



80 Million Soap Bars Distributed Worldwide | Impact Report 2024-2025

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Executive Director's Message:

2025 marked a major milestone for Eco-Soap Bank: our 10-year anniversary.

It is hard to put into words what that means to me. What began as a simple idea has grown into a powerful, proven model for impact, one made possible by the dedication of our soapmakers, the commitment of our distribution partners across nearly 50 countries, and the belief of a global donor community that continues to show up for this work year after year.

Over the past two years, that impact has continued to grow in remarkable ways. Together, we have expanded access to lifesaving soap for communities with little or no access, strengthened our operations, and continued proving that recycled soap can be both practical and transformative for children and refugees. We also reached an extraordinary milestone in our journey, distributing 70 million bars of soap and extending the reach of safe hygiene to millions of people around the world.

One of the clearest examples of our progress has been SOAPLAY™, our recycled soap designed in fun shapes and colors for children. What began as an innovative idea has become an evidence-based tool for behavior change. Through our research, we have seen that SOAPLAY™ can significantly increase handwashing among children, showing that soap can do more than clean hands. It can create healthier habits, improve well-being, and change the way young people engage with hygiene from an early age.

And now, we are currently working on a soap product that can simultaneously repel mosquitos and prevent diseases like malaria and dengue. More to come!

That is what encourages me most as I reflect on the past decade. Eco-Soap Bank is not only expanding access to soap. We are creating dignified jobs, reducing waste, advancing research, and finding new ways to make hygiene more effective for the people who need it most.

As we look ahead, I feel deeply grateful for everyone who has helped bring us to this moment. The last ten years have shown what is possible when compassion, innovation, and persistence come together. I believe the years ahead hold even greater promise.

Samir Lakhani
Founder & Executive Director |
[Eco-Soap Bank](#) |
samir@ecosapbank.org



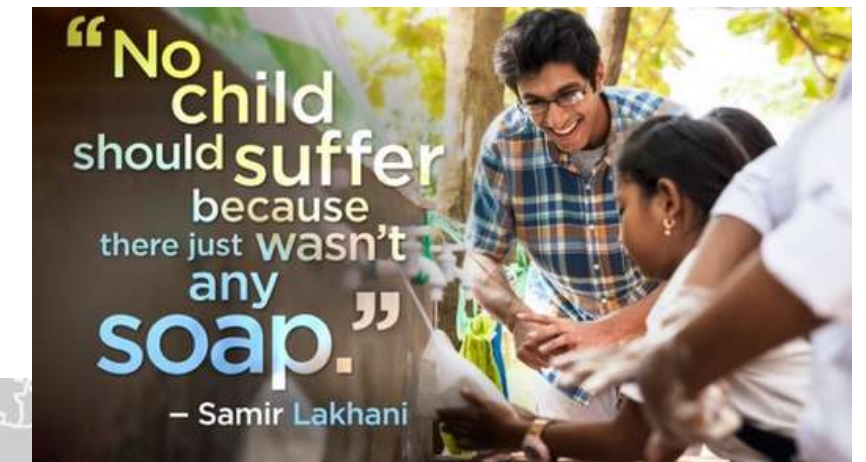
The Eco-Soap Bank Model

Sustainable access to soap for handwashing is a persistently overlooked global development and humanitarian challenge. Handwashing with soap provides a crucial, lifesaving defense against communicable diseases, but soap remains sadly inaccessible to vast segments of the global population. **2 billion people do not have basic access to soap for handwashing**—resulting in an unmitigated spread of highly preventable illnesses, large numbers of deaths, and billions of dollars in avoidable public health expenditure per year. At least 750,000 people, mostly young children, die every year as a direct result of inadequate access to handwashing with soap. Public health expenditure on highly preventable cases of hygiene-related morbidity and mortality is valued in the tens of billions USD a year. [1]

Despite being a life-saving, but extensively unavailable, resource for vulnerable populations we estimate that the soap manufacturing industry **discard around 41,000 metric tons of fully usable handwashing soap into landfills every year.** [2] This waste stream, equivalent to over 410 million soap bars, represents an unnecessary burden on the environment – responsible for approximately 66,4 million kilos CO2 emissions and 158 million liters of freshwater use per year [3] – and a highly significant waste of lifesaving resources that can be utilized to improve basic hygiene access amongst the world’s most vulnerable.

Eco-Soap Bank is a non-profit social enterprise working to solve the global hand-hygiene crisis by employing marginalized women to recycle leftover soap waste from factories and redistribute it to at-risk communities.

Eco-Soap Bank currently operates four soap-recycling hubs in Africa and Asia.



