those who don't have access to it. The Big Bra Hunt is a unique campaign by Oxfam to help women in Africa.

Photographs by **Abbie Trayler-Smith**.

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After going through a large pile, a turquoise bra catches Mami's (Madijiguene Ndiaye) fancy. One of many, this bra was originally donated by Charlotte Eagar from the United Kingdom and distributed by trader Ndeye Faye at the weekly market in Dakar. Bras are in particularly high demand in West Africa, as few businesses there have the technology to make good-quality bras. The Big Bra Hunt came into existence when the Oxfam-funded social enterprise Frip Ethique (meaning 'ethical second hand clothing') in Senegal, run primarily by women, sent a request to the UK offices for more bras.

As a result Oxfam, through a well-



Mami (Madijiguene Ndiaye) buys a turquoise bra originally donated by Charlotte Eagar from the UK



(From top) Donated clothes from Oxfam shops around the country are sorted into batches (lightweight, heavyweight, vintage etc) by workers and then baled up at the Wastesaver Site in Huddersfield, Yorkshire. Over 150 tonnes of lightweight clothing is sent from England to Senegal each month



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publicised campaign and an online website, encouraged women in the UK and around the globe to pull out 'unloved or forgotten bras, ones that looked better in the shop, or gifts that never fit well' and bring them to a local Oxfam shop. These donated bras (amongst other spare clothing) are then either sold in their UK shops, using the money generated towards a poverty-busting campaign in Africa, or

are recycled, sorted and sold in Senegal.

Oxfam, an international confederation of 17 organisations working in around 90 countries worldwide to find solutions to poverty and injustice, has been working in Senegal since 1981. It focuses mostly on gender, governance, peace and security in Casamance, and fair trade in the country. Over 20 per cent of the local economy in Senegal is dedicated to

second-hand clothing with over 70 per cent of the population wearing them. Used clothing is also one of the top 10 American exports to Africa.

Oxfam has tried to emphasise the fact that this campaign in no way objectifies women's bodies or sexualises bras, by getting celebrities such as Helen Mirren to endorse this effort, and even using an 83-year-old ex-model as their poster child. So far, this second-hand-clothing project has been a great way to ensure donated clothes make the most money possible, while also providing gainful employment to Senegalese women traders, like Ndeye Faye, who purchase clothes from the Colobane sales centre and sell them in Dakar. ■