



# Refusing to be Cast Aside: Waste Pickers Organising Around the World

Edited by Melanie Samson

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## Acknowledgements

This book is the product of a collaborative effort that spanned four continents. It was started by WIEGO as part of the follow-up to the First World Conference and Third Latin American Regional Conference of Waste Pickers held in Bogotá, Colombia in 2008, and completed with the support of the Inclusive Cities Project.

Chris Bonner oversaw the conceptualisation and production of the book. Leslie Tuttle and Elaine Jones wrote profiles of waste pickers based on interviews conducted at the World Conference in Bogotá in March 2008. Carmen Roca, Martin Medina and Eloise Dhuy'e assisted with the conducting and translation of interviews. After the conference, Melanie Samson drew on WIEGO's networks to source additional contacts, information and stories. She wrote new stories and chapters and edited the final book. Szelenia Gray and Laureen Bertin copy-edited the final English language text, Agustín Cosovschi translated the text into Spanish and Lucia Fernandez copy-edited the Spanish version. Many people gave generously of their time and information to assist in this process. Of these, special thanks must go to Lucia Fernandez, Carmen Roca, Sonia Maria Dias and Laxmi Narayan who provided contacts, translated materials and conducted additional interviews.

# Preface

by Chris Bonner, WIEGO

Although environmental issues, including the recycling of solid waste, are high on the global agenda, the voice of waste pickers is barely heard. Recognising this, in 2006 the global action-research-policy network, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), decided to embark on a programme to facilitate networking amongst organised groups of waste pickers across the globe. WIEGO is committed to helping strengthen democratic, member-based organisations of informal workers –especially women– and in particular helping to build solidarity and organisation at an international level. It has supported the development of StreetNet, an international organisation of street vendors, and Home Nets South and South East Asia, regional networks of home-based workers. It is currently supporting the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers (IUF) in its efforts to build an international network of domestic workers.

In the early stages, WIEGO's only contact with waste pickers was through its member organisations in India, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Trade Union of Waste Pickers in Pune (KKPKP). WIEGO knew little about the situation of waste pickers in other countries and continents. Thus the first step was to identify and map organisations of waste pickers and supportive NGOs and individuals. Through this process, WIEGO found that waste pickers in many Latin American countries had made great progress in organising themselves into local co-operatives and national co-operative movements, and were engaged in building a network across Latin America. With the assistance of the AVINA Foundation and researchers and activists belonging to the Collaborative Working Group on Solid Waste Management in low-and middle-income countries (CWG), WIEGO was able to forge links between waste picker organisations in Asia and Latin America. This collaboration resulted in the jointly organised and highly successful First World Conference and Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers, held in Bogotá, Colombia in March 2008. Since the Conference, waste pickers have continued to build their connections and raise their voices nationally, across regions, and globally.

In 2008, as part of a larger five-year global project on Inclusive Cities, SEWA, the Latin American Movement of Waste Pickers, the trade union of waste pickers in Pune, India (KKPKP), StreetNet International, AVINA and WIEGO embarked on a project to strengthen the organising of waste pickers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. A key component of this programme involves forming relations with waste pickers in Africa and Asia, regions that were under-represented in Bogotá.

This book was inspired by the waste pickers –women and men– who attended the Bogotá conferences. WIEGO felt that the stories they told and the experiences they shared should reach a wider audience, such as:

- waste pickers who might be encouraged to increase their organising efforts and try new approaches;
- decision-makers who could create favourable policies and laws; and
- the public which could begin to recognise, value and support the work of waste pickers.

Gains made by workers in the informal economy are often impermanent. There is a constant struggle not only to improve their situation, but often to merely hold onto what they have won. The world has changed dramatically since we started work on this publication. The economic crisis has simultaneously meant a downturn in the demand for recyclables and reduced their value, whilst creating a situation where more and more people are likely to turn to waste picking as a survival strategy. These changes in the political economy are having a significant impact on the ability of waste pickers to work and to organise. As part of the collaborative global project, we have begun to gather information on how waste pickers are being affected by, and responding to, the global crisis. We hope that sharing these will encourage others to do the same.

CHRIS BONNER

Director

WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme

July, 2009

# Introduction

by Melanie Samson

In cities across the world, millions of people sustain themselves and their families by reclaiming reusable and recyclable materials from what others have cast aside as waste.<sup>1</sup> Testimonials by waste pickers and the findings of researchers show that, in a range of contexts, waste pickers are treated as expendable nuisances whom authorities and many residents accuse of marring the image of the city. They are frequently ignored within public policy processes and harassed and persecuted by authorities. However, waste pickers from around the world are beginning to organise. They are demanding recognition for the contributions that they make to the environment and the economy, and they are fighting to ensure that their role within municipal waste management systems is valued and made more secure.

In March 2008 waste pickers from more than thirty countries gathered in Bogotá, Colombia for the First World Conference of Waste Pickers and the Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers. This was a groundbreaking event where waste pickers and their allies shared experiences, identified key challenges and discussed ways of strengthening regional and global networks.<sup>2</sup>

The issues and challenges faced by each group of waste pickers in particular parts of different cities are unique, and must be understood on their own terms. As such, it is neither possible nor desirable to try to generalise across regions, let alone the world. However, as was affirmed in Bogotá, there are areas of commonality in the challenges faced by waste pickers in different places. There is much to be gained from sharing experiences, learning from waste pickers in other parts of the world, and engaging in joint and collaborative action.

This book seeks to contribute to this broader project by providing information on, and analysis of, some of the key points of debate and discussion in Bogotá. The cases discussed here are primarily drawn from organisations that participated in the conference and that are linked to the broader WIEGO network. Because WIEGO is still in the process of forging links with waste picker organisations in Africa and in Asia (outside of India) there are, unfortunately, fewer stories collected from these regions. Future publications will need to focus on the experiences of waste pickers in these parts of the world. Much of the information presented in the book is available in other places, although some of it was previously only available in Turkish, Spanish or Portuguese, and some of it was contained solely in lengthy academic and policy documents. One of the main objectives of this book is to make this information more

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<sup>1</sup> According to Martin Medina, the World Bank estimates that 1% of the world's population, or fifteen million people, earn their livelihood from these activities (Medina 2007, vii).

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?lang=english> for further information on the First World Conference and Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers. Links to presentations made at the conference can be found at [http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=143](http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=143).

readily accessible. It is hoped that by bringing together information on the experiences and struggles of waste pickers from around the world, this book will spark ideas and conversations that will be useful in educational, organising and policy processes.

## The Politics of Naming

There are many different terms that can be used to refer to people who extract materials from the waste-stream for personal use or sale to others. Some of these terms, such as 'scavenger', are seen as derogatory and have been rejected by many who do this work. In cities and countries around the world the people who perform this important labour have had debates about what to call themselves. Some of the terms specify the type of material collected. Others are preferred because of how they frame the activity being performed. Some of the many terms that are used include: rag picker, reclaimer, recycler, salvager, waste collector and waste picker in English; *cartonero*, *clasificador*, *minador* and *reciclador* in Spanish; and *catador de materiais recicláveis* in Portuguese.

Ultimately we must respect the choices made by people about how to name themselves. Therefore, when writing about particular movements and organisations, this book uses the terms that are preferred by these groups and that are used in the materials written by themselves and their allies. However, to date there is no global movement that has developed a consensus position on the issue. A problem therefore remains as to what term to use when writing about this activity on a global scale. Before the First World Conference the Steering Committee had a lengthy debate on what terms to use at the Conference. Eventually it was agreed to use the term '*reciclador*' in Spanish, '*catador*' in Portuguese and 'waste picker' in English. The reason for the Steering Committee deciding on the term 'waste picker' was to emphasise that these workers perform labour at the bottom of the much larger waste recycling chain. When referring more generally to people who reclaim reusable and recyclable materials from waste, this book therefore uses the term 'waste picker'.

## Overview of the Book

This book is organised around some of the key themes related to the organising of waste pickers and their integration into municipal waste management systems that were debated at the Bogotá conference.

Since March 2008 and the onset of the global economic crisis there have been major changes in the global recycling market that are having a significant effect on waste pickers and their ability to organise. Currently WIEGO and its partner organisations are exploring issues related to how waste pickers fit into the global recycling market, how they are renegotiating their position within it, and how they are responding to changes resulting from the crisis. These issues will be addressed in more detail in future publications.

This book highlights many issues related to policy, legislation and organising. It is underpinned by the understanding that there is an intimate relationship between

policy and organising; that the policy and legislative context influences the form and goals of waste picker organisations; and that mobilisation by waste pickers and their allies shapes and drives policy and legislative processes.

**Chapter One** of this book tells the stories of some waste pickers from different parts of the world in order to provide some insight into who waste pickers are, what work they do, and why some of them have started organising.

Waste pickers in many different contexts have found that there is power in uniting in collective organisations. These organisations take many different forms and have a wide range of objectives. **Chapter Two** provides some overviews of the different ways in which waste pickers have chosen to organise themselves and explores some of the challenges in organising waste pickers. Still focusing on organising, **Chapter Three** provides information on federations and networks formed by waste picker organisations to help strengthen their collective struggles.

Waste pickers generate their livelihoods and sustain themselves and their families by retrieving reusable and recyclable materials from the waste-stream – typically from streets, open spaces, garbage bins and garbage dumps. Historically their work has been considered informal and often illegal. Nevertheless, they perform an essential service and are an integral, although frequently unacknowledged, part of the waste management systems in the cities where they work. Waste pickers in numerous cities around the world have mobilised for recognition and formal integration into municipal waste management systems. **Chapter Four** looks at some of the different ways in which waste pickers have been formally incorporated into municipal waste management systems.

At best, waste picking has been overlooked within legislation, and at worst it has often been explicitly or implicitly prohibited. **Chapter Five** provides an overview of some different ways that waste picker organisations and their allies have engaged with and successfully transformed the law in their cities, states and countries.

There is currently a global trend towards the privatisation of municipal waste management systems. **Chapter Six** looks at some of the ways that waste pickers in different cities have been affected by, and responded to, privatisation.

**Chapter Seven** draws together some of the key themes and insights from the preceding chapters.

**The Appendix** presents the declarations adopted at the Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers and the First World Conference of Waste Pickers, held simultaneously in Bogotá, Colombia in March 2008.

Each chapter includes some questions to think about when reading, and provides material that can help individuals to develop their own answers to those questions. But the cases and stories are by no means comprehensive. The main intention of both the questions and the stories is to encourage debate, discussion and further research and engagement on issues related to organising by waste pickers, and ways in which they and others can mobilise to transform their position within the economy and society.

## Chapter 1: Waste Pickers From Around the World

Waste pickers are often ignored and treated as invisible. Here we profile some remarkable waste pickers from around the world, sharing their inspiring stories and providing insight into their lives and struggles. Their stories show that waste pickers come from many different backgrounds. Some come from long lines of waste pickers and entered the profession because they knew it was a good way to make a living; others are the first in their families to do this work. Many have little formal education and started waste picking as they had few other options. However, others obtained high levels of formal schooling but cannot find employment elsewhere or prefer waste picking to other forms of income generation available to them. What all of these waste pickers share is a commitment to work that they know will support not only themselves and their families but which also makes important social and environmental contributions. Many have played key roles in forming organisations that help to improve the conditions of waste pickers and which fight for respect and recognition for their work.

Some questions to consider while reading this chapter include:

- What led each person to become a waste picker?
- How do gender, race, caste and class influence their position, choices and struggles?
- What are some key commonalities and differences in their personal stories?
- How have their personal histories affected whether and how they are involved in organising other waste pickers?
- How has organising changed their experience as waste pickers?

### **John Kibaara in Kenya – The Oldest Salvager at Nakuru Dumpsite, Kenya by Patrick Mwanzia, *Practical Action, Kenya***

John Kibaara was born at Ngachura, Nakuru in 1954 as the seventh in a family of nine children. His parents were squatters on a settler's farm. His father herded the farmer's cattle and his mother was a casual labourer on the farm. In 1965 the farm was sold to a co-operative society and John's family became homeless. They moved to Lakeview Estate in Nakuru municipality and rented a house owned by the council. John's father died, and soon after the houses were demolished to make way for new ones. The municipality provided plots for those who were evicted. However, his mother could not afford the fees for the plot or the monthly payments and they found themselves on the streets again. His mother then went to live in a low-income area where she stayed until her death in 1981.

John started school at the age of 13 when a member of the St Nicholas Anglican Church agreed to sponsor his education. He was a bright student, always near the top of his class, but when his sponsor went back to England he could not afford to

continue studying. He explains, “When the school administration started sending me away, my performance dropped. I felt discouraged and dropped out. I then decided to salvage waste in Lakeview where the dumpsite was initially located.”

John describes how he arrived at the Nakuru dump (which the salvagers refer to as ‘Gioto’) in 1978, soon after it was established:

*We came here with my brother since we could not find any other work to do. It was in the same year when Jomo Kenyatta died. We found two other salvagers here. We collected scrap metal and bottles and sold them to buy food. When there was little to collect and sell we survived on salvaged food wastes.*

His brother then obtained a driving licence and was employed to transport goods. However, he died in 2003, together with his wife.

Over the years John has watched new people arrive at the dump and seen others leave to live elsewhere, but he has stayed. He currently lives with his second wife, Wanjiku, and their son. They stay at the dump in a tent made of cloths sewn together and hung between large stones. Approximately 130 other people call the dumpsite their home. There is no water available at the dumpsite and salvagers buy water from mobile water vendors for the exorbitant price of Ksh 10-15 for 20 litres. Salvagers are forced to relieve themselves in the open spaces of the dumpsite since there are no toilets available.

The number of salvagers has increased and consequently there are not always enough salvageable materials for everyone. As a result, John sometimes walks 12 kilometres to salvage in Lanet Kenya Army Barracks area. His income is irregular and falls below the poverty line. When other materials are scarce, the household members eat food salvaged from hotel waste.

Working as a salvager exposes John to many health hazards:

*We often suffer from bruises and injuries from broken glass, sharp metals and needles from medical waste that are dumped here. We do not have protective clothing and shoes when doing salvaging work. I usually suffer from persistent coughs from the effects of smoke and the dust that I inhale. I fall sick sometimes and most often I am unable to meet medical expenses – it’s quite a difficult life in this place.*

Rain is also a major problem as it destroys the carton papers that he sells to earn a living. Improved shelter, he says, would solve this problem. John proposes that if markets can be found for the salvaged items that he and others collect, they could benefit as they are usually exploited by middlemen.<sup>3</sup> Despite his difficult circumstances he holds onto the hope of a better future.

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<sup>3</sup> Although ‘middlemen’ is a gendered term it is widely used by waste pickers and other people in the industry and is therefore used in this publication.

## Jimmy Refes Cañas in Colombia – The Autonomous *Recicladores'* Alliance (*Fundación el Golero*), Bogotá, Colombia by Leslie Tuttle



Jimmy Refes Cañas  
(photo by Leslie Tuttle)

As a child, Jimmy lived on the streets in an environment dominated by poverty, drugs and violence. When he was ten a priest put him into a religious reform school where he learned discipline and practical skills such as woodworking and auto mechanics. Seventeen boys left the reform school at the same time to find work and to live on their own. Because of how they had grown up on the streets, many were uncomfortable having a 'boss' or working in a group. They looked for work that allowed them more freedom and found that they were ideally suited to become *recicladores*. Ironically, they returned to the streets they knew so well, but with a viable occupation.

Four of Jimmy's former schoolmates formed a loose alliance called the *Fundación el Golero* to help them pursue their work as *recicladores*. In addition to working regularly as *recicladores*, they run a solid waste management project at a school. They work with teachers and students to create 'eco' clubs, training the children to look after the environment. They process the school's waste while educating the students, who have decorated collection bins for separating waste materials for recycling. The school provides the space they need for their work. In addition, organic waste is used as compost in a garden plot where the students grow vegetables and run a seed bank as a school research project.

Jimmy's childhood continues to influence the way he lives his life. While his income as a *reciclador* is three times the minimum wage, he explains that "I still feel an emptiness like I felt as a boy on the streets." To counter this Jimmy does volunteer work with boys of all ages at the YMCA. This has enriched his life in many ways. For example, the YMCA sent him to the United States for training. Most importantly, the day-to-day contact he has with boys who value his time gives him a great sense of personal satisfaction.

The four members of the *Fundación el Golero* have chosen not to formalise their association as a co-operative or to join Bogota's Association of Waste Pickers (ARB). The shared experiences of their youth still make them uneasy about committing to the demands of a larger group. Nevertheless, they are trying to improve the reputation of their profession and raise public awareness of the connections between the materials people discard and the quality of the environment.

### **Marife Jostol – Cavite, Philippines by *Lizette Cardenas*, *Solid Waste Management Association of the Philippines (SWAPP)***



Marife Jostol  
*(photo courtesy of Lizette Cardenas)*

*I am not ashamed of being a waste picker because it is an honest job, provides food for my family and enables me to send my children to school. But I don't want my children to be waste pickers like me. I want them to have a better life in the future – that is why educating them is important.*

This is how Marife Jostal sees herself and her work as a waste picker.

Marife Jostol is a 36-year-old waste picker in General Mariano Alvarez, Cavite, in the Philippines. She is married with two children, aged seven and nine. Her husband is also a waste picker. They learned the 'business' from her father-in-law. When they were living in the province she was a housewife, taking care of her husband and children. However, when they migrated from the province to General Mariano Alvarez municipality in Cavite, she had to help her husband augment their meagre income by picking waste at the dumpsite. She explained that she had little choice in the type of work she could do, since she only finished 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She has been waste picking for six years.

Marife works eight hours a day, seven days a week. Her schedule starts at eight a.m. and ends at four p.m. with a one hour break for lunch. Previously, she and her

husband earned as much as P800 (\$17) a day. But now she notes that there has been a drastic decrease in their income from waste picking to P200 (\$4) every three days. This can be attributed to the municipality's enforcement of segregation of waste at the household level. With this segregation, the recyclables are immediately sold to itinerant waste buyers and/or junk shops. This decreases the amount of recyclables that are picked up by the collection truck and disposed of at the dumpsite.

When they started to work at the dumpsite they joined a group of ten other people. Today it includes three women, three men and six children. The children do not have parents and pick waste to earn extra income to buy school supplies. Her group sells their recyclables to the owner of the dumpsite. Another group sells their recyclables to the son of the owner of the dumpsite. The grouping of the waste pickers is informal and was created to avoid conflict. Each group gets one collection group (alternately) so the income from the recyclables benefits all members. They are also able to get a small loan (advance) from the buyer of the recyclables.

