



**ENHANCING URBAN RESOURCE EFFICIENCY AND
CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**
BANGKOK: 19-20 MARCH 2018

Who are Waste Pickers?

- There are no good statistics at city-level within Asia for #s of WPs — that is, sufficient reliable data from National Labour Force Surveys
- We know that IWs overall comprise 82% of non-agricultural employment in South Asia, and that number is 65% for East and South-East Asia (see WIEGO Dashboard)
- However, ILO estimates from 2013 indicate that close to 20 million people **worldwide** earn their living out of waste
- Most often WPs are invisible in policies
- Responsible for high recycling rates of most cities in the global south where formal recycling rates are non-existent or underperforming
- Organizing has increased across the world, but the vast majority are still unorganized
- Organizing has been crucial where waste pickers have managed to be integrated as service providers

Commonalities across the world — including in Asia and the Pacific

- Workers are subject to social stigma, face poor working conditions, and are frequently harassed.
- Waste picking is highly responsive to market driven conditions for recyclables.
- Waste picking is often a family enterprise. It offers flexible working hours (including for women) and a high level of adaptability, which is one of the reasons that waste pickers avoid getting organized. **Having work environments which allows flexibility has been key in Brazil.**
- In some cities, most waste pickers are migrants, such as in Delhi where waste pickers are often Bangladeshis. In other places, they are likely to be from marginalized groups or rejected from global economic processes. In South Africa migrants from other African nations
- Work may appear to be chaotic, but is in fact very organized.
- They are often not part of public solid waste systems, they are socially invisible and therefore they are seldom reported in official statistics.
- Usually the activity does not require literacy, and is easily learned. However, when working in a collective endeavour, some activities (for example, administrative) do require literacy and other administrative skills.
- Non organized pickers are often recruited by middlemen and exploited
- Lack of recognition and punitive action from governments is still widespread.

Formal – Informal Links

- Waste pickers pass materials along the value chain that enables recycling of materials.
- Cities benefit from their work by having less waste to be disposed of but officials seldom acknowledge this.
- Authorities gain positive externalities in terms of environmental protection, good SW governance, and job creation.
- Waste Pickers feed the industries with recyclables, but nevertheless have the lowest pay in the value chain

WIEGO'S WORK WITH WASTE PICKERS

At the global and local level, and across all regions, WIEGO's work with waste pickers employs a **common vision**:

- to ensure waste pickers:
 - ▣ are recognized and valued for the contribution that they make to society, the economy and the environment
 - ▣ have secure access to recyclables
 - ▣ are integrated into solid waste management systems
- to encourage the development of democratic organizations through which waste pickers are empowered to make and act on demands (such as inclusionary waste management policies) and to improve their working conditions, earnings and livelihoods

WIEGO'S WORK WITH WASTE PICKERS

At the global and local level, and across all regions, WIEGO seeks to ensure that waste pickers are....

- **aware** – of their rights, their contributions and the benefits of organizing
- **organized** – in democratic organizations that are inclusive and representative of all waste pickers regardless of sex, race, caste, nationality, ethnicity, etc., and which respect equality and foster leadership in women
- **empowered** – to demand inclusion in municipal solid waste management (SWM) programmes
- **included** – by SWM systems that are flexible and allow for informal worker inclusion
- **capable** – of efficiently delivering any services which they have agreed to deliver
- **covered** – by social protection measures and schemes

WIEGO'S WORK WITH WASTE PICKERS

WIEGO seeks to realize this vision by supporting waste pickers to...

