



May 2017 – Plastic is everywhere. Not only is the durable material finding its way to landfills or oceanic gyres, but also into the food chain and, eventually, onto our dinner tables. Today, even your [sea salt](#) is almost certainly contaminated with plastic.

With the massive need for a clean-up, however, plastic also provides a less literal way of ‘making a living’. Put differently, plastic can be turned into profit, as Dutch [Champion of the Earth](#), Boyan Slat, highlighted in his viral [TED Talk](#) from 2012.

His initiative, [The Ocean Cleanup](#), recently [raised 21.7 million USD](#) to start clean-up trials in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the largest of the world’s oceanic plastic patches. But projects on a smaller scale can also

[make waves](#)

, as demonstrated by the Finnish

[Seabin](#)

– a floating rubbish bin collecting garbage from the waters of marinas, docks and ports, before it reaches the deep seas.

The idea started as one of Seabin's co-founders, Andrew Turton, was preparing for a yacht race and watched trash floating around the boat. In a stray thought, he wondered whether a rubbish bin from land could be placed into the waters, and three years later he shared the idea with his friend Peter Ceglinski.

“It was the ‘aha’-moment. I knew I could combine my experience as a product designer, boat builder and surfer to really bring the technology and project to life,” Peter Ceglinski, who became the other co-founder of Seabin, tells UNRIC.

Although the future of Seabin remains unknown, other examples demonstrate the potential profitability of collecting plastic. One of these is the Kenyan company [Kivumbi Plastic Recycling](#), founded by four Danes.



In a recent [interview with Radio24syv](#), co-founder and economist Michael Hedegaard explains how the company, in just one year, has become a relatively solid enterprise in Kenya, currently collecting 5 tons of plastic each week.

“Using a truck, we drive around to people who knows us and gather plastic to be recycled and not end up in the oceans. But a lot of people are also starting to come to us and deliver their

garbage directly,” he says, adding that Kivumbi’s biggest challenge is to expand the company quickly enough to keep up with the growing distribution.

“The business is definitely there. It does not necessarily cost much to set up, but rather requires the right organising. I believe there will be many more like us,” Michael Hedegaard says, noting that rising prices on returned plastic in, for example, Uganda might indicate the existence of even greater markets.

One example can be found in Senegal, where the flourishing company [Proplast](#) now handles the majority of the country’s plastic recycling, employing over 200 people. The company has gotten attention

[in Europe](#)

as well, and today a social enterprise called

[Waste & Hope](#)

has been created.

In order to support Proplast, in cooperation with the London School of Economics.

But originally, Proplast was created by women, and out of necessity.

“We had to walk very far in order to cultivate”, says Proplast’s founder Germaine Faye in an interview with UNRIC. “There was plastic everywhere. But as we started collecting and recycling, we got to a point where we noticed it can be turned into a business. We were making profit and today the company feeds thousands of people!”

According to Proplast’s Chief of Partnerships, Jean Francois Fillaut, the company also has launched a [crowdfunding campaign](#) in order to combat plastic in the seas.

According to Mrs Faye, the Senegalese are increasingly aware of the plastic problem. “It’s slow, but we’re getting there. What is needed is more awareness-raising. Now people are realising the environmental consequences, and also the fact that recycling is profitable for everyone – people and nature”, she says.

In the wake of Proplast’s success, more than 10 other companies have launched themselves into the plastic recycling business. With reused plastic being 50% cheaper than new, these businesses have proven much more effective than the Senegalese government’s ban of plastic bags.

The problem with the latter is, that while banning plastic might look good on paper, it still needs actual enforcement. And [according to the World Economic Forum](#) , gathering and recycling existing waste remains the more effective way of tackling the plastic problem. Perhaps because the malleable material can be transformed into ‘cold hard cash’.