Advancing a More Inclusive Plastic Waste Value Chain in Bangladesh

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Supporting waste pickers while strengthening circularity

In Bangladesh, thousands of people working in the informal waste sector play a critical role in collecting, sorting and recovering materials that would otherwise end up in landfill, waterways or the environment. Yet many waste pickers face unsafe working conditions, limited access to training and social protection, and few opportunities to improve their livelihoods. To help address these challenges, Unilever Bangladesh has partnered with Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) to strengthen plastic waste management while improving the wellbeing and economic inclusion of waste workers across Chattogram.

Launched in June 2022, the partnership operates across all 41 wards of Chattogram and brings together local government, civil society and the private sector to strengthen the city's plastic waste value chain. The initiative focuses particularly on the collection and recovery of low-value plastics, helping connect waste workers, scrap buyers and recyclers through a more organised and inclusive system.

Strengthening livelihoods and safety

A core focus of the programme is improving outcomes for the people who underpin the recycling system. Since the initiative began, more than 3,000 waste workers have received training in waste management, health and safety, and business practices. Over 200 scrap buyers and more than 2,000 waste collectors have also received protective equipment to help improve workplace safety.

The partnership has also helped strengthen financial inclusion and social protection. Participating waste workers and scrap buyers have been supported to formalise aspects of their businesses, including obtaining trade licences and opening bank accounts. In 2025, the programme introduced group insurance coverage, providing protection for 1,827 waste workers and scrap buyers in cases of accidental death or disability and helping improve financial security for workers and their families.

By combining training, safety measures and social protection, the initiative seeks to support a more resilient and dignified livelihood for workers who are often in the most vulnerable positions in the waste management system.

Delivering environmental and social impact

The programme has demonstrated how a people-centred approach can contribute to wider environmental goals. Between June 2022 and April 2026, the initiative collected

more than 32,000 tonnes of plastic waste, including both flexible and rigid plastics. Flexible plastics, which are often among the most difficult materials to recover and recycle, accounted for a significant proportion of collected material.

Alongside collection activities, the partnership promotes behaviour change and community awareness. Door-to-door campaigns have reached approximately 25,000 households, while environmental education activities have engaged more than 10,000 students in schools and madrasas across Chattogram. Schools have also received colour-coded waste bins and awareness activities designed to encourage responsible waste disposal practices.

A collaborative approach to human rights and circularity

The partnership reflects the importance of collaboration in creating more inclusive and sustainable waste management systems. By working with municipal authorities, civil society organisations and communities, the initiative aims to ensure that progress on environmental challenges also creates positive social outcomes for workers within the value chain.

Following the renewal of the partnership in 2026, Unilever Bangladesh, CCC and YPSA will continue working together to strengthen plastic collection and recycling systems, expand community awareness efforts and support waste workers who play an essential role in keeping materials in circulation. The initiative highlights how improving livelihoods, strengthening social protection and advancing circular economy solutions can go hand in hand.