

One tonne at a time

Turning plastic waste into
economic benefit



tearfund

Tearfund in DRC

Tearfund is a Christian international relief and development organisation with over 50 years' experience in more than 50 countries around the world. Tearfund has been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since 1989 through local partners and national church networks and has had its own operational presence in eastern DRC since 2002.

Although eastern DRC is a complex, dynamic context, Tearfund's niche is that it effectively bridges the triple nexus between development, humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors and Tearfund is currently managing an annual portfolio of \$12 million in multiple sectors and provinces.



Our vision is to build a just and inclusive society in DRC in which everyone reaches their full potential and enjoys their God given human rights.

Plastic waste in Kinshasa

Kinshasa, the capital city of the DRC, used to be called Kin la belle (Kinshasa the beautiful), but is now nicknamed Kin la poubelle (Kinshasa the rubbish bin).

Home to 12 million people who create almost 9,000 tonnes of waste per day, Kinshasa has no organised waste management system. Waste is left to pile up in the streets and rivers. Discarded plastic ends up in pipes,

clogging up an already inadequate sewage system, causing flooding and leading to sickness.

Worse still, rubbish from Kinshasa goes into the Congo River, which flows directly into the Atlantic Ocean where since the 1960s the amount of plastic waste has increased significantly.



📷 River in Kinshasa where plastic waste collects

Turning plastic waste into economic benefit

Tearfund is currently working through its local partner, Eglise du Christ au Congo (ECC), on a three-year project in the Kinshasa commune of Kalamu, one of the most densely populated communes of the city.

The project launched in November 2019 and has funding of £600,000.

The project aims to remove plastic waste from the streets and waterways of Kinshasa,

transform it into marketable goods, and promote improved waste management in the city.

Business opportunities will continue after the project has ended, increased awareness of the harms of plastic waste will ensure behaviour change continues, and this understanding will fuel continued advocacy at national and local levels.

Project objectives



Plastic waste management

Plastic waste is collected and transformed into marketable goods or sold to local private companies to be recycled. This is significantly reducing the amount of waste in communities and rivers.



Employment opportunities

Waste collectors are paid to collect waste from households and public places. Those working in the factory are trained and paid to turn plastic waste into marketable products including sandals, bags and paving slabs.



Community waste management

Proper household waste management and increased awareness among people living in the community of the dangerous effects of plastic waste is improving sanitation and environmental hygiene for the community.



Local and national advocacy

Local and national advocacy is helping to encourage enforcement and implementation of existing legislation and work towards the introduction of further restrictions on production, consumption and disposal of plastics.

The story so far – one year in

Plastic waste management

In the first year, 41.3 tonnes of plastic waste were collected in Kalamu. In the next two years this figure will increase significantly as factory capacity grows. Now that the project is fully running, 11 tons of plastic waste are being removed from the streets and waterways of Kalamu every month.

A total of 48 people, 32 men and 16 women, from Kalamu have been trained as waste collectors. All waste collectors are trained in health, safety and security in waste collection activities, Tearfund's values, safeguarding, and the importance of gender equality.



A waste collector collects plastic from Kalamu waterways

36 Community Action Groups, CAGs, have been established throughout Kalamu. These consist of 1,115 volunteers who are working to make their communities waste-free. Tearfund has provided these groups with the equipment needed to work safely.

Members of CAGs are volunteers and while they collect all household waste, they are paid per kilogram of plastic waste they collect. This allows them to cover the costs of their groups.



11 tonnes of plastic waste are being removed from the streets and waterways of Kalamu every month.

CAGs have been formed in proportion to the size of the population in their districts. They will also be involved in raising awareness amongst community members as the project progresses.



A CAG cleans waste out of drains in Kalamu

The story so far – one year in

Employment opportunities

The waste collectors are paid per kilogram of plastic waste they collect, thereby providing them with safe and dignified employment.

In addition to the waste collectors, 33 women and 22 men have been trained to manufacture marketable goods from the plastic waste that has been collected. The demand for these products is high and the factory is working 5/6 days a week to produce enough quantity to meet this demand.

Other jobs created in the plastic waste value chain include transporting and processing the plastic waste ahead of it being used.

My name is Louise Kepe and I have been collecting plastic waste for one year. The money I receive for the waste I collect has allowed me to repair my house, pay for medical care for my family and meet our needs. I thank Tearfund and ECC for this project which is helping us to survive.

Louise Kepe, Waste Collector, Kalamu



55 people have been trained to transform plastic waste into marketable goods.

Overall, in the first year this project has created 71 new jobs, all of which are for people coming from vulnerable households.



