



Supportive Environments for Healthy Communities

Issue 75 October 19, 2012 | Focus on Waste Pickers

This week's issue contains reports, videos and blog posts that discuss the health, environmental and other issues that affect waste pickers. According to the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers, the term "waste pickers" can be broadly defined as people who reclaim reusable and recyclable materials from what others have cast aside as waste. In many countries, family-based enterprises in the solid waste informal sector account for most recycling of metal, paper, plastic, glass, and kitchen and garden waste. Without the activity of these micro-entrepreneurs, much more waste would end up in dumps or in the environment, but at the same time their conditions of work are difficult and unhealthy.

Please let WASHplus know at any time if you have resources to share for future issues of WASHplus Weekly or if you have suggestions for future topics. An [archive](#) of past Weekly issues is available on the WASHplus website.

GLOBAL REPORTS

- **On the Road to Zero Waste: Successes and Lessons from Around the World**, 2012. C Allen et al. Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives. ([Full text, pdf](#))
Zero Waste is a new way of thinking that aims to safeguard the health and improve the lives of everyone who produces, handles, works with, or is affected by waste.
- **Refusing to be Cast Aside: Waste Pickers Organising Around the World**, 2012. M Samson, ed. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). ([Full text, pdf](#))
Waste pickers generate their livelihoods and sustain themselves and their families by retrieving reusable and recyclable materials from the waste-stream – typically from streets, open spaces, garbage bins and garbage dumps. Historically their work has been considered informal and often illegal. Nevertheless, they perform an essential service and are an integral, although frequently unacknowledged, part of the waste management systems in the cities where they work.
- **Start Your Waste Business: For Waste Pickers, Dealers and Small-Scale**

Recyclers of Recovered Materials. N Agathos, WASTE. ([Full-text, pdf](#))

A step-by-step guide for anyone considering starting a small business in the recovery of waste.

- **Waste and Development: Perspectives from the Ground.** *Field Actions Science Reports, Issue 6, 2012.* S Dias. ([Full text](#))

Millions of people worldwide make a living collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling valuable materials disposed of as waste. In many countries, waste pickers supply the only form of solid waste collection. While waste pickers provide vital services to their communities, their municipalities and the environment – they generally face very difficult working conditions and in many cases have little or no support from local governments. Waste pickers have been organizing themselves into cooperatives, unions and associations and have found that forging solidarity links across continents is an important strategy.

- **Waste Pickers.** WIEGO. ([Link to article](#))

Waste pickers' earnings vary widely between regions by the type of work they do, and for women and men. For example, in Belgrade, waste pickers may earn US \$100 monthly on average, while in Cambodia, the earnings can be as little as one dollar a day. In Santa Cruz, Bolivia, about 59 percent of waste pickers earn below the minimum wage. However, although waste picking is the lowest paid part of the recycling chain in many places, these workers can earn more than the minimum wage; in Brazil and Mexico, some earn many times the minimum wage.

- **Waste Pickers as Service Providers: Why Not?** Fundacion AVINA, Sept 2012. ([Blog post](#))

Historically, waste pickers have been perceived as a problem. Some successful experiences show that they can be part of the solution. A truly integrated solid waste management approach should consider the possibility of incorporating waste pickers as potential service providers. This is not an easy task. It requires time and resources. It also requires government recognition of this issue and support through enabling policies.

- **What a Waste: A Global Review of Solid Waste Management,** 2012. D Hoornweg, World Bank. ([Full text, pdf](#))

Municipal solid waste (MSW) management is the most important service a city provides; in low-income countries as well as many middle-income countries, MSW is the largest single budget item for cities and one of the largest employers. Waste workers, both formal and informal, have a significant impact on overall MSW programming. While in more affluent countries aging workers are a growing challenge, the effective integration of waste pickers, particularly in low-income countries, is critical.

COUNTRY REPORTS

- **Brazil - Integration of Informal Waste Pickers in Dengue Fever Control Partnerships in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.** *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, June 2012. C Alley, Columbia University. ([Abstract](#))

Dengue control campaigns in Rio de Janeiro recruited *catadores*, or informal waste pickers, in interventions that aimed to reduce mosquito vector reservoirs by collecting refuse in slums patrolled by Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora (UPPs), or 'pacification' police. Informal waste pickers contributed to effective dengue vector control in slums where pacification police units secured state access.
- **Colombia - Linking the Poor to New Modalities in Service Delivery: Partnership Innovations in Solid Waste Management in Bogotá, Colombia,** 2012. I Turcotte, Institute of Social Sciences. ([Full text, pdf](#))