### **Santraj Maurya and Lipi in India — Tales of Two Waste Pickers in Delhi, India by *Bharati Chaturvedi, Chintan***

Santraj Maurya is a waste picker from Uttar Pradesh, where his family lives. He is a father of three and a worried parent. "They want to live in Delhi with me, but it's so expensive," he laments.

Santraj is one of the city's most successful waste recyclers. As a graduate of grade 4 he is one of the best educated waste pickers in New Delhi. His story is one of enterprise. He began picking trash in the elite Lodi Road. When the NGO Chintan organised a door-to-door waste collection system, he became the supervisor. In the next four years, Santraj not only supervised this doorstep collection, but also helped set up a new one. In addition, he trained in composting so that "no waste has to reach the landfill and people understand how useful a *kabari* can be." In this manner, he was part of a larger initiative to counter capital-intensive privatisation by building local capacity and enterprise.<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, Santraj was thrown off an Alitalia flight in Delhi because he was a waste picker. He was en route to Brazil to share his experiences with other waste pickers. The airline did not think he looked like someone who should be in first class and refused to let him take the flight. After pressure in the media, the airline compensated him with an apology and tickets. Santraj went to Cairo using one of the tickets; when he returned he spoke widely about his trip. "What I loved the best was their river," he explained. "It was so clean. I wish the Yamuna could be the same way." Most recently, Santraj has opened a string of small junk shops. He buys discards from nine waste pickers in a tiny, disused community dump yard. The rest of the time, he works with the *Safai Sena* (Brigade of Cleaners) recyclers' forum which he, along with others, helped set up.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 4 for further information on this initiative.

Lipi<sup>5</sup> was not as lucky as Santraj. Like Santraj, she began door-to-door collection. She cannot read well, but she is tough as nails and a natural leader. At one point she ran an entire wing of Chintan. She was proactive and took her work seriously. She would identify pickpockets and force the police to act on her evidence. “I have to,” she said. “Otherwise they’ll say the greedy waste pickers stole it.” As a door-to-door waste collector she felt powerful. “I know how everyone is doing when I see their trash,” she pronounced. By her own confession, she ran away from her home in Bangladesh to seek freedom in Delhi. “They’d make me sit covered from head to toe, at home. I hated it.” From a borderline poor family, she came to Delhi and found herself on the edges, picking trash. “I never want to go back, even though I don’t want to tell people what I do here,” she said. Her husband Mukhtar, an Indian, agreed. “What’s there for us?” he wonders about Bangladesh.

Lipi insisted India was her home. India didn’t think so. In 2004, a few days after Lipi delivered a daughter, the police took her away and detained her and her son. Her husband tried bringing up the baby alone for over a week, but she was ill and not recovering. He finally joined Lipi as a desperate measure to save their child. They were all deported to Bangladesh.

Lipi and Santraj were of the same generation, in the same city, doing the same work and with comparable opportunities. But Lipi met the fate of many of her other contemporaries as she was from the wrong country, with the wrong religion. Had she been a Nepalese Hindu, like thousands of security guards and domestic helpers in India, she would have been welcome. Being a Bangladeshi Muslim woman denied her the opportunity to live a secure life. By contrast, Santraj, a Hindu man, scraped through despite his lower caste, and met with some small successes. Much work remains to be done to address the religious, gender, ethnic and caste discrimination faced by waste pickers in New Delhi.

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<sup>5</sup> Lipi prefers to be known only by her first name. She even decided not to have her surname on her identity card.

## Nohra Padilla in Colombia – Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá, Colombia by *Melanie Samson*<sup>6</sup>



Nohra Padilla  
(photo by *Melanie Samson*)

Nohra Padilla is a third generation *recicladora*. Her grandmother came to Bogotá, Colombia's capital, in the 1950s when many people fled to the city to escape high levels of violence in the countryside. Her grandmother was accustomed to rural life and brought cows, pigs and chickens with her to the city. She collected organic waste to feed the animals from garbage bins and streets in nearby neighbourhoods. Soon she realised that she could also find things like paper, metal, glass and clothes that she could sell. Nohra's mother's first job was in mud brick construction, but after having six children she couldn't go back to the factory. So she returned to the work of a *recicladora*, which she had learned from her mother as a child.

Nohra began working with her mother collecting recyclables when she was seven years old. She worked from four a.m. until ten a.m. and then went to school. Other children would call her strange and treat her badly. But Nohra fought back. As Nohra says, "in the first years of school this happened, but after that we became friends. They knew I lived in a house of *recicladoras*, that we had cows. They didn't bother me and I didn't hit them." Nohra won the respect and friendship of her classmates. She did well in school, finishing high school when she was 16, but couldn't afford to go to university so she too became a *recicladora*.

When Nohra left school she began to work at the dump, as there were more recyclables there than in the streets. She worked there for four years until the municipality announced that it was closing the dump. Nohra and others formed a co-operative to help them fight for the right to keep recycling. As Nohra explains, "the co-operative didn't start as an idea, it started as a necessity." With their eyes fixed on

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<sup>6</sup> This story is based on an interview conducted by Melanie Samson on January 14, 2009, with translation by Matt Nohn.

victory, the original twelve members named the co-operative “*Cooperativa de Trabajo Asociado el Triunfo*.” At around the same time, three other co-operatives were formed at the dump. In total there were approximately 200 *recicladores* working there. For two months the members of the co-operatives fought with the municipality. They set fire to the dump and the garbage trucks in order to force the municipality to recognise and talk to them. The municipality still closed the dump, but it gave the co-operative money to help finance its activities, as well as identification cards and uniforms so that they could continue their collection work in the streets. Today *Triunfo* has eighty members. It collects recyclables from the streets and has door-to-door collection initiatives. It also has a recycling centre where members sort and press their materials and collectively sell them directly to factories to obtain a higher price.

Nohra played an important role in bringing together the four co-operatives that were started at the dump to form the city-wide *Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá* (ARB) in 1990.<sup>7</sup> She is currently the Executive Director of the ARB. She is also the president of the national association known as the *Asociación de Recicladores Nacional* and is one of the two Colombian representatives on the Latin American Waste Picker Network (LAWPN).<sup>8</sup> Three years ago, Nohra received a scholarship to finally attend university. She is completing a degree in administration, which is helping to strengthen the skills she developed through the struggle to organise *recicladores*.

Organising waste pickers has not been easy. Between 1991 and 1995 it was especially difficult as Nohra received threats from paramilitaries and intermediaries who did not want *recicladores* to organise. But the woman who has fought for her rights since her schooldays was not intimidated as she is committed to uniting and mobilising *recicladores*. Nohra’s organising work has also brought personal joy. At a national meeting in 1992 she met her partner, Silvio Ruiz Grisales, who is also a leader in the *recicladores* movement. He moved to Bogotá to join her and they now have two sons together.

Nohra reports that it is hard to get *recicladores* to work collectively and to give up their own time to build organisations. But particularly in times of crisis, *recicladores* see the benefits of organising. Although the global financial crisis is creating many hardships for *recicladores*, she hopes that it will also catalyse greater action. Nohra emphasises the importance of the work of *recicladores*, explaining that, “I believe in recycling. It sustains my life and is a contribution to others and to society as it helps to preserve the country’s resources and provides materials for industry.”

### **Suman More – KKPKP, Pune, India by Nalini Shekar, KKPKP**

Suman More is a proud mother. Her son Laxman has completed his Bachelor in Arts and is currently pursuing his Master’s degree in journalism.

This did not come easily to Suman, a waste picker in Pune City, India. Her parents had migrated to Pune from their village in search of work and began waste picking,

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 3 for further information on the ARB.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 3 for further information on the LAWPN.

and Suman started waste picking with them when she was around 13 years old. Suman married Mr More at the age of fourteen and had her fourth child when she turned 22. Their main source of income was waste picking. Suman's husband also earned money by performing on traditional drums and conducting religious ceremonies, although income from these activities was sporadic and irregular.



Suman More and her family

*(photo courtesy of Laxman More)*

When Suman started work she would pick up recyclable waste on the roadside, in local waste depositories, or public waste bins provided by the Pune Municipal Corporation. She walked long distances and worked from dawn to dusk. Her children helped to sort the waste at home as sorted scrap fetched a better price.

From 1992 to 1993, organisers of the KKPKP trade union of waste pickers came to her community to talk about the need to organise waste workers.<sup>9</sup> They explained that the benefits of organising included getting access to waste at source, fewer hours of work for the same amount of money, cleaner working conditions and insurance. Many of her neighbours discouraged her from becoming a member saying that the benefits were unrealistic, and that it was a new way for some people to make money! However, she decided to join KKPKP with a few other people in the community and has never regretted her decision.

Now her working conditions have improved. Suman explains, "I work only four hours for more money, since I collect the waste door-to-door. The quality and condition of waste is much better." Door-to-door collection has other benefits. She builds relationships with people and engages in casual conversation over a cup of tea. Coming from a lower caste and class of society she never thought this would happen in her lifetime. She is happy that she is able to have a proper lunch break and that waste pickers are provided with soap to wash their hands and legs before they sit to have lunch in a cool, clean place in the residential complex where she works. A

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapters 2 and 6 for further information on the KKPKP trade union.

higher income has also meant that she can afford proper medical care instead of self-medicating with the help of a pharmacist to avoid going to the doctor.

Suman no longer takes the waste home to sort. The municipal corporation has provided a sorting shed where several waste pickers gather to sort their waste while engaging in conversation, which provides a social outlet and support. Once she goes home, she has time to watch some television at the end of a hard day's work.

As a member of KKPKP Suman took an oath to educate her children and KKPKP helped her to enrol her children in school. Both her first and last sons have received cash prizes from KKPKP for their achievements. Laxman now works with KKPKP as manager of its scrap shops. In addition, he is a part-time journalist for a local newspaper. Her daughter-in-law is a computer engineer from a Brahmin (upper caste) family for whom she wants to be a good mother-in-law. Suman is particularly proud that her daughter married only after she turned eighteen and the family did not give a dowry.

## Chapter 2: Waste Pickers are Organising!

As the profile of Jimmy Refes Cañas in Chapter 1 demonstrates, some waste pickers make conscious decisions not to form formal organisations. However, many other waste pickers around the world are organising. Some waste picker organisations date back more than forty years. For example, in Colombia, which has one of the oldest waste picker co-operative movements in the world, the *Cooperativa Antioqueña de Recolectores de Subproductos* was formed in the city of Medellín in 1962 (Medina 2007, 80,155). In many other countries, organising of waste pickers has gained momentum in recent years.

Waste pickers have chosen to organise in many different ways. Some factors that influence the forms of organisations adopted by different groups of waste pickers include:

- Their political orientation and objectives – for example, groups that are more interested in negotiating collective rights may choose to form unions, whilst those focused on delivering services may be more drawn to co-operatives or companies
- The political orientation and objectives of NGOs, church organisations, donors and other outside structures that frequently play a key role in facilitating the organising of waste pickers
- Whether they see themselves as workers or entrepreneurs, or in some other role
- The local legislative context, which may prohibit the formation of certain types of organisations and/or make it easier to form others
- The pre-existence of particular kinds of waste picker organisations and networks at the local, regional and national level that serve as models and provide support for the formation of new organisations
- The existence of a regional or national network of waste picker organisations that proactively seeks to facilitate the formation of similar kinds of organisations.

However, there are no factors that can predetermine the exact form of particular waste picker organisations. Ultimately the decision is profoundly political, and even within the same city different groups of waste pickers can decide to form different kinds of organisations. The same group of waste pickers may also decide to form more than one organisation in order to help them pursue different goals. For example, the Indian trade unions KKP and SEWA, which focus on mobilising for collective rights, have both formed co-operatives for the purpose of service delivery.

This chapter provides overviews of a number of different waste picker organisations, including associations, co-operatives, trade unions and companies. It is important to note that even two organisations that both call themselves unions, co-operatives or businesses can have very different orientations, structures, guiding

principles and goals. Rather than trying to identify ‘typical features’ of different kinds of organisations, this chapter seeks to explore why particular groups of waste pickers have chosen to organise themselves in the ways that they have, to provide some insight into the functioning of the different organisations and to give a sense of the wide range of organisations formed by waste pickers.

Some questions to think about when reading this chapter are:

- What are the similarities and differences between the different organisations profiled in this chapter?
- What role do outside organisations play in organising waste pickers? How do the agendas of these outside organisations affect the ways in which particular groups of waste pickers organise?
- How does the form of organisation chosen by different groups of waste pickers relate to their goals and activities?
- Does the form of organisation affect the kinds of goals and activities that can be pursued by the waste pickers?
- What are some of the key factors affecting how waste pickers organise?
- How can organising both entrench and transform gender inequalities?
- What challenges are faced by waste pickers in gaining recognition for their organisations?

### **Ankara Recycling Association (Kooperatif Yolunda Ankara Gerikazanım Derneği), Turkey by *Leslie Tuttle*<sup>10</sup>**

The waste pickers of Ankara began organising in response to violent action taken against them in 2004 by municipal officials. Primarily collectors of paper, they were using an empty city lot as an open air ‘warehouse’ to store what they collected. When they ignored the municipality’s demand that they move, the city set fire to their ‘warehouse’, burning their inventory, the structures that separated each family’s goods and the makeshift dwellings that single men had built. To add insult to injury, many of the pushcarts they used were also lost in the fire. The waste pickers could not go back to work until they could afford new carts.

This destruction had a major impact on the 200 to 300 families in the Türközü neighbourhood who relied heavily on waste picking for their survival. Ironically, the press blamed the action on the ‘Kurds’, a minority group to which most of the waste pickers belong. Such ‘double discrimination’ is not unusual; as the most recent group of urban immigrants they were targeted both economically and socially.

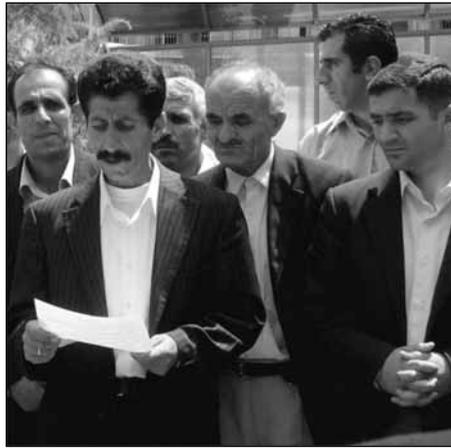
Realising that they could not fight violence with violence, the waste pickers began organising. At first they struggled to do so on their own, but later they were assisted by a group of young professionals involved in human rights work whom they had approached for legal assistance after the fire. The professionals proposed that the waste pickers enter into the World Bank Development Marketplace Contest in order

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<sup>10</sup> This story is based on an interview conducted with Hamit Temel on March 1, 2008 by Leslie Tuttle with translation assistance from Eloise Dhuy. Additional information was provided by Eloise Dhuy.

to receive support to form a co-operative. In a series of meetings the waste pickers discussed the idea and eventually agreed to participate in the contest. As there was no formal organisation at the time, the competition was entered under the name of the project writers. The group won US\$10,000 to help establish a co-operative. Because this was the first project of its kind in Turkey, and since municipal actors were not ready to support such a project, it was decided to start organising under an association as the first step towards creating a co-operative.<sup>11</sup>

The association was formed in June 2005 by seven people – one waste picker (Hamit Temel), three social workers, two urban specialists and one unionist. More clashes with the municipality fuelled another ‘fire’ in the press. This helped strengthen the waste pickers’ resolve and earned them public support.



Hamit Temel, President of the Ankara Recycling Association, at the press conference

(photo by Eloise Dhuy)

In January 2006 the first elections were held to choose a council and president for the *Kooperatif Yolunda Ankara Gerikazanım Derneği*<sup>12</sup> or Ankara Recycling Association. The association is now composed entirely of waste pickers and is in the process of building a community solidarity association that will provide social support, helping students succeed in school and putting up a building for meetings and communal meals.

The association has experienced challenges regarding sustainability as it invested in small premises but has not been able to gather enough member fees to cover the expenses. Even though the premises are located in the heart of the Türközü district, waste pickers have not made much use of them. The main problem experienced by the association is a lack of human investment, as the members have their own work and families to handle.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Information provided via personal communication with Eloise Dhuy.

<sup>12</sup> The members prefer the term ‘geri kazanım’, which means recovering to ‘geri dönüşüm’ which means recycling as ‘geri kazanım’ also means ‘advantage’, ‘recovery’ and ‘win’, which helps to motivate them in their work and their organising.

<sup>13</sup> Information provided via personal communication with Eloise Dhuy.

While the association builds internal strength, the struggles continue. Many waste pickers are still beaten regularly and conflicts over solid waste management abound as others compete for control of materials and contracts. Association members, however, have had an opportunity to raise their voices against violence during a press conference held in June of 2007 where Hamit Temel, as President, was their spokesperson.

Now the Ankara Recycling Association is looking for new ways to gain visibility, perhaps by aligning with other NGOs or becoming the subject of a field study. Hamit views his participation in the First World Conference of Waste Pickers in Colombia as a key learning experience. He now has increased confidence to face the challenges ahead.

### **NIDAN *Swachdhara* Private Ltd – Forming a Company with Waste Pickers in India by Arbind Singh and Rakesh Saran, NIDAN**

The NGO NIDAN was formed in 1996 to support the working poor involved in the informal sector in India. NIDAN seeks to raise aspirations, build structures owned and controlled by the poor, and to help make credit, insurance, technology and the market accessible to them to enhance their bargaining power in the market. NIDAN works in Bihar, Jharkhand, Delhi and Rajasthan.

After piloting door-to-door garbage collection by *safai mitras*<sup>14</sup> NIDAN decided to create a registered institution which could help in providing regular and dignified work to thousands of *safai mitras* involved in dirty work like the collection of rags. Initially NIDAN decided to form a co-operative with the name of *Swachhdhara swalambi sahkari samiti*. However, after more than two years of hard work NIDAN was not successful in registering the co-operative. According to the co-operative registration office it could not register the co-operative as the *safai mitras* do not have permanent addresses or proof of address and so could not be executive committee members. Lack of literacy and basic education was also raised as a hurdle to prevent NIDAN from registering the co-operative.

NIDAN therefore started exploring other forms of organisation. Even though the development sector has largely focused on creating co-operatives or societies, NIDAN was informed that a company was better suited to this situation. Some of the advantages of being structured as a company include the fact that a company can work in the whole of India; bankers feel comfortable in dealing with companies; the workers are proud to be owners of a company; and as a company is for profit, the profits can be distributed easily. Municipal entities have also shown a shift towards using registered companies in their waste management systems, as they feel that only waste management companies can solve their waste problems. All of these reasons encouraged NIDAN to register as a company rather than as a co-operative.

