West Africa Plastic Revalorisation Programme

Concept Note: For Discussion

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What This Programme Delivers

This is a programme with a specific, verifiable payoff for two groups of people. It is worth stating that before anything else.

For the women and cooperatives in the target countries. The informal sector workers who handle plastic waste in West Africa currently sit at the bottom of the value chain. They collect. They sort. They sell to intermediaries at a price they do not set. Someone else manufactures. Someone else sells. Someone else profits. This programme moves them from labour to ownership. Over nine months, each cohort builds a product from the material they already hold, with expert support they could not otherwise access, and exits with an investment-ready proposition they can take to a funder, a buyer, or a development finance institution. The income differential between a waste picker and a product owner is not marginal. It is generational.

For UNDP. UNDP has already done the hard work of entering this space. The Global Plastics Innovation Programme grants in Nigeria and Sierra Leone identified the actors. The Ghana Multi-Stakeholder Waste Recovery Initiative built the platform. The GRID Arendal Women in Informal Recycling Toolkit built the capacity. That is a serious body of investment, and it is the right foundation.

What it does not yet have is a destination. Those three initiatives are currently separate efforts without a shared exit point. This programme is the exit point: the stage at which the actors already identified, already platformed, already capacity-built, convert into investment-ready enterprises with products, markets, and funders in the room.

The return on that conversion is measurable. A programme of this kind, properly designed and delivered, should generate a minimum of ten times its cost: businesses created, income flowing to the people at the origin of the value chain, and capital unlocked at the investment readiness stage in Month 9. That is not a projection. It is a design requirement. Every contributor, from the cohort members to the expert partners to the funder, should be able to point to their share of that return in concrete, countable terms.

This is not aid. It is investment with a return.

The Problem

West Africa has three assets directly relevant to the plastic waste crisis: **volume** (raw material in abundance), **labour** (existing collection and sorting infrastructure in the informal sector), and **proximity** (communities living inside the problem who understand it in ways that no external consultant can replicate). What the region lacks is the conversion pathway: the product design capacity, process engineering knowledge, market access, and investment readiness that would turn those assets into revalorised economic value.

UNDP's existing portfolio in West Africa addresses governance, stabilisation, and small-scale grants. These are necessary but insufficient. They do not provide the structured innovation

capacity to take an informal sector cooperative or a small plastic processor from raw waste handling to a market-ready revalorised product. That gap is what this programme addresses.

The Approach

INNOCELL is a nine-month closed innovation programme that takes a purposeful group of six to ten people through a structured product development process. The methodology has been delivered across three cohort cycles since 1987 on two continents; specific outcomes are commercially confidential. It is not a corporate programme in the exclusive sense; it works with **any group that has a purpose, a commitment to show up, and something to build from.**

The programme runs in three stages:

Part 1 (Month 0). A diagnostic weekend that establishes what the group actually has: materials, skills, market relationships, constraints. No expert configuration is assembled until that picture is complete. No assumptions.

Part 2 (Months 1–8). Monthly expert-led sessions drawing on a curriculum of material science, product design, manufacturing process, regulatory pathway, market access, and finance. Experts are selected specifically for each cohort's starting point and development gaps.

Part 3 (Month 9). Each cohort presents their investment-ready proposition to an audience of relevant funders, buyers, or development finance institutions. This is the exit point from programme to market.

The programme is delivered in both English and French to reflect the linguistic reality of the region.

Programme Structure

The proposal is to run one INNOCELL cohort in each of four participating countries, with a fifth available if programme geography requires it. Each cohort of six to ten people is drawn from women-led waste cooperatives or informal sector organisations identified through GRID Arendal's existing network: groups who have already received capacity building and are ready for the next step. The gender dimension is not incidental. It is the programme's entry point and one of its primary funding justifications.

Country	Language	Rationale
Nigeria	English	Largest economy; high plastic waste volumes (Lagos, Port Harcourt); existing plastic processing sector; UNDP Global Plastics Innovation Programme already active.
Senegal	French	Stable democracy; Dakar is regional hub; visible coastal plastic pollution; strong civil society; UNDP country office well-established.
Cameroon	French / English	Bilingual bridge between programme cohorts; Yaoundé/Douala base (away from Anglophone conflict zones); sufficient industrial base.
The Gambia	English	Stable since 2017; English-speaking second anchor; small scale viable as demonstration cohort; surrounded by Senegal for logistical synergy.

Note: **Ghana** is not within the Sahel Offer envelope but UNDP has an active Waste Recovery Platform there with Netherlands co-funding. It is the natural extension cohort if the programme scales to a second phase.

Partnership Model

Three organisations bring distinct and non-overlapping capacity to this programme:

UNDP provides institutional home, country office coordination, access to in-country actors, and the credibility layer required for bilateral grant applications. UNDP does not need to fund the programme from its operational budget; the proposal is that UNDP structure and endorse it as a fundable programme to be financed by a bilateral donor.

GRID Arendal provides the knowledge base and cohort pipeline. Through their **Awareness and Capacity Building for Women in the Informal Recycling Sector** programme, a two-edition facilitation toolkit developed with GIZ and piloted with women waste pickers in Kenya, with a second edition published in June 2026 , GRID Arendal has already built the relationships, the needs assessments, and the facilitation infrastructure with informal sector women's organisations across the region. INNOCELL is the stage that follows: from capacity and awareness to product development, revalorisation, and investment readiness. The cohorts for this programme are drawn directly from GRID Arendal's existing network. GRID Arendal is co-implementer.

Andrew Henderson provides programme design, Lead Architect delivery, expert curriculum configuration, and Part 3 facilitation for all cohorts. The INNOCELL methodology is the delivery engine.

Funding

The programme budget for four cohorts, covering design, expert curriculum, Lead Architect fees, travel, and administration across nine months, sits comfortably within a single bilateral grant of €500,000 to €650,000. Netherlands (DGIS), Norway (Norad), Sweden (Sida), and Germany (GIZ/BMUV) have all funded waste management and informal sector programmes in West Africa at this scale. GIZ has already funded GRID Arendal's toolkit work directly; this programme is the natural continuation of that investment. The Ghana–Netherlands Waste Recovery Platform precedent is also directly relevant.

With UNDP's institutional endorsement, this becomes a UNDP-structured programme with a proven methodology and a bilateral donor ready to fund it.

The Ask

If we can work together on something like this idea then I am sure that something very useful will come from our collaboration. So the question for the wider organisation could be:

> *Would UNDP consider structuring and endorsing a West Africa Plastic Revalorisation Programme along these lines? If so, who within your structure would need to be part of that conversation, and when could we speak?*

This programme does not ask UNDP to start something new. The work already done in this space makes the next step easier, not harder. This programme is extending and expanding the progress to date into a self-sustaining growth model.

Defeating the endless poverty cycle by homegrown innovation, courtesy of UNDP.

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