

# No Longer At the Margins: Transforming Human Capital in Solid Waste Management for Climate Justice

## POLICY & LEGAL REFORMS FOR CLIMATE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE TO WASTE PICKERS



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# The world of work for informal waste pickers...

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- Play a primary role in waste collection & act as climate agents
- Their work not considered legal in many countries
- Labor laws & codes of conduct not applicable
- Deprived of basic entitlements and social protection



# Hazardous and life-threatening work conditions

Injuries from sharp objects, exposure to hepatitis, AIDS, tetanus, musculoskeletal disorders, fractures, ocular trauma, skin and gastrointestinal disorders.

Workers at incinerators exposed to contaminants such as heavy metals, respirable quartz dust, dioxins

Structural slope failures cause fatalities of waste pickers who work unprotected at landfill sites





## Women waste pickers are at greater disadvantage

- Outnumber men in low-income countries
- Roles are more informal and unregulated
- Found in lower tiers of job hierarchy with lesser authority & incomes

# Women waste pickers safety & security is severely jeopardized

- No toilet or rest areas increases vulnerability to GBV & sexual harassment
- Roam deserted streets with poor lighting in search of recyclable waste
- Little support from the police & local authorities





**Informal waste picking has another global shame attached to it- prevalence of child labor**

- **Gross violation of child rights and conventions**
- **No tracking or action on child labor by relevant authorities**
- **Limited data available on their exact numbers, status, impacts**

**Since children mostly support their families in waste-picking, they may receive nothing in return for their labor**

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- Miss out on quality education
- Health severely affected due to exposure to toxic material and emissions
- Nutritional needs are unmet
- Vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation

**And above all, miss out on a carefree, safe childhood!**

# At 11, Fazliddin is the sole bread earner for his family

"I work with my friend Giyosiddin at this landfill site. We go to school, but after school, we rush here. My father passed away and now it is my responsibility to earn for my mother and my siblings. But suddenly we are faced with a big problem- we are being banned from entering this landfill site. This will be catastrophic for me and my family as this is the only place I can work easily."





# As governments move to more efficient SWM, informal waste pickers stand to lose their livelihoods

- Waste incineration can displace waste pickers, denying them access to materials
- Private companies likely to hire more skilled workers
- Exclusion from decision-making in SWM policies & programs



# **Demand for Recognition of Work of Waste Pickers: Supportive Global Standards and Efforts**

ILO envisages freedom, equality, security and human dignity as crucial for the enjoyment of decent and productive work

Decent work agenda with four pillars of employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogues recognized as integral to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals

ILO recognizes safety and health at work as fundamental principle and right at work and has adopted more than 40 standards on OSH

Demand for recognition of waste pickers as essential workers after disastrous impacts on waste pickers faced during imposed lockdowns and restrictions on mobility.

Upcoming ILO report on “Ensuring safety and health at work in changing climate”



## Columbia's pioneering public litigation for recognition of waste pickers

Constitutional Court of Colombia's landmark ruling, 2011:

- Recognized rights of informal recyclers
- Ordered State to adopt measures for recyclers' rights to health, education and food and other social services
- Included recyclers in in Solid Waste Disposal Programs of collection, classification and marketing of inorganic or recyclable waste and
- Recognized them as autonomous solidarity-based entrepreneurs

# Chile's Policy for Inclusion of Waste Pickers 2016-2020

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## Social objectives:

- Increase access to social protection
- Information system on waste pickers
- Social recognition work of waste pickers

## Environmental objectives:

- Inclusion of waste pickers in sustainable waste management,
- Optimizing their potential in waste recycling

## Economic objectives:

- Integration of waste pickers into recycling chains
- Enhance productive capacity of waste pickers



# Transforming the 'Rules of Engagement' South Africa's Waste Picker Integration Guideline

1. **Formal contract between the cooperative and industry/municipality** that sets out commitments, roles, responsibilities, GRM, and so on;
2. Support for waste picker cooperatives to develop **bids for tenders**;
3. **Payment** to the cooperative for the collection service;
4. **Agreements between cooperative & independent waste pickers** to work together
5. **Comprehensive capacity building & mentorship** program specifically designed to support waste picker cooperatives
6. **Provision of space for sorting, storage, baling and possibly processing** that has all required services, facilities and infrastructure;



# Waste Pickers' Integration in Municipal SWM Systems: 'The SWaCH' Pune, India Story



- In 2005, Pune, a city in Maharashtra in India, entered into a contract with a waste picker organization to become service providers for the door-to-door collection of waste from households.
- In 2023, **4,300 SWaCH volunteers** collect garbage from about **80 per cent of the households** in the city.
- They collect more than 600 tonnes of MSW per day, about 130 tonnes are sent for composting and **150 tonnes are recycled**.
- Their efforts save **PMC over INR 150 million per annum** in waste handling costs alone.

