



Waste Picking in Africa

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CC: Things I know

A typical West African motorcycle taxi used by Tuwizana in his search for waste picker groups.

«It's important that people speak to you in a language they are comfortable with»

In Benin however, taxis hardly exist. Small motor bikes provide transport. "They drive fast and I had to hold on tight. There's no time to talk you have to hop off fast as he's on to the next passenger. I kept my hotel card with the address on me in case I got lost then I could show it."

In Cotonou Tuwizana struggled to make waste picker contacts, so initially he moved around and spoke to pickers on the street pushing carts. But he learnt little. On the second day he sent an email to a StrezetNet contact in Ivory Coast asking for waste picker or trade union contacts. "Trade unions can be helpful in these situations," said Tuwizana.

He was sent a WIEGO/StreetNet contact and she knew where to find waste picker and women's groups.

Tuwizana's command of French and English was very helpful and many people thought he was local or from a neighbouring country. But sometimes people only spoke local languages so he had to find a translator who knew French or English and the local language and negotiate

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Tracking waste pickers in West Africa

KALLY FORREST & KAPITA TUWIZANA

In March this year Kapita Tuwizana found himself in francophone African countries where he had never been before, looking for waste picker groups. His main strengths were speaking the language and his friendly manner. "You must be friendly and willing to talk to anyone. Don't speak to people in offices – talk to people on the streets."

He did some internet research before he left but learnt little. WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing & Organizing) gave him some contacts but he believes the best way to find waste picker organizations is to go directly to where they work.

Finding waste pickers

Tuwizana's first contact was often the taxi driver taking him from the airport to his hotel. "I would ask the taxi driver many things. Who collects waste in the city? Where are municipal offices and landfills? Does he know any waste pickers? Where is it safe to go?"

In Bamako, Mali the taxi driver knew a waste picker in his neighbourhood. Tuwizana bought a sim card for his mobile and gave the driver his number. The driver called him with the contact and he soon met the waste picker and got contacts to five different groups.

Bamako is a huge city and the five groups worked in different parts so Tuwizana arranged transport with the taxi driver and negotiated a price. "I knew he would find the far out places I needed."

Yet it was only on the fourth day, in reply to a question Tuwizana asked, that he learnt about

«Don't speak to people in offices - talk to people on the streets»

a national association of waste pickers. "It is important to ask many questions; don't rely on people just telling you things. In WIEGO we prepared mapping questions before I travelled and I made sure I used these," said Tuwizana.

In Madagascar the taxi driver knew no waste pickers but knew municipal offices and dumps around Antananarivo. So on the first day, Tuwizana drove with the taxi and got to know municipalities, poor areas and where it was safe to go.

But in Cameroon the taxi driver could not help him. "I saw a church near the hotel so I went and asked for the pastor and told him I was a Christian, explained what I was doing and that I needed help."

The pastor was helpful indeed. He explained that the church wanted to start a waste picker organization and he gave Tuwizana contacts. Through this, Tuwizana found the Gozen group which aims to work with plastic recyclables.

The pastor offered Tuwizana his son to help him find waste picker groups. "He was helpful as landfills were far from Douala's centre and it was easy to get lost and it prevented taxis from overcharging me. We had to take three or four taxis and then travel on a small motor bike over rough roads. He instructed the drivers where to go."

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Waste pickers – Solution to climate change?

KALLY FORREST

At a workshop in Johannesburg last year, waste pickers learnt how they help prevent climate change. Neil Tangri of Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives explained why pickers' work and climate change go hand in hand.

Removing toxic gases

Some places in the world are experiencing too much rain and flooding, whilst in others water scarcity is a huge and growing problem. Some areas are experiencing an increase in forest fires and in the Antarctic and Arctic, the ice is melting so rapidly that rising sea levels are forcing people to leave their homes.

The air we breathe forms a blanket around the earth and keeps the temperature stable. However, when we burn things we release carbon dioxide and other gases such as methane (referred to as greenhouse gases), which build up and block in heat, causing the temperature on earth to rise. This is known as global warming.

«Burning waste releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere»

But what has this to do with waste pickers?

A landfill is where people take recyclables and receive money in exchange. But for municipalities, landfills are places that release greenhouse gases, pollute, generate heat and contribute to global warming.

Engineers have solutions to getting rid of these gases which include creating 'wells' in landfills to burn off gas; burning waste in big incinerators; or capturing methane gas on a landfill using pipes.

Many governments favour incinerators to control landfill pollution but they are hugely expensive. In Maryland, USA for example, one incinerator cost \$430 000 000 (430 million).

An advantage of the incinerator is that it produces energy (electricity) in a process known as waste-to-energy (WTE). Municipalities favour this, but there are problems with WTE. Burning waste releases carbon dioxide and incinerators

release toxic gases into the atmosphere.

Companies also capture landfill gases by inserting pipes into the waste and syphoning off the methane gas, which they convert to energy. But methane still escapes into the air.

