

Improving plastic waste collection and empowering women in Indonesia

In our Insights Series, TRANSFORM shares successes and learnings from our projects to:

- Help the SME and entrepreneur community gain knowledge and learn from our projects
- Showcase to funders what can be achieved through impact-led initiatives

PROJECT AT A GLANCE:

CONNECTING COMMUNITY WASTE COLLECTORS TO RECYCLING MARKETS

Lohjinawi works with local waste banks across East Java to collect recyclable plastic and connect community waste collectors to recycling markets. By strengthening these local collection networks, the project helps more plastic waste enter formal recycling systems while creating income opportunities for community members, especially women.

THE CHALLENGE

Indonesia generates around 6.8 million tonnes of plastic waste each year, with East Java one of the country's largest contributors. Yet only 10% of this plastic waste is recycled. One barrier to improving recycling rates is the limited sorting of waste at household level. This is partly due to low awareness of waste management practices and limited local infrastructure, including overburdened landfill systems. As a result, large volumes of recyclable plastic are lost from the recycling system before they can be collected.

Find out more

Collaboration is key to scaling impact enterprises. TRANSFORM has captured lessons from over a decade of experience supporting impact enterprises into a playbook, a practical 'how-to' guide for public, private and non-profit leaders seeking to build and manage successful public-private partnerships. [Learn more here.](https://www.transform.global)

www.TRANSFORM.global



THE INNOVATION

Lohjinawi works with waste banks, small aggregators and material recovery facilities to collect recyclable plastic from communities across East Java. More than 5,000 community members, many of them women, take part in waste collection and sorting activities that generate additional income. TRANSFORM's support helped Lohjinawi expand its waste collection network by delivering training on waste management, waste sorting and capacity building in schools and local communities, including support to strengthen leadership, teamwork and the management of local waste-bank activities.

THE IMPACT

With support from TRANSFORM, Lohjinawi established 412 new collection points and partnered with 16 recycling off-takers across East Java, collecting around 23 tonnes of plastic waste each month. The project delivered training to 488 community members and students, giving communities the tools needed to establish new waste banks and strengthen local recycling systems.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Lohjinawi plans to continue expanding its network of community waste banks by increasing the number of collection points and training more people on waste management and sorting. Through this work, it aims to collect and process more plastic waste while continuing to support income-generating opportunities for community members, especially women.

INSIGHTS:

EXPANDING WASTE COLLECTION NETWORKS THROUGH COMMUNITY TRAINING

1. SECURE LOCAL PERMISSION EARLY BY WORKING THROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD LEADERS AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Establishing new waste banks required formal permissions and local buy-in before waste management activities could begin.

Lohjinawi engaged neighbourhood leaders and municipal environmental services at the outset to secure approval to deliver training and establish waste banks in each area. This early engagement helped unlock access to communities, legitimise new waste management activities and enable the first waste banks to be established, creating a foundation for expanding the collection network across East Java.



2. PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL WORKFORCE NEEDS AS COLLECTION NETWORKS EXPAND

Recruiting enough workers became more difficult as operations grew.

As Lohjinawi scaled its collection network, the volume of plastic arriving for sorting and segregation grew rapidly. This created pressure on labour-intensive operations and highlighted the limits of relying on existing or nearby labour alone. Lohjinawi responded by using open recruitment to widen the pool of potential workers. The enterprise also partnered with local stakeholders to promote these roles, reaching more potential candidates.

3. PROVIDE PRACTICAL TRAINING TO HELP WORKERS IDENTIFY PLASTIC TYPES AND IMPROVE SORTING QUALITY

Workers needed training to recognise different plastic types so materials could be sorted correctly and sold to recycling companies.

To ensure workers could operate effectively, Lohjinawi delivered practical training focused on identifying different plastic types such as PET and HDPE. To reinforce understanding, Lohjinawi sometimes brought in external experts to explain sorting criteria and quality standards, helping improve accuracy in segregation and reduce contamination. This enabled materials to meet recycling industry requirements and be sold at better prices.

4. ADAPT TRAINING APPROACHES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Participants required different levels of time and support to understand waste management practices.

Lohjinawi delivered training to a wide range of participants, including students and community members of different ages, bringing in professionals in waste aggregation to train workers on optimal waste segregation practices. It found that some groups needed more time to understand how waste should be sorted correctly. In response, Lohjinawi adjusted training schedules and provided additional or follow-up sessions where needed, recognising that a single, standardised approach was not sufficient for all participants.



5. WORK WITH MULTIPLE OFF-TAKERS TO MANAGE FLUCTUATIONS IN PLASTIC WASTE PRICES

Changes in the prices offered by recycling companies meant Lohjinawi needed flexibility in where and when materials were sold.

Prices offered by recycling companies varied over time and across locations, creating risks for Lohjinawi's operations. To manage this, Lohjinawi worked with multiple off-takers and prioritised those located close to its warehouses to reduce transport costs. In some cases, materials were stored temporarily until prices improved, helping reduce potential losses from market volatility.



**We
TRANSFORM
Lives**



TRANSFORM is an impact accelerator that has united corporates, donors, investors and academics to support visionary enterprises across Africa and Asia between 2015 and 2026. Together, we have tested and scaled new market-based solutions to build inclusive, sustainable economies, empower marginalised communities, and drive climate-resilient growth.

By combining grant funding, business insight and research, TRANSFORM has advanced innovative business models to help solve global challenges. The initiative has been led by Unilever, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and EY.

Having delivered its intended outcomes, TRANSFORM concludes in 2026, leaving a strong legacy of more resilient enterprises and insights to inform future collaborations.