



# Waste Picking in Africa

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Mmapula Baloyi at the Temba landfill in Tshwane.

## India's waste pickers

### I saw a miracle

Mmapula Baloyi is not looking like a waste picker today. She is smartly dressed as she smilingly meets us inside the 'stop nonsense wall' that surrounds Temba, the site where she works.

She is a proud reclaimer who enjoys her work, "I have worked here for ten years and I can't think of working anywhere else. The people are friendly and I think it's great to clean the environment. I live near here too so I don't have to travel to work. But I don't like sorting, my favourite is picking."

But Mmapula is more than a waste picker. She is a good organizer and she sees the shortcomings in people's work conditions.

"It's hard work with a lot of bending and we work with sharp objects and dangerous substances sometimes. A chemical bottle can burst, and pickers get asthma and

irritable eyes. You have to bring your own gloves as you can cut your fingers badly."

She was elected chair of the workers' committee because they quickly saw that she cared about them, as she put it, "I would feel ashamed if I didn't help them." Her leadership led to the Tshwane Waste Pickers Network nominating her to go to India in June to learn how reclaimers have organized themselves there.

#### Miracle in Pune

"It was my first time to go on a 'plane and I was so afraid." But her fear vanished when she was drawn into the fascinating world of waste reclaiming in and around Mumbai together with other waste pickers from elsewhere in the world.

Her Indian hosts took the visitors to Pune where they witnessed how waste was segregated. In a collectively run project Mmapula saw the separation of dry and wet waste and how dry waste was converted into compost and sold to people for their gardens.

In Pune they dropped in on Malhem Engineering Company which collects discarded hotel food and converts it into bio gas. Mmapula watched fascinated as the food was squeezed through a machine, the liquid filtered off as fertilizer while the remainder was used to generate bio gas which was captured in a large balloon above the machine.

"I was so surprised that something like cabbage can make gas! Then outside they showed us a cooking stove which was operating off the gas. I saw a miracle, waste ending up as compost and gas. It made me think."

#### New Delhi – hope and threat

In New Delhi the Indians told their visitors about their organization Chintan. Chintan invests workers' savings and pays them out to send their children to school. It also ensures that no children work on landfills.

In New Delhi Mmapula learnt that waste pickers had ten good years of organizing and plentiful work. But now they are being evicted from landfills as companies dig up and incinerate the waste to generate electricity. The incinerators can be manned by five labourers whereas waste picking provides work for many more.

To ensure that waste pickers voices and grievances are heard, collectors' organizations try to keep in close contact with local and regional politicians. Their collectives encourage politicians to meet with reclaimers and to listen and understand their fears and hopes and assist them where possible. This has been successful in some cases.

In Pune Mmapula also learnt about SWaCH an organization for street collectors who move from house to house collecting packets of waste. The organization helps them sell directly to buyers who want, for example, plastic waste. Through the SWaCH collective workers have managed to buy decent work uniforms.

#### India inspires

"I liked Indians," comments Mmapula, "I'd like to live there because waste pickers are so organized. It made me think we must raise our voices and build in Tshwane. groundWork (a South African environmental justice NGO) has been helping us organize but we were not listening but now, coming from India, I understand what they were saying is actually true."

Mmapula has a number of ideas that she would like waste pickers to pursue. She'd like them to build a collective organization and get registered and recognized so they can open a bank account and organize pensions and assistance with their children's education.

She feels strongly that waste pickers need to meet with the local municipality more often and also with politicians in higher places like the minister of environmental affairs. In this way their contribution, needs and grievances can be recognized.

"Inspiration comes from others. In India I know we have their moral support. But we lack knowledge. We need more workshops and discussion. But without organization we can do nothing. Government will just say who are you and where do you come from."

Mmapula intends to report back to the Tshwane Network to see what they think about her Indian experience. "But first and most important," she emphasizes "we must listen carefully to each other. At meetings everyone talks at the same time and pulls in different directions. We need to learn to listen properly in the way I saw in India."

Kally Forrest with translator Bongani Xezwi



Baloyi (back right) with Indian waste pickers that she so admires.

Lucia Fernandez

# Same issues world over

The AIW (Indian Alliance of Wastepickers) workshop on Landfill Workers Struggles and Strategies was held in Mumbai in June this year with a view to understanding the situation of waste pickers working in landfills across the country and abroad.

Workshop participants were waste pickers on landfills and staff of waste pickers organizations in India representing the Indian cities of Ahmedabad, Delhi, Ghaziabad, Mumbai, New Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune, Thane as well as WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) staff and two waste pickers from South Africa and Senegal.

The current situation with regard to access to waste and waste management in 11 landfills across the country and in Senegal and South Africa were presented by one waste collector from each city working on a landfill. The impact of the closure of dumping grounds on unorganized waste pickers in Vasai-Virar near Mumbai was also shared.

Waste pickers brainstormed a number of issues. These included occupational health issues on landfills; formulation of their demands such as access to recyclables at an increased number of points; improved working conditions; medical and insurance provisions along with livelihood alternatives and recommendations to the government.