<sup>14</sup> *Safai mitra* is the term that is used in Nidan to refer to people who pick rags, do door-to-door collection and collect recyclables. *Safai mitra* can be translated into English as “a friend who keeps our locality clean”. As people who do this work are traditionally looked down on and discriminated against, this term was chosen to give dignity to their work and help to improve their status in society.

The company NIDAN *Swachdhara* Private Ltd was registered in 2008. It is governed by a board of eleven directors, seven of whom are *safai mitras* elected on an annual basis. Currently two of the *safai mitra* directors are women. The seven *safai mitras* who are board members represent hundreds of other *safai mitras* when the board takes decisions on key issues such as recruitment of waste pickers from new areas; incentives and other benefits like social security; applying for tenders in new cities; and expanding the work of the company. *Safai mitras* are further involved in the running of the company as shareholders; each *safai mitra* who works for NIDAN *Swachdhara* Private Ltd owns one share in the company. Two per cent of the shares are owned by the Director, 18% are owned by the managing director, and the two other non-*safai mitra* directors each own 0.2% of the shares. The *safai mitras* who are directors each own 1.8% of the shares, and the 500 *safai mitras* who are employed by the company own approximately 80% of the shares.

NIDAN *Swachdhara* Private Ltd currently has five contracts in three municipalities. 400 *safai mitras* are employed to provide services to 68,000 households. Those who collect waste from households work independently. Those who work on the pickup van work in teams of four. *Safai mitras* employed to work on open drainage, vermin compost or at the sorting centre work in pairs. The transition from working independently to being employed to work on contracts by NIDAN *Swachdhara* Private Ltd has created a number of challenges for the *safai mitras*. For the first time, they have to achieve externally defined targets and their work is monitored. In addition, instead of earning money whenever they decide to sell their materials, they now need to wait until they are paid their wages.



(Picture courtesy of NIDAN)

Overall incomes have improved as a result of employment by the company. In the past, *safai mitras* earned approximately Rs1500 (US\$33.33) per month. Now each *safai mitra* is paid a monthly salary of Rs2000 (US\$44.44). In addition, they earn between Rs1200 (US\$26.67) and Rs1800 (US\$45) per month from the sale of recyclables. They are therefore earning significantly more than the government minimum wage of

Rs2300 per month. All *safai mitras* are covered under a micro-insurance policy that covers health, accident and death. Every employee receives health coverage up to Rs6000 (US\$150) annually on submission of medical bills, and on death the family receives Rs3000 (US\$75). They do not work on Sundays and national holidays, and they receive health check-ups from government doctors.

## The Ikageng Ditamating Recycling and Waste Management Group, Metsimaholo, South Africa by *Melanie Samson*<sup>15</sup>



Members of Ditamating

(photo by Melanie Samson)

The reclaimers from the Sasolburg dump in Metsimaholo, South Africa formed the *Ikageng Ditamating* Recycling and Waste Management Group in mid-2009. This co-operative unites all of the reclaimers on the dump. Its formation was the result of hard work and intensive organising activities that focused on overcoming historical divides between the young Sotho men who collected scrap metal and the older Sotho men and women who collected paper, plastics and glass.

Reclaimers have been working on the Sasolburg dump since the 1980s. For as long as anyone can remember, the local council has granted a string of private companies the right to extract all recyclable materials from the dump. However, this was never strictly enforced as the dump was not fenced and so the reclaimers could sneak materials off to sell to other buyers. In 2004 the company that held the contract

<sup>15</sup> This story is based on research conducted for the NGO groundWork in September 2008, with additional interviews conducted with Simon Mbata and Maki Ramotsidisi on July 2 and 3, 2009. For more information on the original case study please see Samson (2008), which is available at [www.groundwork.org.za/Publications/Reclaiming%20Livelihoods.pdf](http://www.groundwork.org.za/Publications/Reclaiming%20Livelihoods.pdf)

abandoned its operations three years into a five-year contract. This left the reclaimers unofficially in charge of reclamation activities at the dump, and they began to negotiate the direct sale of their materials to the largest purchasers in the region.

The reclaimers aspired to formalise their place within the waste management system. They claim that during this period they were told by a manager in the municipality that if they wanted to receive the contract they would have to form a collective. There were long-standing tensions between the women and older men who collected paper, plastics and cardboard, and the young men who collected scrap metal – the older men and women alleged that the young men were ill-disciplined and disrespectful and that they poached materials from their elders. As a result, they did not invite the young men to join them when they formed the *Ikageng*<sup>16</sup> Landfill Committee. The young men subsequently formed the *Ditamating*<sup>17</sup> Scrap Metal Association. Both groups registered as closed corporations. The two separate organisations co-existed on the dump and there was little co-operation or communication between them.

The municipal officials deny that the reclaimers were organised during this period or indicated an interest in obtaining the contract. But the officials do note that the reclaimers were neither informed nor consulted when a new contract was awarded without having been advertised or put out for public tender. The contract was given to two black professionals who had no real experience in recycling. The city called it black economic empowerment. The reclaimers called it unfair and discriminatory. Given that they are also black, they could not understand why the contract should go to professionals who worked in schools and offices instead of to the people who actually did the work. After an extended battle in which the dump was fenced off and the police were called in to remove the reclaimers from the site, the reclaimers finally ‘surrendered’ and signed contracts agreeing to only sell their materials to the black empowerment company. The company forced them to sell individually, breaking the unity amongst the metal reclaimers who had previously sold their goods collectively. It then sold to the same buyers that the reclaimers had directly supplied their goods to in the past. As the company took a cut for itself, this meant that there was a significant drop in the prices received by the reclaimers.

When it became clear that the company did not have the financial and technical capacity to run the operations at the dump, it partnered with an established white-owned company. By October 2009, however, internal divisions had emerged between the two companies, and they subsequently abandoned operations at the dump. The space was re-opened for the reclaimers to mobilise and demand the contract. However, Simon Mbata, the leader of *Ditamating*, realised that it would be impossible to achieve this goal as long as the reclaimers remained divided into two separate groups. The previous contractor had played the two groups off against each other. Simon was convinced that the municipality would continue to do the same, and that it would

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<sup>16</sup> *Ikageng* means ‘build ourselves’ in seSotho.

<sup>17</sup> *Ditamating* means ‘place of tomatoes’ in seSotho. The committee picked this name as it is the nickname for Sasolburg due to the large number of tomatoes grown in the area. They said that choosing this name would help to ensure that the committee is seen as a local initiative.

use the divisions between the reclaimers to justify not granting them the contract. According to Simon, an exchange trip to India where he saw waste picker groups successfully implementing separation at source, and other innovative practices that the Sasolburg reclaimers had only dreamed of, convinced him of the importance of uniting the reclaimers on his dump. He returned to South Africa firmly committed to achieving this goal.

Simon began by rebuilding the solidarity between the members of *Ditamating* that had been broken by the contractors. He met with the young men individually and convened weekly meetings. The metal reclaimers began to work as a collective once again, pooling the materials that they retrieved and selling them together to obtain higher prices. As in the past, they decided to share the profits equally. Simon convinced the members that they would only be able to win the contract to manage recycling at the dump if they joined with the members of *Ikageng* and presented the municipality with a united front. Once *Ditamating* was consolidated, the members initiated a campaign to convince *Ikageng* to merge with them. At first they focused on meeting with the *Ikageng* members one by one. Simon reports that many days he would travel to the dump and spend the whole day talking to people without working. Eventually three women saw the wisdom in uniting and began to attend the weekly meetings. However, *Ditamating* decided that the women could not join as individuals as they did not want to undermine *Ikageng* as an organisation. The three women responded by beginning to play an active role in reaching out to the other members of *Ikageng*.

After five months of intensive organising work, joint meetings were convened between the two groups. Two key issues that needed to be addressed were the division of work and the name of a new organisation. *Ikageng* members were hesitant to unite with the *Ditamating* as in the past the young men had prevented them from collecting metal. It was agreed that when they formed a common organisation all reclaimers would be able to collect all materials. Because they would share the profits equally there would also be no reason for the young men to stop the women and older men from accessing the more valuable metals. With respect to the name, as neither group wanted to forfeit their history and identity, they decided that the organisation would be called the *Ikageng Ditamating Recycling and Waste Management Group*.

Currently, forty-nine reclaimers are members of *Ikageng Ditamating*. It is officially registered as a co-operative and is governed by a committee made up of four women previously from *Ikageng* and four men previously from *Ditamating*. The members of the co-operative are divided into two groups. One group collects materials and the other sorts them. All members must clock in and out with the co-operative's secretary. Profits are shared equally based on the number of days that each person works. In its first two weeks of operation the co-operative earned R37,000 (US\$4,625). Since then it has managed to earn up to R51,000 (US\$6,375) in a fortnight.

The members of *Ikageng Ditamating* have made enormous strides in a short period of time. They have managed to overcome previously entrenched divisions of labour based on gender and age, have united the reclaimers into a collective organisation,

and increased their income. According to Maki Ramotsidisi, the Secretary of the co-operative and a former member of *Ikageng*, now that they are working co-operatively, animosity between the two former groups has subsided and all members of the co-operative work well together. It is, however, unlikely that all power relations related to gender, age and other social divisions could be so quickly overcome on a permanent basis. It will be important for *Ikageng Ditamating* to continue to identify and address inequalities within the organisation.

Perhaps the greatest challenge faced by the waste pickers relates to their status within the city's waste management system. They still do not have the formal contract to recycle materials at the dump and live under constant threat that the municipality will once again grant the contract to outsiders. If this challenge does arise, they will be better equipped this time. As they are all members of *Ikageng Ditamating* they will have the strength of a united organisation behind them, and will be well prepared to take on the municipality and fight for their rights.

### ***Independencia de la Mujer (Women's Independence) Co-operative, Montevideo, Uruguay by Lucia Fernandez and Melanie Samson***

The *Independencia de la Mujer* (Women's Independence) Co-operative was formed in Montevideo, Uruguay on December 2, 2005 by a group of four women brainstorming ways to work together and improve their income collectively. All of them occasionally helped men in their families who worked as *clasificadores*. They thought that if they could unite and work together they could attain a more stable income. According to Maria Peres, one of the founding members, "as we didn't want to have a boss, we decided to set up a co-operative because we thought it is the best way to avoid having a boss." They knew that to register a co-operative they needed at least five people, so they looked for a fifth woman to join them.

The women obtained a trolley and started collecting recyclables from garbage bins in the area where they lived. Although they started by themselves, a councillor named Juan Ansúa and a lay missionary named Jorge Meoni provided them with support by assisting the members in registering the co-operative. They also helped the women to make brochures that explain their work and asked residents to provide them with recyclables so that they would not have to collect from the garbage bins.



Member of Independencia de la Mujer in her uniform

(photo by Lucia Fernandez)

The members of the co-operative collect recyclable materials from households and companies in the area. They provide this service for free and earn their income by selling the recyclables. At first they used a trolley, but after receiving a loan from *Cudecoop* (a federation of co-operatives) they were able to purchase a van. They now collect materials with the van, sort them in a small warehouse that is provided to them for free by the relative of one member, and sell the materials to the highest bidder. The members take great pride in the uniforms that they designed for themselves. In addition to protecting their clothes, the uniforms help them to feel like ‘workers,’ provide them with a collective identity and make them recognisable to the public.

The main objective of the co-operative is to work together to strategise how to gather materials from existing clients and how to get new clients. At its peak the co-operative had 12 members. They would meet weekly and make decisions collectively. The co-operative now has only four members. Maria explains that some of the members left as they found jobs with better incomes. Others left as they were not able to care for their children and work in the co-operative at the same time. Some simply didn’t want to work hard enough and left when the income dropped.

*Independencia de la Mujer* has good relations with co-operatives composed only of men, some of which they are connected to through family relations. Maria reports that they have considered allowing men to join, but for now it remains an exclusively female co-operative. This can help them to address some of the particular problems confronted by women *clasificadoras*. For example, members of *Independencia* have found that men were paid more than they were for PVC containers. In one case a buyer refused to give them prices over the phone, even though he had given prices to men from another co-operative. Maria explains:

*Yes, we are always discriminated against. But we want to show we can do things as independent women, that we can carry bundles of materials and also be in charge of burning copper.<sup>18</sup> We want to show we can recycle.*

Working in a co-operative has helped the members of *Independencia de la Mujer* to access support and resources, increase their incomes and advance as women in the sector. However, the current economic crisis is creating tremendous problems for the members. According to Maria, “the situation is really horrible. We used to get up to \$100 (US\$4.15) per kg. Now we get \$15 (\$0.62). Cardboard, newspaper and green bottles are not purchased anymore.” Most of *Independencia’s* clients are no longer producing significant enough amounts of material to make it worthwhile for them to collect the materials, so they have transferred the few remaining clients to another co-operative and have basically stopped their work as *clasificadoras* for now. Like other *clasificadoras*, Maria and the members of *Independencia* are forced to try to find other work to generate an income. Although there is some work in the construction sector in the summer months, this mainly goes to men, and the women of *Independencia* are once again confronted with the challenges of gender discrimination.

### **Coopcarmo, Mesquita, Brazil by Leslie Tuttle, Sonia Maria Dias and Melanie Samson<sup>19</sup>**



Members of Coopcarmo, Brazil.

(photo by Emmanuela Lorenz)

“Back in those days, we were looking for charity.” This is how Hada Rúbia Silva, President and Director of *Cooperativa Mista de Coleta Seletiva e Reaproveitamento de*

<sup>18</sup> “Burning copper” refers to the burning of plastic off of pipes to obtain the copper, which has one of the highest prices.

<sup>19</sup> This story is based on an interview with Hada Rúbia Silva conducted and translated by Elaine Jones and recorded and transcribed by Leslie Tuttle on March 2, 2008; interviews conducted with Hada Rúbia Silva by Sonia Maria Dias on May 8-11, 2007; and email communication with Hada Rúbia Silva in December 2008.

*Mesquita* (Coopcarmo), describes the women of Coopcarmo before they began to organise.

Traditionally, women were always looking for handouts from the church. One day, the priest stopped in the middle of the mass and started telling us that we could change our lives. He had come from Rio Grande do Sul, another area where the congregations had been very active.

The priest inspired Hada's church members to begin a programme called the 'kilo campaign'. The parish consisted of 12 communities, each assigned a co-ordinator. Hada was the co-ordinator for her neighbourhood. Her job was to go to shop-owners in her area and request one kilo of food to distribute amongst poor members of the congregation, including herself. She also collected leftovers from wholesalers whom she asked to donate whatever they had not sold by the end of the day.

Through this work the co-ordinators came to realise there were many poor women sitting around without work, not producing anything, so Hada and others got them started making an unleavened bread called '*pan de Cristo*' (bread of Christ). Soon, the priest introduced another idea during the mass, one that would create jobs in the community. This time the women were not focused on handouts, but on waste picking. Hada recounts what he said: "This is an empowerment programme to combat your problems." She assisted in recruiting church members to begin a recycling project.

That is how Hada and 25 other church members began walking their neighbourhoods, collecting recyclable materials that they carried in backpacks. In retrospect, she says that they really didn't know what they were doing. It was difficult carrying everything on their backs, and they couldn't go very far. Eventually, the nuns gave them a donkey and a cart, but they still did not know much about how to proceed.

Once they began waste picking, they were subjected to all kinds of discrimination, called names and accused of being 'smelly'. Most of the women are black and have low levels of education, so the stigma of waste picking compounded the existing racial discrimination. Hada's son was harassed and humiliated because of his mother's activities. Their requests to the municipality to supply trucks for collection were dismissed. This too, they felt, was a form of discrimination. One day they waited for the mayor to leave a meeting and pressed their demands. "You'll have a truck by next Thursday," he promised. But it never appeared and a long battle ensued. When the trucks finally did arrive, there was a huge celebration.

"The next thing we learned about was the environment and how it relates to what we are doing," Hada elaborates. The grassroots nature of their project attracted support from Belgian and German NGOs who helped to educate them about environmental issues and supported their efforts to improve their recycling and sorting processes over the next eight years. Initially they were not accustomed to thinking in organisational terms, and they thought of themselves as 'housewife volunteers'. As they worked together, the NGOs trained them to build their management capacity and the women formed the co-operative Coopcarmo. Registering their co-operative as a legal entity required that women who "had been living completely outside of the boundaries of

society” had to take on the bureaucracy. In June of 2003, ten years after they first lifted their backpacks, the *catadoras* of Coopcarmo gained official status.

The Coopcarmo *catadoras* collect paper, plastic, metal and glass following specific routes and varying the neighbourhoods in which they work from day to day. They conduct awareness programmes with neighbourhood residents and businesses to explain the importance of managing one’s own garbage and the resulting benefits to people’s health and the environment. The co-operative is not paid for collecting the materials, but generates income by selling the recyclables. Members sell the materials collectively and co-operative members are paid based on the number of days worked. Although past earnings exceeded the minimum wage, the current financial crisis has decreased profits, dropping their earnings to below the minimum wage. In addition to their wages from the co-operative, members receive a ‘*cesta básica*’ of basic foods from the municipality, which is targeted for low-income employees.

In the beginning, a priest was a member of the co-operative and made most of the decisions. When the members said that they wanted more autonomy the priest left, and they took up the challenge of running the co-operative themselves. Coopcarmo has grown to count 20 *catadoras* as members. It has developed a formal structure, appointing a Director, a President and an Administrator, and creating Production, Finance and Audit Committees that help to oversee the work of the co-operative. Ongoing operational decisions are made at regular meetings. Once a year, there is an Ordinary General Meeting to address policy.

According to Hada, working as a co-operative is not easy:

*It is a cultural thing. You expect someone else to be the boss, right? We are raised like that, I remember when I was a child and my mother used to say something like this: ‘Hada, you have got to study so you can have a job, and a contract, and everything.’ Nobody was raised and had someone say: ‘Hada, you have got to study so maybe one day you’ll be one of the partners of a Co-operative!’ It was hard for us to understand these things.*

Hada reports that members of Coopcarmo still find it hard to believe that the shed where they sort materials belongs to them, so they must also take care of it and fight to expand it. Even though Hada sees that there is still a long way to go, she feels that the members of the co-operative are becoming more actively engaged and moving towards working as a “real co-op.”