[1] Townsend et al (2017): Costs of diarrhea and acute respiratory infection attributable to not handwashing the cases of India and China, *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, Vol. 22; World Health Organization (2019): Burden of disease attributable to unsafe drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene, 2019 update. Geneva: World Health Organization; UN Water (2023): "Handwashing/Hand hygiene", available at <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/handhygiene/> [2] 8.2 billion tons of bars soap was produced globally in 2024. Out of that, 25,3% was handwashing soap bars, 62,5% bathing/body bars, and 12,2% specialty bars (organic, therapeutical, etc.). Focusing on handwashing soap bars only and assuming an industrial production scrap rate of 2% (which is in the lower range of accepted industry standard ratio of maximum 5%), this equates to 41,5 metric tons, or 415 million 100-gram soap bars. $(8,200,000 \times 0,253 \times 0,02 \times 1000) / 1000 = 414\,920\,000$. See: IndexBox (2025): World - Soap And Organic Surface-Active Products In Bars - Market Analysis, Forecast, Size, Trends And Insights, available at: https://www.indexbox.io/blog/soap-in-bars-world-market-overview-2024-5/?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Future Market Insights Inc. (2025): Bar Soap Market, available at: https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/bar-soap-market?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Shoplogix (2024): Understanding Scrap Rate: Key Insights and Strategies; available at: https://shoplogix.com/scrap-rate/?utm_source=chatgpt.com [3] Life cycle studies show that the production of one single kilo of soap generates around 1.6 kg of CO2e emissions and consumes 4,48 liters of freshwater. See: Francke I.C.M & Castro J.F.W. (2013): Carbon and Water Footprint Analysis of a Soap Bar produced by Natura Cosmetics, *Water Resource and Industry*, Vol. 1, pp. 37-48; Koehler, Anette & Wildbolz, Caroline (2009): Comparing the Environmental Footprint of Home-Care and Personal-Hygiene Products: The Relevance of Different Life-Cycle Phases, *Environmental Science and Technology*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 8643-8651; Witlox Kasja, Keller Regula, Jungbluth Niels: A LCA Case Study on Handwashing with Liquid and Bar Soap, ESU-Services, available at: <https://esu-services.ch/publications/>





10-Year Anniversary

Ten years ago, Eco-Soap Bank began with a simple yet transformative idea: recycle discarded soap to improve global hygiene. What started as a small initiative has since grown into a global movement, preventing waste, creating jobs, and providing lifesaving soap to millions. This progress is a testament to the impact we've made and the future we're building.

Here, to celebrate our ten year anniversary, we briefly explore the key milestones that shaped our journey, share powerful stories from those we serve, and highlight what's next in our mission to make hygiene accessible and sustainable for all.

The Beginning: How It All Started

In our early days, we focused on collecting and sanitizing partially used hotel soap, giving it a second life in communities without reliable access to hygiene products. It was a practical and sustainable solution—but as we evolved, we uncovered an even greater opportunity.

Each year, soap factories around the world discard approximately 41,000 metric tons of unused soap scraps, sending perfectly good material straight to landfills. Recognizing this immense source of waste, we pivoted our model.



By partnering directly with soap manufacturers and artisan soapmakers, we scaled our operations, rescued more materials, and provided even more people with high-quality, recycled soap.

This shift came with challenges—refining collection processes, building sustainable supply chains, and ensuring our environmental and humanitarian impact remained strong. But through innovation and collaboration, we transformed an industry-wide waste problem into a powerful solution, proving that recycled soap can change lives, protect the planet, and create economic opportunities

10 Years of Impact: By the Numbers

Eco-Soap Bank has grown from a small-scale initiative into a global movement. Over ten years*, we have:

- Improved **10,721,746** lives through access to hygiene
- Recycled **14,670,775** pounds of soap from landfills
- Distributed **71,162,520** bars of soap distributed worldwide
- Employed **175** women in meaningful, sustainable work

*Statistics as of March 2025

Each number represents real change—a child who can wash their hands at school, a family with reliable access to hygiene, a woman earning an income to support her community. And we're just getting started.

This progress is only possible because of the partners, donors, and advocates who believe in our mission. By prioritizing sustainability and hygiene access, we are proving that recycled soap is a tool for global health, empowerment, and change.

Stories That Shaped Us

Behind every bar of recycled soap is a person whose life has been transformed. Here are just a few of the voices that inspire us:

Mrs. Morn Korn, Soapmaker at our Cambodia Hub:

“Since I started working with Eco-Soap Bank, I can buy enough food for my family, and I am so happy to have a supportive team. When I feel down or depressed, my team at Eco-Soap Bank always motivates and supports me. Thank you!”



A Partner School on Student Confidence:

“Many students would avoid certain classroom activities or remove themselves from the classroom to discover the underlying issue was low self-esteem or concerns about their cleanliness... With these barriers eliminated, we are able to watch them blossom in school both academically and socially.”

A School Nurse in Raytown School District:

“I was happy to hear from a mother of one of my students as she was very thankful that we supplied her student with hygiene items. She was near tears, explaining that things were tight and she was so thankful for the program. It is so nice to have this resource for our students!”

Co-Executive Director, Synergy Services (Partner NGO):

“It is impossible to have confidence in the workplace or school without the ability to have soap for showers, shampoo for clean hair, deodorant, and toothpaste to not be offensive, and the comfort and safety of overall good hygiene.”

Moments like these fuel our mission. Whether by expanding into new countries, forming key partnerships, or empowering local soapmakers, every step forward is built on real impact.