But municipalities do not favour the best solution, which is recycling.

Benefits of recycling

Paper and cardboard are made from wood, so when municipalities burn them on landfills more trees must be cut down to manufacture more paper. But if waste pickers collect paper and sell it for recycling, they can save thousands of trees. Forests are important for absorbing carbon dioxide.

Plastic is made of oil so when municipalities burn it, more plastic must be manufactured in polluting factories. Recycling plastic on the other hand means that industry can reuse it to make new products.

All recycling has a good effect on climate change as it prevents waste and pollution. So when waste pickers recycle they prevent harmful climate change impacts.

Why do governments prefer WTE to recycling? Industry is taking advantage of climate change for profit. Companies persuade municipalities that their methods of waste removal are the best. They ignore recycling as this is bad for business.

Wet, or food waste, rots on dumps and without contact with air produces methane. The solution is to keep wet waste out of landfills and use it to produce compost for agricultural use. In Indonesia pickers collect wet waste from hotels,

«Industry is taking advantage of climate change for profit»

compost and sell it. Hotels also pay them to remove food.

The other possibility is to feed wet waste to animals such as pigs.

The third possibility is to make biogas. A small biogas plant consists of a sealed chamber into which food waste is placed and covered with water. The chamber captures the methane which people can then use to cook or for electricity.

«Recycling does not emit toxic fumes and creates ten times more jobs than incineration»

Indian waste collectors do this and sell the gas.

Separating dry and wet waste from source is therefore important and waste pickers need to educate business and homes to do this for collection.

Almost everything that incinerators burn can be recycled. Recycling does not emit toxic fumes so it has better effects on the climate and it creates ten times more jobs per tonne of waste than incineration.

CDM threat

Unfortunately the ability of waste pickers to recycle is under threat from the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), an international institution created by 192 governments with a stated aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. CDM awards finance to companies that provide landfill gas systems and incineration, claiming these reduce emissions, but CDM does not support recycling projects.

CDM projects operate worldwide. In Dakar, Senegal, the government aims to close the huge Mbeussbeuss landfill and open a new one using incineration with CDM finance. Waste pickers are fighting this.

In Delhi, India at Oklha, a CDM project cost 10 000 waste pickers their work. The CDM financed a company that installed an incinerator. The government received finance for implementing this project, so it ignored waste pickers' protests.

Bisasar Road landfill is a CDM project in Durban which claims to remove methane to generate electricity for the poor. In reality it sells methane to Eskom. The company has fenced off the landfill to pickers.

CDM projects destroy thousands of jobs and ignore the good impact that waste pickers have on climate change.

Waste pickers need to actively promote recycling as a better alternative and engage governments and the media otherwise companies will promote their services for large profits.

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a price. Hotel receptionists were helpful in finding such people. "It's important that people speak to you in a language they are comfortable with," explained Tuzwana

Keeping within budget

"You only have a certain amount of money and you must keep within this. You don't want to

get stuck with no money." Tuzwana's advice is to always keep your budget in mind, negotiate prices, think on your feet, don't panic and be patient.

His budget covered transport and food while his hotel was pre-booked. He looked at the hotel menu to get an idea of food costs and this helped him budget.

He also built up trust with taxi drivers. "This is important, then you know he will assist you. I invite taxi drivers for a friendly drink and we

negotiate a price and make the arrangements. One taxi driver even phoned to see if I was OK. It's important to get the driver's name, address and mobile. You may forget something in the taxi, or need information or something may go wrong."

Tuzwana points out that he only visited major cities and there is still a need to find other waste picker groups in smaller towns. "But it will be so much easier now that these first important contacts have been made."



Global Alliance of Waste Pickers making posters for the huge COP17 Day of Action march

Waste pickers at COP17 «Cheapest, most beneficial and healthiest solution»

DEIA DE BRITO

In December of last year in Durban, South Africa, waste pickers gathered with many others at the UNFCCC's (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17). Delegations from 192 countries discussed how to address climate change and come to some agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (see "Waste pickers: Solution to climate change?" to better understand climate change ideas).

In reality there are many powerful corporate and government actors making decisions that do harm. These decisions include privatization of waste management and the UN-backed CDM 'waste-to-energy' schemes such as corporate incinerators that burn recyclable materials.

At COP17, the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers intervened in policy meetings, held press conferences, protested, marched and spoke publicly. It met with government leaders and policy-makers to build relationships and influence them to support waste picker recycling work.

As the conference was in South Africa, 70 members of the South African Waste Pickers' Association (SAWPA) attended to make their demands heard in their country where polluting energy companies have a strong presence. This strengthened the Global Alliance.

SAWPA took advantage of the gathering to hold meetings, network and strengthen the association. Waste picker leaders from associations in Costa Rica, Brazil, India and Senegal also participated and engaged in solidarity meetings with South Africans.

One of the most memorable events that brought everyone together was the climate justice Global

Day of Action on 3 December. Waste pickers joined the march and were one of the largest participating groups. Their energy was high as they sang South African struggle songs and demanded climate justice.

