



Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association

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PRESS STATEMENT

COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL WASTE PICKERS DAY

On the occasion of the 29th commemoration of International Waste Picker's Day, the Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association, with support of Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), wish to reiterate the myriad of challenges confronting waste pickers globally and in Ghana in particular.

International Waste Picker's Day is marked annually on 1st March in honour of the eleven waste pickers who were brutally killed at a Colombian University in 1992. On that day, staff at the University lured workers into the institution with the promise of recyclable materials. Once inside, workers were beaten and shot so that their organs could be trafficked and sold and their bodies used for medical research. This vicious incident is remembered annually by waste pickers and their partner organizations, like WIEGO and Global Alliance of Waste Pickers, as tribute to the eleven waste pickers killed that day. The day is also used to highlight the challenges and demands of waste pickers across the globe.

In Ghana, although the contributions of waste pickers to solid waste management and environmental services are essential, waste pickers working on the Kpone landfill site and other waste dump sites are facing a multitude of challenges and threats to their livelihoods.

Waste pickers are one of the vulnerable groups that have been hardest hit in times of global and national crisis. A recent study conducted by WIEGO on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal workers in Accra showed that waste pickers and their families are facing the brunt of the pandemic:

- The study revealed that waste pickers have reduced earnings primarily due to reduction in the prices and volumes of recyclable waste materials. As of April 2020, waste pickers were earning only 9% of their average pre-crisis (February 2020) earnings, with 88% of respondents reporting no earnings at all due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The reduction in household earnings is also accompanied with increased household stress because of increases in domestic and childcare duties.
- The study also confirmed that waste pickers did not receive any support from the COVID-19 relief programs announced by the government – no waste pickers covered in the study received cash relief or food aid.
- About 88% of Waste Pickers are having to purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) on their own although their activities are essential services. They are also using

these PPE despite having difficulties in performing manual work and breathing freely while wearing the face masks.

Therefore, on the occasion of this year's International Waste Picker's Day, we the Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association wish to highlight the following concerns:

1. As the Kpone landfill site is the main source of income and livelihood for about 500 waste pickers and their families, the decision by government to proceed with the decommissioning and reengineering of the Kpone landfill site without due consultation with waste pickers or provision of livelihood safeguarding measures has had dire consequences for the livelihoods of waste pickers and their families. Waste pickers should be consulted on what adequate livelihood safeguards measures are needed now that the dumpsite has been decommissioned, and these safeguards should be provided.
2. Government should target waste pickers as a group in need of COVID-19 relief support measures. Immediate efforts should be made to support waste pickers with appropriate PPEs, food items, financial aid, medical aid and other necessities to address the extraordinary drop in earnings and increase in stress and risk caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. While waste pickers have over the years provided critical services in municipal solid waste management (SWM) in the country, informal waste pickers are still not integrated into municipal SWM systems. We therefore urge Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) to integrate waste pickers into the solid waste management systems through the provision of contracts for recycling service provision and secure conditions for work.
4. Waste pickers working on the Kpone Landfill Site have been proactively exploring and piloting waste collection services in low-income coastal communities that are underserved by the current system. Now we need to be supported by government and private sector with the requisite logistics, infrastructure and subsidies and assisted to secure community waste management contracts from MMDAs.
5. Whereas waste pickers are a key stakeholder involved in waste management and providing environmental services in the country, they are not recognized as such. We therefore wish to use this remarkable day to call for the recognition of, and effective inclusion of waste pickers through their membership-based organizations in decision making processes and structures that have implications for waste pickers.

As we mark this International Waste Pickers Day in honour of our comrades that lost their lives in Colombia in the course of their work, we wish to send our heartfelt compassion and solidarity to the ALL waste pickers in Ghana and abroad who are still faced with stigmatization, disrespected, excluded, threatened and in some instances having to lose their lives through their struggle as waste pickers.

Long live the global solidarity of waste pickers!!!

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