The Bigger Picture: Sustainability and Global Change

Eco-Soap Bank was founded on the belief that solving global challenges requires innovative, sustainable solutions. Recycling soap waste into life-changing hygiene products improves health outcomes and drives a circular economy—a system where resources are reused and reintegrated rather than discarded.

Each year, the soap industry produces 41,000 metric tons of waste. Through our partnerships, we intercept this waste, transform it into new bars of soap, and distribute it to communities that lack access to basic hygiene. This closed-loop approach prevents millions of pounds of soap from being wasted, reducing landfill contributions and lowering the environmental footprint of soap production.

But sustainability isn't just about waste reduction—it's about long-term global health. Hygiene-related illnesses remain a leading cause of preventable deaths worldwide, particularly among children. By providing both soap and comprehensive hygiene education, we empower individuals with the knowledge and resources to protect themselves against disease, breaking cycles of illness and poverty.

Eco-Soap Bank's model proves that environmental responsibility and humanitarian aid can go hand in hand. By aligning sustainability with public health, we're creating a ripple effect—cleaner communities, healthier families, and a global shift toward smarter, waste.

This is Only the Beginning

As we celebrate ten years of Eco-Soap Bank, we are filled with gratitude for every donor, partner, volunteer, and advocate who has made this journey possible. Your support has turned discarded soap into a life-changing resource, provided meaningful employment, and empowered millions with the tools for better hygiene. None of this would be possible without you.

Together, let's create a world where hygiene is a right, not a privilege.

// Lauren O'Brien,
Senior Marketing Manager,
Eco-Soap Bank







2024-2025 in Numbers

During the past two years, Eco-Soap Bank recycled and redistributed **35.8 million** soap bars to beneficiaries in **42 countries** – providing a lifesaving first line of defense against prevent-able illnesses where there was previously none. The efforts helped divert **7.2 million pounds** of usable soap scraps from landfills, saving 5,226 tons of CO2e emissions and 1,7 million liters of freshwater. Soap scrap were sourced from **over 500 unique donors** and the operations helped sustain fair, good wage for **175 female soap recyclers**.

We were also extremely proud to reach a significant organization milestone, **with over 80 million recycled soap bars distributed in total worldwide!**

2024/2025 Impact



7.2 M
Pounds of soap recycled



35.8 M
Recycled bars of soap distributed



9.8 B
Handwashes

42
Countries

175
Women Employed

500
Soap Donors

Impact Snapshots: 2024-2025

Research, innovation, and evidence-based programming

Eco-Soap Bank offers a holistic approach to solve the global hand hygiene crisis. By harnessing the value of a previously wasted resource, the organization is working to 1) make soap more accessible and affordable for marginalized populations, cutting costs thanks to donated raw material while reducing soap industry waste, water footprints, and carbon emissions; 2) provide good-wage employment and training for disadvantaged women in low-income countries; and 3) produce high-quality, attractive recycled soap products that contribute directly in critical settings towards the fight against one of the world's most damaging and overlooked humanitarian disasters – hygiene-related illnesses and deaths.

To ensure efficiency, transparency, and accumulated learning, our in-house research team continuously assesses our efforts across 4 key impact dimensions. The following sections summarize some of the key achievements and learnings from the past 2 years.

Innovation



Hygiene and Health



Environment



Economic Empowerment





Innovation - Shaping Early Handwashing Habits with SOAPLAY™

Eco-Soap Bank launched the SOAPLAY bar to help instill and nurture healthy handwashing habits among young children. Building on the latest insights from the subconscious and incentivizing realm of nudge theory, SOAPLAY bars – made in a variety of fun shapes and colors – are meant to serve as an environmental cue, or “nudge”, for handwashing among children. The innovative soap bar – made from 100% recycled, unused, soap factory waste – is designed to appeal directly to children’s deeply rooted sense of curiosity and play.

The efficiency of SOAPLAY has been rigorously evaluated through a series of quantitative and qualitative studies – including semi-urban pre-school children from South Africa and a large-scale school test incorporating 16,000 primary school children in rural Tanzania.[4] The results offer exiting new insight into the drivers of handwashing with soap among children.

Across all tests, SOAPLAY was by far the preferred soap option for handwashing. A vast majority of children expressed a clear preference for using SOAPLAY and rated the soap as better than other soap bars they used in the past. A large proportion also reported that the use of SOAPLAY had made handwashing feel more fun and inspired them to talk more about handwashing with their family and friends. The preference for using SOAPLAY was also reflected in the realms of handwashing practices and health outcomes.