Presenters also outlined different strategies to highlight waste picker issues on landfills. They gave information through interactive sessions with graphic presentations, games and exercises. Input ranged from landfill laws; policies and trends in landfill management and the move towards controlled, sanitary landfills, which often exclude waste pickers and the implications of this trend.

The workshop highlighted that working conditions of landfill waste pickers across the globe were very similar and so were their problems.

## Visit to Delhi – Chintan

Mmapula Baloyi from South Africa and Senegal's Aliou Faye went to Delhi to see the programmes on the ground run by Chintan Environmental Action and Research Group. They learnt about programmes run by Chintan with its waste picker members who belong to the sister organization Safai Sena.

They also visited Safai Sena's sorting and packing centre where soft drink bottles are collected, uncapped, bailed and shredded into flakes, which fetches a higher selling price than just selling the bottles. All profits are split among Sena members and 50 per cent is directed to Chintan's projects with waste pickers.

Mmapula and Aliou also saw door-to-door collection of waste with their cycle rickshaws, a scrap shop that gives fair prices to waste pickers and the Okhla landfill where the waste-to-energy plant has been constructed.

They saw a big scrap shop in Bhopura where waste pickers are employed segregating waste and have started collecting tetrapack, which is used as packaging for beverages and food. This is a model that Tetrapack Pty Ltd is willing to help implement in any nation.

## Visit to Pune: KKP KP

Information exchange visits are organized by the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) waste picker trade union in Pune

through the Asia Network and the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers regularly to aid an exchange between Indian waste pickers and those abroad to get a picture of each others' struggles and strategies.

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door collection by members of the SWaCH cooperative. They accompanied members to see how they collect waste from homes with their pushcarts and separate bins for dry and wet waste.

The collectors put the wet waste into compost pits when ready, then the

compost is sold and the profits distributed fairly among waste pickers. They also have a sorting area to further classify dry waste and store it if necessary.

They saw a biogas plant that gets wet waste from municipal trucks which collect

waste from hotels. SWaCH members sort the waste so that only organics go into the shredder. The gas from this plant supplies electricity to 68 street lights.

They also saw a mini-biogas plant, which is movable and accommodates 200 kgs of wet waste and produces cooking gas. Aliou

was very interested in launching a biogas plant in Senegal because apart from bread which is sold to piggeries, wet waste is simply thrown away. Because Senegal has energy issues, he felt that biogas was a solution and he aimed to discuss it with Senegalese government representatives.

The African waste pickers heard about the formation of KKP KP and its work with waste pickers and saw a Pune landfill. Local waste pickers told how their main problem was that truck drivers sometimes kept the high quality dry waste and then the waste pickers got nothing of much value. Aliou and Mmapula noticed that the smell was the same in their dumpsites, and that the work was also similar.

While interacting with local waste collectors about work situations in landfills in both India and Africa, pickers realized that the situation was similar in all countries. The threat of privatization, and minimal government support or protection loomed over everyone's heads as they realized their struggles are all the same.

Neba Govindan

## Learning from India

Aliou Faye is a 34-year-old Senegalese waste picker who has worked in Mbeubeuss landfill in Dakar for the last 16 years. He is vice-president of the waste pickers' organization in his landfill, Bokk Diomm.

This organization was set up in 1995 as a result of waste pickers' frustration with people's lack of recognition for their work. They needed a place to talk about landfill issues and to build solidarity among workers.

Since its creation more than 15 years ago, Bokk Diom has been an important source of support for the waste pickers. It has set up facilities within the landfill such as a nursing centre, a literacy centre and a credit and savings cooperative. It has 800 members among the 1 200 waste pickers on the landfill.

### Indians work together

The main problem collectors face is the closing of the landfill. For environmental, health and economic reasons, the Senegalese government decided to shut it down in 2002.

The association has fought back and managed to delay it, but the threat of closure in August 2011 hangs over them.

The Bokk Diom members chose Aliou to go to India in early June 2011 to learn more about how Indian waste pickers deal with landfill closures. He took part in a workshop where he heard about their struggles and victories.

What really impressed Aliou is that the Indians are organized and work together, "This way they are stronger and can fight

for their rights", he emphasized. After the two-day workshop in Mumbai, he visited the cities of Pune and Delhi and met with collectors to see how they work and to visit installations. He saw landfills, sorting areas, composting and biogas plants and scrap shops.

A few days after he returned to Senegal, Aliou reported to Bokk Diom members on his trip and what he had learnt. He explained that the Indian waste pickers are organized into associations all over the country, which is helpful as it makes it easier to share experiences and ideas. "India is amazing", he exclaimed and he found the waste pickers' organizations "very inspiring".

He also told people about his visits and differences from Senegal. For instance, door-to-door collection does not exist in Senegal, and it may be a good opportunity for reclaimers when the Mbeubeuss landfill closes. In Pune they are organized into the SWaCH cooperative, and each worker collects from 250 houses to pick up segregated waste every day. They sell the good material and use the wet waste in composting or in biogas plants.

