

Scaling refill models requires industry-wide collaboration

TRANSFORM – a joint initiative between Unilever, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and EY – has funded and provided in-kind business support to 18 SMEs focused on building the circular economy, such as those looking to improve the lives of informal waste workers and those aiming to scale alternative business models. One of these innovators Bopinc, develops refill station distribution models and runs behaviour-change campaigns to help consumers switch from single-use to refills.



Bopinc, Kenya



Bopinc, Kenya

Refill models hold great promise, presenting many benefits to communities by reducing waste and often offering goods at lower costs.

TRANSFORM recently supported Bopinc and its partners with a pilot scheme of refill stations across both Kenya and Bangladesh. Providing distribution expertise, grant funding as well as access to multiple Unilever brands, Bopinc tested the sale of household goods like washing detergent, shampoos and handwash dispensed through its refill vending machines¹.

Find out more

Collaboration is key to scaling impact enterprises. Learn more about the successful projects that TRANSFORM has delivered alongside other enterprises. [Read more stories here.](#)

www.TRANSFORM.global

We
TRANSFORM
Lives

BOPINC'S REUSE-REFILL TRIALS² IN BANGLADESH AND KENYA INDICATE THREE KEY POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

1. Refill models can attract new customers and help to increase market share.

Obtaining a sizeable market is critical to doing business successfully. Retailers involved in the refill pilots reported increased footfall in their stores, with up to 32% of customers new to the stores in Bangladesh, while the trialled brands in Kenya found that 37% of customers were new. With 52% of customers in Kenya driven by the affordable price proposition of the refills, sales volumes trended upwards at the end of the pilots.

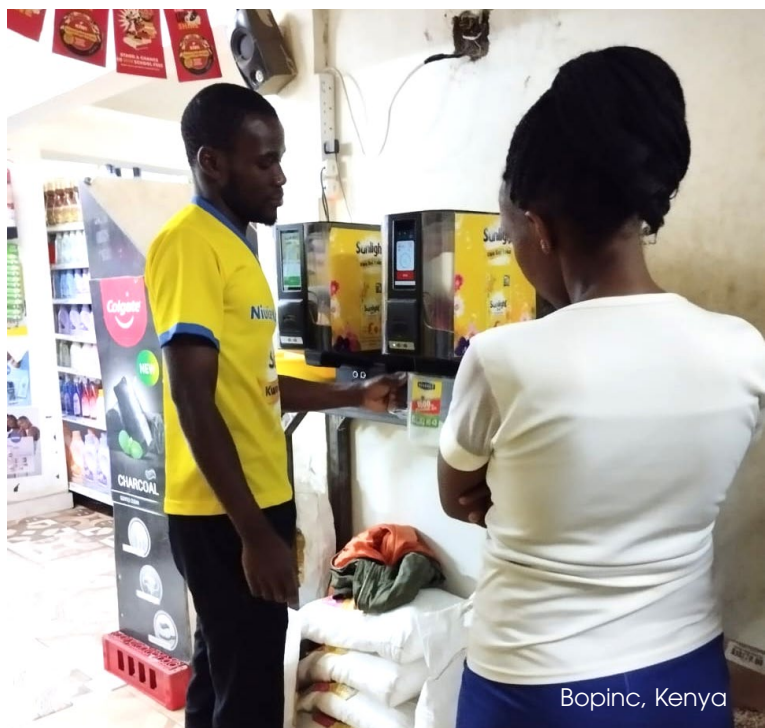
2. Refill solutions have potential to reduce packaging costs.

Refill solutions are often distributed in bulk packaging, which, alongside being better for the planet, can be more cost-effective than smaller single-use packaging. With each refill sale, the packaging cost can be incrementally reduced throughout the value chain.



Bopinc, Kenya

In both Bangladesh and Kenya, consumers could choose to bring their own packaging or purchase reusable containers at the refill station. The trials sought to better understand the types of containers desired by consumers in their respective regions – and in the next phase of development, Bopinc aims to address and improve on the environmental traits of the packaging it offers. One of the key learnings of the recent trials showed that many consumers opted to bring their own packaging.



Bopinc, Kenya

3. Refill models can support compliance with Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulation.

EPR schemes – where companies pay for the collection and processing of packaging – can be a game-changer in tackling packaging waste. EPR systems can be industry-led voluntary programmes or are mandated and underpinned by policy and regulation. Well-designed EPR schemes ensure that money is invested back into waste management and packaging innovation. It can also hold businesses to account for the packaging choices they make.

Refill models can support compliance with EPR schemes by both reducing the total amount of packaging used and helping to switch to packaging that can be better managed through either reuse or recycling. The refill trial in Kenya, for example, was able to reduce the amount of single-use plastic packaging by more than 75%³ and, where single-use plastic packaging was still required, the trial used materials that are more readily recyclable in Kenya⁴. Similarly, the trial in Bangladesh enabled some consumers to switch from hard-to-recycle plastic sachets to refillable packaging that could be reused and more easily recycled.

HOWEVER, IMPLEMENTING REFILL REQUIRES AN 'ALL-IN' APPROACH:

With increased sales in both regions offering a range of consumer benefits such as lower costs and increased convenience, Bopinc's pilots across Kenya and Bangladesh show the potential of refill solutions.

Reaching even more consumers and making a bigger impact, however, will require introducing more refill options at scale and offering a wide range of brand and product choice. For this, collaboration across the supply chain and supportive regulations are essential.

TRANSFORM invites corporates, both local and international, to test refill solutions across multiple markets and share their insights. By working together, we can help to overcome shared challenges and make refill options even more accessible and convenient for consumers.



Bopinc, Bangladesh



Bopinc, Kenya



Bopinc, Bangladesh

- 1 The refill vending machines were developed in collaboration with another TRANSFORM-supported enterprise, Smartfill. Bopinc developed the design criteria for the operational model and technical designs. Smartfill then stepped in to build the appropriate technical infrastructure, ranging from machinery optimally adapted to various retail environments and product ranges, to a cloud platform that enables brands and partners to track performance across a wide range of metrics.
- 2 Bopinc. launched a nine-month pilot program starting with two stores and growing to six in Bangladesh, as well as a six-month pilot in two stores in Nairobi, Kenya. The initiatives tested shampoos and handwash in Bangladesh, and refillable washing detergent dispensers in Kenya, enabling customers to purchase products by the gram, with a minimum purchase of 34 grams. Brand ambassadors were present in the stores for the initial months to guide customers through the buying process.
- 3 This was calculated by measuring the plastic-to-product ratio for the highest-selling Sunlight washing powder, then comparing this with the plastic-to-product ratio for the 10kg bags that Bopinc uses for its refill solution.
- 4 The 10kg refill bags that Bopinc uses are made of woven, mono-material plastic bags, which are easier to recycle as it utilises just one type of plastic with one melting point



TRANSFORM is an impact accelerator that unites corporates, donors, investors and academics to support visionary enterprises across Africa, Asia and beyond. Together, we test and scale new solutions that tackle environmental challenges, improve health and wellbeing, and build inclusive economies.

Combining grant funding, business insight and research, TRANSFORM is advancing the development of innovative business models to help solve global challenges. It was established in 2015 and is led by Unilever, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and EY.