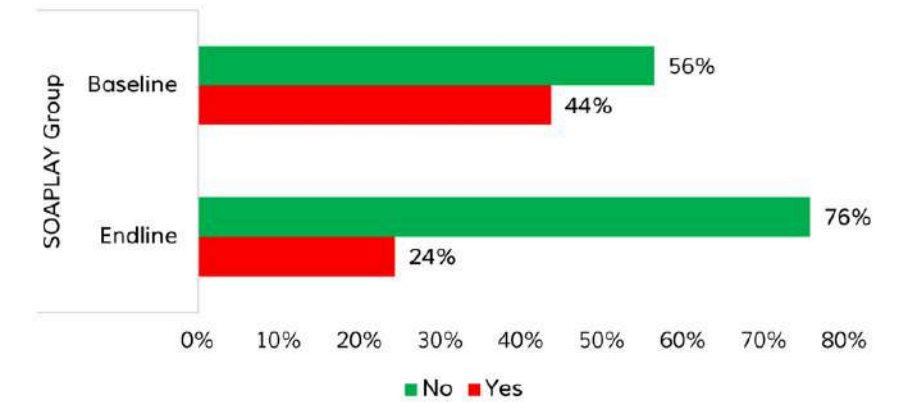
The findings offer strong new evidence suggesting the design of soap bars can help influence and instill healthy handwashing behaviors among children. In a world of continued hygiene paucities, all such gains are of utmost importance.

To this end, SOAPLAY offers a highly affordable, incentivizing soap bar alternative ready for large-scale distribution to vulnerable communities across the world. Either as part of a larger nudge-based handwashing package or on its own, SOAPLAY can add an important new dimension to handwashing promotion for children. With the aid of these affordable and attractive soap bars, it is now possible to help more children engage with handwashing on a level that moves beyond abstract notions of germs and illnesses and tap into the powerful realm of play in a way that subconsciously nudges them toward improved handwashing practices.

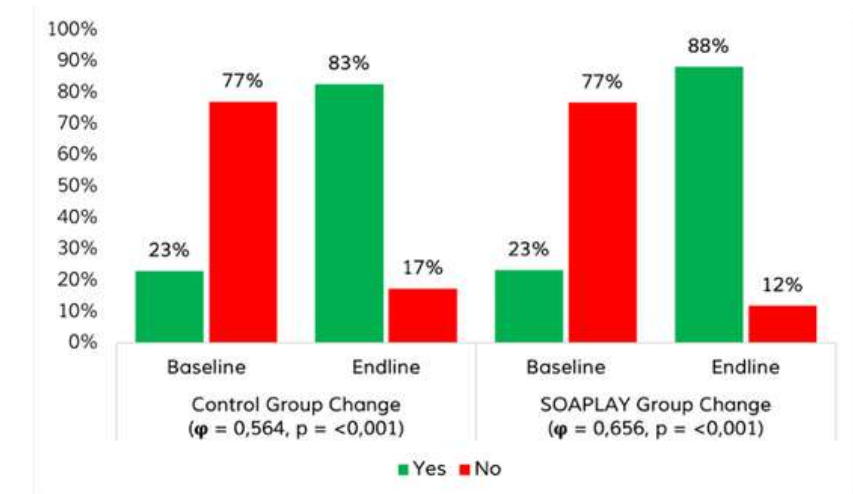
Eco-Soap Bank is working intensely to ensure more vulnerable children gain access to SOAPLAY.



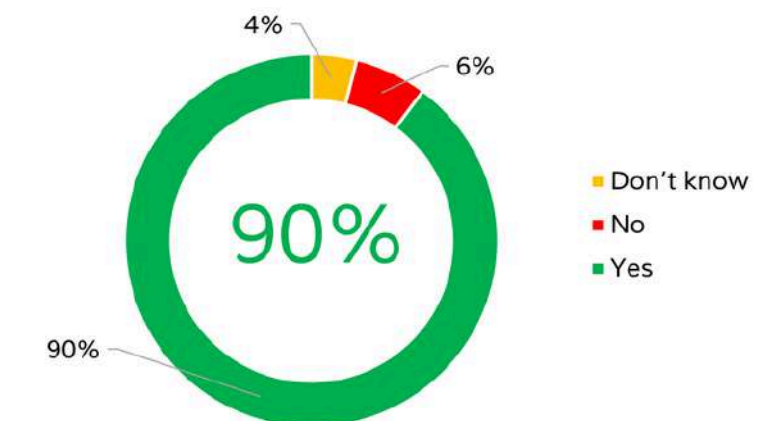
General Illness Symptoms (fever, vomiting etc.) among Primary School Children in Tanzania



Observed Handwashing with Soap among Primary School Children in Tanzania



Parent Survey, South Africa: Have you noticed any positive changes in your child’s (aged 2 to 4) handwashing behavior since starting to use SOAPLAY bars?



[4]All research available at ecosoapbank.org/impact



Hygiene and Health - The Impact of Soap Distributions in Crisis and Emergency Settings

Basic hygiene – handwashing with soap – is critical to prevent the spread of diseases and save lives in emergency settings.[5] Unfortunately, this aspect is routinely overlooked,[6] and handwashing with soap is rarely practiced by crises affected populations [7]

Children are notoriously susceptible to the devastating effects of hygiene deficiencies and its associated illnesses – e.g., acute respiratory infections and diarrhea. Every year, at least 750,000 people, mostly young children, die from preventable illnesses directly resulting from inadequate access to handwashing with soap.[8] In emergency settings, diarrhea alone is responsible for 25-40% of all child deaths. [9]

More needs to be done to help responders improve handwashing practices during crises.

Over the last few years, Eco-Soap Bank participated in two research projects specifically designed to better understand the handwashing and health impact of soap distributions in emergency settings.