Hada explains how Coopcarmo’s origins as an organisation intended to support women have contributed to the internal strength that has sustained it through many changes:

*When we started this project, we were thinking about those women who never had the opportunity to study or receive an education because they had very difficult lives. Their main objective was to make their lives worthwhile by turning them into productive citizens, giving them self-esteem and helping them to value their lives more highly.*

The respect for self that Coopcarmo advocates is nurtured by a commitment to maintaining an environment of respect for others. Although the initiative started in the church, Hada points out that Coopcarmo's members now come from various religious backgrounds, and that these differences are respected. Initially, Coopcarmo held meetings to discuss how to deal with the racial discrimination being experienced by the members. However, as the co-operative has advanced and the women have won respect in the community, they feel that this has become less of an issue.

When Hada explains the kinds of challenges the women faced, she highlights the importance of building positive relationships with the municipality and the broader community:

*The shed we built, the balance scale we installed, getting the municipality to pay for the truck driver. We only survived by building partnerships. People perceive us differently now. No one calls us smelly and my son is proud of our work.*

Hada is proud of her work too. As she explains:

*I feel very good, since I know now how much value this work has. The change came when things changed inside me. If you would like things to change, it is necessary to change yourself first.*

## **The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) – Organising Through Union and Co-operative in India by Janhavi Dave, Manali Shah and Yamini Parikh, SEWA**

SEWA is the largest union of women working in the informal sector in India. It was formed in 1972, and today has a membership of over a million women members representing approximately 67 trades. SEWA straddles the realms of both union and co-operative. The union mobilises and organises women to come together around their work issues. It provides them with an identity, voice and the strength required to influence policy. Pushpaben Parmar, a waste picker leader, explains:

*SEWA is a union of women like us who work without being noticed, who speak without a voice, and who get exploited without even being a victim. Union means coming together for a common purpose. SEWA is 'us' and we come together to get recognised as workers, get full employment and earn at least minimum wages prescribed by the government.*

Union members also form trade co-operatives to increase their bargaining power to gain collective working contracts. Doing this as a co-operative provides the members with equal power, eliminating the employer-employee relationship. These trade co-operatives give women greater bargaining power, access to credit, training and markets, and moreover help them to build assets. SEWA has nearly ninety different co-operatives in both rural and urban areas. Some are built around products, others around services. SEWA has co-operatives in a number of trades such as vendors, midwives, weavers, handicrafts, snacks, dairy and waste pickers.

## Recruiting members in the SEWA union

SEWA started its efforts to include waste pickers in the union in the late 1970s, when a university student was asked to do a study (Dave 1979) on the waste pickers in Ahmedabad. Her study found that the majority of rag-picker women were rural landless artisans who, until two generations back, were weavers, cobblers and leather-workers. They were *dalits*<sup>20</sup> who left their villages due to extreme poverty and arrived in the thriving textile city of Ahmedabad, where they lived in slums and searched for jobs. As living expenses were much higher than in the villages, the women family members had to take up jobs to make ends meet. Many took up work in the textile mills winding the thread and filling bobbins. When there was a decline in the textile industry later that decade, women were the first to be removed from work without any prior notice. Gradually, even men lost their jobs. This led to large-scale unemployment. The unemployed were not able to go back to the village as they had already sold off their ancestral homes to migrate to the city. Therefore, they started looking for alternative jobs in Ahmedabad. Men found jobs in small-scale industries as labourers, while women took up waste picking, as no skill or investment was required for this job.

The study conducted by Dave found that waste pickers earned as little as US\$4 per month and worked in extremely hazardous conditions, where they handled acid bottles, electrical wires, nails, glass, dirty paper and cloth with their bare hands. This exposed them to innumerable health risks like skin diseases, eczema, breathlessness and chronic pain in their back, legs, neck and shoulders. Unstable income aggravated their problems, as they lived hand-to-mouth and had no work during the monsoon season. Caste prejudice, in addition to the low status of their work, increased their sense of worthlessness (Bhatt 2006).

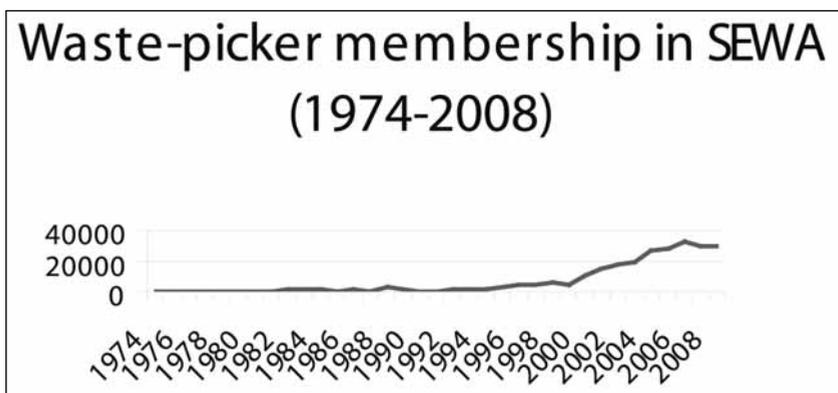
After the study, meetings were held in the waste picker community. Inadequate income from their current economic activity was raised as a key issue. SEWA started with three main interventions:

- It identified reasons for inadequate income and interventions were made
- It linked members to alternative income generating activities
- Waste pickers were organised to develop unity.

Steadily, the number of waste pickers in the SEWA union increased. The graph on the following page represents the growth of waste picker membership in the SEWA union.

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<sup>20</sup> *Dalit* is a self-designation for a group of people in India traditionally regarded as untouchables or outcasts or people who do not belong to any particular caste. They themselves came up with this term, as they were called '*achhot*' or untouchable which was derogatory in nature. The caste system is a social construct that has been constitutionally abolished by the Indian Constitution, but discrimination and prejudice still exist against *dalits*.



Initially SEWA drew on its connection with the Textile Labour Association (TLA) to help improve the income of the waste pickers. SEWA approached those mills with relationships with the TLA and requested that they give low-grade waste paper to the waste picker members of SEWA. As a result, some members obtained a steady flow of waste paper. However, the union had to confront the vested interests of mill employees who had an in-house arrangement and earned money for themselves from the sale of the paper.

The more contracts SEWA was able to secure with the mills, the more women joined the union. The increase in the number of union members encouraged people to take notice of them as workers, which brought them other contracts. However, each mill required only 2-3 waste pickers, and as the number of members increased it became difficult to ensure that each one would get work through the mill.

In 1978, the waste pickers organised a general meeting to discuss these limitations and chart a course for the future. It became clear that it was necessary to develop alternative income generation activities due to lack of income for all those members who depended on waste picking. While some members were keen to identify new supplies of waste, others wanted to look for an alternative income source. In addition to waste picking, three alternative income generating activities were discussed: weaving (which had been done by the women's ancestors); salaried domestic and institutional cleaning; and producing finished goods out of waste. All the women wanted an alternate career for their daughters who were already involved in waste picking along with them.

### Co-operative Initiatives

Soon after this meeting, training was initiated for waste picker members in their area of interest and five co-operatives were initiated: a waste pickers' co-operative where women collected and sorted waste and sold it to a scrap shop owner; a waste pickers' co-operative which sought contracts from government and private offices to access waste paper; a weavers' co-operative; a co-operative that made stationery from recycled paper that it sold to various offices; and a co-operative that obtained

contracts to clean offices and hospitals. Managing each of these co-operatives was full of struggle and challenges. This was also the first time that these women had come together in large numbers and were managing a co-operative. Even so, the first three co-operatives are now being managed by women members themselves without SEWA's assistance.

These co-operatives were initiated to improve the working conditions of the members and to strengthen their source of income, but in many cases they were not able to sustain themselves with the alternate vocation and had to resort to waste picking from time to time. For example, members of the stationery co-operative produce stationery for offices, but this work can employ only a few members and so others have contracted their services to collect waste from residential colonies.

Currently, there are three co-operatives of SEWA waste picker members. In the last five years, two of them have procured tenders for door-to-door collection of dry and wet waste in Vejalpur Nagarpalika. This is the first instance of door-to-door collection in Ahmedabad, and it sustains 401 waste picker members of SEWA. There are 46,842 households in the ward and each Arogyabhagini ('sister of health' as the waste pickers are known in SEWA) collects waste from 100-125 households. They further segregate the waste and empty the wet waste into the tractors stationed by the Municipal Corporation around 1 kilometre from the society or commercial complex. They carry the dry waste themselves and sell it to the scrap shop. For picking waste from these wards, they get paid Rs7.30/- (US\$0.18) per house or office. Each member earns within a range of Rs800/- to 1,200/- (US\$20-US\$30) per month for three hours of work. They also manage to earn Rs400/- to Rs500/- (US\$10-US\$12.5) per month for the dry waste collected from the households.

These two co-operatives have an executive committee of seven members, who take overall decisions for the co-operative. The executive committee appoints supervisors from the waste picker group, and one supervisor oversees the work of 20 waste picker members.

### **Difficulties faced by the Co-operatives**

The purpose of forming a co-operative is to make women owners of their work and eliminate middlemen, thereby contributing to their economic freedom. However, the government regulations and acts make it extremely difficult for women to run their co-operatives. The main difficulties faced by the co-operatives include corruption in the tendering system, irregular payment and lack of tools, and these challenges make it very difficult for waste picker members to sustain their co-operatives.

### **Campaign for Strengthening the Union**

SEWA uses campaigns as a strategy to create unity amongst members and highlight the challenges that they face. In the case of waste pickers the most pressing issues are inadequate income and lack of visibility.



Pushpaben Parmar, a SEWA organiser, with SEWA members in Sewage Farm, Pirana Road, Ahmedabad. It is the biggest dumping site in Ahmedabad, where approximately 200 SEWA members go to collect waste

(photo by Bharat Patel).

The team for the waste pickers is called the *Jumbish* team, and comprises waste picker leaders along with a SEWA employee and a SEWA executive committee member. These leaders have now become employees of SEWA with the sole responsibility of reaching out to the maximum number of waste pickers and organising them. Every morning they meet in SEWA's office, decide their course of action and then spread out into different areas of the city. They organise meetings in the community to identify the needs of the community members and then link them to SEWA's services. The campaign team helps the members to understand the importance of organising. The Campaign team is like a bridge between SEWA and its members. In the past few years, the *Jumbish* team has managed to take up a number of issues related to waste pickers, and their achievements include:

- Procurement of a bonus for the waste picker members: For the past five years all waste picker members in Ahmedabad get a bonus of Rs.50/- to Rs.500/- (US\$1.25-US\$12.5) annually during *Diwali*.<sup>21</sup>
- Establishing the Gujarat Informal Economy Board Development Board: SEWA had been lobbying for a Government Welfare Board for workers in the informal sector for the past twenty years with constant petitions, letters and meetings with government employees. They were finally successful in 2007 with the establishment of the Gujarat Informal Economy Board Development Board. This Welfare Board is helped by SEWA to register the members. Through this board the waste picker members have obtained: identity cards; medical reimbursement up to Rs.1200/- (US\$30)

<sup>21</sup> An important Hindu festival in the month of October or November (as per the lunar calendar).

if the member is hospitalised for 24 hours in a government hospital; skills upgrading courses in sorting of waste; and tool kits.

While there has been a breakthrough in lobbying activity with the government, SEWA continues to lobby for the following:

- Education scholarships and uniforms for children of waste picker members
- Health and life insurance for members
- Increase in the medical reimbursement to Rs.7,000 (US\$175) per year, and for medical treatment instead of only hospitalisation
- Medical reimbursement for members if they have been admitted to hospitals near their residence
- Abolishment of the tender system and replacement with contracts being entered into with those organisations working with waste picker members
- Shaded areas to be provided for sorting of waste in the waste picker communities
- Uniformity in the rates of waste in scrap shops across the city.

## Organising through Trade Committees

The trade committee is a bridge between the union and co-operatives. It takes decisions related to the campaign team and has the responsibility to decide where to take the trade and its activities. The leaders of each trade form trade committees. In order to strengthen the waste pickers' trade group, regular trade committee meetings are organised. Each leader represents, and is accountable to, her members and discusses the issues related to her trade. Together they create strategies to resolve the problems faced by their members, and then pass on these strategies to the members in their communities.

## Conclusion

SEWA is using the twin strategy of struggle and development to sustain existing livelihoods and increase members' income. SEWA uses the legal structures of a co-operative and union for the development of its members. While a co-operative is a viable legal structure to start economic activities, a union negotiates with the government and invisible employers (like the scrap shop workers) to get long-term benefits. Approximately 3% of SEWA's waste picker members are part of co-operatives, while the others benefit from the activities carried out by the union. The waste picker members of SEWA are approximately 2.5% of the entire strength of SEWA. Being part of a union with more than a million members helps to ensure that the government listens to the voices of the waste pickers.

## Chapter 3: Combining Forces – Networks and Federations of Waste Picker Organisations

Organised waste pickers are starting to forge relationships across cities, countries, continents and the globe in order to strengthen their collective struggles. In this chapter we provide overviews of initiatives to unite waste picker organisations at municipal, national, continental and global levels. The stories profile these important developments, provide insight into how and why these networks and relationships have been forged, and highlight the challenges encountered in doing so.

The following questions should be kept in mind when reading this chapter:

- What are the objectives of the different networks and federations?
- What are the advantages of forming networks, federations and alliances?
- What are some key problems and challenges that need to be confronted by waste pickers when forming and sustaining networks?

### **Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá (ARB), Colombia** *by Melanie Samson*



Alqueria Recycling Centre, Bogota

*(photo by Chris Bonner).*

Colombia has one of the oldest movements of waste picker co-operatives in the world. The *Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá* (ARB) was formed in 1990 when four co-operatives that had been fighting the closure of a dump in Bogotá, Colombia decided to formalise their relationship. They were assisted in this process by the

*Fundación Social*, a foundation that played a pivotal role in catalysing and supporting the formation of *recicladores* co-operatives across the country. The *Fundación Social* provided the ARB and its member co-operatives with advice, training, grants and loans until it was forced to cancel its support programme in 1996 due to financial problems (Medina 2007, 156-159).<sup>22</sup>

The ARB is registered as an association of co-operatives working in the municipality of Bogotá. When it was first established, the ARB was governed by a board of ten people whose members were drawn from the member co-operatives. Its first tasks were to identify other *recicladores*, help them to form co-operatives and then encourage these co-operatives to join the ARB. Today 24 co-operatives are members of the ARB. Each member co-operative sends four delegates to the ARB Assembly that governs the association's activities. The ARB Board has seven members. An Administrative Council of nine people is responsible for its day-to-day activities.

The ARB seeks to promote and strengthen the organisation of *recicladores*, defend their common interests, improve their working conditions and gain social and economic recognition for their work. The ARB has a three-year agreement with the municipality that covers 10% of the Bogotá area. Municipal trucks collect recyclables that residents have separated out from their garbage and deliver these to a centre where members of ARB-affiliated co-operatives sort the recyclables, press them and sell them to factories. The workers are each employed for six months by the ARB. They receive a salary, social security, medical aid, pensions and access to occupational health and safety services.

The ARB also engages at the level of policy and legislation. Aided by professionals who provide free support, the ARB has conducted a number of studies to demonstrate the social, economic and environmental contributions of *recicladores*. With the assistance of pro bono lawyers, the ARB successfully challenged the constitutionality of legal provisions that prevented co-operatives from bidding for contracts to provide door-to-door services.<sup>23</sup>

According to Nohra Padilla, the formation of an association has been critically important for *recicladores* in Bogotá. As she explains, "It helps to prevent the exclusion of *recicladores* by uniting the co-operatives in a common struggle. Each separate group is fragile and vulnerable, but together we have weight and the capacity to fight." The ARB has deepened and extended this capacity by helping to found the national association in Colombia, having a representative on the governing body of the Latin American network, and hosting the First World Congress of Waste Pickers.

## **South Africa's First National Waste Picker Meeting by Melanie Samson**

On July 2 and 3, 2009, 100 waste pickers from across the country gathered for South Africa's First National Waste Picker Meeting. The waste pickers came from 26 landfills

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<sup>22</sup> Additional information from interview with Nohra Padilla, 14/01/2009.

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with Adriana Ruiz-Restrepo; Interview with Nohra Padilla, 14/01/2009. See Chapter 5 for further information on the court case.

in seven of South Africa's nine provinces. Speaking at a plenary session, waste picker Simon Mbata emphasised that the meeting was "making history" as it was "the first time we see waste pickers in South Africa together deciding our future."

The meeting was organised by the environmental justice NGO groundWork, which has a long history of working with communities affected by hazardous and toxic waste. In 2008 it began to work with waste pickers after realising that they are also negatively affected by poor waste management practices. In addition, groundWork was concerned that the new waste management legislation being drafted did not recognise the role of waste pickers in municipal waste management and threatened to undermine their livelihood, as did trends toward incineration of municipal waste. Musa Chamane, the groundWork waste campaigner, spent eight months traveling to dumps in all of South Africa's nine provinces to make links with waste pickers. In preparation for the national meeting, he facilitated provincial workshops that introduced the waste pickers to groundWork, reported on groundWork's research on waste pickers and identified key issues faced by waste pickers. Representatives from all the dumps visited by groundWork were then invited to the National Meeting, held in Midrand, Gauteng.

While groundWork is keen to support the organising of waste pickers, it is clear that this initiative must be driven by the waste pickers themselves. The organisation sees its role as facilitating opportunities for waste pickers to meet and engage, and providing information and support to help waste pickers organise themselves. According to groundWork, the main objective of the national meeting was to provide the opportunity for waste pickers throughout South Africa to meet and engage with each other in order to promote collective organising for securing their livelihoods.

Waste pickers who attended the meeting made great sacrifices to be there. As they are self-employed, they all forfeited two days of work when they could have been generating income. Province after province reported in plenary that they had come in order to create stronger links with other waste pickers, and in the process of doing so, to learn new strategies about how to forward their own struggles. They also hoped that collectively they would be able to address the discrimination that they face and lobby government for recognition.

Running a national meeting in South Africa is not an easy task. South Africa has eleven official languages, and at least seven were spoken during the conference. Facilitators and participants pulled together to ensure that everyone could communicate and participate. A team of multilingual facilitators translated every point made in plenary into English, isiZulu and seSotho. As isiZulu and seSotho are from the two main language groups in South Africa they can be understood by most African language speakers in the country. At times participants spoke languages that the facilitators could not translate, and in these cases other participants who spoke their language quickly volunteered to translate for them. These skills were crucial in the breakaway sessions, where the translation process highlighted not only the valuable language abilities of the waste pickers but also bridged linguistic and cultural divides between them. The waste pickers were brought closer together not

only because they could share ideas and experiences, but also because they relied on each other to do so.