- share experiences of organizing and of strong organizations across the world
- share experiences and suggestions for dealing with threats
- share information on inclusionary SWM systems across the world
- help build solidarity among groups of waste pickers across the world
- strengthen the capacity of waste pickers to build democratic organizations
- conduct, publish and disseminate statistical data and other research on waste pickers, their numbers, lives, and contributions
- support the participation of waste picker representatives at regional and global events
- promote understanding and recognition of the role, conditions and actions of waste pickers and their organizations through the media and through advocacy

EXAMPLES OF INCLUSIVE SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Promising examples of inclusive solid waste management for waste pickers include:

- **Belo Horizonte, Diadema and Londrina, Brazil** – national guidelines, but city-specific schemes for collection and transportation of recyclable waste by waste pickers
- **Buenos Aires, Argentina** – public warehouses for waste picker cooperatives to sort & sell recyclable waste + government subsidy to waste picker cooperatives for environmental services
- **Pune, India** – contract to waste picker cooperative to collect and transport all waste from half of the city
- **Bogota, Colombia** – the Constitutional Court and the district administration today understand the recyclers as managers of public waste collection services, in the component of “collection and transport of recyclable waste”, and are remunerating them gradually for this service (this moving beyond Bogota to other cities in Colombia)

Circularity and Waste Pickers

- Circular economy aims at keeping materials in circulation at their highest and best use for as long as possible
- We need to ensure that the circular economy is also a solidarity economy
- How: integration of informal workers within municipal recycling systems, EPR, capacity-building of informal workers for service provision in waste collection and recycling and for usage of new technologies

Examples from Brazil Towards CE

- “Novo Ciclo” (New Cycle) Project – a partnership between Danone, the National Movement of Waste Pickers and other local partners: involves 4 second level cooperatives (networks) of the Minas Gerais state, Brazil, in 67 cities, over 1,500 informal recyclers.
- The collaboration btw the networks enables a circular chain of cardboard and direct selling to the industry, implementation of selective collection of recyclables with informal workers and environmental education.
- Since its inception in 2012, there has been a noted increase of 300% in waste pickers’ incomes.
- [Danone now extending support for WPs to West Africa]

Towards Circularity – Examples from Brazil

- 2010 National SW Policy establishes the normative terrain for reverse logistics (shared producers responsibility) making it mandatory that industries, government and informal recyclers movement (MNCR) establish common goals for recycling.
- The industry and governments needed to invest in infrastructure for recyclers' coops.
- Examples: Coca Cola, Pepsico, Danone and others have dedicated programs for improvement of working conditions of coops and capacity building programs.

Participatory Platforms: key to inclusive SW systems and to Inclusive Circular Economy

- Participatory platforms are regular platforms, alliances or forums that convene different organizations: informal workers' representatives, NGOs, private and public sector
- Objective: to discuss and strategize how waste management projects can improve environmental standards and enhance the livelihoods of waste pickers — with WPs at the table.

National Alliance for Inclusive Recycling Colombia

- Goals: strengthening of urban recycling systems, encouraging formalization processes, strengthening of the value chain, and creation of the national recycling observatory.
- Partners: *Recyclers* (National Association of Recyclers), *Government* (Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Sustainable Development, Health and Social Protection, and Ministry of Industry), *Industry* (National Association of Entrepreneurs, Business Commitment for Recycling, Association of Plastic industry), *Non profits* (WIEGO, Avina Foundation, Grupo Familia Foundation)
- Advances: articulation of actors to negotiate the inclusive recycling framework, monitoring of implementation of policies

Waste and Citizenship Forums - Brazil



- **National Forum created in 1998**
- **Belo Horizonte Municipal Waste & Citizenship Forum created in 2003:**
 - ▣ Stakeholder platform with representatives from coops; NGOs (INSEA, WIEGO, Tzetka), municipal government (sanitation department), Municipal Parliament, Universities etc with the goal to develop municipal policies in inclusive recycling
 - ▣ It is also a space for 8 wp organization to cooperate with one another
 - ▣ The Forum holds monthly meetings
 - ▣ It is organized into working groups
 - ▣ Advances: contracts for coops for service provision, fund raising for infrastructure, capacity building

Participatory Platforms – Key Issues

- Regular meetings are crucial.
- Rules of engagement – clear rules of who participates and how; letter of commitment signed by participating organizations.
- Representation of all sectors – multi-stakeholder platform.
- Capacity-building support for WP participation in the platform.
- Communication strategy – internal and external.
- Representatives' commitment to internal feedback within their organizations is key.
- Work-plan with short to long term goals.
- MBOs can have their own platforms to reach consensus and work collaboratively within multi-stakeholders' platforms.