The studies found remarkable improvements of handwashing practices and illness rates. When teaming up with an international research consortium - lead by the London School of Medicine and Tropical Health and the African Population and Health Research Center - in the Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya and Kyrawaly Uganda, we found that regular soap distribution resulted in:

- A 3-times increase (141%) in observed handwashing with soap compared to baseline (Uganda)
- Two-fold (98%) increase in observed handwashing with soap
- A 3.8 times (74%) reduction in diarrheal cases in children under 5 (Uganda)
- 68% reduction in diarrheal cases in children under 5 (Kenya)

All improvements were sustained at both a the 2-month and 9-month follow- up.

Similar impacts could be found during a large-scale SOAPLAY bar distribution and evaluation among Rohingya refugee children in Cox’s Bazar. In Bangladesh:

- Observed handwashing with soap among children increased from 62% at baseline to 97% at endline
- General illness symptoms (fever, vomiting, colds, etc.) decreased by 26%

Unfortunately, as uncertainties continue proliferating throughout the global humanitarian system, and core functions are buckling under new pressures, **the fundamental right to basic hygiene remains under severe threat.** Despite its essential, lifesaving function during emergencies, basic hygiene issues are too often neglected – severely exacerbating the damage and death toll among disaster victims.

The conclusions are unmistakable – the international community must act immediately to help mitigate unsustainable hygiene conditions, save lives, and engender more dignified living situations for crisis affected populations across the world. If not, the deteriorating situation will continue to claim the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent individuals (mostly children) every year.

Eco-Soap Bank is continuing reaching to actors within the humanitarian sector to help mitigate the ongoing hygiene crisis in temporary settlements and crisis areas around the world.





Soap Bar Distribution

Cox's Bazar, Banglad





Environment – The Benefits of Rescuing and Recycling Soap Factory Waste

The natural world we all rely on for survival is detrimentally affected by an ever-intensifying portfolio of human activities. Industrial and agricultural emissions are fueling environmental degradation, depleting the natural resources available to the most vulnerable segments of the global population. The need to contain and mitigate the fallout of human activities becomes more urgent for every year that passes. Children are least responsible for these changes, yet they are the most susceptible to its impact.

To ensure a sustainable environment for future generations, every sector of society has a responsibility to do its utmost to reduce waste, greenhouse gas emissions, and freshwater usage. This, of course, includes the soap making industry.

Every year, the soap making industry produces and directly discards perfectly usable soap “scraps” equivalent to around 410 million soap bars. The waste stream is a largely unavoidable aspect of the production process, yet the raw material extraction and manufacturing processes associated with these wasted resources – consisting mainly of deformed bars and soap shavings – creates large water and carbon footprints.

Eco-Soap Bank is helping the soap making industry reduce its environmental footprint by saving and utilizing these valuable resources. To better understand the impact of these efforts, we traced the environmental footprint created by the yearly stream of soap factory waste and explored the gains that can be made by expanding attempts to reduce it.[10]

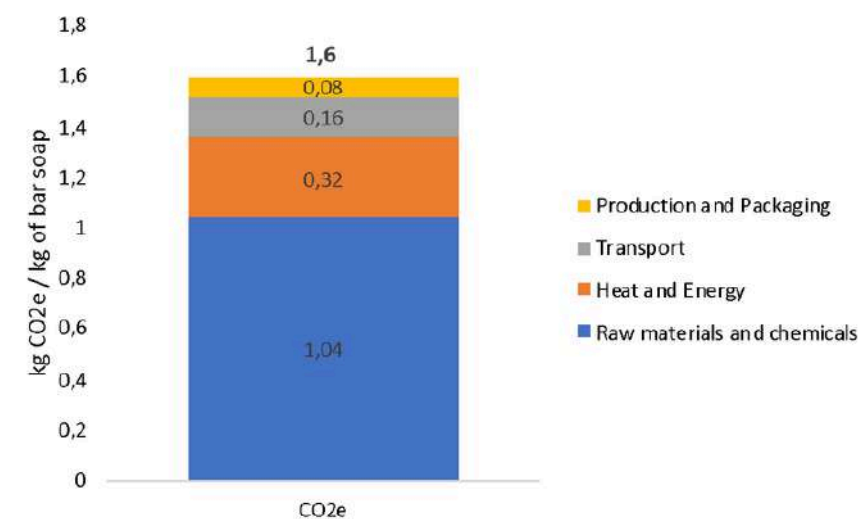
The results were staggering. Focusing exclusively on raw material extraction, processing, and soap production process, we found that the production of 1 kilo of bar soap is estimated to generate around 1,6 kg of carbon dioxide equivalents emissions (CO₂e) and consume 4.48 liters of freshwater.[11]

Considering the volumes discarded, rescuing and recycling the entirety of the yearly soap factory waste stream would result in **annual** gross savings of approximately 40 million kilos of CO₂e and 112 million liters of freshwater. According to the latest calculations regarding the social costs of carbon dioxide emissions – i.e. the monetary value of the damages to society caused by a metric ton of CO₂ emissions – the emission savings alone would be valued at \$7.4 million a year.