### Going forward

When Aliou returned from India he went with other members of Bokk Diom to meet with the authorities and companies about the closure of the landfill. Their aim was to discuss alternatives and compensation for waste pickers losing their livelihoods.

The authorities are offering educational programmes for children under 16, pensions



Bokk Diom's Aliou Faye is discussing alternatives with Senegalese authorities from what he learnt in India.

for waste pickers over 55, and work in the recycling centre for 350 workers. Unfortunately, this leaves 350 jobless, and "this is a big issue for us", declared Aliou.

He has visited the soon-to-be recycling centre, in which none of the promised facilities like a restaurant, housing and health centre have been built yet.

Aliou told the authorities about the composting and biogas plants he saw in India and suggested this could be integrated into the recycling centre and create more jobs. He explained how the biogas plant turns the wet waste into gas and electricity energy, while the compost could be useful for the recycling centre itself. "They were interested by these ideas, and we might meet again soon," explained Aliou.

Solidarity and exchanges between waste pickers in different parts of the world can help to generate new ideas to improve the situation of waste pickers confronting similar problems.

Fanny Chantereau

# Tshwane: power through networking

In the 1990s the Tshwane municipality in South Africa engaged in a number of failed projects with waste pickers. These included a project that hired waste pickers to make crafts out of recyclable material. It also included talks with a private company with interests in waste management helping waste pickers to set up cooperatives and run buy-back centres for the cooperatives. However, the positive that came out of these failures was that waste pickers formed committees on dumps and this provided the base for independent organizing.

But what lessons and openings for organization emerged in this period?

## Lessons and openings

Firstly, it became clear that projects could not just sell waste made from recyclables if they wanted secure incomes for waste pickers.

Also, this history showed that waste pickers perform a valuable service because they save airspace and extend the life of landfills. So if the municipality can't or won't offer pickers employment, or if pickers prefer self employment, it should offer to pay them for diverting recyclables from landfills.

In Diadema, Brazil, for example, local government pays waste picker cooperatives the same amount per tonne for recyclables that they stop from going to the dump as it pays to waste disposal companies.

Another lesson is that municipalities need to help democratic, waste picker controlled co-ops to grow by bringing in organizations with experience in developing co-ops to support them and by ensuring that they develop skills to run co-ops. Municipalities should only bring in recycling and waste industry experts when they need to assist on technical issues.

Local government should also acknowledge that waste pickers are working on municipal land and providing a key service to the municipality by providing them with safety equipment such as overalls, gloves and safety shoes.



Meeting preparations at a landfill in Soshanguve, Tshwane.

## Forming committees

As part of the municipal projects, Tshwane waste pickers were assisted to form committees on each of the landfills. Once the municipal projects collapsed they moved towards independent organization as they created self-run committees that focused on improving their conditions. In 2009, they formed a city-wide network of committees called Rekopane Recycling Revolution (RRR). This Network consists of committee members from Tshwane's seven public and one private landfill.

These committees operate informally. They do not hold regular elections nor do they have constitutions. Still, they are powerful forces that have the support of most waste pickers on landfills. Committees are generally made up of 11 to 16 members and have a chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary, deputy secretary and treasurer.

An equal number of women and men sit on committees although there are still fixed ideas about who does what job. Older men are usually elected as chairpersons because people feel they command the authority to enforce decisions, while women serve as deputies or general members. Foreign workers tend to be left off committees. It will be important for RRR to reflect on how it can become truly gender equitable and represent all waste pickers on the landfills regardless of their ethnicity and nationality.

Members give many reasons for serving on committees. Some include bringing order to the landfill and working cooperatively and responsibly with others. Also they want to fight for their rights and better conditions and prevent corruption.

Developing waste pickers' skills is also a big issue. They want such skills as being able to speak to large groups of people, improving their English and gaining confidence to deal with government authorities.

RRR outlined its priority tasks. These are to create safe and orderly environments by tackling violence, theft, alcohol and drugs and ensuring people don't steal or damage trucks coming to landfills. They also want to end the harassment of women.

Committees have also expressed the desire to prevent new people from working on landfills and they are prepared to exercise violence against newcomers. This is clearly an area that waste pickers need to reflect on and to remember that they were also once desperate newcomers.

Members aim to hire private security guards to protect their materials at night and to get formal recognition from municipalities including the ability to negotiate better working conditions.

The committees want to find new buyers and share price information with other landfills so that waste pickers can negotiate better prices.

## Tshwane network: true independence

The need to improve price negotiations with buyers sparked the idea to form RRR. RRR organized around the drop in prices linked to the global economic crisis and also that buyers were paying different prices at different dumps and playing pickers off against each other.

However, as the Network grows, it is also finding ways to engage with the municipality as well, specific dump problems and how to resolve them.

For example, when a waste picker repeatedly harassed women, the RRR held a debate and decided the man could no longer work at the dump. The Network has the authority to enforce such decisions.