Waste picking has become a prominent activity in the urban landscape, bridging the gap between shortfalls in service delivery and personal income generation in virtually all cities of the developing world. Overcoming previous stigmatization and work fragmentation through organization and dialogue, social economy organizations constituted by waste pickers are emerging as valuable actors in the governance framework, partnering at times with the public and private sectors to fulfill public service provision while aiming to improve the livelihoods of the poor.
- **India - Failing the Grade: How Cities Across India are Breaking the Rules, Ignoring the Informal Recycling Sector and Unable to Make the Grade,** 2011. Chintan. ([Full text, pdf](#))

Indian policies and rules, while not perfect, have some important safeguards and recognition for informal sector recyclers, particularly wastepickers. However, municipalities, urban policy makers, and private companies ignore them while conducting business in solid waste management. In so doing, they bypass the environment and the poor. They disrupt a chain that so importantly contributes to reducing greenhouse gases in our increasingly consumptive cities and towns.
- **Philippines - Integration of the Informal Sector into Municipal Solid Waste Management in the Philippines - What Does It Need?** *Waste Manag.* July 2012. J Paul, GIZ-AHT Project, Philippines. ([Abstract](#))

In Iloilo City, Philippines, the local government proposed various measures to integrate the informal sector into the municipal solid waste management program. As a key intervention, a Waste Workers Association called USWAG Calahunan Livelihood Association Inc. (UCLA) was initiated and registered as a formal business enterprise in May 2009. Up to date, UCLA counts 240 members who commit to follow certain rules and to work within a team that jointly recovers wasted materials.
- **South Africa - The Management, Practice and Environmental Health Implications of the Municipal Solid Waste Dump Site in Alice, South Africa.** *Online Journal of Social Sciences Research*, Aug 2012. V Remigios Fort Hare Institute

of Social and Economic Research. ([Full text, pdf](#))

This study wanted to examine the management of the solid waste disposal site in Alice, a town in South Africa. It was observed that the management of the landfill does not meet the Minimum Requirements set by the Department of Water Affairs. There is co-disposal of municipal, hazardous and building waste at the site. The site is not guarded and waste pickers and animals access the site any time of the day. Municipal workers were responsible for burning waste at the site thereby contributing to greenhouse gases. The study recommends that the Alice community be exposed to education and awareness campaigns on the need to minimize the amount and types of waste getting to the site....If necessary there should be a measure of structured access to waste pickers by registering waste pickers who operate within the disposal site.

- **Bangladesh - Improving the Informal Recycling Sector through Segregation of Waste in the Household: The Case of Dhaka Bangladesh.** Habitat *International*, 2012., A Matter, Eawag: Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology. ([Full text, pdf](#))

This paper presents research that focuses on the production of waste at the household level, and explores how household waste segregation can preserve the value of recyclable materials, enhance their accessibility to informal workers of the recycling sector and reduce overall waste flows.

WEBSITES

- **Chintan** - ([Website](#))
Chintan, a Delhi based NGO that works with wastepickers to convert waste into social wealth, has been awarded the US Secretary of State's award for Innovation. This was the first award instituted by Secretary Clinton and the Rockefeller Foundation.
- **Global Alliance of Waste Pickers** - ([Website](#))
The Alliance is helping to organize associations in Africa, Latin America and Asia where waste pickers are not yet well organized or connected.

VIDEOS

- **Kenya: Buried in Dandora: Voices of Nairobi's Waste Management Disaster**, 2012. Pulitzer Center. ([Link](#))
A series of photos, videos and blog posts about Nairobi's Dandora Municipal Dump Site which has been officially "full" for years and is implicated in a host of diseases--yet provides employment to scavengers.
- **Space for Wastepickers in Solid Waste Management**, 2012. Global Alliance of Waste Pickers. ([Video](#))
A video detailing activities and lessons learned at the Global Strategic Workshop of Waste Pickers held in April 2012.

- **Waste to Resource**, 2012. ESCAP. ([Video](#))

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Waste Concern and local partners embarked on a regional project, Pro-Poor and Sustainable Solid Waste Management in Secondary Cities and Small Towns. By regarding waste as a resource, the project's overarching objective is to enable participating towns to develop and execute solid waste management strategies that are decentralized, particularly beneficial to the urban poor, contribute to low-carbon priorities and can be partly financed through the sale of carbon credits.

Each WASHplus Weekly highlights topics such as Urban WASH, Indoor Air Pollution, Innovation, Household Water Treatment and Storage, Hand Washing, 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 five-year project funded through USAID's Bureau for Global Health, creates supportive environments for healthy households and communities by delivering high-impact interventions in water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH) and indoor air pollution (IAP). WASHplus uses proven, at-scale interventions 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.

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