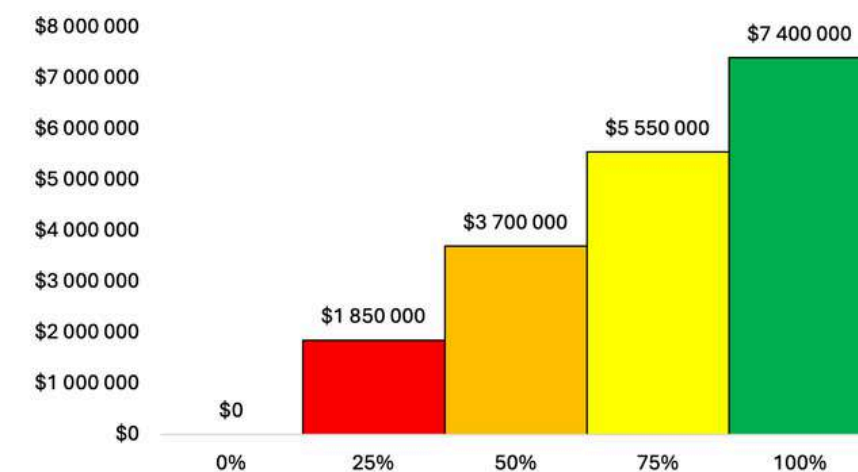
Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and freshwater waste are key measures to lay foundations for a more sustainable future. The purpose of Eco-Soap Bank’s environmental study was to shine the spotlight on the environmental implications of the **unnecessary** waste stream engendered by the soap making industry. Not to limit the manufacturing of this essential, lifesaving product, but to highlight the urgent need to stop wasting it and start harnessing the full value of all that is being produced.

Ending soap waste would represent a crucial step towards a more sustainable industry and future. This simple act would not only stop an unnecessary waste of natural resources, but by recycling and redirecting the soap towards at-risk communities, it can also be utilized to combat the prevailing prevalence of preventable illnesses and deaths among children and vulnerable populations.

CO₂e emissions associated with the manufacturing of 1 kg of finished bar soap (kg of CO₂e / kg of soap)



Monetary savings (USD) per % reduction in soap waste related carbon dioxide emissions



[10] Full report available at: ecossoapbank.org/impact; [11] Approximation based on data gathered from: Francke I.C.M & Castro J.F.W. (2013): Carbon and Water Footprint Analysis of a Soap Bar produced by Natura Cosmetics, *Water Resource and Industry*, Vol. 1, pp. 37-48; Koehler, Anette & Wildbolz, Caroline (2009): Comparing the Environmental Footprint of Home-Care and Personal-Hygiene Products: The Relevance of Different Life-Cycle Phases, *Environmental Science and Technology*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 8643-8651; Witlox Kasja, Keller Regula, Jungbluth Niels: A LCA Case Study on Handwashing with Liquid and Bar Soap, *ESU-Services*, available at: <https://esu-services.ch/publications/>; [3] Rennert, Kevin et al. (2022): Comprehensive Evidence Implies a Higher Social Cost of CO₂, *Nature*, Vol. 681, pp. 687-692



Creating New Paths towards Economic Empowerment

The absence of secure, living-wage employment constitutes a serious livelihood barrier for women in low-income settings. Caught in the intersection of multiple hardships, women trying to establish themselves on the formal labour market experience greater vulnerability due to prevailing social norms, structures, and an unequal allocation of resources. Overcoming these entrenched livelihood obstacles are essential for inclusive economic growth and one of the most important contemporary social interventions for women today.

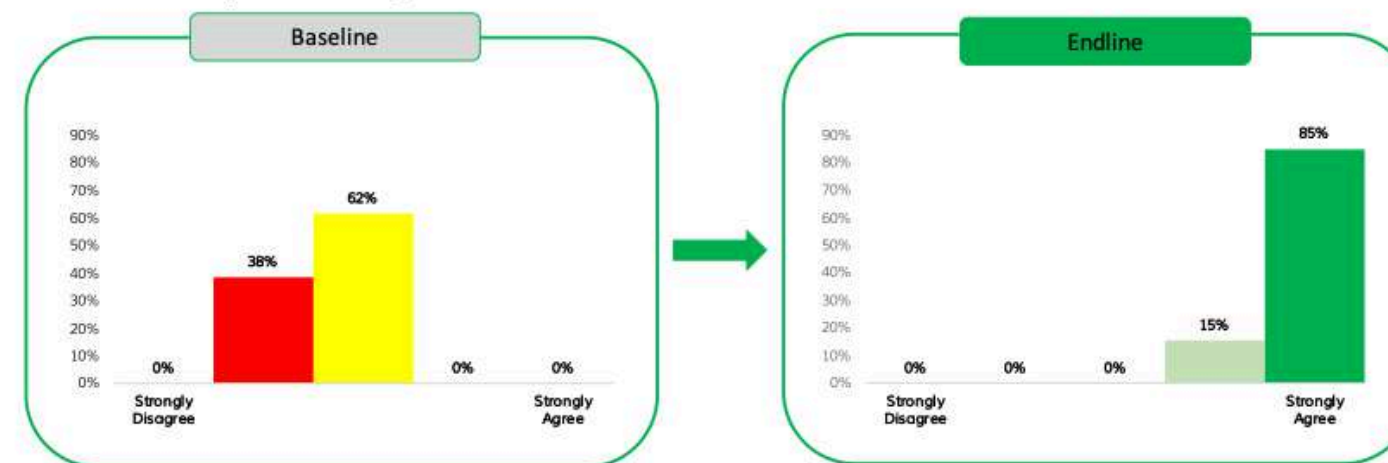
To help dismantle ingrained livelihood barriers, Eco-Soap Bank employs and trains disadvantaged women to recycle and redistribute soap to schools, refugee camps and NGO partners working directly with vulnerable populations. All soap recyclers are local women with no previous reliable source of income. The immediate aim is to alleviate financial burdens, help them support their families, and encourage development and growth as individuals. The long-term objective is to create tangible progress towards economic empowerment for all women employed at Eco-Soap Bank.

