

Bath organisation ships hand-cranked washing machines to refugee camps in Iraq

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Bristol-based chamber of commerce Business West has helped a company founded at the University of Bath to ship hand-cranked washing machines to refugee camps in Iraq.

Engineering graduate Navjot Sawhney has created a machine made from wood and plastic that allows people living in poverty and without access to electricity to dramatically reduce the amount of time cleaning their clothes.

Mr Sawhney was inspired to start The Washing Machine Project in 2018 while volunteering in India, when he saw a woman living in the village he was staying in struggling to hand wash clothes.

The Washing Machine Project is now working with humanitarian charity Care International with the aim of delivering 7,500 of Mr Sawhney's machines to communities in Kenya, Lebanon, and India.



Navjot Sawhney, founder of The Washing Machine Project
(Image: The Washing Machine Project)

The venture has received free support from the business community in the South West of England, including from Bristol design company Huxlo, who have made the parts for the machine.

Business West was also able to assist with the exporting of the first batch of 30 machines to northern Iraq last month.

The chamber was approached by The Washing Machine Project as the company was struggling to complete a certificate of origin, an important international trade document which identifies the origin of the goods being exported.

Mr Sawhney, a former cost engineer at Dyson's campus in Malmesbury in Wiltshire, said Business West was able to provide the assistance they needed at "very short notice".

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Mr Sawhney said: "We managed to turn around the documentation within a couple of days with Business West's support.

"This has meant that our washing machines have been able to reach people in need quicker.

"This is so important because the current traditional practice for washing clothes is done by hand and this burden is disproportionately placed on women who can spend 20 hours washing clothes per week while being at risk of injury."

Catherine Stephens, head of international trade services at Business West said: "We can help innovative companies like The

Washing Machine Project to grow their business overseas by providing export documentation support.

“With years of experience in international trade, Business West will ensure your goods will reach their destination without incurring extra costs.

“It is crucial that documentation is completed correctly to avoid delays, so if you need documentation support do not hesitate to get in touch with us.”

According to The Washing Machine Project, 70% of the world’s population do not have access to electricity.

The hand-cranked machines the company has created have a drum capacity of 5kg and use 10 litres of water per cycle, as opposed to the 30 litres used by the average electric washing machine.

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