Protest against incineration

Two days later empowered by the march, the Global Alliance held a protest inside the conference headquarters, making their demands on solving climate change very visible. Waste pickers appeared in many media outlets, including "The Mercury, Democracy Now!, IPS, Sowetan Live" and "The Citizen". SAWPA, the Alliance of Indian Waste Pickers (AIW) and Neil Tangri from GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternative) spoke to a BBC reporter on the United Nation's [ital]Climate Change Studio[ital].

After the protest, the Global Alliance held a press conference. Delegates called for an end to 'waste-to-energy' projects backed by the CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) and for a Green Climate Fund (GCF) with direct access for grassroots communities. In 2010 UNFCCC member states agreed that this fund would channel US\$100 billion per year towards climate change projects. But if the private sector gets these funds, local community projects will lose out.

A just GCF must support community waste management that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, provides employment to large numbers and saves municipalities money.

Representatives from three continents highlighted that recycling is the best way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They spoke against CDM-supported waste disposal technologies that replace the work of waste pickers through incinerators and landfill gas projects.

Simon Mbata from SAWPA declared, "We demand a Green Climate Fund that is accessible to waste pickers and an end to CDM projects which compete directly with us."

"The most expensive and most toxic solution is incineration," said Marlen Chacon, a waste picker from Costa Rica. "The cheapest, most beneficial and healthiest solution is the waste picker."

The Global Alliance also asked questions during a CDM Executive Board session. Musa Nokwe, a SAWPA leader, challenged the board to take responsibility for its actions. "Aren't you the ones that are supporting the incinerators? Do you really care about the environment?" she asked. "If you do, why do they continue supporting projects that are destroying the environment?"

Other activities

The first SAWPA national gathering took place at the People's Space for three days. It brought together 70 waste pickers from South Africa who talked about challenges and organizing plans. SAWPA also developed its structures and decision-making processes, with special attention to the inclusion of women.

"We come to COP17 to say that the government must recognize us as workers," said SAWPA's Nimrod Mati.

"If African waste pickers unite, they'll have a stronger presence. If they are not united, the government can easily shut down a landfill without creating other options. We have to think of ways of helping each other," remarked Chacon.

«We come to COP17 to say that the government must recognize us as workers»

Members of the Global Alliance also attended activities such as the ALBA countries' (Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua) briefing with social movements, where waste pickers put forward demands on the development of the Green Climate Fund.

The Global Alliance visited two landfills. Marionhill landfill buries mixed waste from Durban and sells CDM carbon credits from flaring gas. In this way valuable resources are wasted and pickers are excluded from recycling. At the Pietermaritzburg landfill, waste pickers exchanged experiences. Suman More and Sushila Sabale, waste pickers from India, encouraged people there to work together, go door-to-door to educate the public, and to never stop fighting for recognition from government.

COP17 has come to an end and it is clear that work outside the conference is crucial. It is necessary to meet with government leaders, decision-makers, corporates and scientists but the Global Alliance must also make allies with waste pickers, social movements and civil society groups that are fighting for a just climate change solution.

Organizing Tips 2 – Waste picker leadership

Leaders can make or break an organization. Where leaders are strong and work collectively and listen to their members, the organization can flourish. But where leaders just work for themselves, organizations will die or remain only a shell.

An organizer plays an important leadership role. This is true whether they are an elected leader, an appointed official or a volunteer. An organizer as a leader is usually the person who educates and guides newly elected leaders. An organizer may have to work with existing leaders to help them change their approach and style.

Checklist

Use the checklist below to find out what your own leadership qualities are like, and as a guide for other organizers, worker leaders and members.

Qualities of an effective leader

I am:

- Committed to organizational objectives, policies and values
- Committed to serving the interests of the members
- A person who understands and is close to the members
- Honest and sincere
- Respectful of other peoples' opinions
- Fair when dealing with people of different sex, religion, colour and politics
- A person who listens to what members say and acts on their suggestions and mandates
- Able to work collectively and give as part of a group
- Able to inspire and influence others
- Willing to accept responsibility
- Ready to admit mistakes and to learn from them
- Gender sensitive and committed to the empowerment of women
- Confident in myself and the members
- Cool and calm under pressure
- Tactful, patient, humble and never rude
- Brave, and able to defend myself and my organization
- Active and able to implement things – full of drive and energy!

I do NOT:

- Talk too much
- Consider myself an expert on everything
- Dominate other people's way of thinking
- Manipulate to serve my own interests
- Misuse or steal the resources of the organization
- Consider myself a leader for life! How did you rate? Are you a leader? How did other people in your organization rate? Are they true leaders?

Collective leadership

One of the principles of democratic organization is collective or shared leadership. Collective leadership means leadership by a group of people who make the decisions together through discussion and consensus. It is not leadership by one person or a few people in the group.

Sadly you often find that in worker associations, there are powerful leaders but they act alone. This may be because people only know leaders

who take decisions for people or who control access to money, resources and power.

