



## Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

# Waste Worker Inclusion

Region	Asia and the Pacific
Award Scheme	Others
Themes	Waste Management
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere Goal 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

## Summary

Waste Worker Inclusion into the formal waste management system recognizes the value these workers bring to the local economy, particularly waste collection and recycling sectors, and supports their health and safety so they can sustain their livelihoods.

Today, there are an estimated 15 million waste pickers who remove 15-20% of the world's metropolitan waste.

## Background and Objective

In many developing and emerging economies, the informal and formal waste sectors are not effectively integrated, leading to inefficient collection and recycling processes, and a lack of transparency on waste supply chains. The outcome is less waste collected, less waste processed, and more waste leaked into nature. Informal waste pickers typically recover only high-value plastics, like those in milk jugs or water bottles. However, because soft plastic like chip bags and chocolate wrappers do not have a financial value, these networks do not have an incentive to intercept it from the environment. It is said that 26% of plastic is currently profitable to recycle. The remaining Low-value plastic (LVP) is indiscriminately dumped, often in nature.

## Actions and Implementation

The term “waste picker” refers to a person who salvages reusable or recyclable materials that have been thrown away by others and sells this material for profit. Some also reuse the materials themselves. Waste pickers have existed for centuries and play an important role for both the environment and local economies. In fact, waste pickers are the world's oldest form of waste management. Today, there are an estimated 15 million waste pickers who remove 15 to 20 percent of the world's metropolitan waste. In many cases, their work is informal, often dangerous, and wholly unrecognized by both the community and government. But in recent years (since 2007 in Brazil, 2000 in India), local governments and concerned organizations have sought ways to incorporate waste pickers into the formal waste collection system in order to recognize their work and guarantee their livelihood. The inclusion of waste pickers in waste management systems—and a recognition of their importance—is crucial not only for their own health and livelihoods, but for the economies of municipalities as well. In cities where they operate, waste pickers may collect up to 25 per cent of the municipality's waste. This saves considerable collection expenses, including transportation to a landfill, vehicle maintenance, salaries, and more. In 2014, Jain University, Hasiru Dala, and the Solid Waste Management Round Table (SWMRT) estimated that in Bengaluru, India, the city's 15,000 waste-pickers saved the municipality nearly USD \$12 million annually by collecting over 1,000 tons of the city's 4,500 tons of daily waste. This system can be so effective that in countries like India over 90 per cent of PET bottles sold are collected, proving that the recycling of certain high-value materials is not only viable but provides much-needed income for waste pickers. It is important to include waste pickers into the formal waste system in ways that recognize their value and empowers them—rather than pushing them out as new programs are launched. Waste pickers can attain a healthier, safer, and more secure future. But they can rarely do this on their own. True empowerment requires a systematic change in their rights, as well as recognition of their valuable contributions to society. Organizations that represent them need to fight on their behalf, while governments need to change the legal standing of waste pickers and heighten their economic opportunities. India and Brazil, arguably the two countries that have best supported waste pickers, both followed similar steps that moved waste pickers from subsistence living to greater opportunity. These four steps are listed below. Solidarity among waste pickers Mobilization around recognition and economic opportunity Legitimacy through ID Cards and right to work Entrepreneurship opportunities Governments share many of the same priorities, including a desire to increase recycling levels and reduce the amount of waste going to landfills. By utilizing waste pickers in formal waste collection, governments can move them from dangerous and unhealthy work in landfills to more dignified work at the front of the waste-value chain. The cost is lower than municipal-led or private haulier systems and often more effective because waste pickers can travel on foot and reach otherwise inaccessible



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areas. For more information on Waste Worker Inclusion, please see the source of this information - “Leave No Trace: Vital lessons from pioneering organizations on the frontline of waste and ocean plastic”: <https://www.vitalocean.org/book-download>

## Outcomes and Impacts

**Saahas Zero Waste** The informal sector plays a critical role in dry waste management in India. Saahas Zero Waste has initiated Social Inclusion Projects to leverage the entrepreneurial nature of stakeholders in the informal sector and truly integrate them into the formal waste management ecosystem. This includes holistic efforts in capacity building, introducing them to customers, hand holding through various compliance requirements, book-keeping, health and safety standards, and assistance in interactions with the local governments, among others. [Learn more](#) about case study examples of Saahas Zero Waste's Social Inclusion Projects.

**FINILOOP** (Financial Inclusion and Improved Livelihoods Out of Plastics) works with cities to reduce, redesign and improve management of plastics to create green jobs and local circular economies. The Finiloop program aims to: raise awareness about plastic waste; empower waste pickers; professionalize the plastic recycling sector; integrate local financial resources; and encourage collaboration between governments and development partners to make scale happen. [Learn more](#).

**Recykal** is an end-to-end cloud-based waste and recycle-enabling technology that connects waste generators with collectors, processors and recyclers. The software assures transparency and traceability in supply chains, transparency in pricing and recorded electronic payments to improve conditions for wastepickers. [Learn more](#).

**Sweepsmart** provides modern segregated waste management solutions based on European waste management knowledge, but tailored to emerging and developing countries. With local partners, Sweepsmart turns waste pickers into waste managers. They collect, segregate and recycle waste, to offer a professional waste management service. The Sweepsmart Waste System has a Europe-meets-local design, which includes a total package of hardware, IT, processes and training. [More information](#)

**Kabadiwalla Connect** helps leverage a city's existing informal waste infrastructure in the collection and processing of post-consumer waste. Kabadiwalla's research into the informal sector and commercial pilots in India, Indonesia and the Ivory Coast provide strong evidence to the commercial, environmental and social benefits of forming mutual partnerships with stakeholders in the informal waste supply-chain. Solutions offered include: spatially enabled, industry compliant data-collection on informal waste infrastructure; transaction based material tracking and traceability across stakeholders in the informal supply-chain; and hyperlocal reverse-logistics solutions for post-consumer waste management, powered by local informal scrap-shops. [More information](#).

**Project STOP** helps cities design and implement waste management programs to increase collection rates and keep plastics out of the environment. Project STOP works directly with cities to build and fund low-cost, circular, replicable, zero-leakage waste system with: Measurable impact: projects directly reduce ocean pollution. Long-term frontline implementation: The team works closely within local government agencies to provide implementation support and funding for multiple years Transparency: They track 14 waste management metrics, and are working to set a standard for determining local ocean plastic flux levels. Quality supply of clean waste feedstock and circular revenue streams: They derive as much value from the waste stream as possible, finding markets for 'lower-value' flexible plastics and processing organic waste for local business markets. [Learn more](#).

**Octopus** is an app that connects collectors to high quality PCP materials for efficient pick-up, while ensuring fair remuneration via an ethical, transparent pricing model. Octopus is based in Indonesia, and not only seeks to help manage waste, but also improve the livelihoods of waste collectors within the ecosystem. Entering its third year of operation as of 2021, Octopus is running in Makassar with a total of 1524 registered scavengers, 9431 users, 436 checkpoints and more than 5000 daily transactions. The effort, built around 1000 collection points, has collected over 9 million pieces of plastic, created over 100 jobs for former hotel employees and increased the livelihoods of local waste collectors.

## Conclusion

There are a number of local programs and NGOs working to support waste workers' rights, such as the Alliance of Indian Waste pickers, State Secretariat of Women Collectors of Recyclable Materials of São Paulo, National Movement of Waste Pickers in Brazil, among other local initiatives that support waste worker inclusion.