Meeting delegates discussed and debated a wide range of issues. They identified the health risks associated with their work and argued that is the responsibility of the state to provide them with protective clothing and to ensure that medical and toxic waste are not dumped at municipal landfills. Waste pickers from a number of cities reported that they were being evicted from dumps as contracts were being given to private companies. They identified that one of their key challenges was:

*... to resist privatisation of our resources, both at the landfill site and upstream, and to ensure our right to work and to resist exclusion from the landfill sites where we derive our livelihoods.*

They also resolved to “develop strategies to ensure that the exploitative practice of middlemen is permanently destroyed.”

Workshop delegates identified that collective organisation will be key to achieving all of these objectives. Most of the delegates came from dumps that did not have formal organisations. They were particularly inspired by a plenary session in which waste pickers who have succeeded in organising both co-operatives in their dumps and city-wide alliances provided insight into how they had achieved these successes. After hearing of their accomplishments, the delegates resolved that they would try to build organisations on all of the dumps. For, as the breakaway group focusing on organising noted, “it is only where waste pickers are united that we see them advancing,” and, “the municipality will not listen to an individual, but it will listen to a collective.” The meeting came up with a number of suggestions regarding how to convince other waste pickers to see the benefits of organising. Key amongst these was the idea of running local workshops where more experienced waste pickers from other cities can share their experiences.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the delegates elected a national working group with one representative from each province to take this agenda forward. Because waste pickers also face problems related to housing, education and access to services, the delegates resolved to “work with other community organisations to take forward our collective struggles.”

The National Meeting was an important first step that has altered the landscape in South Africa. Nevertheless, much work remains to be done to make future processes even more inclusive. Despite the fact that women were active participants in the meeting and gave the majority of reports from breakaway groups, only one of the working group members elected at the conference was a woman. Two provinces were not present and only a small number of waste pickers working in the streets attended the meeting. Although many foreign migrants work as waste pickers in cities across the country, none were present at the workshop. Some participants felt that excluding foreign nationals from dumps would be a way to address concerns about overcrowding. As the working group moves forward, there will be a need to explore how to overcome exclusions and divisions and to ensure that all waste pickers can participate and have a voice in the emerging national processes.



Delegates at the First National Waste Picker Meeting

*(photo by groundWork)*

### **The SWACHH National Alliance of Waste Pickers, India by the Central Secretariat, KKP KP**

Efforts to work with waste pickers started in the late 1990s in different parts of India. These were usually modest experiments that in some cases gradually grew to be city-wide. The groups working with waste pickers included NGOs, university departments and trade unions. They typically initiated work with either children or adult women waste pickers.

The approach of working with waste pickers (originally referred to as rag pickers) depended on the orientation of the group's founders and their philosophies. A number of groups involved in gender justice issues started working with waste pickers when they identified that a large number of women worked in this sector were in extremely vulnerable positions. Some struggles and movements that address discrimination based on caste identified waste pickers as the most vulnerable within their own caste. For their part, workers' groups organised waste pickers with the intention of obtaining recognition of them as workers, as they were not even in the hierarchy of labour. Finally, groups interested in environmental issues identified waste pickers as contributing to the protection of the environment, and began to support protection of their rights.

Experiments in providing access to dry recyclable waste at source were carried out in a few cities with the hope of improving the working conditions of waste workers. In some cities, experiments like collective scrap stores were tried, while in others there was an effort to offer waste pickers training to move to other work opportunities.

Nationally the groups interacted with each other to exchange ideas, discuss strategies and visit each other to learn. These interactions were very informal and happened organically as per member needs.

It was only in March 2005 that a group of eight organisations met and decided to forge an alliance and form a network called SWACHH. The organisations in the national network come from a number of different states in India including Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. While most of the groups are from metros and big cities in India, some come from smaller cities.

SWACHH is not a registered body as the groups have decided to allow the national network to grow organically. The KKP KP trade union of waste pickers in Pune currently functions as the secretariat for SWACHH. In December 2008, with the help of donor funding, a co-ordinator was hired, who works out of the secretariat of the KKP KP in Pune. All the meetings organised so far have been non-funded, meaning that all organisations have been willing to invest their time, energy and money to nurture the national network.

Twenty-four organisations are members of SWACHH. These include organisations of waste pickers as well as organisations that work with waste pickers. While some of them are member-based organisation like registered trade unions or co-operatives, most are NGOs registered as public trusts or societies. Some of the organisations have set up co-operatives or companies that complement their activities as a trust, society or union. There seems to be an increasing trend to use business entities owned and run by waste pickers. Almost all the organisations work in Tier I (metros) and Tier II cities (million plus population), although there are also some efforts underway in smaller towns.

The agenda for working together is driven by the needs of the day and includes responding to changing environments that affect the waste pickers' work. One of the main achievements of 2008 was the drafting of a national policy for solid waste management as a group. Efforts in 2009 will include advocating for its implementation with the various ministries that deal with municipal waste management.

In 2009 SWACHH collected national-level information on the scrap prices that were affected by the recession in the market. SWACHH is in the process of collecting data on different systems used by the groups to collect waste from household and business establishments. This documentation will help the group to exchange ideas and will assist newer members to explore what works in their own context. SWACHH is also investigating the possibility of providing health insurance for all waste pickers.

Efforts planned for the future include:

- Exploring whether it is possible to develop a methodology to determine carbon credits for waste pickers
- Providing access to financial and other experts for groups who would like to get assistance to further their projects
- Facilitating exchanges of waste pickers and their organisers to other groups in the country to promote the sharing of experiences.

The diversity of the groups in terms of geographical location and level of work pose challenges of organising in general. The mode and language for communication are particular challenges.

Each of the cities has a unique situation, with different levels of understanding of solid waste management and particular strategies of working with waste pickers. This lends itself to a creative tension when attempting to further the network. It also keeps the agenda of waste pickers alive, and ensures that the constant evolution of strategies is in their best interest.

Some key issues for debate within SWACHH revolve around gender discrimination. Traditionally, the waste pickers in most cities have been women. Projects to implement door-to-door collection often involve the use of bicycles, tricycles or travelling on trucks, and due to gender stereotypes and assumptions regarding who should use such vehicles, many groups have chosen to work with men connected with waste pickers' families once these modes of transportation have been introduced. This has pushed the women waste pickers out of the sector. Some of the groups have trained women to use bicycles or tricycles, which has been an empowering process. However, it is time-consuming to provide training, change attitudes and increase acceptance of different ways of working. This remains a heavily debated area of strategy.

Organisational forms have often been a subject of debate among the national groups. While some groups feel that workers' associations and unions form a stronger link to the issue, and that participation of workers themselves in their struggles is central, others are exploring alternative forms of organisation such as trusts, societies and registration under the Companies Act in order to complement the workers' movement. There is also a move towards registering the group in multiple ways to address the growing needs of the organisation and respond to market changes.

The national network is in a phase of exploring strategies to work towards common agendas and to address the needs of waste pickers in specific cities. This is just the beginning of efforts at the national level – there is much scope for organisations to learn from each other, forge an alliance on common issues, lend support and collaborate in city level struggles.

## Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis (MNCR), Brazil *by Melanie Samson*



(photo from [www.mnccr.org.br](http://www.mnccr.org.br))

Brazil's *Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis* (MNCR) or National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Materials is currently the largest national movement of waste pickers in the world (Medina 2007, 82). The organising of *catadores* in Brazil dates back to the late 1980s when the *Pastoral de Rua* of the Catholic Church began facilitating this process in various municipalities. When the Workers' Party gained power in a number of local councils it played a critical role in supporting existing co-operatives of *catadores*, promoting the formation of new co-operatives where they did not already exist and creating formal partnerships with co-operatives to implement source segregation programmes. The presence of sympathetic individuals in key positions also helped to ensure that the inclusion of *catadores* became part of the Workers' Party's broader agenda of transforming the state (Dias and Alves 2008, 8-9, 65). The existence of a receptive governing party and supportive bureaucrats, first in local and later in national governments, has been important for creating an enabling environment for the development of a strong, national movement of *catadores* in Brazil.

In 1998 a major advance was seen at the national level when UNICEF helped to create a National Waste and Citizenship Forum. This forum brings together key stakeholders to look at issues such as how to stop children from working as *catadores*, improve the status and conditions of *catadores*, strengthen their organisations, promote partnerships between municipalities and co-operatives of *catadores*, and encourage the formation of Waste and Citizenship Forums at state and local levels (Dias and Alves 2008, 9-11).

The first concrete moves towards the formation of a national movement of *catadores* were made in the same period. Also in 1998, the Federation of Recyclers' Associations of the Rio Grande do Sul State (FARRGS) was created to put forward the demands of *catadores* in that state. The First National Meeting of *Catadores* was held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil in November, 1999. This meeting was organised by the National

Forum of Studies on Street Dwellers with the support of the *Pastoral de Rua*, the Belo Horizonte municipal administration and many other organisations (Dias and Alves 2008, 9-10). In June 2001, the National Movement of *Catadores* (MNCR) was founded by the more than 1,700 *catadores* who attended the first National Congress of *Catadores* held in Brasilia ([www.mnccr.org.br](http://www.mnccr.org.br)).



MNCR Brazil, march against privatisation

(photo by Fabiana Goulart)

The MNCR is a social movement committed to organising and advancing the interests of *catadores*. It views *catadores* as workers who must be recognised and valued for the important work that they perform. The MNCR believes that *catadores* must be integrated formally into municipal waste management systems and compensated for the work that they do. It promotes collective – as opposed to individual – advancement and argues that *catadores* should work in a co-operative manner that does not create hierarchies and inequalities between them. The MNCR supports initiatives by co-operatives of *catadores* to move up the recycling value chain and take increasing control over their own work as well as the sale and processing of their products.

The MNCR is guided by a number of key principles, including:

- Control of the organisation by *catadores*
- Direct democracy and collective decision-making within the organisation
- Direct action, which is a means to guard against apathy, and the expectation that others will bring about change and ensure active involvement in struggle

- Independence as a class from government, political parties and entrepreneurs
- Recognition that differences exist within the movement, but a commitment to ensure that these do not divide the MNCR.

The MNCR has a class analysis of society and sees *catadores* as part of the broader class of the oppressed. It believes that it cannot achieve its goals in isolation and that true victory requires a profound transformation in society to eradicate the power relations and inequalities that divide society into the oppressors and the oppressed, the rich and the poor. The MNCR is therefore committed to building solidarity with social movements in Brazil, and beyond that to advance the struggle of the oppressed class ([www.mnrc.org.br](http://www.mnrc.org.br)).

The MNCR is governed by democratic structures that are rooted in the member organisations. Each co-operative or association elects a representative onto a regional committee. Delegates from the regional committees are elected to participate in committees that are formed within each state. The state committees each send two delegates to Regional Commissions that are formed in the south, southeast, central, central west, north and northeast regions of Brazil. The main decision-making body of the MNCR is the National Commission which has 37 members elected from the State Committees. The National Articulation Committee has seven representatives from the National Commission. It is charged with co-ordinating the activities of the MNCR's various structures (Fernandez 2008). The MNCR has a national office in São Paulo and employs two staff associates. However, as noted above, the MNCR is firmly committed to the principle that *catadores* must control the organisation through democratic processes.

More than 500 co-operatives from across Brazil are now affiliated to the MNCR ([www.mnrc.org.br](http://www.mnrc.org.br)). Whilst this is a significant number, the MNCR is aware that it is only a fraction of the existing registered co-operatives, which number over 3,500. The MNCR therefore has a proactive campaign to recruit more affiliates. New members benefit from political education that covers issues such as the definition of a movement; the class nature of the MNCR; *catadores*, informal traders and street-dwellers as part of the urban poor; and the common interest of organisations of the urban poor in public policies (Horn 2008).<sup>24</sup>

## Shack/Slum Dwellers International – Facilitating Waste Picker Exchanges in Africa *by Melanie Samson*

There are presently no networks or federations of waste pickers that span the African continent. However, Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) has facilitated

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<sup>24</sup> For further information on the MNCR, please see [www.mnrc.org.br](http://www.mnrc.org.br) as well as the presentation by Severino Lima Junior at the First World Conference of Waste Pickers, which can be found at [http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=143](http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=143).

exchanges between waste pickers in South Africa, Kenya and Egypt that have helped to forge links and promote the sharing of experiences between African waste pickers.<sup>25</sup>

The NGO Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) is a South African affiliate of SDI, and until recently it hosted the SDI Secretariat. SDI was formed in the early 1990s to promote exchanges between slum dwellers (as they are referred to by SDI) in South Africa and India. It is currently a network of community-based organisations and slum dweller organisations in more than 30 countries. SDI promotes what it calls 'horizontal learning' and trans-national communication and alliance building between marginalised urban people. A key component of SDI's approach is to encourage the formation of savings groups by local communities to help build solidarity and generate funds for building houses. In recent years CORC identified a need to pro-actively address the problems of the urban poor in other areas of service delivery in addition to housing. Waste management services emerged as a key issue due to the extremely limited nature of service provision for slum and shack dwellers. It also became apparent to CORC that some groups were generating income from the sale of recyclables, and that this could be a strategic way to increase money available for savings and other activities.

CORC was aware that the *zabbaleen* (informal waste collectors) in Cairo, Egypt have developed a particularly advanced informal recycling system<sup>26</sup> and felt that other African waste pickers could benefit from drawing on their experiences. In December 2004, CORC undertook an exploratory trip to visit the *zabbaleen* in Egypt. In 2005, using funds provided by the Ford Foundation, CORC facilitated exchanges that involved waste pickers from Egypt, Kenya and South Africa visiting each other. In Cairo, Nairobi and Cape Town, participants visited a number of different recycling projects and met a range of organisations including recycling groups, other activist groups and NGOs. They learned about each other's histories, struggles and the ways in which they each conducted their recycling activities. The main participating organisations included: the youth group 'Spirit of the Youth' from Mokattam in Cairo, Pamoja Trust, a youth recyclers' network from Nairobi and representatives from a mix of new and experienced recycling organisations in Cape Town.

The CORC manager dealing with waste recycling projects notes that the exchanges had many positive effects for the participating organisations. He reports that the South African and Kenyan delegates were particularly inspired to see how waste pickers in Egypt can have a secure income and are valued and respected for the work that they do. According to CORC, the Egyptians felt less isolated and were proud to be considered as being advanced and having useful information to share with other waste pickers. The exchanges helped to open the minds of participants to new ideas and different ways of doing things. At the same time, the exchanges also highlighted that whilst there is much to be gained from sharing experiences and ideas, due to the

<sup>25</sup> This case is drawn from CORC (2005) and Bolnick (2006) as well as from an interview with Stefano Marmarato of the Community Organisation Resource Centre. For more information on CORC, please see [www.corc.co.za](http://www.corc.co.za); for more information on Shack/Slum Dwellers International please see [www.sdinet.org](http://www.sdinet.org).

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 6 for more information on the historical development of informal recycling in Cairo as well as current challenges being faced by the *zabbaleen*.

very different social contexts in the three countries the needs of the waste pickers and appropriate responses vary in important ways. For example, whilst the participating South African organisations feel a need to build community and find savings groups a useful way of doing so, this is less relevant to the Egyptian context where the *zabbaleen* have long historical ties and a strong sense of community. The experience of the SDI exchanges shows that although approaches to recycling and organising waste pickers cannot and should not be simply transplanted from one context to another, there is a tremendous amount to be gained from facilitating networking and exchanges between waste pickers (Bolnick 2006; CORC 2005).



(Picture courtesy SDI)

### **Latin American Waste Picker Network by Lucia Fernandez**

The first steps towards creating a Latin American Waste Picker Network (LAWPN) were taken after the Second Latin American Waste Pickers Conference, held in São Leopoldo, Brazil in February 2005. There were four countries involved in the initiative: the Brazilian Waste Picker Movement (MNCR), the Bogotá Waste Picker Association (ARB) from Colombia, some waste picker co-operatives and associations from Argentina (Bajo Flores and Tren Blanco) and members of the Waste Pickers Trade Union (URCUS) from Uruguay.

The first meeting of LAWPN leaders from different countries took place on February 25th, 2005 in Porto Alegre, Brazil at the World Social Forum. Throughout 2005, the LAWPN maintained intense communication by email and provided solidarity to waste picker co-operatives when they faced repression by local governments and engaged in protest action.



First meeting held at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, February 2005

*(picture by Lucia Fernandez)*

When the Inter-American Development Bank held a conference on ‘Improving the lives of Latin American and Caribbean waste segregators’ in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the LAWPN decided to participate in order to give voice to waste pickers at the event. An important parallel session took place where leaders involved in the LAWPN shared information about the network with new organisations.

The AVINA Foundation for Sustainable Development in Latin America has provided support to the network since 2006.<sup>27</sup> In November of that year, AVINA organised a Conference in Bogotá, Colombia, where the LAWPN had the opportunity to talk about its history and involve waste picker organisations from three new countries: Peru, Paraguay and Ecuador.

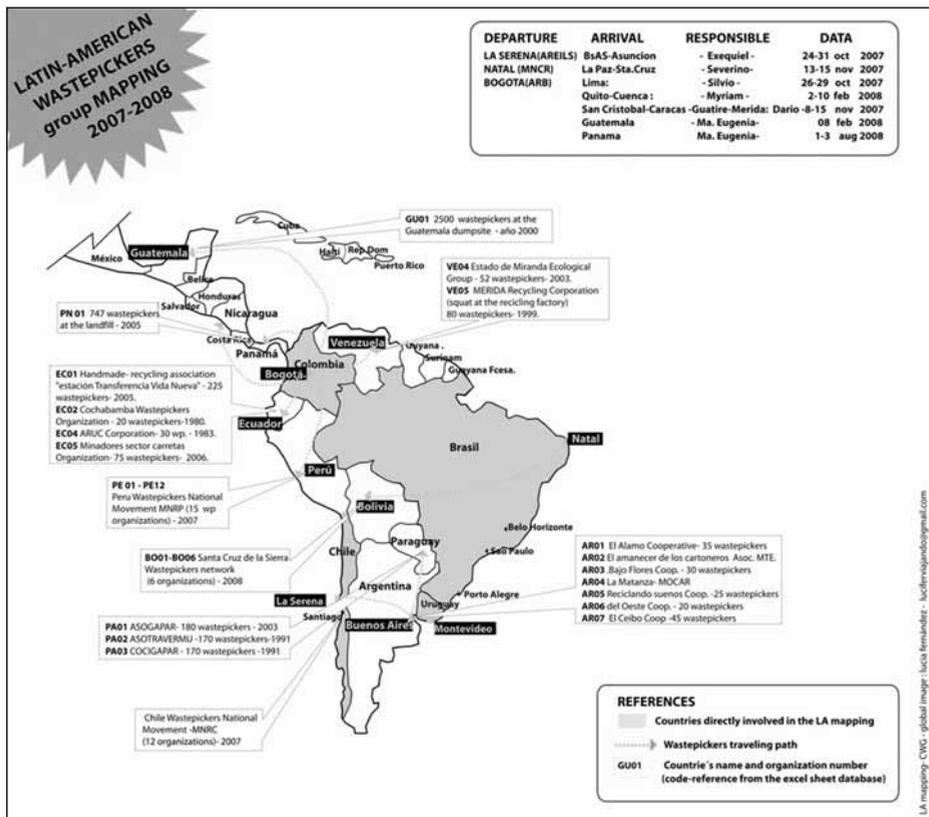
The idea of organising a third Latin American Conference became part of the main objectives of the LAWPN. In April 2007, the LAWPN had a meeting in Chile with representatives from Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and the Collaborative Working Group in Solid Waste Management (CWG), two other international networks involved in issues related to waste management and waste picking.

