

## Cleaning up the Brantas River, Indonesia

### Organisation Name

---

Unilever

### Problem

---

Unilever Indonesia has a factory in East Java, 5km from the Brantas river, the province's main waterway at Rungkut in Surabaya. The factory uses treated water from the Brantas to manufacture soap, toothpaste, deodorants and skin products, all of which require clean water.

The 325 km long, River Brantas becomes heavily polluted from local industries as it passes through Surabaya. In particular, this comes from domestic waste, as houses lining the riverbank use the river as a rubbish dump and open sewer. It is clearly in Unilever's commercial interest, as well as in its social interest as a local corporate citizen, to help improve the river's water quality and its general environmental condition.

### Solution

---

Just cleaning up the river would not solve the problem as it was not solely an environmental issue. To have real effect, a complete solution required a change in people's mindsets and a different attitude towards the river. Rather than simply donating money, Unilever encourage villagers to take a self-help, partnership approach by providing management expertise, voluntary resource and equipment.

In 2001, Unilever 'adopted' four riverside villages and, working in partnership with local authorities, government agencies, environmental NGOs, Surabaya University and the villagers, started to develop a practical and sustainable programme. A survey conducted by the university highlighted the need to improve basic communal sanitation, create a household waste management process and introduce a 'greening' programme in order to encourage villagers to take individual responsibility for the well-being of their village.

To discourage use of the river as a public toilet, communal lavatories were built or renovated, and schoolchildren were taught the importance of sanitary hygiene and of keeping their community clean. Local villagers and Unilever volunteers helped to clear the riverbank and Unilever donated 2,000 morinda fruit trees whose fruit will provide an income. Villagers also started to segregate their rubbish into organic and non-organic waste, using rubbish bins and compost bins provided by Unilever. A high resale value for cans, bottles, plastic and paper acted as an additional incentive to segregate waste.

### Constraints

---

- Need to monitor progress across a range of criteria, including water quality and public health
- Partnership with other stakeholders, especially government, and aligning the programme's goals with government aims is essential to the project's long-term sustainability

### Benefits

---

- Villagers are taking more care and showing more pride in their surroundings. The greening, waste management and income-generating activities are starting to gather a life of their own
- Unilever Indonesia and the Indonesian government are also talking to other companies to persuade them to back similar partnership schemes in other villages. Initial signs are promising, with two more companies adopting villages and several others showing interest
- Unilever learned to not push on with any part of the process until the community was ready
- Dedicated field officers proved crucial to generate enthusiasm through community stimulating activities

### Period Of Implementation

---

Launched in 2001

### **Place Of Implementation**

---

Indonesia

### **Themes**

---

Environment

Stakeholder Engagement

### **Solution Champion**

---

Please [login](#) to view this information