Members may be afraid, or not interested to challenge old undemocratic ways of leading. You will need to carefully educate people about the importance and power of collective leadership. You will need to point out the advantages of collective leadership to existing leaders and very importantly to the members.

«Combat the spirit of the big man. Combat the spirit of closed circles.» Amilar Cabral – former leader Guinea-Bissau

How will you argue that collective leadership is the strongest and most effective? Here are some points to argue.

- Collective leadership combines everyone's ideas, creativity and experience.
 - Collective leadership makes the best use of each person's skills and strengths.
 - Collective leadership provides support to everyone.
 - Collective leadership shares power and shares responsibility.
 - Collective leadership gives praise to those who work for themselves and everyone else.
 - Collective leadership facilitates openness in the organization.
 - Collective leadership combats corruption and abuse of power.
 - Collective leadership combats people who just want to get the best for themselves.
 - Collective leadership strengthens the leadership capabilities of everyone in the group.
- Collective leadership is spread throughout an organization and does not only happen at the top. A democratic organization has many layers of leaders. Grassroots leaders are the direct link

between members and top leaders and organizers and staff. Grassroots leaders are tomorrow's 'top' leaders.

Encouraging women leaders

Women are often excluded from leadership positions in organizations because men do not want to be led by women. Women also contribute to the problem when they lack confidence in themselves or believe that leaders should be men.

Gender roles rooted in tradition and religious beliefs, as well as child and homecare tasks also make it difficult for women to take leadership positions. But if you give women a chance, you will see that they are as effective as men in leadership positions.

Organizations need to represent all of their members' needs and interests. As women are part of organizations they need to be represented in the leadership too. It is important to encourage women to become leaders. This means we need to target men, discuss with them and raise their awareness, and challenge narrow traditions that exclude women. Both men and women need to be educated on gender equality.

Organizations should also hold discussions with women members to increase their confidence and help them to see that they are good leaders. We must all help each other to overcome fears, build new skills and also provide role models for other women.

The structures of your organization may need to change to help women become leaders. Set dates for a certain number of women to enter leadership and say how many women have to be in leadership. This is called a 'women quota.' Set up and give proper status to women's committees in your organization and always put women's issues on your agendas.

If you see your organization's leaders are only interested in themselves and their friends and family, discuss this openly in your organization and with these leaders. Help them to change their ways and their mind-sets – or elect new leaders who really want to help the organization's members.



Members of Africa's unusual women only waste pickers association with an all women leadership



Lucia Fernández

Juana Rafaela Járez Téllez is the oldest waste picker in Nicaragua with 50 years recycling in La Chureca landfill.

Central and Latin American first!

DEIA DE BRITO

The First Central American Conference and Assembly of the Latin American Network took place in Managua, Nicaragua in February this year. The Waste Pickers' Association of Bogotá (ARB) brought waste picker representatives together for the first time from Central America with more active South American countries to discuss the future of Red Lacre (Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Recicladores), their regional network.

«The group found that 79% of waste pickers in Central America work at dump-sites»

There were 17 countries represented at the conference. Prior to 2011 there had been only 11 countries in the network, but waste picker representatives from Red Lacre did a mapping exercise to identify new waste picker groups in Central America and the Caribbean. During the mapping activity, 675 interviews were conducted in ten countries. As a result of this activity six new countries joined the network and

participated in the conference in Managua.

At the conference 160 waste pickers from the region came together with about 100 from Nicaragua. The goal was to discuss the challenges they face, particularly regarding the closure of dump sites, and to better organize into cooperatives or associations.

The conference was widely publicized in the regional media and supported by local governments.

On the first day, Nicaragua's environmental minister and the mayors of Managua and Bluefields came to show support.

In a symbolic gesture, Managua's mayor handed the Red Lacre waste pickers the 'keys to Managua.' Luz del Futuro, a women-run waste pickers' cooperative from Bluefields dump-site, also signed a memorandum of understanding with their city government that will allow waste pickers to work in better conditions when the landfill closes. It promised a proper work space and that they could continue to be owners of their cooperative.

Delegates made some important findings during the conference. Lucia Fernandez of WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing & Organizing) conducted a focus group to discuss conditions at dump-sites in the region. The group found that 79% of waste pickers in Central

America work at dump-sites. This means that their working conditions must be improved and solid waste management systems modernized.

The second day began with another focus group about the importance of organizing and the different strategies that waste pickers are using. Alex Cardoso, from the National Movement of Waste Pickers in Brazil (MNCR) led the session and focused on organizing as a way to deal with threats to pickers and to create models for the kind of inclusion they want.

Cardoso and other Red Lacre members distributed organizing booklets produced by StreetNet and WIEGO for waste picker leaders to share in their countries.