After this meeting, the La Serena Waste Pickers’ Association in Chile was appointed to act as the Secretariat for the network, with technical assistance being provided from Uruguay. With the support of WIEGO, the CWG and AVINA network members

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<sup>27</sup> For more information on AVINA, please see [www.avina.net](http://www.avina.net).

embarked on a mapping exercise to collect information on waste picker organisations in Latin American countries not yet connected to the network.



(graphic by Lucia Fernandez)

In collaboration with WIEGO and AVINA, the LAWPN played a leading role in organising the Third Latin American Waste Pickers Conference/First World Conference of Waste Pickers in Bogotá, Colombia in March 2008. At the conference, five new countries joined the network, bringing membership to 12 organisations from 12 Latin American/Caribbean countries: Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Colombia and Brazil.

There is a wide variation in the strength of national organisations within the network. For instance, the MNCR is well-established as a national movement in Brazil, while national networks in Ecuador and Bolivia were only created after the conference. In Paraguay and Puerto Rico there still are no national associations.

## Structure

The LAWPN Secretariat from Chile worked for the network on a voluntary basis and was expected to co-ordinate activities and communicate information

electronically to members. After the First World/Third Latin American Conference, the Secretariat moved to Brazil and is presently housed by the MNCR, the biggest waste picker movement in Latin America. Four members of the National Commission of the MNCR are in charge of the Latin American Secretariat. The strengthening of the LAWPN Secretariat is one of the objectives of a new five-year Global Project.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the work of the LAWPN will be carried out via e-mail and through the LAWPN web page that is expected to be operational by mid-2009. The AVINA Foundation still provides the main support to the LAWPN's meetings, projects and other initiatives.

## Mission

The LAWPN's mission is:

- To achieve social and political recognition of waste pickers' work as an important occupation/profession, economically, environmentally and socially.
- To change public opinion and that of policy makers in favour of waste pickers, and to advocate for supportive laws, regulations and policies.
- To strengthen waste pickers' organisations.
- To share information amongst waste pickers and with communities.

Santo Spolito, a Colombian waste picker who is a member of the national association in Colombia (the ANR) and was part of the Bogotá conference organising team, expands on the goals of the LAWPN:

*We must all be linked to the same support chain, where, if an organisation suffers any setback, it can be somehow supported by the other linked movements, so that everyone is regarded as skilful businessmen instead of the helpless poor.*

## Accomplishments

To date the main accomplishments of the LAWPN have been related to networking and shared learning. Through their participation in the network, waste picker leaders have improved their internet capacities and enhanced their knowledge of web-based networking strategies. Leaders are all able to connect to each other by internet to co-ordinate actions and meetings, share information and engage in collective planning.

With respect to learning, the network has enabled waste pickers in a growing number of countries to learn from each other's experiences. As Exequiel Estay, the first secretary of the network observes:

*Something that is usually overlooked is that the exchange has strengthened the local groups in each country, and we do not give enough importance*

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<sup>28</sup> LAWPN and AVINA are Latin American partners in the Inclusive Cities, Global Project.

*to that. Peru and Bolivia have now given formal documents to their Governments. Chile is on a working group with Government. We have all learnt from how Brazil and Colombia have moved forward.*

Peru created their National Waste Picker Movement after learning more about the Brazilian and Colombian experiences. In Chile a national movement was created after the involvement of waste pickers' organisations in the network. The Uruguayan waste pickers learnt about co-operatives from Brazil and their union now has seven co-operatives.

Outlining some of the challenges faced by the LAWPN, Exequiel Estay emphasises the importance of communication and leadership:

*How to stay informed of the progress of each movement is a challenge. The blog has worked out for Chile. Colombia and Brazil have a webpage. Communication is the first challenge. What fostered the growth of the National Movement in Chile was communication – to work closely with the press, radio, TV, also through their contacts. Another challenge is continued leadership. Those who work without funding, those who equally face joys and failures, those are leaders.*

Santo Spolito concurs that the question of leadership is central and highlights the necessity of forging a common vision, arguing that,

*[T]he group in general should be strengthened by having a group vision instead of an individual one. As leadership we usually have different points of view. We have to discuss with each other and have to reach agreements.*

## **Making Global Connections by Melanie Samson**

There is at present no overarching global network of waste picker organisations, but the First World Conference of Waste Pickers held in Bogotá in March 2008 provided an important opportunity for waste pickers from across the world to meet with each other, share their experiences, and explore how they can continue to work together in the future.

Nohra Padilla of the Colombian National Association of Waste Pickers, who was the chairperson of the World Conference, had this to say about the significance of the event:

*The congress was super-important. At the first meeting of the Latin American network we resolved that we need to know about other parts of the world. This congress allowed us to bring together many people to know the conditions of recyclers in many parts of the world, and to discuss the need to sensitise governments about the problems of recyclers and the possibilities and alternatives for social inclusion.*

Many waste pickers and allies from support organisations commented on the invaluable experiences of learning about the different ways that waste pickers have organised, the demands that they have developed and the agreements that they have

made with governments to win recognition for their role and be formally integrated into municipal waste management systems. Laxmi Narayan, General Secretary of the KKPKP trade union in India, said that she was particularly inspired by the ways in which waste pickers from Latin America have increased their influence through the Latin American Network.

Although there is no formal, global network, Nohra Padilla noted that, “there is already a global network as we pass information to each other. It is not necessarily necessary to have meetings. But we know what is happening with each other.” At the Conference, plans were developed for continental meetings and a second global conference. In the meantime, waste picker organisations from across the globe have taken solidarity actions to support each others’ struggles and are collaborating on a number of initiatives. Some of the key challenges that waste picker organisations from across the world will have to engage with as they move forward in these processes include finding ways to support the building of waste picker-controlled, democratic organisation in weaker areas; ensuring that there is open and productive debate about differences between organisations; and developing ways of providing each other with meaningful support and solidarity.



First World Conference of Waste Pickers, Bogota

*(photo by Leslie Tuttle)*

## Chapter 4: Formal Integration into Municipal Waste Management Systems

by Melanie Samson

The work of waste pickers is largely unrecognised. When not treated as invisible, waste pickers are frequently harassed by police, security, municipal officials and residents who accuse them of ‘stealing garbage’ and allege that they are responsible for crime in the area. However, waste pickers perform an essential service and save money for municipalities by reducing the amount of waste that goes to landfills. In reality, waste pickers are an integral part of the waste management systems in the cities where they work.

Waste pickers in numerous cities around the world have mobilised to demand recognition and formal integration into municipal waste management systems. This chapter looks at how waste pickers have been formally incorporated into municipal waste management systems in four municipalities. The case material presented here is drawn primarily from two extremely valuable country studies of Brazil (Dias and Alves 2008) and India (Waste Matters SNTD Women’s University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008) commissioned by the GTZ as part of a broader project investigating the role of waste picking in municipal waste management. Additional information on the Brazilian case of Diadema is drawn from Jutta Gutberlet’s insightful book *Recovering Resources Recycling Citizenship: Urban Poverty Reduction in Latin America* (Gutberlet 2008).<sup>29</sup>

These four cases highlight the significantly different approaches that have been taken in each city. In Delhi, India, although door-to-door collection and segregation of waste by waste pickers is sanctioned by the New Delhi Municipal Council through memoranda of understanding with Chintan Environment Action and Research Group, payment is made directly from residents to the waste pickers. In Belo Horizonte, Brazil, the municipality has a formal accord with the Asmare association of *catadores* and provides it with a monthly subsidy. However, this subsidy is not linked directly to service delivery and comes from the social welfare budget. In Diadema, Brazil, the municipality has implemented the first programme in the country in which, in addition to being able to keep recyclable materials, a co-operative of *catadores* is remunerated by the municipality per tonne for the materials that it removes from the waste-stream via a source segregation door-to-door service. Lastly, in Pune, India, after mobilisation by the KKP KP trade union of waste pickers, the municipality has moved away from a contracting model and has made door-to-door collection the responsibility of a co-operative which receives support from the municipality but is independently controlled by its members. The co-operative receives payment directly

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<sup>29</sup> Information on these municipalities was also presented at the First World Conference of Waste Pickers in March 2008 and can be found at <http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?lang=english>.

from service recipients and is accountable to them. Each of these approaches has different implications for how waste pickers relate to the state and residents, how the waste management system is transformed as a result of formal integration, and how waste pickers generate their livelihoods.

Some questions to think about when reading this chapter are:

- How are the different approaches shaped and influenced by both mobilisation by waste pickers as well as the broader legislative, social, political and economic context?
- What are the advantages, disadvantages and implications of different ways of compensating waste pickers financially for their labour (for example, access to recyclables, an organisational subsidy, payment for services by residents, payment for services by the municipality)?
- What challenges and issues arise for waste pickers when they become formal service providers remunerated for services delivered?

## Delhi, India – From a Cup of Tea to Payment for Services

Historically, municipalities in India have not provided door-to-door collection and have only taken responsibility for disposing of waste that has been deposited in communal collection points, called dhalaos. However, as part of its ruling in the case of *Almitra Patel vs The Union of India*, the Supreme Court decided that door-to-door collection of segregated waste should be implemented in all municipalities by December 2003. It did not, however, prescribe how this was to be done.

In response to the ruling, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) initially began to informally sub-contract collection to people known to the existing ground level staff. This negatively affected waste pickers who had previously been providing similar services. In response, the waste pickers organised to demand that they be formally contracted to do the work.

The NGO Chintan Environment Research and Action Group had already organised 2,500 waste pickers in the NDMC areas and 12,000 in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) areas. Chintan and the waste pickers collected data about the waste pickers' livelihoods, their contribution to waste management in the city and the savings that their work provided to the municipalities. Backed up by this research, the waste pickers mobilised to demand that they be given contracts to provide the door-to-door services. After several weeks of discussion and a series of very poorly drafted contracts, a formal agreement was signed that gave the waste pickers the right to collect waste from approximately 50,000 households.

Chintan identified several key factors that led to the workers' victory, each one reflecting the importance of the workers' active engagement in their own struggle. To begin with, the collection of reliable data made it possible to convince the municipal chairperson of the validity of the workers' case. That the municipal chairperson's opinion overrode several vested interests proves the importance of this action.

Furthermore, the waste pickers' commitment to seeing the struggle through, which notably included dealing with the loss of their income during the long process of negotiations, gave crucial weight to their demands. The workers fought fearlessly, meeting with local officials and working on the ground to transform the opinions of those who opposed their validation through contracts. Their active engagement in all levels of the process, including the drafting of their contract, illustrates the centrality of the workers themselves to their own empowerment.

The NDMC has negotiated four memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for service delivery with Chintan. The programme is monitored by a waste picker who is paid out of monthly contributions by the participating waste pickers.<sup>30</sup> In terms of the MOUs, the Council provides the waste pickers with spaces for segregation and in some cases with cycle rickshaws.

Initially, due to its interpretation of the Supreme Court's guidelines, the NDMC did not permit Chintan to charge a fee to residents for its services. The waste pickers worked around this restriction by asking residents to give them a contribution towards a cup of tea each week that amounted to a modest service fee. Eventually, in newer contracts the NDMC allowed the waste pickers to be paid for service delivery, and 70% of those being served now pay the waste pickers.

Previously the waste pickers' only income had been generated from selling recyclables, a portion of which was used to pay bribes. Now, as a study conducted in 2008 shows, their average earnings have increased from US \$59-71 per month before the contract to US\$126-126 per month. The project has led to increased cleanliness in the areas and has gained strong support from residents. It has also had profound effects for the waste pickers, dramatically improving the quality of life for them and their families. Some of the negative health risks of waste picking have been eliminated as waste pickers are able to access cleaner waste and do not have to sit in trash dumps or risk dog bites. Harassment by the police has decreased as they are now seen as legitimate service providers. As their incomes have increased, their children have stopped picking trash and are now accessing education (Waste Matters SNTD Women's University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008, 72-73).

## **Belo Horizonte, Brazil – A Social Accord**

The Asmare association of *catadores* was formed in May 1990 in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The *Pastoral de Rua*, or street pastoral of the Catholic Church, played an important role in promoting its formation by bringing together *catadores* in assemblies and street parties where they identified the need to form an organisation.

Initially Asmare had a difficult and conflict-ridden relationship with the municipality, although it did succeed in securing a change in the municipal constitution that advocated recycling, preferably by co-operatives. This relationship improved significantly in 1993 when the Workers' Party won a majority in the municipal council, a

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<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 1 for a profile of Santraj Maurya.

position it has retained to date. The Workers' Party had an agenda of transforming the state and promoting participatory democracy. Mobilisation by Asmare therefore fell on receptive ears, and the Council began to negotiate agreements to formally incorporate *catadores* into the municipal waste management system.



Member of the Asmare Cooperative, Brazil

(photo by Sonia Dias)

The municipality's approach to recycling was developed through a consultative process that involved both Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua*. A decision was taken to implement a source segregation scheme through a partnership between the city and Asmare. In 1993 an accord was signed between the council, Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua* stating that Asmare was the city's preferred partner for source segregation programmes, and which furthermore committed the municipality to providing Asmare with a monthly subsidy to cover administrative expenses. In terms of the accord, the municipality's waste management department (SLU) must, amongst other things, provide recycling containers, a warehouse where *catadores* can sort materials, trucks for collection of materials from the containers and environmental education. For its part, Asmare must run the warehouses, sort and sell the recyclable materials and provide data on its activities to the municipality for monitoring. The city also formed a Social Mobilisation Department staffed by sociologists, psychologists, education specialists, geographers, artists, architects and engineers, tasked with helping to change public attitudes towards *catadores* and promote public participation in the source segregation

programmes. In 2000, legislation was adopted that institutionalises the Social Mobilisation Department as part of the SLU and clearly laid out its responsibilities, including requiring that it help build the capacity of *catadores*' organisations.

The source segregation programme has gone through several phases. At first, recycling containers were placed in public areas. Municipal trucks collected the recyclable materials and transported them to warehouses provided by the municipality to Asmare. At the warehouses, Asmare members would sort, bale and sell the recyclables. Individual *catadores* also continued to collect materials from businesses using manual pushcarts. They sorted the recyclables at the Asmare warehouse. Asmare members then sold the materials collectively in order to obtain a higher price, but each *catador* was remunerated individually based on what she or he had collected. The programme has now been extended to include door-to-door collection in some parts of the city covering 80,000 people.

The accord between the municipality, Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua* was a landmark achievement in that it was the first time that a municipality in Brazil negotiated a comprehensive agreement to formally integrate *catadores* in the municipal waste management system. It has served as a model for many other organisations of *catadores* and progressive municipalities. However, in recent years some people within Asmare as well as allied NGOs have criticised the fact that the accord falls under the Municipal Secretariat for Social Assistance and is a subsidy or charity payment as opposed to a payment for services. They argue that it does not properly recognise and value the contribution of the *catadores* to the waste management system. Others point out that changing the accord to a commercial contract that would reimburse *catadores* for services provided would require significant changes in the way that they perform their work, something that the Diadama case discussed below shows has not been without its own challenges (Dias and Alves 2008, 8-9, 18-24).

## Breaking Down Barriers, Changing Attitudes

As the personal stories in Chapter 1 affirm, waste pickers around the world are frequently stigmatised and confront tremendous discrimination (Beall 1997; Benjamin 2007; Chikarmane and Narayan 2005; Huysman 1994; ILO 2004; Medina 2007; Samson 2008). In Belo Horizonte, Asmare and the Council undertook a number of innovative initiatives in order to transform how *catadores* are perceived and to forge new forms of social ties between *catadores* and other residents. For a number of years Asmare and the Social Mobilisation Department ran a pre-Carnival in which *catadores* and municipal waste management employees wore costumes that they had made from recycled materials. The event showcased the talents of people previously ignored and discriminated against by society. It received national media coverage and played an important role in transforming attitudes towards *catadores*.



Carnival

(picture courtesy of Asmare)

Through the running of a bar named *Reciclo 1* and a restaurant named *Reciclo 2*, both staffed by *catadores* from Asmare, spaces have been created wherein members of the public can interact socially with *catadores*. *Catadores* who work at the *Reciclos* acquire new skills that can help them move out of waste picking if they so desire. In addition, *Reciclo 1* includes an internet café, sewing workshop and administrative centre that facilitate alternative income generating activities by Asmare members. *Reciclo 2* has a meeting space that can be rented out, and that also houses the offices of both an NGO that works closely with Asmare and the Minas Gerais State Waste and Citizenship Forum. This generates revenue for Asmare and brings it closer to allied organisations in a way that inverts traditional hierarchies between NGOs and social movements (Dias 2000, 2006; Horn 2008).

## Diadema, Brazil – Payment for Services by the State

The municipality of Diadema has become a well-known and widely celebrated case in Brazil as it is the first city where *catadores* are paid by the municipality for removing recyclable materials from the waste-stream. The city's approach was not always so open to *catadores*. The first law regulating selective collection, which was adopted in 1996, did not mention *catadores* and stated that the Municipal Environment Fund (FUMMA) should receive resources generated by the sale of recyclable materials. However, in May 2000 the law was amended to prioritise the establishment of partnerships with *catadores'* organisations as well as other institutions. The amendments further stated that these organised groups, as opposed to FUMMA, should receive the funds generated from the sale of recyclables (Dias and Alves 2008, 38).

In 2002 the city launched the *Vida Limpa* (Clean Life) Program, which seeks to promote *catadores'* social inclusion, generate and/or increase their income, raise environmental awareness and promote environmental conservation. Initially the programme focused on resettling *catadores* whom the city had expelled from the Alvarenga dump. As it was aware that this would have negative effects on the *catadores'* livelihood, the municipality passed legislation that allowed it to direct resources from the city's Minimum Wage Programme and School Bursary Programme to *catadores* families. It also provided the *catadores* with a warehouse where they could continue their work. This has since been expanded and the *catadores* now have six warehouses across the city (Dias and Alves 2008, 34-35).