Representatives from all landfill committees meet on the first Thursday of every month to discuss and take forward issues that affect them all. Each month the meeting is held at a different landfill. The waste pickers at the host landfill provide a hot meal and refreshments for delegates and each landfill covers the costs of their representatives attending meetings.

## Negotiating with buyers

The Network has engaged buyers in different ways. Waste pickers at Network meetings have helped each other find new buyers and to establish common prices.

RRR invited groups of buyers to a meeting to explain their lower prices to them and to put forward a fair deal.

The buyers were impressed at how well organized the waste pickers were and how they organized the meeting. This has changed their ideas about them. From now on they will start to treat waste pickers more seriously as business partners. Also by forcing buyers to explain their drop in prices, pickers learnt how their work is affected by the global economy.

## Co-ops: end to middleman

When waste pickers realized how little buyers valued their work, they felt determined to form co-ops and buy vehicles and equipment, and start selling directly to manufacturers.

Inspired by Network discussions about the power of organizing collectively and removing middlemen, waste pickers at Ondestepoort landfill formed a co-op called *Yebo Rekopane Recycling* (Yes, We All Work Together Recycling). In 2010, the co-op had 66 members which aimed to buy and sell material and purchase, with collective profit, a truck, bailing machine and a shelter.

The greatest challenge facing the co-op is raising money for new activities. Using profits from the new activity of crushing glass, it used Network contacts to sell this and with the profits the co-op bought plastic and employed a woman to weigh materials for bulk selling to buyers.

Other committees inspired by Ondestepoort now also want to form co-ops. They share information on how to build co-ops at RRR meetings and also look at the experiences of co-ops in other cities, through the South African National Waste Picker Network.

It is through sharing ideas and information and developing a common identity that the RRR is achieving success. This has included developing common rules on how waste pickers can take responsibility on landfills. Its collective identity has also allowed it to present the municipality with a common set of demands.

Although the municipality has not yet responded to them, waste pickers believe the RRR will give them the strength and knowledge to successfully engage with it.

Within its first year alone, the RRR has had much success. It took on buyers, formed co-ops, shared information, built organization and created a strong common front.

Based on a report by Melanie Samson.



Loading recyclables onto buyer's truck.

Melanie Samson

Melanie Samson

# Hands in trash, heads held high

In September last year at an important meeting of waste collectors in Dakar, Sénégal StreetNet International encouraged its Africa affiliates to organize waste pickers.

At a previous Waste Pickers Without Frontiers conference in Bogota, Colombia in 2008, it was clear that organization of waste pickers in Africa was lagging behind Latin America where there is a continental network of waste pickers and India where there is an Alliance of Indian Waste Pickers. As a result, in 2009 StreetNet launched a project to help

support organizing by waste pickers in Africa.

The meeting in Dakar included delegates from countries across Africa such as Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sénégal, Niger, Rwanda, Congo, Togo, Burkina Faso and Chad.

Participants discussed key problems such as child labour, waste pickers paying to collect waste instead of being paid, lack of knowledge of rights, lack of local government capacity to manage waste, and privatization of waste collection.

People listened with great interest to presentations from the well-organized waste pickers in Pune, India which made delegates realize that whatever men can do, women can also do. They heard, too, how collectors in Latin America had launched a strong network that now spreads across the continent.

There was also much discussion about the health scheme for waste pickers in Sénégal's Bokk Diom organization put in place by NGOs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

## What was gained?

At the end of the workshop people reflected on what they had gained. They felt by learning about waste pickers in different countries they had begun to understand the importance of managing the environment

through recycling. They had learnt about the value chain from collecting to recycling with all work done by marginalised groups.

The importance of communication and networking to build strong organization also came home to people especially as this can assist in creating employment and eradicating poverty.

A South African delegate, Cynthia Nkosi was truly excited, "The Indian people Wow! They do things as one. Kenya people also. Each and everyone gets the same salary. I work on my own but we are still trying to make one because we are 15 in our Barberton landfill."

On returning to their countries delegates vowed to keep in contact and reach out to other waste pickers in Africa and across the world. Most of all they wanted to go home and implement in their own organizations what they had learnt especially from organization, in Latin America and India.

Delegates spoke of the need to contact their governments at home to introduce waste picker friendly legislation and to make government aware of their plight.

StreetNet encouraged its African affiliates to meet other waste pickers and to find out if they are organized, and to assist the unorganized to form associations or cooperatives. Street vendors often meet waste pickers as they both work in public spaces so this is very possible.

When countries identify waste pickers'



Bokk Diom Landfill site.

organizations affiliates need to notify StreetNet of names and contact details. It will then pass on this information to Wiego's (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) Africa Waste Pickers' Coordinator as WIEGO is supporting waste pickers to establish a global network of waste pickers.

At the end of the meeting delegates committed themselves to keeping in touch with StreetNet affiliates and to locating and building new waste pickers' organizations in their countries.

One delegate said, "Initially we thought that only the Latin Americans were organizing, but now we are proud that internationally while it may be that our hands are in the trash, but our head is held high."