«Women pickers took control of an assembly session to focus on their issues. It was the first time the Latin American Network considered gender»

Another historical moment that concluded the intense first two days was the drafting of the Declaration of the First Central American Waste Pickers' Conference. It was dedicated to Juana Rafaela Járez Téllez who has spent 50 years recycling in La Chureca landfill, which makes her the oldest waste picker in the country. Central to the creation of the Declaration was an impressive democratic voting process.

In the next two days of the Red Lacre Assembly delegates created three new committees. The first was a Global Committee to liaise with other regions and participate in Steering Committee discussions. The second was a Climate Change and Livelihoods Protection Committee which will work with GAIA (Global Anti Incineration Alliance) and participate in the struggle against incineration, among other campaigns. The third was a Gender and Social Inclusion Committee which will work with WIEGO in the region.

One of the highlights of the conference was when women pickers took control of an assembly session to focus on their issues. It was the first time the Latin American Network considered gender. "This was not planned or pushed by us," said Lucia Fernandez. It was spontaneously organized by Brazilian and Argentinean waste picker leaders.

It is important to note that there were 26 women and 26 men at the assembly. This was because of a collective effort of waste pickers and allies to ensure equal gender representation for each country.

"This was the best conference I've ever been to," said Eduardo de Paula, MNCR leader. "There was a lot of participation and strategic discussions from all there."

Fernandez added, "This conference shows that with persistence and patience the process of organizing this worker category is coming to a good place in that region."

Waste pickers in Africa

WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing & Organizing) is beginning to build a picture of waste picker (WP) groups in Africa and how they are organized (as this map shows). Groups include unions, cooperatives and informal associations. Groups in most countries have no Africa-wide or international links, not even with neighbouring countries, but would like to forge such ties.



Senegal

There are 800 WPs at Mbuessbeuss landfill in Dakar, members of Bokk Djom. They are well organized, receive support from the NGO Enda and have a meeting place and health clinic on the landfill. Government is trying to close the landfill and open a material recovery facility that will only employ a few of the WPs.

Mali

Strong district WP groups of 20-50 people which include young and old pickers and children. They formed in 2004 in a national structure called Coglaim. Since 1990 waste picking is included in national job creation initiatives. WPs perform municipal waste collection and sign contracts with families who pay them to remove waste. They also sell recyclables.

Ghana

There is one known union of WPs at Sarbah and Ablekuma landfills in Accra. It organizes waste pickers on landfills and represents them to waste management officials.

Benin

There are many small organizations. The biggest and best known is the Women's Association of Waste Pickers. It meets with the municipality and chamber of commerce but WPs say authorities ignore decisions and are unhelpful even though WPs pay monthly taxes. The Association receives assistance from Canadian Oxfam including kiosks, education and marketing.

Cameroon

There are many local groups of 100-200 members. An active national organization, ARC, was formed in 1996 in Douala with 134 men and 30 women young members. It now also covers Yaounde. A general assembly meets once monthly; a permanent bureau meets weekly. WPs feel the local authority is bureaucratic and difficult to negotiate with. Members contribute US\$2 each for the running of ARC and \$12 to a fund for hard times. ARC identifies large entrepreneurs for pickers to sell to.

Kenya

Large landfills exist in Nairobi, Kisumu, Nakuru and Mombasa where WPs with many problems are getting organized and working towards a national WP organization. They have drafted a constitution and hope to incorporate more groups.

Madagascar

WP organizations are strongest in the three main cities, especially in Antananarivo. Environmental organization, Enda, assisted in creating a national WP organization, Plafcco, in 2010. It has 300 members. Enda tries to negotiate with local authorities and is doing research on WPs. WPs do not directly run their own national or regional organization.

Mozambique

There are two known WP groups in Maputo. A cooperative of former WPs, RECICLA, buys plastic recyclables and makes plastic pellets for local industry. The Fertiliza co-op, composed of former WPs and unemployed youth, makes compost. They have little relationship with local government. Both projects were founded by the Italian NGO, LVIA. Literacy classes are compulsory; members receive technical training.

South Africa

There are many small, informal groups and a few registered co-ops. The only city-wide network is in Pretoria. The South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) formed as an informal association in 2008. It includes groups from landfills but a few from the streets as well. It has no formal structures. National meetings discuss organizational issues and elected provincial coordinators take decisions in between. SAWPA helps resolve issues between WPs, management and municipalities including access to landfills and opposition to privatization.



Mbayo on the UN climate change programme asking, 'Why don't we just give waste pickers a chance? ... Let them create this zero waste system.'

«Give women waste pickers a chance» SAWPA's Nomaceba Mbayo

DEIA DE BRITO

Nomaceba Mbayo, 28, seemed reserved. When I got to know her better, I found that she was just focused on exchanging lessons with women waste pickers from across South Africa at the United Nations climate change conference (COP17) in South Africa in December 2011.

Waste pickers spoke at press conferences, marched through Durban for climate justice, and lobbied COP17 leaders. But perhaps most valuable were meetings they held with each other at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's 'Peoples' Space.'