As in other Brazilian municipalities, in this period Diadema's *catadores* had to generate their income exclusively from the sale of recyclable materials. However, the Diadema municipality recognised that *catadores* save the city significant costs by diverting materials that would otherwise need to be transported to the landfill and buried there. In 2004 the municipality therefore adopted a law governing the System for the Sustainable Management of Solid Waste (Law #2336/04) that allows *catadores* to be paid by the municipality for services rendered. Since December 2005 the municipality has paid participating *catadores* the same amount per tonne of recyclables that they collect as it pays to private companies that transport waste to the landfill (Dias and Alves 2008, 34-36).

Under this legislation, as part of the *Vida Limpa* programme of door-to-door collection, *catadores* have received support from the municipality to form *Organizações Social de Interesse Público*, or OSCIPs, to conduct door-to-door collection and separate out recyclables. The city has also created sixty locations where residents can take their recyclables (Gutberlet 2008, 136). Although Dias and Alves (2008) and Gutberlet (2008) differ on the amounts of recyclables collected and average monthly incomes, they concur that the initiative has boosted the incomes of *catadores*. There are two reasons for this: first of all, in addition to selling recyclables, the *catadores* now also receive payments from the municipality for the service that they provide; secondly, the groups can obtain higher prices for their materials by selling directly to industry and cutting out middlemen who make a profit by paying *catadores* less than the price paid

by industry (Gutberlet 2008, 138). Dias and Alves (2008, 37) assert that the average monthly take-home pay is now significantly higher than the minimum wage.

Although highly successful, the Diadema initiative has had to confront a number of challenges. According to Dias and Alves many *catadores* who participate in the programme have found the transition from individual to group labour to be difficult. Many are used to being highly autonomous and working alone and resist collective organisation. Some dislike the rigours of being accountable for performing the service as opposed to choosing their own places and times of work. In addition, there is a general distrust of wage labour and a preference amongst some *catadores* for daily and weekly payment. As a result, some *catadores* have found it difficult to sever ties with middlemen who pay them on a more regular basis, even if this means that middlemen continue to exploit them by paying them lower amounts than if they saved up their materials and sold directly to industry (Dias and Alves 2008, 36). Gutberlet notes that participation in the programme had actually decreased from 62 *catadores* at its inception to 49 in 2007 (Gutberlet 2008, 137).

In order to promote participation by autonomous *catadores* who still work independently the municipality tried to register all *catadores*, and in doing so develop a socioeconomic profile of *catadores* in the city. The city then conducted training courses to increase awareness and understanding of the programme, emphasising that participation should lead to an increase in income. While this may help to increase participation, Dias and Alves argue that it undermines the efforts of those *catadores* who are trying to form a formal co-operative (Dias and Alves 2008, 39). In overcoming the exclusions brought about by policies such as those discussed in Chapter Five that focus on collaborating only with co-operatives, a new set of dynamics has been created. This highlights the point that policies for social inclusion of *catadores* impact on the organisation of *catadores*, and proves that there are tensions and trade-offs regardless of which approach is taken.

## Pune, India – Moving Away from the Contracting Model

As in Delhi, the initiative to implement door-to-door collection in Pune came from waste pickers as opposed to the municipality. The KKPKP trade union of waste pickers started *Swachateche Varkari* ('harbingers of cleanliness') through which its members offered waste collection services to residents. The Pune Municipal Commissioner authorised the KKPKP to organise collection services and provided it with equipment and space. However, the waste pickers were responsible for the implementation of the programme. They collected the waste, retrieved and sold the recyclable materials and deposited the remaining waste in municipal containers or compost pits. The waste pickers were contracted by the residents of apartments. Rates charged depended on the area and were determined by the class of the residents. The programme started in two municipal wards in 2005. Through the combined efforts of the KKPKP, campaigners, the municipal administration and elected councillors it spread to twelve other wards and included almost 1,200 waste pickers and over 150,000 households by the end of 2006.

According to the authors of the GTZ report, this project demonstrated that people, even those living in slums, were willing to pay for collection; service providers were more accountable when paid directly by users; and collection by waste pickers led to high levels of recovery of recyclable materials and was a low-cost, labour-intensive and less polluting alternative to collection with motorised vehicles.

In 2006 the Municipal Commissioner appointed a Steering Committee that included the KKPKP and other members of Waste Matters<sup>31</sup> to help oversee the restructuring of the waste management system. The Committee's recommendations included proposals to establish a co-operative of waste pickers to do door-to-door collection and to create designated sorting areas for waste pickers. In February 2007 the municipal general body approved the formation of a co-operative of waste pickers that would perform door-to-door collection and would receive support from the Council for five years. However, after elections the new municipal body rescinded the decision. Although the Municipal Commissioner was also new, he supported the initiative and asked the state government to overrule the new Council and restore the resolution to support the formation of a co-operative – it did so, but with a few important modifications. The key change related to the criteria for membership of the co-operative. While the majority of members must still be waste pickers, membership was opened to waste pickers and doorstep collectors who are unaffiliated or belong to organisations other than the KKPKP, as well as to the urban poor who have not previously worked as waste pickers but want to do collection work.

The Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH) co-operative formally came into existence in August 2007. It is governed by a committee made up of 14 waste pickers/collectors, two representatives of the Council and one representative of the KKPKP. The management team includes a Chief Executive Officer and staff responsible for Operations, Administration and Finance, Marketing, Customer Care and Relations, Management Information Systems and Data Management.

The establishment of SWaCH and the role allocated to it by a municipal resolution formally integrates waste pickers into the municipal waste management system outside of a contracting framework. In terms of this landmark decision by the Council:

- One central co-operative (SWaCH) will take responsibility for door-to-door collection of segregated waste in the entire city.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation will guide the co-operative, but it will be autonomous and independent.
- The co-operative will work in a decentralised manner with local citizen's groups and other NGOs.
- The fee of US\$0.24 per month per household is set by the Council, but is collected by the co-operative directly from individual households and businesses. In the case of slums, the Council will pay the co-operative

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<sup>31</sup> Waste Matters is a collective of the KKPKP, NGOs and citizens committed to a community-based, decentralised, eco-friendly, participatory, labour-sensitive and sustainable model of solid waste management in Pune.

US \$0.01 per month per household and the co-operative can charge an additional US\$0.01 per hut per month directly to the citizens in the slum.

- The co-operative will be directly accountable to the local citizen's group for providing the service.
- The waste collector has rights to the recyclable waste and retains the income earned from its sale.
- Sorting centres for the segregation of recyclable waste and non-recyclable waste will be established, preferably one in the centre of each ward.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation should provide the co-operative with funds for handcart maintenance, uniforms, gloves, insurance and other necessary requirements/services for the first five years.
- For the first five years, the Pune Municipal Corporation should provide the co-operative with training, create awareness among citizens, and pay an amount towards machinery and other unspecified items which could include things such as cleaning materials, protective gear and insurance programmes. After five years the co-operative is expected to be self-sufficient.
- If the standard of work of the proposed co-operative is not satisfactory, then the Pune Municipal Commissioner is authorised to terminate all municipal help provided to the co-operative and find an alternative service provider.

To date the initiative has been implemented in 127 wards. The co-operative has 1,510 members and services 200,000 households. The formation of the co-operative has led to an improvement in working conditions and an increase in income for the waste pickers. It has also changed the gender dynamics in the sector as men are more willing to do door-to-door collection than work as waste pickers. In a number of cases, husbands and wives work as collection teams. The authors of the GTZ report identify this as a positive move as previously many of these men did not work and instead relied on their wives' incomes. Poornima Chikarmane of the KKPKP adds that in order to ensure that the inclusion of men in this work does not result in the displacement of women (as has happened in some other cities) the SwACH bylaw requires that its membership be 75% women.<sup>32</sup> The formation of SwACH has had material benefits for the participating waste pickers as it has improved their income, working conditions and status in the community. It has also simultaneously strengthened relations between waste pickers, residents and the state by making everyone more actively involved in service delivery (Waste Matters SNTD Women's University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008, 23-25, 59-63).

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<sup>32</sup> Personal communication with Poornima Chikarmane.

## Chapter 5: Using the Law

by Melanie Samson

In addition to mass mobilisation, waste pickers and their allies in a number of countries have pursued legal battles to secure policy and legislation that are more supportive of waste pickers. This chapter looks at legislative and policy gains in Peru, Brazil, Colombia and India. It shows that different movements of waste pickers have prioritised winning different kinds of rights. Peruvian legislation has recently been changed to formally acknowledge the role of *recicladores* in municipal waste management systems. This mode of formal integration has been taken furthest in Brazil, where *catadores* have achieved progressive legislation at municipal, state and national levels, and where their work is now formally recognised as an occupation. In Colombia *recicladores* and their allies used constitutional and human rights law to establish their right to compete against companies for contracts to privatise municipal waste collection. The constitutional court set a precedent in ruling that the human rights of *recicladores* must be protected, and that they must be formally included in municipal waste management systems even when these are privatised. The case from India highlights a different legal strategy in which the KKKPK union prioritised winning collective social rights for its members based on the argument that the work they perform informally benefits the municipality.

Some questions to think about when reading this chapter include:

- How do the types of legislative and policy changes sought by different waste picker organisations relate to and strengthen their broader goals?
- How does the broader context affect what types of policy and legislation are most useful for waste pickers in different countries?
- What are the advantages of securing changes in policy and legislation?
- What are the limitations or risks of relying on changes at the level of policy and legislation?
- What is the relationship between using the courts and other organisational strategies?
- What are the implications of legislation focusing on organised waste pickers when the vast majority of waste pickers remain unorganised and many consciously choose not to join collective organisations?

### Peru – Legislating Inclusion in Municipal Waste Management Systems<sup>33</sup>

2008 was a landmark year for *recicladores* in Peru. The National Movement of Waste Pickers of Peru (MNRP) was officially formed on June 1. In addition, the Peruvian

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<sup>33</sup> The following section on Peru is based on information provided via email interviews by Albina Ruiz, Executive Director of *Ciudad Saludable*, a non-profit that is involved in helping *recicladores* to organise, supporting the National Movement of Peruvian *Recicladores* (MNCR), conducting research and implementing waste management projects. *Ciudad Saludable* was also actively involved in advocating for the legislative changes. See <http://www.ciudadasaludable.org/es/> for further information on *Ciudad Saludable*.

government adopted several declarations and regulations that improve recognition of *recicladores* and require their integration into municipal waste management systems.

The first progressive change in waste management legislation dates back to 2004, when the non-profit organisation *Ciudad Saludable* and waste picker co-operatives that it had been helping to organise since 1998 mobilised around the General Law of Solid Waste (Law #27314). This law promotes the interests of *recicladores* by requiring municipal authorities to create conditions to benefit people and organisations that promote waste minimisation and separation at source.

Several years of implementation revealed a number of problems with the General Law, and *recicladores* and organisations working with them lobbied for changes. After a series of working meetings and consultations that involved the General Directorate of Environmental Health from the Ministry of Health, the National Advisory for the Environment, known today as the Ministry of the Environment, some municipal officials, several NGOs and representatives of organised *recicladores*, on June 28, 2008 a legislative decree that amends the General Law of Solid Waste came into effect.

Key changes in the decree include:

- A commitment to formalising people, operators and other enterprises that are involved in solid waste management.
- A commitment to develop measures to create healthy and safe working conditions.
- A commitment to promote participation of micro and small-scale enterprises in the management of non-hazardous waste.
- A requirement that provincial municipalities<sup>34</sup> implement a ‘Solid Waste Sorter Formalisation Programme’ in which the municipality will assign work zones for selective collection to *recicladores*. The *recicladores* will not be paid by the municipality and will earn their income from the sale of recyclables. The municipalities are charged with facilitating and monitoring the programme and promoting education and awareness amongst local residents and businesses.

On October 7, 2008 a Technical Rule was adopted governing the work of people who sort waste, including *recicladores*. The main objectives of the Rule encompass:

- providing guidance for operational activities that involve handling, sorting, packaging, collection and transportation of solid waste before its reuse
- ensuring proper management to prevent sanitary risks; protecting and fostering environmental quality, health and welfare of human beings.

*Recicladores* and non-profits participated in discussions concerning the development of this Rule, and the MNRP lobbied the President to speed up its implementation, which nevertheless still took two years.

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<sup>34</sup> Peru has two levels of municipalities – provincial and district. Each Provincial Municipality is made up of several Districts. District Municipalities must implement policies that are adopted by the relevant Provincial Municipality in spheres where they have jurisdiction.

Finally, in April 2008 a Commission was formed to develop a new Technical Health Regulation Bill. The Commission included the Ministry of the Environment, the Ombudsman Office, the Municipalities of Metropolitan Lima and Callao, the Regional Government of Junin, the MNRP (once it was formed), the Commission of Andean, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian peoples, the Environmental Congress of the Republic and *Ciudad Saludable*, amongst other organisations. On October 30th it held a Walk of Joy in which 2,000 *recicladores* marched to present the Bill to Congress where it was formally introduced. The Bill includes the state's acknowledgment of the role played by *recicladores* and a commitment to formalising their work and integrating them into municipal waste management systems. In particular, it specifies the following requirements:

- Local regulatory regimes must incorporate *recicladores* as part of local solid waste management systems.
- Local government solid waste management programmes and projects must include the activity of independent *recicladores*.
- Local governments must establish regulations to facilitate the activities of *recicladores* as well as their organisations.



Members of the MNRP march in support of the new legislation, October 2008

(picture courtesy of Albina Ruiz)

Clearly, significant progress has been made towards ensuring that Peruvian law recognises and advances the role of *recicladores* in sustainable waste management systems. Nonetheless, Albina Ruiz, Executive Director of *Ciudad Saludable*, notes that although *recicladores* were consulted in the development of the new legislative regime, there was never consensus or universal support for the changes. Some *recicladores*

wanted to continue working on dumps and landfills which is now prohibited under the law. In addition, she also notes that those who support the changes remain sceptical about their ability to be realised. For example, whilst the legislative gains are important, Ruiz argues that the main challenge is to ensure that they are implemented. In municipalities such as Callao, where progressive policies have already been developed, execution has been slow due to bureaucratic and technical processes. Much work therefore remains to transform the possibilities created by the legislation into improved conditions for *recicladores*, and to ensure that the new legislation meets the needs of and benefits all *recicladores*.

## Brazil – Legal Gains at Municipal, State and National Levels



MNCR leaders meet with President Lula of Brazil

(photo courtesy MNCR)

Brazilian *catadores* are organised at local, state and national levels in the strongest movement of waste pickers in the world (Medina 2007, 82). As discussed more fully in Chapter Three, the fact that the Workers' Party had a transformative agenda for the state and key individuals within the party and government administrations were supportive of *catadores* played an important role in helping to catalyse and facilitate the formation of *catadores'* organisations (Dias and Alves 2008, 8-9, 65). It is also perhaps one reason why mobilisation by *catadores* to create more inclusive and progressive legislation has been relatively more successful in Brazil than in other countries. As Dias points out, legislation promoting the social inclusion of *catadores* in Brazil is the result of strategic openings in the political system and mass mobilisation by *catadores*.

According to Dias, the mobilisation process around the Minas Gerais State Policy on Solid Waste (Law 18031/2008 – '*Política Estadual de Resíduos Sólidos de Minas*

*Gerais*) is a good example of how organised *catadores* have skilfully combined formal engagement with the state with protest action in order to bring about legislative change. In this case, demands by *catadores*' organisations and the state's Waste and Citizenship Forum led the Minas Gerais state to organise a series of debates, public hearings and seminars to discuss the need for inclusive waste management policies. During these events waste pickers not only participated in the round table discussions but also organised marches and sit-ins. In addition, the issue was debated at the Waste and Citizenship Festival. As a result of this mobilisation, at the end of 2003 the State Government adopted Resolution #67 that changed previous legislation forbidding *catadores* access to open dumps. This Resolution specifies that when closing an open dump municipalities should create labour and income alternatives for the *catadores* who are removed from the dumps. This was the first move towards recognising the social inclusion of *catadores*, a goal that has since been entrenched in the legal system due to the continued mobilisation of *catadores* around each piece of proposed legislation.<sup>35</sup>

Dias and Alves (2008) provide an overview of some of the key legislative gains by *catadores* in Brazil at all three levels of the state. They note that the first gains were made at the local level in the early 1990s. Landmark changes within municipal legislation included:

- In 1990 the municipality of Porto Alegre adopted an Urban Cleansing Code which states that *catadores* organisations registered with the Urban Cleansing Department should be the preferred recipient of recyclables collected by the municipal recycling programme.
- In 1990 the municipal constitution of Belo Horizonte was amended to include a clause stating that the collection and sale of recyclables would preferably be done by co-operatives (although it did not explicitly state that these should be co-operatives of *catadores*).
- In 2000 Belo Horizonte adopted a law (#8052/00) creating an Urban Cleansing Superintendency responsible for carrying out environmental education programmes and providing technical advice to *catadores*' organisations.
- In 2004 the municipality of Diadema became the first municipality to adopt a law that allows for the signing of contracts with co-operatives to pay them for the provision of services as part of the municipal recycling programme.

Several states have adopted laws that acknowledge the role of *catadores* within municipal waste management systems:

- In 2001, the Environmental Policy Council (COPAM) in Minas Gerais State issued Resolution 52 that gave municipalities a six-month period to upgrade the final destination of waste and prohibit waste picking on dumps. After

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<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Sonia Maria Dias, March 26, 2009.

objections raised by *catadores* at the Second Waste & Citizenship Festival held in Belo Horizonte in 2003, this deadline was extended to the end of 2003 and municipalities were required to create labour and income alternatives for *catadores* displaced from the dumps.

- In 2004 Law #3517/04 of the Federal District of Brasília stated that organised *catadores* should receive recyclable materials generated in state buildings. On July 7th 2006 the state supplemented this with Law #3890, which requires the implementation of selective collection in all of the state's administrative regions, and that organised *catadores* should receive the recyclable materials.

