



Thanks to a grant from UK Aid, academics from Northumbria University have spent time working with environmentalists and the local community close to the northern coast of Kenya, to help establish a new Heritage Boat Building Training Centre.

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Heritage boat building will support mission to reduce plastic pollution

Academics from Northumbria University have travelled to Kenya to help establish a new Heritage Boat Building Training Centre which will use indigenous knowledge and skills to transform single use plastics into traditional sailing vessels.

Thanks to a grant from UK Aid, Senior Lecturer [Simon Scott-Harden](#) and Senior Technician Johnny Hayes, from Northumbria's School of Design, spent

time working with environmentalists and the local community close to the northern coast of Kenya, in the Lamu Archipelago. Their trip earlier this month was to help establish a facility capable of designing and constructing recycled plastic sailing vessels using some of the millions of tonnes of plastic waste which makes its way into our seas each year.

Simon, an expert in product and material design, first became involved in the [Flipflopi Project](#) in 2017, when he supported the community to create a traditional dhow sailing boat weighing seven tonnes called the Flipflopi, made from plastic waste and over 30,000 discarded flip flops collected from the coast of Kenya.

Now a major circular economy movement in East Africa, the Flipflopi Project was co-founded by former Northumbria University student, Ben Morison and two Kenyans, Ali Skanda and Dipesh Pabari. These days the organisation runs education programmes and innovation hubs to help generate public and policy engagement on reducing plastic waste.

“The [UK Aid](#) grant is a major step forward and there’s such potential for this closed-loop model of using waste plastics to create traditional sailing vessels to be widely replicated in coastal communities all over the world,” explained Simon, who teaches students on the [BA \(Hons\) Design for Industry programme](#) at Northumbria.

“It’s about tackling pollution and keeping some of the traditional boat making skills alive. We have been working to get a production line up and running for recycling the plastics and certifying the material which comes off it to demonstrate that it’s a viable alternative to locally sourced timber and reducing the environmental impact.

“What the end result will be is a fully online recycling centre based in Lamu and run by local Kenyans where we can process tonnes of plastic a day to turn it into new parts for buildings, construction and traditional sailing dhows, alongside a centre for heritage skills to keep the dying art of traditional dhow building alive.”

The funding from UK Aid is phase one of the five-year [Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution \(SMEP\) programme \(2019-2024\)](#), implemented in partnership with the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which supports innovative solutions to prevent manufacturing and plastics pollution from being released into the environment.

The Flipflopi Project and consortium partners including Northumbria University, [CORDIO East Africa](#) and the [University of Portsmouth](#), are now gearing up for phase two which will see further development of the research and design for boat building, as well as curriculum development for the heritage boat building training centre and establishing a centralised collection system for waste plastics across the Lamu Archipelago.

Ali Skanda, one of the co-founders of The Flipflopi Project, said: “Without any proper waste management systems in the remote island communities, we have been forced to take our own action on plastic pollution. Our vision is to create a sustainable innovation centre for recovering and recycling waste plastics that benefits the community, and retain our indigenous knowledge of dhow-building in the process.”

In preparation for establishing the new recycling and training centre, partners involved in the Flipflopi project took part in a 300 kilometre scientific sailing expedition earlier this year, in an effort to map the impact of plastic waste on the remote communities surrounding Lamu Archipelago. Observations showed that, even in the most remote island states, the problem of plastic waste littered across shorelines and throughout mangrove forests was having a serious impact on lives and ecosystems.

Mr Mamo B. Mamo, Director General of Kenya’s National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) said: “The Lamu Archipelago receives plastic pollution from across the oceans. The Flipflopi Project is tackling this through the first of its kind material recovery and recycling centre in Lamu. Kenya continues to develop sustainable solid waste management policies at national and county levels. We have also released Kenya’s first National Marine Litter Action Plan, in which the Flipflopi Project is a core case study of good practice. We all need to play our part if we are going to turn the tide on plastic pollution.”

More information on Northumbria's links to the Flipflop Project can be found [here](#). To find out more about sustainability efforts across the University as a whole, visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/sustainability.

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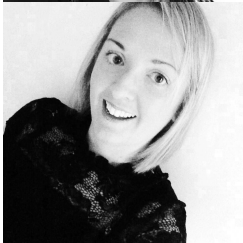


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