<https://punemirror.com/pune/civic/pune-municipal-commissioner-approves-five-year-contract-with-swach-for-door-to-door-waste-collection/cid1703732830.htm#:~:text=SWaCH%20has%20been%20collecting%20segregated,and%20women%20from%20weaker%20sect ions.>



**Waste Picker Organizations are working to improve working conditions for their members**

Child-care facilities for waste pickers' children, Buenos Aires, Argentina

**Amanecer de los Cartoneros entered** an agreement with the city government to support two child-care facilities for waste pickers' children, and a day-care center for children from 3 months to 5 years old. The centers are open in the afternoons and at night, while waste pickers are working, and receive 200 children a day.

# Ending Child Labour: National Child Labour Project, India

- Scheme introduced in 1988 to rehabilitate working children in 12 child labour endemic districts
- The Scheme seeks to adopt a sequential approach with focus on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations & processes in the first instance.
- The identified children are to be withdrawn from these occupations & processes and then put into special schools to enable them to be mainstreamed into formal schooling system.
- The special schools/Rehabilitation Centres provide:
  - Non-formal/bridge education
  - Skilled/vocational training
  - Mid Day Meal
  - Stipend @ Rs.150/- per child per month.
  - Health care facilities through a doctor appointed for a group of 20 schools.





# Extended Producer Responsibility: How does it impact informal waste pickers?

- Extends responsibilities of the manufacturer of a product to its entire life cycle including the take-back, recycling and final disposal
- Encourages producers to redesign products and packaging to minimize disposable content and make them easily recyclable.





# Fair Circularity Initiative

Respecting Rights in  
Circular Value Chains

## A bold effort for Private Sector to Support Informal Waste Pickers

- The Fair Circularity Initiative brings businesses together around the aim of **ensuring the human rights of workers within the informal waste sector** are respected and their critical role in circular value chains is recognized.
- Adopted UN Guiding Principles Business and Human Rights to the Plastic Packaging Recycling Value Chain
- Efforts underway to secure Just Transition through the UN treaty to achieve a **living income for waste pickers**
- Signatories include Nestle, Coco Cola, PepsiCo, Unilever

<https://faircircularity.org/business-action/>

# Tajikistan: Dushanbe Sustainable Urban Development Project

## Early Assessments and Consultations

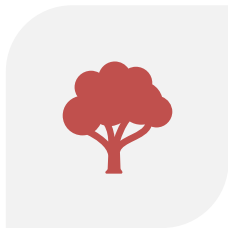
- ⌘ Informal waste picking regarded illegal
- ⌘ Loss of livelihood- waste pickers, informal recyclers and scrap-dealers from formalization/modernization efforts
- ⌘ Exclusion of women, vulnerable population in planning & accessing alternative livelihood & skills
- ⌘ Health and safety risks
- ⌘ Incidence of child labor
- ⌘ Weak enforcement of labor laws
  
- ⌘ Labor influx and related risks of GBV
- ⌘ Negative impact on host community at landfill and waste management sites;



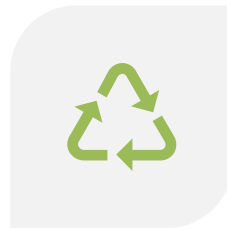
# Dushanbe Sustainable Urban Development Project

## An opportunity for inclusion of Waste Pickers in SWM

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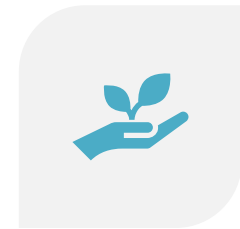
**SUPPORT DUSHANBE'S GREEN  
AND RESILIENT URBAN  
DEVELOPMENT**



**INCREASE RECYCLING AND  
RE-USE OF  
MATERIALS; WASTE  
REDUCTION**



**IMPROVE CONDITIONS AT  
COLLECTION POINTS &  
REMEDiate POOR  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONDITIONS AT THE CITY'S  
LANDFILL**



**PROMOTE 'GREEN JOBS' AND  
ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS**

# Let's continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments in the IAIA24 app.



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**#iaia2**

# Exercise (5 minutes): Group Work

Participants to rank the following key priorities based on their importance and 'transformatory impacts' on working conditions of waste pickers. Scale 1-5, where 1 is the lowest score and 5 the highest:

1. Influencing laws and policies to ensure recognition of roles of waste pickers in solid waste management systems
2. Integration of waste pickers into municipal SWM systems
3. Engaging private sector to explore jobs for waste pickers
4. Improved and safe working conditions for women

# Group Exercise (25 minutes)

Participants are organized into three groups around 4 themes and discuss:

1. What are the key 2-3 key actions which can help to achieve more 'transformatory' impacts around this issue/theme?
2. Who are the critical stakeholders and allies for this shift?

Each group to share discussion highlights.

**Final wrap up by session chair -Harjot Kaur**