To achieve these objectives, Eco-Soap Bank offers a holistic employment package consisting of a steady living-wage income, social benefits (pensions, health insurance, debt management support, etc.), vocational training, and opportunities to participate in workshops and education programs. During their employment, soap recyclers play an active role in shaping their work and education environment, and progress is followed up through surveys and interviews. The impact among the women has been clear [12], including:

- 40% increase in income
- 100% of women saving regularly and having their own personal savings (compared to 0% before they joined the organization)
- 100% reporting an improved ability to influence key decisions at home and with their families
- Significant reduction in worries and stress levels
- Significant improvement in personal well-being, including
 - 100% reporting improved confidence
 - 92% reporting improved purchasing power
 - 100% reporting that they are making progress toward their own personal goals and dreams



I have the important things I want in m life:





Interview – Hing Sreyheak, 27, Soap Recycler, Cambodia

A redly tinted sand road zigzags its way through a small community and stops at a group of beige concrete houses in the outskirts of Siem Reap, Cambodia. While located just a couple of kilometers outside of the bustling city center, the surrounding area is more reminiscent of rural stillness than urban frenzy.

Hing Sreyheak and her sister, Hing Sreykhouch, meet us at the end of the red sand road and take us down a narrow passage leading to a group of wooden houses. We sit down in the soothing shadow of a large mango tree. The seating area overlooks a small lake largely covered in greenery and wildflowers. Just next to us, children are laughing and playing in a large sand pile. Ducks and chicken freely roam the grounds. A couple of dogs growl suspiciously in the background, while a tiny black puppy excitedly runs around our feet and then cools himself from the mid-day heat by jumping into a bowl of water left in the outside washing area.

Sreyheak looks composed. Life is stable now. It is, however, safe to say that has been far from the case for most of her life.

She takes a deep breath. Then starts at the very beginning. Somewhat emotional, but with a steady hand, she guides us through the winding paths of her life.

- I grew up in a traditional wooden house in the rural parts of Siem Reap province. My father was a scrap collector. He collected bottles and things and sold it.

- My mother left me when I was 8 months old. She moved to Thailand and started a new family.

Growing up without a mother was difficult, and she struggles to hold back the tears when she thinks back to that time.

- All I had from my mother was an old picture. That was the only thing I knew about her, how she used to look like. The other children in school bullied me for it. They kept asking: Where is your mother? Why don't you have a mother?

- It was really upsetting and hurt me a lot. I felt lost and just wanted someone to call "mother". So, I started to call my neighbor Mom instead.

Sreyheak's father always did his best to take care of her and her siblings. He was a good man working hard from morning until evening to take care of his family. She had a close relationship with her father and remembers him fondly. Even if money was scarce, he encouraged her to go to school. Sreyheak really enjoyed school.

- School was easy for me. The teachers were nice, and I really liked learning new things.

But her time in school would not last very long.

When Sreyheak was in 2nd grade, her father suddenly and unexpectedly passed away.

His death was major trauma. While she was still a young child, she remembers it all clearly. He had not been sick; he just went to sleep one night and never woke up. For a girl who had grown up without a mother, the loss was almost too much to handle.

- I had already lost my mother, and now I did not have a father either. I could not accept losing my father too. I did not want to let him go. I still remember sleeping next to his body until they took him away.

After her father's passing, Sreyheak could no longer find the strength to attend school. She had also lost the support and encouragement she previously got from her father.



- I was sent to live with one of my older brothers and his family. They were not very nice to me. School was far away. No one would take me, and we did not have a bicycle. So, I stopped going to school.

When her father died Sreyheak's older siblings began looking for their mother in Thailand. No one knew where she was living or even if she was still alive. But, after a while, they found her.

- When I was 13 years old, I went to see my mother in Thailand for the first time. It was very strange in the beginning. I was happy to see and hold my mother, but her face no longer looked the same as it did in my old picture. I had to ask my sister: Is this really our mother? But I got used to it in the end.

She continued to visit her mother during the coming years but, remained with her brother's family in Siem Reap. While she was still just a child, they showed little kindness and demanded she would support herself. So, when she was 14 years old, she started working.