«Waste picking brings bread to the table. But it's not just for us – it's for the world»

Nomaceba, who is with the South African Waste Pickers' Association (SAWPA) responded strongly in those meetings and began to shine. During the first week, many South African waste picker leaders spoke at important sessions. Some of them were more experienced leaders than Nomaceba. After some returned home, Nomaceba showed her speaking skills.

She first spoke during the last days of COP17 at 'Reclaiming Power: Energy Models that Serve the People and the Planet,' organized by Friends

of the Earth, about incineration, 'It's not an option. You cannot solve a problem by creating an even bigger problem.'

She spoke about solutions for cities that waste pickers can take part in. "Biogas is very much an option. From that, you can use the gas for lighting. In poorer areas people steal electricity to have light."

«You must give it time and people will join in large numbers»

She told how recycling preserves natural resources. 'You don't need to go drill for oil if you are recycling what you have.'

And she talked about how easy it would be for pickers if waste was separated at source. "We wouldn't need a landfill. The wet waste causes the methane that causes the problem."

Also, a BBC reporter on the United Nations' television programme interviewed Nomaceba, Simon Mbata (also from the SAWPA), and Neil Tangri from GAIA. As the camera rolled, Nomaceba spoke at a fiery pace.

"We need to recognize the South African waste pickers as well as global waste pickers because these are people that make sure that climate justice is done by taking the paper back for recycling. Out of that we are saving trees from being cut ... as well as taking back plastic and recycling it then we are doing more justice

«It's now in my interest to know how everything works – to whom we are selling, who the middlemen are»

because the oil is kept in the soil and that is what we want. At the same time, what we are doing puts bread on the table ... It's creating jobs which is the biggest problem in South Africa. Why don't we just give waste pickers a chance? ... Let them create this zero waste system."

Nomaceba has been a waste picker for only two years but her passion outshines her experience. She went to her mother's house in Cape Town three years ago and was shocked to find that her mother was collecting waste in her yard. Nomaceba complained and her mother quickly called the middleman to take away the recyclables.

Nomaceba eventually started helping her mother collect and sort recyclables. They walked the streets with pushcarts and came up with a smart system. People know them as the ladies who take away bottles after parties, so many people contact them before their weekend festivities.

Mother and daughter sell the recyclables to a middleman who takes 40% of what they could earn. Nomaceba admitted she doesn't know much about selling recyclables. But things are changing.

"It's now in my interest to know how everything works – to whom we are selling, who the middlemen are."

Why now? Because during COP17 she was elected a SAWPA leader at only her second meeting with other waste pickers. Before, she was an observer but other waste pickers recognized her leadership qualities and pulled her in.

"Now that I've been elected a leader, I need to start coordinating. I need to make sure that SAWPA gets more members and that the NGOs we work with get to Cape Town and that people are aware that people work in landfills."

The Cape Town group works with about 50 waste pickers, but there is much outreach to be done, especially at landfills. "There are probably thousands of waste pickers in Cape Town."

"I'm going to start report-backs and deliver information at meetings. At first I thought it was not my responsibility, but now I'm going to do my best ... I want to see SAWPA on a different level ... especially women need to grow. The women are too quiet and withdrawn. They don't voice their opinions ... How is the government going to take us seriously ... Let the people know, let the government understand that you're there."



Transport of bottles is a big issue for the Women's Association of Waste Pickers.

«Now the association has about 1 000 members, of which 400 women make their living from reselling bottles»

living from reselling bottles. Other women collect in the streets or go door to door collecting waste.

Around 70% of Cotonou's population uses this waste collection system – 40 000 households, as well as hospitals and restaurants. So these *gbobetoo* (waste collectors) clean the streets and keep Cotonou healthy.

The organization consists of a general assembly, permanent bureau and membership. Office bearers are elected in a general assembly for three years. Meetings are held monthly, quarterly and annually, and at every meeting members contribute a small amount to the running of the organization. The association has a bank account and keeps minutes of meetings and financial statements.

Oxfam Canada assists with projects and has played an important role in organizing the women's association. It built a new recycling centre after it was burnt down, as well as a meeting place for waste pickers. It also arranged for 270 women to learn to read and write.

Oxfam Canada also developed 15 hectares of composting on municipal land near the airport. Here women compost wet waste and use it to fertilize vegetables which they sell. The vegetables are in demand in Cotonou's restaurants!

Over 250 women waste pickers have stalls built by Oxfam in Cotonou's market, which at 24 hectares is one of the biggest in West Africa. They sell about 1 000 bottles a day, earning about US\$12; during the festive season, they can earn as much as \$122 per day. Their clients include drink makers, vendors of different products, Canadian companies and people from neighbouring countries.

Commented Tuwizana, "Everyone gets something out of their work. Poor people get paid for their bottles as the association aims to help the poor. Local and international buyers buy the 70 different kinds of bottles they sell. And the waste pickers make a living."

The association gets no help from the municipality although the women pay the equivalent of US\$3 tax a month. They have no social protection or health insurance and the association does not offer members a savings or credit programme, childcare or business advice.

