

FROM TRASH TO OPPORTUNITY, A Campus Story of Impact and Dignity



On many university campuses, waste is an overlooked problem, bins overflow, plastics are mixed with organic waste, and litter quietly accumulates despite available disposal systems. But for Kiyimba Emmanuel, a support staff member at Equator University of Science And Technology, waste became more than a challenge. It became an opportunity, one that now touches livelihoods, environmental responsibility, and community awareness.

Emmanuel's journey into plastic collection began with curiosity. Seeing others gather plastic waste, he asked a simple question: *"Why do you collect it?"* The answer: *"We sell it and earn money"*, sparked something deeper. What began as a practical decision soon evolved into a personal mission.

Despite the presence of trash cans on campus, Emmanuel noticed a persistent issue: poor disposal habits. Littering remained common, and waste was rarely sorted. Rather than ignore it, he took initiative. He began picking up plastic waste himself. Over time, his quiet actions did not go unnoticed. Today, colleagues and students alike call on him to collect waste from their bins, an informal system built on trust and example.





Beyond collection, Emmanuel has become an advocate for waste sorting, an issue widely recognized as a global barrier to effective recycling. He now educates peers and friends on separating waste at source, emphasizing that proper sorting is the first step toward sustainability.

His guiding principle is simple yet powerful: **“Trash is treasure.”**

To Emmanuel, waste only becomes waste when its value is ignored. By collecting and selling plastic to recycling companies

and local waste buyers, he transforms discarded materials into income. Currently, **1 kilogram of plastic waste is sold at approximately UGX 600 (about USD 0.16)** a modest figure that, when accumulated over time, becomes a meaningful source of financial support. This income helps him contribute to his children’s education, demonstrating how small, consistent efforts can translate into real economic impact.



His work reflects key priorities outlined by the United Nations through the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**:

- **SDG 1: No Poverty** – By generating additional income through recycling
- **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** – Promoting waste sorting and recycling
- **SDG 13: Climate Action** – Reducing plastic pollution and environmental harm

In a broader context, Emmanuel’s efforts also align with global sustainability frameworks such as the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings, which assess universities based on environmental responsibility, including waste management practices, community engagement, and sustainability education. His grassroots initiative contributes directly to the

kind of impact these rankings seek to measure, not just policies on paper, but real behavioural change within campus communities.

What makes Emmanuel's story compelling is not just the environmental impact, but the human element. He is not an environmental scientist or policy maker, he is a worker who saw an opportunity and acted. In doing so, he has inspired others to rethink waste, not as a burden, but as a resource.

His message to others is both practical and forward-looking:

“When opportunities come, let's embrace them and take charge of the future. The youth must be creative enough to use the natural resources around us to earn a living and to grow more trees.”

In a world increasingly defined by environmental challenges, solutions like Emmanuel's remind us that change does not always begin with large systems. Sometimes, it starts with one person picking up a piece of plastic and seeing value where others see none.