Photos: Plastic waste (left) is collected and used to create marketable goods including bags (right), sandals, hats and brooms

The story so far – one year in

Income generation

Marketable goods include bags, sandals, hats and brooms are being made from plastic waste. These can be sold to provide an income for those making them, as well as to support the project.

In addition, the project is producing paving slabs. So far almost 23,500 slabs have been made from plastic waste helping to promote a circular economy. They are high quality and are being used domestically, in schools and have even been approved for use on roads by the government.



23,500 paving slabs have been made from plastic waste helping to promote a circular economy.

The project has an order for 1,500 m² of paving slabs from Mgr Bokeleale Institute and has supplied 82m² of slabs to the University of Kinshasa. Tearfund expects increased orders for all products which will contribute to economic sustainability.

As well as receiving practical training and learning skills which provide an income, all those working to transform plastic waste are trained in savings and solidarity credit unions, gender equality, and health and safety in waste management work.



Paving slab made from plastic waste



Sandals made of plastic waste. They can be sold for US\$6-9



Over the past year my standard of living has improved as a result of the training. Because I can sell bags made from plastic waste, I can now support my family. I have also signed a contract with the commune of Kasa Vubu to train 50 young women in making goods from plastic waste. I am now convinced that anything is possible, anyone can succeed. Tearfund and ECC gave me the opportunity to build a future for myself.

Cynthia Meta, making a bag from plastic waste.

The story so far – one year in

Community waste management

The project involves mass awareness raising of the harms of plastic waste and the correct management of household waste. This is being done through radio broadcasts, door-to-door messaging, distribution of leaflets, and messaging by key community leaders.



Project sensitizers prepare to deliver messaging in Kalamu

Door-to-door messaging on household waste management reached almost 70,000 people in the first year. Messaging focused on the harmful effects of waste on health, management of plastic waste in the context of COVID-19, the appropriate use of bins for waste rather than burning, and the importance of removing waste from household and community spaces.

77 church leaders participated in a workshop to strengthen their understanding of the negative impacts of plastic waste, waste management, theological understanding of waste management and care of the environment, and their role in sharing these messages to their congregations.

Faith is a central part of people’s lives in DRC. Faith leaders are trusted and respected individuals and so are able to play a transformational role in contextualising messaging, shaping cultural norms and providing practical support.



Door-to-door messaging reached almost 70,000 people in the first year.

Working with these religious leaders increases community ownership of the project and encourages quick acceptance and maintained social and behavioural changes. It also enables messaging to continue beyond the project cycle.



Church members collecting waste in Kalamu

The training we got as church leaders was new to us but we are now able to speak to our congregations and communities about good waste management. Church members have started to volunteer to clean up the community and collect waste for the project.

[Reverend Israel Nlandu, church leader who received training and is now passing messaging onto his congregation.](#)

The story so far – one year in

Local and national advocacy

Advocacy is a major component of the project in order to induce long term change. Tearfund is working to encourage enforcement and implementation of existing legislation and introduce further restrictions on the production, consumption and disposal of plastic.

Tearfund is also working to establish local networks of actors involved in plastic waste management, to demonstrate the benefits of repurposed plastic goods, and to advocate for public and private financing for enterprises which are transforming plastic waste into marketable goods.



Meetings were held with the provincial Ministry of the Environment, the President of the Provincial Assembly and senators.

Year 1 has focused on developing an advocacy plan and building the right relationships with government. Tearfund has also met with RASKIN, the Kinshasa Sanitation Authority and other organisations already working in waste management.

Lobbying meetings were held with the provincial Ministry of the Environment, the president of the Provincial Assembly and elected senators from Kinshasa. This has allowed Tearfund to highlight the need for improved waste collection and plastic disposal within communities.



📷 CAGs activities launch by the Mayor of Kalamu Commune



📷 The then Prime Minister of DRC being shown the paving slabs made from plastic waste

Year two targets



Plastic waste management

Plastic waste collection and transformation into marketable goods will continue. Through improved methods and increased capacity, the project aims to collect 200 tonnes of waste a year.



Employment opportunities

77 more heads of vulnerable households are expected to find paid employment in the plastic waste recycling value chain as it expands and capacity grows. These workers will all be trained and will benefit from safe and dignified employment.



Community waste management

Two pilot CAGs will be trained in SME management to become mini-businesses. This will allow them to move from voluntary groups reliant on project inputs to self-sufficient groups. The remaining CAGs will continue to operate as in year one.



Local and national advocacy

Tearfund will hold a stakeholder's forum which will lead into an advocacy conference. This conference will target the country's political and administrative authorities at local, provincial and national levels, as well as civil society groups.



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