Key Lessons: building formal-informal linkages

- “*Nothing for us without us*”: respect informal workers MBOs and work towards meaningful participation and inclusion.
- Integration into SW systems, but no to subordination and exploitation.
- Build SW systems on what you know works: the vision of a modern SW has to include existing informal waste workers **because**:
 - ▣ it makes more sense in labour abundant countries;
 - ▣ deliberate policies that favour employment hold the key to achieving human and economic development;
 - ▣ informal recycling saves the city money;
 - ▣ Builds recycling rates;
 - ▣ if the city is aware of the SDGs and wants to implement them inclusive SWM can impact its targets and goals.

Key Lessons: building formal-informal linkages (2)

- Technical ambitions and privatization processes need to be modified to protect livelihoods.
- Comprehensive policies:
 - participatory channels (regular not sporadic);
 - recycling chain needs fair distribution of profits;
 - supportive legal/regulatory framework;
 - mechanisms for empowered integration;
 - formal recognition of waste picking as an occupation.

Key Lessons: building formal-informal linkages (3)

- Governments have a key role: they can shape SW systems by addressing environmental and social concerns, ensure implementation of comprehensive policies not ad-hoc solutions, and plan for inclusive circular economy.
- Governments can be catalyzers of processes by: opening dialogue channels, guaranteeing the non-criminalization of reclaiming, and providing incentives for cooperatives in order to enable them to enter new niches.
- Governments can implement processes by: providing infrastructure for sorting, baling, etc; contributing to changing prejudice against reclaimers by running educational campaigns; supporting capacity building; implementing source segregation with inclusion of reclaimers; payment for waste pickers as service providers.

Key Lessons: building formal-informal linkages

Any intervention on solid waste systems (landfill closure, implementation of separation of source, MRFs) must be preceded by adequate research on livelihoods aspects, i.e. the impacts on informal waste workers — including working conditions and income generation, health, eradication of child labor, organizing and institutional strengthening, legal framework, efficiency and productivity, etc.

Key Lessons: building formal-informal linkages

Payment for collection services through proper contracts.

- ▣ Payment of waste pickers for environmental services (they redirect materials that would otherwise be dumped): the province of Minas Gerais, Brazil has pioneered a scheme called “recycling bonus” whereby coops are compensated by recyclables reclaimed.
- ▣ Things work better when governments invest in planning well
- ▣ Implementation of good projects may take a while, red tape requirements might be too daunting for WP organizations and NGOs – thus technical assistance and financial support may be required to speed up things.

Key Lessons: building formal-informal linkages

- Governments that overcome lack of preparedness and invest in building a good team capable of dealing with technical/operational aspects of segregation at source schemes tend to be more successful in integrating waste pickers, as well as addressing environmental concerns associated to SWM. Important to invest in building knowledge of the commodity face of recycling; adopting a holistic planning and monitoring systems.
- Overcoming a short sighted vision that modernization of SW can only mean use of capital intensive technologies and involvement of big private firms is important. Waste is a social and technical issue.
- Mobilizing the city to participate: In my Belo Horizonte city for instance a social mobilization unit (sociologists, popular educators working alongside engineers and other technical staff) was formed to educate the population about recycling and to show them waste pickers are environmental agents.

Conclusions

- By giving incentives to organizations of informal waste pickers such as associations, cooperatives, micro-enterprises, and unions their social and economical condition can be enhanced.
- These organizations can voice demands of waste pickers, represent their interests, fight for visibility and validity – strong civil society is good for social development and thus good for a country as a whole.
- Social function: by including women and other vulnerable groups coops have a social function in terms of poverty reduction. And this socially relevant work needs to be valued as an integral feature of the system.
- Addressing gender inequalities within the occupation is extremely relevant.
- **Striving for a pro-poor SW system means creating a long-term commitment, comprehensive policies and understanding the inherent difficulties of informal reclaimers, while ensuring their participation in the process.**
- There is no recipe for integration: it is context-based considering the nature of organizing, legal/regulatory frameworks, features of SW system, etc.