- My job was to mix concrete and carry bricks. It was very hard and heavy work. But I had no choice, I needed money. I worked in construction for about 3 years. Then I got married and moved to live with my husband's family.

The marriage did not last very long. Sreyheak was still very young when she got married and pregnant. Her husband did not offer much support and spent most of his time away from her. The little money they had, her husband wasted and never gave anything back. After a while, the situation became untenable.

- I was 16 years old and 8 months pregnant when I divorced my husband.

Life as a divorced and pregnant teenager was not easy. She remembers being scared and worried that she would not be able to feed her young child. Fortunately, she could stay with her sister during the last month of her pregnancy.

But she did not stay still for long.

Just two months after giving birth she moved to her mother in Thailand and started working on a sugar cane farm.

- It was a bit scary since I did not have a passport. But the work itself was fine, I had become used to hard work by then.

The salary was never really enough, and she struggled to buy baby formula and other items needed to take care of her newborn daughter.

- It was seasonal work. Sometimes we had money, sometimes we had not.

To try to gain a more stable footing in life, she eventually moved back to Siem Reap. After returning, she worked a variety of jobs in construction, a beauty shop, local restaurants, and as a cleaner. Despite multiple jobs, she continued to struggle to pay for essential things like books and school for her daughter. Life was, however, relatively stable for a while.

Then, about two years ago now, another traumatic incident would throw everything on its head again.



Late one night, while sleeping alone in her room, Sreyheak was abruptly awakened by a terrifying sound. Suddenly, an unknown man appeared from the darkness and attacked her. Fearing for her life, she fought back with all her force and screamed out as loud as she could.

- I kept hitting and screaming, just hoping someone would hear.

Her resistance worked, and the man abandoned his attack and ran away.

The incident, which she believes was an attempted murder, did, however, leave very deep emotional scars. In the aftermath of the attack, she lost her voice and suffered from post-traumatic stress symptoms. She became increasingly reclusive and did not want to talk or see anyone. It took a long time for her to work through the trauma and reach a place where she could start thinking about returning to work.



Sreyheak was finally able to join Eco-Soap Bank in December 2022. She remembers how scared she was in the beginning.

- When I started at Eco-Soap Bank, I was still suffering the repercussions of my attack. I was afraid to talk to people and ask questions. I was very silent and avoided people. My confidence was very low.

But she also remembers how kind and welcoming the women at Eco-Soap Bank were. She felt the team supported her from the start and she quickly learnt how to use the different soap recycling machines.

After a while she could feel her confidence growing. She started to ask questions and join in conversations with the other women. And, all of a sudden, she started to make new friends.

- Working at Eco-Soap Bank completely changed my life in a positive way. Before I was always alone. Now I have a lot of friends. I can joke, smile, and be happy again. It has really helped me to get over the trauma I experienced after my attack.

- I am not scared and worry much less now. I have bought a roof for my house, and I know I have a steady income so I can pay all my bills. My daughter can go to school [which is something she could not afford earlier], and I can buy the things she needs for now. I even have some savings today!

Sreyheak's sister, Sreykhouch adds:

- My sister has had a really difficult life. After our father died, she had to move around to different families that did not look after her. Her brother's family was not nice to her, her mother's new family was not nice to her, and her husband was not nice to her. She had to work so hard to fend for herself from a very early age.

- Before she started at Eco-Soap Bank, she was very lonely and had no friends. She made very little money and could not afford to buy the basic things she and daughter needed. She did not have any savings and could not make any plans for the future. She worried a lot and was very tired. She was not happy.

- Now [since joining Eco-Soap Bank] I have seen a great change in my sister's life. She is happier than before, worries less, she can afford to buy food and other things she likes for herself and her daughter. She has transformed from a shy, silent, reclusive person into a person that is much more open. She smiles and jokes, and when she has something to say, she is no longer afraid to say it.

She continues:

- The team at Eco-Soap Bank has become like a second family for my sister. They always motivate and support her. I believe she is going to continue to get better and better.

Today, Sreyheak is no longer scared for the future.

- My dream is to own my own small restaurant. I want to have my own house, and I want to see my daughter graduate from school.

She is positive and believes she is on a good path now.

- I have skills and a steady income now. I believe I can continue to work and save money to reach my dreams.





Conclusions

Eco-Soap Bank experienced a remarkable transformation during the past 2 years. We extend our deepest gratitude to all partners, donors, and dedicated supporters that made this journey possible.

With your help, we invested heavily in new, more efficient, soap recycling equipment, secured large manufacturing partnerships that ensure sustainable access to raw material for years to come, expanded our global workforce of women, and reached millions more vulnerable people with soap.

Our continued devotion to innovation and evidence-based programming have produced groundbreaking new evidence highlighting the life changing impacts of regular soap access, stable employment and training, and new simple, affordable tools to help instil early handwashing habits among vulnerable children.

The work is, however, far from done, and it is with a great sense of excitement we look forward to expanding the reach of our soap distributions, create more jobs for women, and continue to iterate and innovate on the humble soap bar to help instil healthy handwashing habits and save lives among the worlds most vulnerable populations.

Thank you everyone that are making this mission possible.

// The Eco-Soap Bank Team