Ricardo Valencia



Bokk Diom Health Centre at Mbeubeuss Landfill, Sénégal.

Ricardo Valencia

## Waste pickers! COP17 is important

Here we go again, the yearly United Nations (UN) climate summit is approaching in Durban at the end of the year, with its usual endless list of strange words that make us scratch our heads in confusion.

Why do people make such important issues around climate change, waste and waste pickers so complicated when it comes to making agreements that respect grassroots communities and the environment?

Did you know that the climate summit is in fact called COP? What does it mean and why is it important to us? Let's try to get the basics right to make sure we don't miss the chance to participate in this important opportunity for grassroots communities to shape the future of our planet.

Waste pickers are one of the frontline communities that can do most for the environment, as collecting recyclable materials is one of the easiest and cheapest ways not to threaten the climate.

### What is climate change?

Climate change is the rise of the global temperature as a result of putting lots of man-created pollution into the atmosphere.

In short, the planet is getting a bit hotter, and this is impacting severely on many places: the ice is melting in the Pole North, sea levels are rising and flooding small islands, crops die waiting for rain that never comes, people and animals suffer from



Waste pickers united at COP16 in Mexico.

starvation, strong winds make coastal cities collapse under heavy tornados.

The problem is now at an alarming stage: climate change is already happening, and it has become the biggest challenge humanity has ever faced.

### Why is this happening?

Industries have been expanding enormously in the last decades at a very high cost for all of us. Fabrics, transport systems, intensive agriculture and other means of intensive production have let out lots of pollution into the atmosphere creating a layer of gases that is now surrounding the globe.

This is known as the greenhouse effect: the pollution (different kinds of greenhouse gases) surrounds the planet and does not allow any cooling down, the same as if we left on our coat on a hot summer day.

Forests and oceans normally help to refresh the planet, but now the amount of pollution is so huge that the only way to cool down the planet is to stop emitting more of these gases into the atmosphere.

### Who is responsible?

Rich countries, responsible for dirty industries, have polluted without paying for it and now most of them are even

resisting slowing down pollution rates. They are delighted to carry on with an economy based on producing and consuming at an ever increasing rate, without caring that this is increasing pollution and wasting resources. The more we consume, the more we waste... but plastic, wood, and metals are not forever! One day they will be finished too!

### How can waste pickers help?

Waste pickers are already doing a great job in stopping climate change, as collecting recyclable materials prevents the new production of goods and therefore prevents a lot of pollution.

Through collecting, sorting, cleaning, remanufacturing and selling out recyclables, waste pickers are protecting lots of natural resources. Recycling paper saves trees, recycling metal saves mining and extraction, recycling plastic saves oil and all the related environmental costs.

At the moment there are around 15 million waste pickers in the world, a very powerful work force to reduce the amount of waste that goes to the landfill through real reduction of polluting emissions.

### What are COPs?

The COP (Conference of the Parties) is a giant international delegation from 192 countries that meet to discuss how to address climate change.

In Durban it will be the 17th in a series of UN conferences on climate change, in which the UN has to ensure that developed countries finally agree on reducing their greenhouse gas emissions.

By 1997 negotiations had progressed towards the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty that would bind signatory countries to emission reductions to be reached by 2012. Now the Kyoto Protocol period is about to finish, but some countries like Japan, Russia and Canada are resisting the renewal of their commitments to reduce emissions within a new treaty.

### Any good news?

Sure! One of the positive outcomes from last year Cancun's COP was the establishment of the Green Climate Fund. This Fund will hopefully channel money from rich to poor countries as a payment for their historical, large contribution to climate change. The Fund is meant to cover the financial needs of climate change, both to prevent an increase in emissions and temperature increases, and also to help communities adapt to some of the climate catastrophes.

GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives), WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing) and the Global Alliance of Wastepickers have concentrated their advocacy efforts on making the Green Climate Fund accessible to finance grassroots communities.

Specifically, we have argued for a direct access mechanism to the Fund to allow national and local governments, and civil society to participate and benefit. This is a major Fund and it is very important to make sure it is set up with the right principles from the very beginning.

### COP 17: what can we do?

GAIA, WIEGO and the Global Alliance of Wastepickers have attended the UN climate conferences on several occasions to offer our solutions to climate change, and to protest false solutions such as 'waste-to-energy'.

We have also been part of the climate justice movement. We defend the fair treatment of all people with the creation of policies and projects that counter climate change systems that continue discrimination.

Through demonstrations, press conferences, side-events, conversations with delegates, and actions held together with other allies within the climate justice movement, waste picker leaders from all over the world have united and defended grassroots recycling and composting as the fastest and cheapest way to fight against climate change.

The Durban COP17 will be a crucial time to see how the Green Climate Fund develops and what the future holds for international climate negotiations. Waste pickers can raise their voices for truly just and grassroots-focused solutions that recognize their valuable contribution in the struggle against climate change.