The women want to work towards the municipality recognizing the work they do as waste pickers and assisting with social benefits, and are keen to work with WIEGO as they pursue their goals.

Says Tuwizana, "These women have the "will" to work and move forward and they have "experience". They want to work towards a big organization and expand to other cities.."

Women Waste Picker Group in Benin

KALLY FORREST AND KAPITA TUWIZANA

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing & Organizing (WIEGO) contracted Kapita Tuwizana to make contact with waste picker organizations in francophone Africa. Recalling his experience in Benin in March 2011, he said: "Everywhere I went in Benin people talked about the Women's Association of Waste Pickers. So I went to investigate."

This is what he found:

Nearly 75 years ago, Benin women were collecting household waste to make a living. Although a million people live in the country's largest city of Cotonou, the city did not have rubbish collection or a city dump. Waste was a serious problem. Over time many waste picker organizations emerged but the public and municipality did not take them seriously.

Then in 1997, Zopanou Marie Missodji and

four others created *Yesuwamê* ('In the arms of Jesus'), later renamed Women's Association of Waste Pickers. Their aim was to collect garbage and recyclables and to get women waste pickers into a structure that would improve their living standards and status.

They began by organizing waste pickers who bought empty bottles, cleaned and resold them. The women moved around calling "*Goxoto wa loo*" ("Empty bottle buyers are here!"). "Parents whose children were chased from school because of unpaid fees were selling their empty bottles to women waste pickers and this helped them to meet their financial obligations," explained the association President Missodji.

At first they had 4 000 members but as people constructed houses around the market, membership dropped and fewer people bought from them. Now the association has about 1 000 members, of which 400 women make their

Partnering to organize in Nigeria



KALLY FORREST & KAPITA TUWIZANA

"I can't stand the smell. I know waste pickers around my place but I want them to first bath before I have meetings with them." So said one delegate from Fiwon (Federation of Informal Workers' Organization of Nigeria) at a training session run jointly with WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing & Organizing) in Nigeria.

«Fiwon and WIEGO have formed a partnership to collect information on waste pickers in Nigeria»

In March, Kapita Tuwizana, working for WIEGO, trained Fiwon members for two days on how to identify, contact and collect information on waste pickers' organizations and support groups in Nigeria. He answered the delegate by saying, "Let me share my experience. I have now visited many landfills and you have no choice if you want to make contact with waste pickers. And I'm still alive and so are they! Soon you don't even notice the smell."

Tuwizana continued, "I was glad the delegate said this because she allowed me to tell the group about my experiences and I could then share and address organizational questions. I told them you have to be open and friendly and go there, go into their working environment. How you behave is very important." (see "Tracking waste pickers in West Africa," where Tuwizana talks about his experiences.)

Fiwon and WIEGO have formed a partnership to collect information on waste pickers in Nigeria. Fiwon already organizes informal traders so eight of its members, organizers and its general secretary were now learning about the best way to find information about waste pickers. Fiwon members often share the same space as pickers when they are selling their goods in markets and on the streets.

Delegates explained that finding waste pickers is not a problem as many of them stay where they are living. However they wanted to discuss how to get information from pickers who are

busy people and time away from work means money. Tuwizana explained that WIEGO had prepared questions to help them.

He went through the questions in detail and also explained that interviewers should paraphrase the questions if necessary as some waste pickers may not understand and many have no schooling. So, for example, a picker may not understand the term 'income' so this needs to be explained in a different way. Participants practised asking questions with one person playing the waste picker and the other the interviewer.

«Waste pickers are not alone in their struggle for decent conditions and a decent livelihood»

"I told them to use local languages if necessary. There are many different languages in Nigeria so I explained they should find translators that speak English and the language in the area where they are doing research," said Tuwizana.

Tuwizana encouraged delegates to inform waste pickers about the importance of finding information on pickers across Nigeria so they understand they are not alone in their struggle for decent conditions and a decent livelihood. He gave participants information on waste pickers organizing around the world, on waste picker programmes in Africa and on the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers.

Delegates were very interested in this new newsletter "Waste Picking in Africa" which Tuwizana gave them. "They returned the next day after they had read it to ask all sorts of questions. They were particularly interested in the article about Mmapula Baloyi's visit to waste pickers in Pune, India. They want to show waste pickers this newsletter."

Internet culture is not strong in Nigeria as many people don't have computers, so the newsletter is a useful information and organizing tool.

The workshop also drew up an action plan. Each participant took an area or city to map waste picker groups.

Concluded Tuwizana, "Workshop participants were interested and keen to have contact with waste pickers. They asked lots of questions about how to approach and organize them. They already have organizing experience but I was able to sharpen their approach to waste pickers."

Some funding lessons

KALLY FORREST AND KAPITA TUWIZANA

As WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing & Organizing) collects information about waste picker groups across Africa, it has found that different organizations have different ways of funding. There are lessons that can be learned from these experiences.

