



Issue 198 | July 10, 2015 | Focus on Waste Pickers

This issue contains recent policy briefs, manuals, videos, and country studies on environmental health conditions and other issues faced by waste pickers. According to Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), recognition is growing that waste pickers contribute to the local economy, to public health and safety, and to environmental sustainability. However, they often face low social status, deplorable living and working conditions, and little support from local governments.

OVERVIEWS/POLICY

Managing the Emerging Waste Crisis in Developing Countries' Large Cities, 2015. Institute of Development Studies. [Link](#)

This policy briefing identifies some of the key challenges and opportunities for transitioning waste management into resource management, which engages both the formal and informal sector and provides livelihoods for the urban poor. Mainstreaming the informal sector is both economically efficient and financially beneficial for local governments as it reduces the costs of waste management as well as the need for large-scale investments in infrastructure.

Forging a New Conceptualization of "The Public" in Waste Management, 2015. M Samson. [Link](#)

This paper critically analyzes innovative approaches to including informal waste pickers in service delivery in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, Pune, India, and Bogota, Colombia and argues that by mobilizing collectively to demand formal incorporation into municipal waste management systems waste pickers are expanding both the public sector and the public sphere; transforming relations among the state, formal economy, informal economy, and residents; and contributing to the forging of a more inclusive, participatory, and democratic state.

Solid Waste Management and Social Inclusion of Waste Pickers: Opportunities and Challenges, 2014. M Marelo. [Link](#)

Authors explore the opportunities and challenges inherent in the model of cooperation between municipal solid waste systems and waste picker cooperatives. Enthusiasm is growing about waste picker inclusion, often as part of "integrated solid waste management." The World Bank and the InterAmerican Development Bank, for example, have both funded projects to support waste picker integration into formal sector recycling.

Urban Solid Waste Management: A Compendium of Global Good Practices, 2015.

National Institute of Urban Affairs. [Link](#)

This report summarizes good practices in solid waste management from more than 15 countries.

Rethinking Urban Waste Management in India: Policy Brief, 2015. STEPS Centre. [Link](#)

This policy brief proposes a number of basic guiding principles for the establishment of an alternative approach to urban solid waste management. Current waste management plans are created on the basis of a standardized model of waste flows in Indian cities. This model fails to accurately reflect the situation on the ground. As a result, attempts to address the environment, health, and livelihoods of local residents are being threatened, and opportunities for innovative solutions are being overlooked.

Myths & Facts about the Informal Economy and Workers in the Informal Economy, 2015. C Bonner. [Link](#)

Waste picking is closely linked to the formal economy. The Informal Economy Monitoring Study coordinated by WIEGO showed that in the five cities studied waste pickers are an integral part of the recycling value chain and thus are linked closely to the formal economy. More than 75 percent of waste pickers reported that formal businesses are the main buyers of their products. Waste pickers reported a range of services that they provide, including transportation, recovery of recyclables, semi-processing and, in one of the cities, also composting and biogas production.

Scenarios of Waste and Resource Management: for Cities in India and Elsewhere, 2015. A Chaturvedi. [Link](#)

With unplanned urbanization and large numbers of urban poor, local governments find waste to be a management challenge given their limited finances and capacities. However, waste management is an economic opportunity for the urban poor in the informal sector. In developing countries, waste management provides jobs for 1 to 2 percent of the population, mostly the urban poor. Evidence suggests that the informal sector not only supports local governments in waste management but also saves substantial amounts of natural resources through efficient recycling. However, city governments often prefer to contract big companies to collect and process waste.

WASTE PICKERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Electronic Waste Management—A Challenge for Contemporary India, 2015. S Verma. [Link](#)

In India, informal waste pickers contribute significantly to e-waste management and resource efficiency by collecting, sorting, trading, and sometimes even processing waste materials. Several studies have shown that these informal recycling activities have some positive effects on the environment by virtue of reducing the waste destined for landfills and thereby reducing the costs of waste management systems. E-waste is one of the most critical waste streams globally, due to the burgeoning volume and the toxicity concerns. In India, the informal sector is estimated to be handling around 95 percent of the e-waste recycled.

Creating Green Jobs through Safer and Cleaner E-Waste Recycling Practice in India, 2014. Switch Asia. [Link](#)

The new e-waste management and handling rules that guide producers of electrical and electronic equipment and mainstream the informal sector into an environmentally, socially, and economically feasible e-waste management system are an eminent example of voluntary

action by producers and formal recyclers alike.

Assessment of the Safety and Health Hazards in Existing Dumpsites in Kenya, 2015. K Mugo. [Link](#)

Exposure to waste-handling sites is likely to give rise to significantly increased risks of chronic respiratory illness. Focusing on three dumpsites in Kenya, this study determined that exposure to dust and bio-aerosol in substantial proportion at composting sites likely exceeded the thresholds for the development of chronic (and disabling) respiratory illness.

VIDEOS

Waste Pickers in Bangladesh, 2014. R Rumbold. [Video](#)

Waste pickers are exposed to a variety of occupational hazards and are living on the margins of society. However, to raise their status in society and reduce these hazards, collaborations among governments, NGOs, waste picker representatives, businesses, and multilateral organizations must be created.

East African Compliance Recycling: Facility Visit, 2015. EACR Kenya. [Video](#)

East African Compliance Recycling (EACR) has been able to prove on a small scale that its concept for e-waste recycling can work and that it changes the habits of local waste pickers in a sustainable manner. Our goal is now to create a financially viable business and therefore scale it up. EACR will source its e-waste from collection centers working with the informal sector and located all over the Kenyan territory.