*Mariel Vilella*

# False solutions to climate change

## CDM incineration and landfill gas systems



*Waste pickers saying no to waste-to-energy false solutions*

**W**aste has become an important item on the international agenda for climate change.

Greenhouse gas emissions from waste are growing. In particular, people expect methane gas from open landfills to increase almost 50 per cent between 1990 and 2020. Since methane is a powerful greenhouse gas, decreasing methane emissions is crucial to prevent catastrophic climate change. (see 'Waste pickers! COP17 is important' for information on climate change issues.)

Climate policy attempts to reduce methane emissions from waste have mainly focused on the United Nations-administered Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The CDM was created to help rich countries reduce their greenhouse gas emissions through the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

Basically, the CDM allows rich countries to buy pollution permits from projects located in poor countries that have low greenhouse gas emissions, instead of cutting back on emissions themselves. In this way, the CDM supports the development of projects in the Global South that in principle are helping the fight against climate change.

Since the CDM started operating in 2005, many criticisms have been raised against some of these projects, as in most cases they pose serious threats to the environment and local communities. Ultimately, rich countries keep buying pollution permits to escape from their commitments to reduce emissions in order to save our planet.

### CDM and waste: huge threat

In the case of waste, the CDM is definitely not doing a great job. So far, the CDM has mostly supported the expansion of 'waste-to-energy' technologies such as waste incinerators and landfill gas facilities, which are a huge threat to waste pickers. Considerable evidence indicates that the projects approved by the CDM are directly undermining local population and potential recycling programmes, apart from posing other environmental problems.

Incinerators take recyclable materials such as paper and plastic to burn them and produce electricity. Landfill gas systems bury vegetables and kitchen waste, mixed with other kinds of waste, to produce methane and then electricity as well.

In this way, these technologies actively compete with the valuable contribution of waste pickers to prevent catastrophic climate change as well as with general recycling programmes. Waste pickers and other recyclers offer much greater greenhouse gas reductions, especially when combined with biological treatment methods.

Recycling paper, plastic and metals is a very effective way to prevent pollution involved in the production of stuff. In the extraction, transport, processing, distribution, consumption and final disposal, each step of the process involves pollution. However, if we recycle stuff, we do not need to produce so many new things, and we can effectively prevent the pollution in the first place.

We should prevent vegetables and kitchen waste coming into landfills to avoid methane emissions. Instead we can pile this waste up in a facility to turn into fertiliser for crops. This kind of fertiliser is called compost. In India, some waste pickers' groups take this waste and close it up in a biodigester, a small container that will decompose the vegetables and produce electricity for homes without environmental harm.

Recycling provides a livelihood for approximately 15 million people worldwide - 1 per cent of the urban population in the developing world. Waste pickers are incredibly efficient recyclers, achieving recycling rates higher than 80 per cent in places where they have handled vegetables and kitchen waste, such as in Cairo, Egypt.

In India's Delhi, gas emission savings that the informal sector brings to the city is estimated to be over three times more than other waste projects in the city that receive pollution permits. Waste pickers present a huge opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through increased recycling rates, if they get the proper recognition and support.

### Dangers of incineration

The CDM fails to take waste pickers and the potential of recycling programmes into account while CDM landfills and incinerators result in increased emissions from materials that waste pickers previously recycled, and that are now burnt or landfilled.

In incinerators, energy produced through

burning recyclable materials involves a much higher rate of greenhouse gas emissions than other conventional means of energy generation such as coal-fired power plants. The use of added fossil fuel to burn organic waste is not 'renewable' energy, and the lack of monitoring of this method has serious implications for the CDM's environmental integrity.

Furthermore, the CDM does not require any monitoring of, or compliance with, pollution controls in incinerators so they are a major source of global pollution.

In landfill gas systems, methane emissions are not reduced as much as project developers claim. In fact the opposite is happening. Their low efficiency rate involves a considerable amount of methane emissions being released into the atmosphere.

Evidence shows that landfill operators manipulate the sites to increase methane emissions and make more profit, and so these projects result in an increase of atmospheric methane releases.

After strong campaigning by GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternative), WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing) and the Global Alliance of Wastepickers, the CDM has included the revision of its projects in their work plan. Hopefully this will address the methodological flaws that overestimate the amount of greenhouse gas reductions achieved by these projects.

GAIA together with waste picker representatives from Latin America, India and South Africa submitted detailed comments to the CDM Secretariat about these projects.

Moreover, we also welcomed the opportunity to present and discuss the issues with the CDM secretariat and other stakeholders in the Practitioners' Workshop on CDM Standards held in Bonn in June this year, which devoted half a day to problems with these project types.

We will be watching closely to see how the CDM addresses its methodological flaws to comply with its mandate. Failure to do so would result in the issuing of false pollution permits, and would compromise the livelihoods of millions of waste pickers and further undermine confidence in the CDM.