In some countries, waste pickers contribute financially to the running of their organizations. Members decide what to give money for and they make sure that the leadership spends the money in this way.

Payments from members fund core activities of the organization such as meetings where they need money for travel and food. It is important that members contribute their own money for this purpose as money from outside funders is insecure and the organization can collapse if the funder pulls out.

Self-funding also ensures that waste pickers control their organization and determine its principles, objectives, strategies and activities, and that the organization is accountable to the members themselves.

In Cameroon, members give money to support their national organization as well as for their own social security. They have carefully planned to save money that will help them when business is bad.

«Self-funding ensures that waste pickers control their organization and determine its principles»

In Mali waste picker organizations have good financial systems and national leadership has to account for how it spends money coming from regions. Leaders are elected for only two years so they do not become self-satisfied and forget members' needs.

But sometimes members have other needs which they cannot pay for themselves. They may then get funding from government or non-governmental organizations. Both Benin and Madagascan waste picker organizations get help from outside, and this has been helpful.

In Benin, Oxfam Canada has greatly helped the Women's Association of Waste Pickers (see "Africa's rare women waste picker group"). It is clear that the waste pickers are using this funding in ways that can help them in the long term even if they stop receiving support later. The waste pickers feel that Oxfam Canada is

empowering them to make a better living but the organization is still owned and run by the women themselves.

However, lots of donor money does not always help. Planning how to use money for the organization is always important. It is also essential that members have democratic control over how the money is used.

Some funding lessons

The type of funding depends on the organization's needs. Every organization needs to hold a workshop to look at its needs and evaluate what funding is necessary. The organization may realize that it does not need money but rather it needs to build members' capacity or perhaps it needs to understand how to invest or use the money better rather than getting more money.

Before an organization receives donations it must make sure that it has skilled people to manage the funding and that no corruption creeps in.

Start-up money is often useful but the organization needs to plan before receiving it. It needs to discuss organizational problems and what activities could solve them. It must collect information to plan. Then it must decide what it wants to achieve with each activity and how the organization will benefit.

Before receiving any money, waste pickers need to ensure that their organization is democratic. If the leadership is corrupt and not interested in the members but only in enriching themselves, the money will achieve nothing. Waste pickers must first build consultation and accountability in their organization, especially in the leadership.

Fighting climate change South African waste picker workshop

KALLY FORREST

At a South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) Climate Change Workshop in September 2011 in Johannesburg, Neil Tangri, a facilitator, commented, "Companies have started to take advantage of climate change issues so waste pickers should be more of a presence. Waste pickers need the arguments to go to the media and government to explain why their solutions are best and also to air their problems and to fight for better solutions to managing of waste. Municipalities don't have solutions but waste pickers do have one and they are in the best position to implement it."

This is why waste pickers from all over South Africa came together to learn and discuss more fully how they could become important actors in fighting disastrous climate change. (see "Waste pickers: Solution to climate change?") They also met to assist SAWPA in building a stronger national movement. These South Africans were joined by waste pickers from Senegal, Kenya, India and Argentina.

The workshop focused on understanding why recycling of waste is so much better than waste-

to-energy (WTE) and landfill solutions to combat climate change. They learnt that all material that waste pickers recycle including metal, paper, cardboard and plastic has a good effect on climate change as it prevents waste and pollution. Recycling also prevents the burning of waste which releases greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. So when waste pickers recycle they prevent harmful climate change impacts.

Delegates also learnt about destructive Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects. CDM is an international institution created by governments that aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It oversees the world's waste system but it is a failure. It awards finance to companies providing landfill gas systems and incineration, but these do not effectively eliminate dangerous gases. And CDM does not support more climate friendly recycling projects.

Delegates also heard from other participants at the workshop how CDM projects are destroying waste pickers' jobs in places like India and Senegal.

After learning about the science and politics of climate change, delegates used role plays to practice how to explain their opposition to WTE

and to put forward more climate friendly ways of dealing with waste.

Workshop facilitators encouraged waste pickers to start planning for "complete" or "zero waste" management solutions including the handling of wet waste food stuffs.

Finally delegates discussed how waste pickers were going to take part in COP17 in Durban in December that year. They heard how COP17 (17th Conference of the Parties) was a giant international delegation of 192 countries that were meeting to discuss how to address climate change. At COP17 the United Nations was going to attempt to get countries to agree on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This meeting was a good chance for waste pickers to find these international delegates and convince them of the good work waste pickers do.

Waste pickers heard about the unofficial events for NGOs (non-government organizations) and other organizations at COP 17 to meet and present their ideas, including to the media. They also heard that on December 3 there would be a massive protest march of about 20 000 people, which they could take part in to protest climate change and to promote the best waste solutions.



«If African waste pickers unite, they'll have a stronger presence. If they are not united, the government can easily shut down a landfill without creating other options. We have to think of ways of helping each other»

Delegate, COP17, December 2011

Useful contacts

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Global Alliance of Waste Pickers - www.globalrec.org