How Waste Pickers Grabbed the Attention of 1000's by Drumming, 2014. Music Matters. [Video](#)

The waste pickers of Swach, along with the members of Deep Griha Society, came together to tackle the issue of cleanliness. An initiative by Music Matters, this one-of-a-kind event in India created music out of junk to instill values of cleanliness in people.

Waste Pickers of Brazil Unite, 2015. Equal Times. [Video](#)

In Ourinhos, Brazil, waste pickers organized, exited the informal economy, and in the process managed to secure a better standard of living.

COUNTRY STUDIES

Colombia – Recycling in Bogotá: A SWOT Analysis of Three Associations to Evaluate the Integrating the Informal Sector into Solid Waste Management, 2015. C Martínez. [Link](#)

Few studies have analyzed the possibilities and strategies to integrate the formal and informal sectors of solid waste management for the benefit of both. This study conducted a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT) analysis of three recycling associations of Bogotá to understand and determine recycling from the perspective of the informal sector as they transition to become authorized waste providers.

DRC – Scavenging for Solid Waste in Kinshasa: A Livelihood Strategy for the Urban Poor in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Habitat International*, Oct 2015. D Simatele. [Abstract/order info](#)

Scavenging in Kinshasa has increasingly become an important livelihood source for the urban poor. This development has taken place amidst high levels of poverty, deterioration in

infrastructure, and increased civil conflict. Despite the role that scavenging for solid waste plays, it is neglected in urban development and policy planning and should be integrated to contribute to sustainable urban development.

India – Executive Summary: Waste Pickers in Pune, India, 2015. Inclusive Cities. [Link](#)
In 2012, focus groups were held with 73 waste pickers; a survey was administered to the focus group participants, as well as 77 other waste pickers. Three categories of waste pickers were involved: itinerant waste buyers, itinerant waste pickers, and fixed waste collectors. The study presents key findings and policy and advocacy recommendations, which include creating enabling conditions for occupational health and safety of waste pickers and providing incentives for informal trade and processing of secondary commodities.

India – Economics of Solid Waste in India. *Economic & Political Weekly*, June 2015. M Balasubramanian. [Link](#)

This article provides an overview of the economics of solid waste and related issues. Public attention to solid waste and recycling has increased in India. In response, economists have developed models to help policy makers choose an efficient mix of policy levelers to regulate solid waste management and recycling activities.

India – Recovery of Consumer Waste in India: A Mass Flow Analysis for Paper, Plastic and Glass and the Contribution of Households and the Informal Sector.

Resources, Conservation and Recycling, Aug 2015. B Nandy. [Abstract/order info](#)

Both the informal sector (garbage collectors, waste pickers, waste dealers, small stores, and itinerant merchants) and households in India play a vital role in recovering consumer waste. This case study provides a better understanding of the contribution of households, garbage collectors, and itinerant waste merchants toward the recovery of consumer waste. This study shows that consumer waste is far more efficiently recovered in India than what has been reported in literature until now.

Mozambique – Solid Waste Management in Maputo, Mozambique, 2015. Cities Alliance. [Link](#)

Currently, the issue of waste collection is a symbol of a divided city; it has tangible implications for people's self-esteem, well-being, and health. While the municipality is in the process of improving the system in the formal parts of the city, including systems for the separation and reuse of different types of trash, people in the informal settlements do not get the services they pay for and regard the waste piling up as a major problem in their lives.

South Africa – “I Would Rather Have a Decent Job”: Barriers Preventing Street Waste Pickers from Improving their Socioeconomic Conditions, 2015. K Viljoen, Economic Research Southern Africa. [Link](#)

As a result of the high levels of unemployment in South Africa, many unskilled people are forced to resort to a variety of income-generating activities in the informal economy. The activity of collecting and selling recyclables presents virtually no barriers to entry, making it a viable option. This article reports the results of the first countrywide research into the barriers that prevent street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic circumstances.

Thailand – Co-Benefits of Household Waste Recycling for Local Community's Sustainable Waste Management in Thailand. *Sustainability*, 7(6) 2015. A

Challcharoenwattana. [Link](#)

The study aimed to evaluate co-benefits in term of greenhouse gas reduction and avoided

landfill costs by implementing a community-based management (CBM) program for municipal solid waste. Two peri-urban settlements in Thailand were investigated in case studies to compare eco-performance with and without implementation of the CBM program. The study demonstrates that by allowing local mechanisms and community involvement programs to develop with operational waste banks, the efficiency of collecting recycling waste increased. A similar system can be applied to other communities in other countries.

WEBSITES

Global Alliance of Waste Pickers - [Website](#)

The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers is a networking process supported by WIEGO of thousands of waste picker organizations with groups in more than 28 countries covering mainly Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

WASHplus Weeklies highlight topics such as Urban WASH, Household Air Pollution, Innovation, Household Water Treatment and Storage, Handwashing, Integration, and more. If you would like to feature your organization's materials in upcoming issues, please send them to Dan Campbell, WASHplus Knowledge Resources Specialist, at dacampbell@fhi360.org.



About WASHplus - WASHplus, a multi-year project funded through USAID's Bureau for Global Health, supports healthy households and communities by creating and delivering interventions that lead to improvements in access, practice and health outcomes related to water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and household air pollution (HAP). WASHplus uses at-scale, targeted as well as integrated approaches to reduce diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections, the two top killers of children under five years of age globally. For information, visit www.washplus.org or email: contact@washplus.org.