



WasteAid's work in Cameroon: Douala-III's first plastics recovery facility



Background to WasteAid

In low-income countries 90% of waste is openly dumped or burned, posing a threat to people and planet, and missing the opportunity to generate income from recyclable waste. To address this WasteAid promotes the concept of a circular economy, where resources are kept in use for as long as possible, maximising their value and minimising waste. We tackle different strands of work through three signature programmes.



WASTEPRENEUR PROGRAMME

Our wastepreneur programme creates decent employment and tackles waste. We work with informal waste collectors and invest in their professional development and capacity for collection to improve their working conditions and income from waste, whilst scaling up waste recovery into the materials value chain.



CIRCULAR ECONOMY NETWORK PROGRAMME

Our circular economy network programme builds links between private sector entrepreneurs and innovators and to donors, research institutions and corporates to help fast track local solutions to the circular economy.



FIRST STEP WASTE SYSTEMS PROGRAMME

Through our first-step waste systems programme we support innovation and deliver appropriate waste segregation and collection systems with communities, local authorities and the private sector to recover resources and generate income from waste recovery and reuse.

Our programmes improve knowledge and practice on waste recovery and recycling, sustain and create green jobs, improve working conditions and income. This reduces water, soil and air pollution to preserve natural resources and reduces climate change emissions, resulting in healthier people and planet. It also creates wider social change, as people shift their behaviour around discarding waste and see those working in waste increasingly positively.



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WasteAid in Cameroon

In Cameroon WasteAid has been working with the local authorities and three waste collector groups in the third arrondissement (borough) of Douala on our first-step programme. Douala is the largest city in Cameroon and is strategically important as it lies at the mouth of the Wouri River where it enters the Wouri estuary. The estuary contains extensive mangrove forests, which are being damaged by pollution and population pressures, but need protection as they serve an important role in providing vital habitats for numerous species, protecting coastlines from erosion and storm damage, sequestering carbon, and filtering pollutants from water.

To scale up waste recovery in Douala-III a plastics recovery facility was constructed on land allocated by the local authority. Three ambitious informal waste collector groups (Groupe JIRE, ASHOPE and Enprosa Action) were identified early on and joined the development of the facility, becoming its first users upon inauguration in July 2023. Group members (13 women and 15 men) underwent a training programme to improve their knowledge and skills on different types of plastic waste, their value, how to work safely to recover and process the material and first aid. Group leaders also took training on finances and operating a viable business. The facility has not only provided a safe space to work and store materials, it has also enabled the collectors to increase their productivity by providing a washing station to efficiently clean bottles and a hydraulic baler to compress bottles for sale into the recycling market. Not only does this increase their throughput, it also improves the purchase price.



“ I’ve been able to set up a network of collectors that work for me ”

In its first year of operation, the collector groups, now formalised and licensed under the cooperative Scoops Eco-Friendly, have collected and processed over 71,589 kg of plastics, equivalent in carbon dioxide savings to replanting circa one hectare of forest. The collective has been challenged by a plummet in off-take prices for plastics linked to changes in national policies, leading to some changes in the team. Led by Mama Pasto, the remaining cooperative members continue to collect and process waste to recover it back into the materials value chain.

“People used to take us for fools, but now society acknowledges us”, comments Mama Pasto about her role as a waste collector. “The centre has helped me avoid theft of materials I’ve collected as I can store them safely here and I’ve been able to set up a network of collectors that work for me . Through the centre we’ve also got to know EcoGreen.” EcoGreen is a plastics off-taker with which Scoops Eco-Friendly now has an on-going contract to sell them waste plastics. Another member, who prefers not to be named, explains that working at the centre has helped her pay school fees for her two young brothers. It has also grown her independence and confidence to speak up for herself.



Participating in the project has been life-changing for Ganyou Mbambou Rose, who sorts incoming waste. She explains that it has enabled her to meet new people who have been helping her to develop herself. Working at the centre “gets me out of my four walls and chases away stress.”

Kamdoum Franck is a machinist at the centre, compacting plastic bottles into bales after they have been washed by other workers. Before this he worked in a scrap depot. He says that the centre has reaffirmed his courage to work in waste and people take them more seriously now, some even asking for jobs at the centre. “It has given me stability and status . [...] I have responsibility and an open field of vision to new projects.”

“ [The centre] has given me stability and status ”

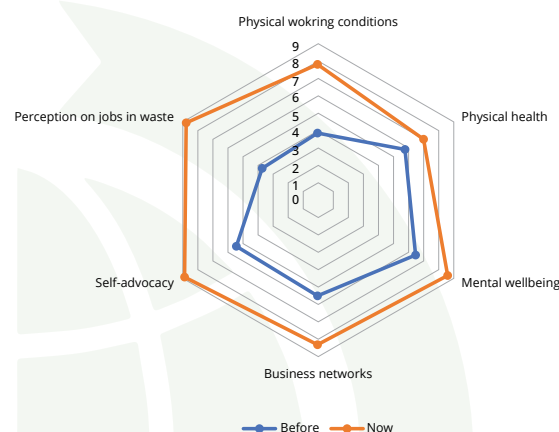
The centre has enabled three groups of waste pickers to move from working informally to formally. Having previously been overseen by WasteAid, they now work under the oversight of the local authority, which is seeking to replicate WasteAid’s plastics recovery facility model more widely across the city as an integrated component of its waste management due to its multiple benefits. “The visible outcome is a project collecting waste in Douala ”, explains Moutassi Ebongue Paul Alain, Head of Service Cooperation and Partnership for Douala-III and focal point for the project. “Environmentally, this reduces flooding, reduces water-borne disease and improves the lives of the population. It’s allowing people to earn their daily bread by creating employment. We will continue to assure the functioning of the waste recovery centre as it is within the framework of the mayoral prerogatives to deal with waste.”



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Our programmes aim to create decent employment to tackle waste. To determine whether we achieve this we examined different elements of the participating cooperative members' work, comparing them from now to before they started working at the plastics recovery facility. We explored their physical working conditions, their physical and mental health, the networks that are important for the success of their business, their ability to advocate for themselves and others' perception of their work. All of these are factors that contribute to dignified, decent work. As the diagram shows, all of these elements improved from prior to participating in the programme (blue line) to now (orange line). Big improvements are evident in participants' physical working conditions through the provision of the facility and equipment, as well as their ability to self-advocate having gained knowledge and confidence through professional training. Significantly, the cooperative members are also changing other people's perception of working in waste as they show that a decent living can be earned from waste whilst also contributing to cleaning up a community.

Changes in wastepickers' lives a year after joining WasteAid's first-step waste systems programme



The plastics recovery facility was made possible through funding from:



Find out more about our work at: wasteaid.org



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