*Mariel Vilella*

Lucia Fernandez

# Organizing tips 1

## Waste pickers

**This column will be a regular feature for waste pickers and support organizations who are helping waste pickers to organize themselves. In each newsletter we will include some organizing tips.**

### Why organize?

Quite simply waste pickers want to see real, immediate, concrete improvements in their lives. They also want to feel a sense of their own power. In experiencing this power, waste pickers will find they change important power relationships.

Every waste picker knows what they need to fight for and what would make a difference in their lives. This may be easy access to waste or becoming part of local government waste systems. Or perhaps waste pickers want to move beyond picking to different forms of recycling as well as fair prices for these recyclables.

Other waste pickers may want to end their exploitation, dependency and fear of middlemen and be able to negotiate and sell directly to buyers to achieve a better and more secure income.

Yet other waste pickers may want to end the competition between themselves which brings stress and unpleasantness to their work and undermines the potential for collective action. They may realize that organizing into some kind of association or collective could bring new friendship and solidarity amongst fellow workers.

Many waste pickers worry about children working on landfills, especially their own children. Many waste pickers want to see good laws that protect children and allow them to go to school and develop their talents.

Other waste pickers may want access to good health facilities and pensions.

And finally, every waste collector wants people to acknowledge them as useful workers that deserve to be treated with respect.

So there are many reasons to organize but how to go about this? The first step is to build and maintain a democratic organization.

### Building democratic organization

Building an organization is much more than just recruiting and growing membership. Members of an organization need to ensure that the organization lasts. This means that its members must run and control it through democratic structures and processes. Waste pickers' organization must be open to and represent the interests of all waste pickers regardless of their gender, race or nationality.

A democratic, member-based workers' organization can take many different forms.

It can, for example, be a trade union, an association, a network or a worker cooperative. It can be small or large, local, national or international. Its members may be waste pickers, formal workers or a mix of both. Whatever its form or its name, the organization must be based on strong, democratic grassroots structures

that meet regularly – maybe at a landfill site or perhaps a regular meeting of street collectors in a park.

The organization must be led by a leadership that is elected by its members and it must be accountable to the members. The organization must decide on a clear purpose with sound values and principles.

### Building organization: challenges

It is never easy to run a democratic membership-based organization. Because the members are the owners, the managers and the beneficiaries, decision-making is often slow and complicated and administration and management may not be efficient.

Below are three of the challenges waste collectors may face in building organization. It is important to be open about these challenges so members can discuss them in the organization and find ways of dealing with them.

#### **Challenge 1: Choosing the right kind of leader**

These are some of the types of leaders to avoid:

- Leaders from organizations with a history of weak and undemocratic practices.
- People who only want to further their own interests.
- People who are corrupt, and maybe even in the pockets of politicians or criminals.
- Men in a situation where the majority of members are women.

#### **Challenge 2: Developing skills and knowledge to run an organization**

Many waste pickers have had little opportunity to acquire a good education and formal skills. They often lack the confidence and experience to run their organizations well.

#### **Challenge 3: Enough money to carry out the objectives of the organization**

Membership-based organizations rely on fees paid by their members. Waste pickers cannot pay high or regular subscription fees. It is difficult to collect subscriptions regularly because members are poor and are scattered, as in the case of street pickers, and they lack financial facilities.

However, as waste pickers are engaged in income-generating work there are also creative ways in which they can generate income for their organizations. For example, at one landfill in Pretoria organized waste picker members collect glass collectively and use the money earned from the sale of glass to finance the organization's activities.

But these challenges can be overcome if the waste pickers organization holds meetings where everyone puts forward their ideas on what to do and how to go about doing it.

**In the next waste pickers' newsletter this column will talk more about selecting good leadership.**



RRR waste picker network meeting in Tshwane.

## Organizations and Organizing

Democratic worker organizations, in this case waste picker organizations, bring workers with a similar occupation, common interests and issues together, in a structured and democratic form, with the purpose of using their collective power to challenge and change their position in society.

The organization may focus on using collective power to further their economic/business interests, such as in a cooperative, or on defending and advancing their rights and status as workers, such as in a trade union. Often it combines these two purposes, within a co-op or a union, or other democratic organizational form such as self-help groups and associations.

Organizing is the process of building such organizations. It involves:

- bringing workers into the organization through recruitment
- constantly developing and maintaining democratic organizational structures
- collectively implementing activities and programmes
- providing a voice through representing members in engagements with public authorities, industry and other relevant actors
- building leadership and empowering members.

*Chris Bonner, Director, WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme*

# Preparing for COP17

## Waste pickers get active

### 7 – 8 September 2011 Johannesburg

#### Waste and Climate Change Workshop

How do waste picking jobs link up with threatening climate change? Waste pickers from across South Africa will learn about, and discuss this issue in a three-day workshop. Together with waste pickers from India, Latin America, Kenya and Sénégal they will prepare for the Cop17 (international climate change conference) in Durban at the beginning of December. At the workshop they will learn how climate change affects South Africans, Africans and the world. They will hear how their work is extremely important because it is not just a job, but is also an important way of protecting the environment.

### 1 – 2 December 2011 Durban

#### Waste pickers meeting during COP17

COP17 begins on 28 November. While this conference is happening waste pickers will have their own meetings.

On 1 December South African waste pickers nationally will meet to discuss the constitution of the South African Waste Pickers Association and also the Code of Conduct for waste pickers on landfill sites and in streets. This is a closed meeting.

The South African Waste Pickers Association was launched in February 2010 and it has drawn up draft principles of the organization. People will continue to discuss this draft at the December meeting with a view to finalizing the constitution in a meeting early next year.

Waste pickers who have participated in setting up the Association see great value in being organized nationally. This means they can speak to government and other national organizations. Simon Mbata, who represents the Association, has for example met with the Institute of Waste Management and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to discuss how they can work together and assist waste pickers.

On 2 December the meeting will open up to include delegates from waste pickers across the globe from the Interim Global Steering Committee of Waste Pickers. This will include reclaimers from such places as Latin America and India. Delegates will exchange ideas and learn from each other as they join in solidarity.

### 3 December 2011

#### COP Day of Action

3 December is a global day of action. All members of civil society, including trade unions and environmental organizations, will demonstrate the importance of protecting our planet against disaster. Waste pickers will come out in their numbers to state that they are mitigating the effects of climate change by recycling waste so governments should value them and give them good support and opportunities. They will also show that they are creating important green jobs. Researchers for the One Million Climate Jobs Campaign have shown that the waste picking sector is an important job creator. Waste pickers are no longer invisible.



Melanie Samson

## Global waste picker events calendar

### Coordination meeting MNCR and LAWPN, Sao Paulo-Brazil, end August

Some Latin American leaders, part of the Latin American Wastepicker Network along with WIEGO regional coordinator for Latin America, will meet with the main MNCR (Brazilian National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Materials) leaders to decide on further involvement in regional and international networking process. At this meeting, possible coordination and invitations for African exchange and learning visits to Brazil may take place. See more [www.mncr.org.br](http://www.mncr.org.br) and [www.redrecicladores.net](http://www.redrecicladores.net)

### Fund-raising workshop for AIW, India, end August

Inclusive Cities global director will provide a fund-raising workshop to the Indian Alliance of Wastepickers (AIW) members in India in late August. This is part of WIEGO's sustainable plans programme aiming to achieve autonomy and financial independence from partners. See more [www.inclusivecities.org](http://www.inclusivecities.org)

### Clinton Global Initiative – informal sector recycling meeting, New York, USA, mid September

Global Wastepicker coordinator along with a Latin American waste picker representative will attend this meeting with key actors involved in dumpsite closing strategies, waste-to-energy projects, and business models for recycling, with the aim of the Global Alliance of Wastepickers getting their voice heard amongst important players which are not necessarily aware of its demands. See more <http://www.informalwastesector.net/>

### Expocatadora, Sao Paulo, Brazil, early November

The Brazilian Wastepicker Movement will hold its 3rd Expocatadora this year, involving thousands of their waste picker members and previous president Lula and current president Dilma. It expects the participation of several international participants such as Latin American, African and Indian waste pickers. See more <http://expocataadores.com.br>

### ILO workshop, India, November

The Indian Alliance of Wastepickers has planned as part of their regional year programme to hold a meeting with ILO (International Labour Organization) members in India. Although there is little information on this activity, we are expecting to organize something with the Green Jobs Programme at the ILO as part of its recent interest on working with WIEGO and the Global Alliance of Wastepickers. For more information: Lakshmi Narayan, Asian coordinator at WIEGO and KKP general secretariat <[wastematterspune1@gmail.com](mailto:wastematterspune1@gmail.com)>

### Launch of Global Wastepickers website, mid November

As part of the decisions and discussions held last March at the International Interim Steering Committee of Wastepickers, a new waste pickers' groups website is being prepared and designed in collaboration with a communication secretariat in Chile, as well as an editorial committee from different continents. More on this soon!

### COP17, Durban South Africa, late November

For the third time, waste pickers will be representing the sector at the Conference of Parties, in Durban. As happened in Copenhagen in 2009 and Cancun in 2010, a group of waste picker representatives from India, Africa and Latin America will come together as a Global Alliance of Wastepickers along with allies from GAIA and WIEGO. See more at <http://frontlineagainstclimatechange.inclusivecities.org/>



“Initially we thought that only the Latin Americans were organising, but now we are proud that internationally while it may be that our hands are in the trash, but our head is held high.”

Delegate, waste pickers' meeting Senegal, Dakar, September 2010



## Useful contacts

Coordinator of WIEGO Africa Waste Picker Programme – Melanie Samson email: [melanie.samson@wiego.org](mailto:melanie.samson@wiego.org)

WIEGO website – [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org)

WIEGO address: 521 Royal Exchange, Manchester, M2 7EN, United Kingdom

Inclusive Cities website – [www.inclusivecities.org](http://www.inclusivecities.org)

GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives) website – [www.no-burn.org](http://www.no-burn.org)