Finally, Dias and Alves also describe important gains at the national level:

- In 2001 'Scrap Iron Picker', 'Paper or Cardboard Picker', 'Scrap Picker', 'Scrap Packager (co-operative)' and 'Scrap Sorter (co-operative)' were included as occupations in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations. This has led to formal recognition that the work of *catadores* is an occupation. It also means that it is possible to use official data bases to analyse the conditions of *catadores*.
- In 2007 the adoption of Law # 11.445/07 established national guidelines for basic sanitation. It amended previous legislation and made it unnecessary for bidding when municipalities contract *catadores'* organisations. As a result, municipalities can contract and pay *catadores'* associations and co-operatives to perform selective waste collection without putting this service out to a competitive tender.
- In August 2006 Presidential Decree 5940/06 was presented at the Fifth Waste & Citizenship Festival held in Belo Horizonte. Organised *catadores* had participated in the development of this decree. Following on the example of Brasília, according to this Decree selective collection must be implemented in all federal public buildings and the recyclable materials must be given to organisations of *catadores*. The Inter-ministerial Committee for the Social Inclusion of Waste pickers (CIISC), which includes representatives from key federal government ministries, the Presidential Staff Office, the National Economic and Social Development Bank, the Social Bank (CAIXA) and the MNCR, is responsible for its execution. Implementation was first initiated in 12 metropolitan regions through the establishment of agreements between the relevant public institutions and local organisations of *catadores* (Dias and Alves 2008, 59-62).

Clearly, tremendous strides have been made in transforming Brazilian legislation to promote the inclusion and advancement of *catadores*, both within municipal waste management systems and more generally as citizens. However, as Dias points out, the entire legal framework is based on *catadores* being members of formally organised co-operatives or associations. In a context where the vast majority of *catadores* are

unorganised and where many resist organisation, Dias voices the troubling concern that unless ways are found to address independent waste picking activities, the legal gains of organised catadores may end up creating new forms of social exclusion (Dias 2008, 3-4).

## Colombia – The Right to Compete and Individual Human Rights

In 2003 and 2009 two cases were argued in Colombia's Constitutional Court that established the rights of *recicladores* to be involved in waste privatisation processes. In the second case the court also ruled that the government must implement municipal commitments in the city of Cali to include *recicladores* in separation at source initiatives and ensure the realisation of the basic social rights of the *recicladores* in that city.

### Securing the Rights of Co-operatives to Compete in Bogotá



Bogota Recicladores March against new law

(photo by Juan Carlos Sierra)

The first case was taken forward in 2003 by the *Asociacion de Recicladores de Bogotá* (ARB) and a team of *pro bono* lawyers. The ARB was formed in 1990 when four *recicladores* co-operatives that had been fighting the closure of a landfill in Bogotá decided to formalise their relationship. Today 24 co-operatives in the city of Bogotá are members of the association.<sup>36</sup> Historically, all municipal waste management services in Bogotá were provided by EDIS (the city's department for public cleansing). In 1994 the EDIS employees went on strike to oppose plans to privatise the service.<sup>37</sup> During the strike the waste started to pile up, and the city found itself on the verge of a

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter Three for more information on the ARB.

<sup>37</sup> Personal communication with Adriana Ruiz-Restrepo.

sanitary crisis. The administration requested the assistance of the waste pickers, and the ARB responded by helping the municipality collect 700 tons of waste per day.<sup>38</sup> However, the strike was unsuccessful and a decision was taken to close EDIS.

Between 1994 and 1996 various providers were responsible for public cleansing services in Bogotá: 45% of the work was done by EDIS, the company which was in the process of being liquidated; 45% was done by private companies; and jointly with *Fundacion Social* (a foundation that provided support to *recicladores* organisations across Colombia), the ARB was contracted to provide 10% of the cleansing services of the city. However, when EDIS was completely shut down in 1996, the privatisation of public cleansing services was structured so that 100% of the collection, transport and final disposal of waste was handed over only to private corporations and the *recicladores* were completely excluded and consigned again to the informal economy.

This concession was scheduled to end in 2003 and the municipality was required to put out a new tender for the provision of cleansing services. The ARB had found international partners and was prepared to compete. With the combined financial capacity of the international partners, and the knowledge and experience of the *recicladores*, they felt they had a consortium capable of bidding for and winning a concession in one of the six zones of the city. However, the ARB soon discovered that it was not possible for it to enter the competition because law 142, regulating the domiciliary public services in Colombia, declared that only stock owned corporations were allowed to compete in the bidding process for concessions in Bogotá (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008). The lawyers<sup>39</sup> that the ARB and its partners had been using to structure the bid shifted to *pro bono* mode and drew on constitutional and human rights law to review the extent to which the law provided opportunities for the inclusion of poor people who were willing to enter the formal and mainstream economy.

In a paper titled “The Poor Shall Not Remain Small” (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008) one of the *pro bono* constitutional lawyers outlines the legal problems that the ARB faced, the arguments that the lawyers used to argue the case, and the outcome of the constitutional court judgment. Ruiz-Restrepo identifies three obstacles confronted by the ARB:

- Legislative discrimination between for-profit and not-for-profit organisations in Law 142 of 1994 meant that only stock corporations could provide domiciliary public services in large cities. Even though the ARB had already been providing cleansing services during and after the strike in Bogotá as well as in other smaller cities, it remained an association of co-operatives and was only eligible to provide services in smaller, almost rural, and thus less profitable, municipalities.
- The terms of reference for the tender were so narrow that it would be impossible for the ARB to meet them. For example, the municipality would only grant the concessions to those bidders who could demonstrate

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Norha Padilla, 14/01/2009.

<sup>39</sup> Attorneys Nestor Raul Correa Henao, Luis Jaime Salgar and Adriana Ruiz-Restrepo formed a team of ‘friends of the *recicladores*’. Alfonso Fidalgo, Elkin Velasquez and Diego Tobon also participated in their professional and personal capacity on a *pro bono* basis.

direct experience in cities of more than half a million people during the five preceding years. Not surprisingly, the corporations that had won the previous concessions all qualified, but the ARB did not meet the five year requirement.

- National Decree 1713 of 2002 established that once garbage was placed outside of the buildings it became the property of the private consortium operating in the area. This meant that *recicladores* could potentially be charged with theft for taking recyclable materials out of the waste-stream.

In order to address these problems judicial actions were presented against (1) Law 142/1994; (2) Bogotá's tendering process; and (3) the ceding of ownership of waste to private companies conducting collection by Decree 1713/2002. The legal arguments put before the Constitutional Court used the innovative approach of focusing on how policy and legislation that were technically and formally legal undermined human rights and principles such as equity and dignity that are protected by the Constitution. Some of the key arguments were that:

- The requirement that services be provided by stock corporations was based on the false assumption that they are more efficient. It unfairly prevented co-operatives from even having the opportunity to bid for the contract and therefore violated the right of waste pickers to decide how to associate (freedom of association) as well as the right to participation. The requirement also created insurmountable barriers to entering the formal economy.
- The terms of reference for the bid were not broad enough to allow groups such as the ARB to compete and did not include any mechanisms to alleviate the negative effects on *recicladores*. The lawyers argued that it was up to the municipality to prove that its measures were not discriminatory and that the contract should include positive discrimination to improve the position of *recicladores*.

Ultimately all of these arguments were successful and the Constitutional Court ruled that:

- It was unfair to exclude co-operatives from the bidding process.
- The terms of the proposed contracts would worsen the marginalisation and discrimination faced by *recicladores*.
- Future contracts should include affirmative action for *recicladores*.

In addition, the National Decree that made waste the private property of contractors was overturned by National Decree 1505 of 2003.

Although the ARB secured a positive ruling, the awarding of the contract had already proceeded. As a result, the ARB will only be able to bid for the next round of contracts scheduled for 2010, as well as for planned processes to privatise the areas for waste recycling in the city. The court ruling does, however, ensure that the ARB will be

able to fulfil its goal of competing to win future privatisation contracts. This, it argues, is central to *recicladores* pursuing their right to life and their right to development (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008).

## Ensuring the Human Rights of Recicladores in Cali

In 2009, the foundation CIVISOL, which includes some of the *pro bono* lawyers involved in the 2003 case, began to devise a legal strategy to further advance the rights of *recicladores*.<sup>40</sup> This was in response to an urgent call for assistance put out by the National Association of *Recicladores* or *Asociación de Recicladores Nacional* (ARN) for help in responding to Law 1259. The law had been passed by the national government in December 2008. It provided for an environmental fine of up to US \$500 for opening garbage in public places. The ARN was extremely concerned that the new law would make it impossible for *recicladores* to access the materials on which they depend for their livelihood.



Recicladora in Cali

(photo by Shailly Barnes)

<sup>40</sup> The following information on the Cali case is based on two skype interviews with Adriana Ruiz-Restrepo, conducted on July 3 and 4, 2009.

CIVISOL informed the ARN that one option available to the *recicladores* would be to take the law for judicial review. But at best this would result in the Constitutional Court removing either problematic articles from the law or the entire law from the juridical order. It would not result in a binding requirement for the government to take action to protect and promote the rights of *recicladores*. A better option would be to find 'writs of human rights protection' issued to *recicladores* and use these to force government to take action to ensure the human rights of *recicladores*. Writs of human rights protection are special court orders requiring the state to secure someone's human rights within a specified period. They are issued when there is either no other way to secure the right in question, or regular means of doing so would be so time-consuming that the right would be threatened. According to Colombian law, all writs of human rights protection are reviewed by the Constitutional Court. The Court looks for precedent-setting cases and then selects them for review. CIVISOL discovered that more than one hundred *recicladores* from the city of Cali had applied for writs of human right protection and that the case had already been scheduled for review by the Constitutional Court. CIVISOL therefore decided to intervene to try to establish and extend the rights of *recicladores*.

*Recicladores* had been working on the Navarro dump in Cali since 1967. Historically the dump had been managed by the municipal waste management department called EMSIRVA. On the pretext of improving the financial operations of EMSIRVA the national government took it over in and proceeded to privatise it instead. Collection and transportation of waste was privatised in three of four parts of Cali. Plans were laid to privatise the dump, liquidate EMSIRVA and privatise service delivery in the last remaining part of the city.

In June 2008 the dump was closed and replaced by a new private landfill that did not allow waste picking. Although promises had been made to the *recicladores*, nothing was done to compensate them for their loss of livelihood. They protested at the dump the day that it was shut down, and then in August 2008 they seized the symbolic La Mernita church to insist that their demands be met. Once again they were assured that their concerns would be addressed, and once again they were left with nothing but false promises. Having lost their means of generating an income and facing starvation, many of the *recicladores* applied for and were awarded writs of human rights protection requiring the state to protect their rights to food, work, life and social security. However, little had been done to give these writs effect by the time that the Constitutional Court was scheduled to review them in 2009.

In its *amicus* to the Court, CIVISOL raised a number of arguments relating to the writs, Law 1259 and the privatisation of service delivery to advance the rights of the *recicladores*. It convinced the Court to order that the writs of human rights protection that had previously been granted needed to be upheld and that the basic social rights of those *recicladores* to things such as food, education and health care must be enforced. The Court also ordered the municipality to conduct a survey to identify *recicladores* without writs and to develop a plan to fulfil their basic social rights.

The lawyers then turned to ways in which *recicladores* could continue to generate a livelihood and sustain themselves and their families. Once they had been evicted from

the dump there were theoretically only two ways that the *recicladores* would have been able to pursue their profession – by collecting recyclables in the streets or by collecting recyclables directly from households as part of separation-at-source programmes. However, the lawyers argued that without the intervention of the Court neither of these options would be available to the *recicladores*. They pointed out that due to Law 1259 the *recicladores* were forbidden to collect recyclables out of waste in the streets and faced heavy fines if they tried to do so. The Court agreed that this limited the rights of *recicladores* to work and suspended the application of the law in Cali.

The lawyers also argued that it would be impossible for the *recicladores* to initiate separation-at-source programmes, as the national government had included these in the tenders awarded in three parts of the city for privatised service delivery. Although the companies were not implementing any such programmes, they still maintained a legal monopoly over them. The lawyers argued that by including separation-at-source programmes in the privatisation contracts, the national government had violated Cali's 2004 Integrated Waste Management Plan which stated that by 2004 there would be separation-at-source and a selective recyclable route that would include *recicladores* and formalise their role in waste management. The Court therefore ruled that within two weeks the municipality needed to establish a multi-stakeholder committee to develop a plan to bring *recicladores* into the formal economy. According to the criteria laid down by the Court, the committee includes but is not limited to, representatives from different levels of government, civil society, the Association of *Recicladores* of Navarro, FERRESURCO (the network of *recicladores* organisations in Cali), the ARN, CIVISOL, the mayor and the legal representative of EMSIRVA (or the company that succeeds it if it is liquidated). The plan must be in place by no later than November 29, 2009, and the Court stipulated that by December 1, 2009 the mayor of Cali must submit a report on the plan to the Court that details indicators to track the inclusion process.

At the time of the review by the Constitutional Court, the contract to deliver waste management services in the fourth area of Bogotá was out for tender. The Court ordered that the tender be suspended. It further instructed that the terms be redrafted to allow waste picker organisations to submit bids and to give points to companies that include waste pickers in formalised positions.

Finally, the Court recognised that without access to recyclables there was a strong risk that the *recicladores* and their families would starve while they waited for the new policies and tender to be put in place. It therefore ruled that the environmental agencies of the Cali Municipality and the Department<sup>41</sup> to which it belongs must cooperate with civil society organisations in creating a campaign to encourage residents to separate out their recyclables and give these directly to *recicladores*.

The Court ruling did much to advance the legal and human rights of *recicladores* in Bogotá. But, as was identified in the Peruvian case, many challenges remain with respect to the implementation and realisation of these rights. The Court created space for the *recicladores* to participate on the committee to draft Cali's new policy as well as

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<sup>41</sup> A Department is the equivalent of a state or province in federal systems of government.

to bid for the privatisation contract. However, as the Court did not require that they be provided with resources to facilitate their participation, the *recicladores* must now struggle to build their own capacity and secure the finances and assistance required to take advantage of these opportunities.

## India – Winning Collective Rights and Benefits for Waste Pickers

As discussed in previous chapters, the *Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat* (KKPKP) trade union in Pune, India has fought for and won changes that facilitate the formal integration of waste pickers into municipal waste management systems. In addition, it has mobilised to win social benefits for waste pickers, arguing that they are already performing socially and environmentally useful labour that benefits the state and residents. As Chikarmane and Narayan (2005) outline, major victories have been achieved in the spheres of health care and education.<sup>42</sup>

As a first step towards securing social benefits for waste pickers, the KKPKP had to struggle to gain recognition for them as workers. This process needed to start within the KKPKP membership; initially, most waste pickers did not view what they did as “work” and thought of it as only rummaging through garbage. Through a critical reflective process the waste pickers realised that they preferred waste picking to other forms of available work such as domestic work or construction, and that they wanted to improve their conditions. They began to define themselves as workers, to recognise the social, economic and environmental contributions of their own labour, and to believe that it would be possible to change their conditions through the formation of a union and collective action.

Starting in 1993, thousands of waste pickers participated in rallies and demonstrations demanding that municipal and state governments recognise them as workers.



KKPKP mass meeting  
(picture courtesy of KKPKP)

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<sup>42</sup> The following information is drawn from Chikarmane and Narayan's 2005 paper entitled "*Organising the Unorganised: A Case Study of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (Trade Union of Waste pickers)*". It can be found at [www.wiego.org/program\\_areas/org\\_rep/case-kkpkp.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/program_areas/org_rep/case-kkpkp.pdf).

Based on research that quantified the contributions of waste pickers, the union determined the amount of money that the waste pickers save the municipalities in transport costs and how much income they generate for the local economy. The union also established that the waste pickers make an important contribution to the environment. In 1995 and 1996, the municipalities of Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad acknowledged the contribution of waste pickers to municipal waste management systems and endorsed the waste pickers' KKP KP identity cards, officially authorising them to collect scrap. Validation of the identity cards had a tremendous psychological effect on the waste pickers and the public at large as it helped to legitimise their work. The identity cards have also provided practical assistance to the waste pickers who have used them as bail and as surety.

Once this relationship between waste pickers and the state had been established, the KKP KP could mobilise to make claims on the state.



KKP KP member with her Identity Book

*(picture courtesy of KKP KP)*

Health care was a key issue for KKP KP members. Studies showed that they suffered from occupation-related musculo-skeletal problems, respiratory and gastro-intestinal ailments, tuberculosis, eye infections and major injuries related to the performance of their work. Due to their low levels of income, most waste pickers could not afford proper treatment.

The KKP KP argued that it was unfair that the municipality gained financially from the work of waste pickers, as they reduced transport and disposal costs by taking recyclables out of the waste-stream, but all of the health costs were borne by the waste pickers themselves. After sustained mobilisation by waste pickers that was supplemented by research demonstrating their contribution to the municipal

waste management system, the Pune Municipal Corporation agreed in 2002-2003 to create a Scheme for Medical Insurance for all Registered Waste Pickers in the city. The municipality now includes payment of the annual premium to the New India Assurance Company in its annual budget.

The KKPKP has also won major victories in the sphere of education. These relate to ensuring that waste pickers can benefit from existing laws as well as secure special support for the children of waste pickers. All children have the right to go to school and public education is free in India. However, the children of waste pickers were often turned away as they didn't have age certificates and weren't properly dressed. Together with children's rights organisations, the KKPKP mobilised to end this discrimination. They negotiated agreements with government departments to get rid of procedural requirements that limited access, and they sensitized people working in the school system to end the harassment experienced by these children. When combined with enrolment drives run by the KKPKP, this substantially improved the ability of the children of waste pickers to access their right to education.

The KKPKP also successfully mobilised for the children of waste pickers to be included in the Central Government-aided Scheme for Pre-Matric Scholarships to Children of those Engaged in Unclean Occupations. This scheme initially applied only to the children of night soil carriers. At first the government refused the KKPKP's demand as it said that waste picking was not an unclean occupation. KKPKP members then participated in rallies and protests. The media played a pivotal role in this campaign by carrying articles that revealed the terrible conditions that waste pickers work in and shaming the government for declaring it too clean to merit help. Since 2001, waste pickers in the state of Maharashtra have been able to use their municipally endorsed KKPKP identity cards as proof that they work in an unclean occupation, and their children can benefit from participation in the scheme (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005).

## Chapter 6: Confronting and Engaging Privatisation

by Melanie Samson

There is currently a clear global trend towards the privatisation of municipal waste management systems. Privatisation is traditionally understood as the transfer of state resources and activities to the private sector. Waste management privatisation in third world countries often goes beyond this by extending the reach of the formal waste management system into activities that were previously the domain of informal waste pickers. For example, although historically waste pickers in India performed door-to-door collection, some municipalities are now awarding contracts to private companies to perform this task. This displaces waste pickers and undermines their ability to generate income. Even if the activities of waste pickers are not explicitly included in the privatisation contract, shifts in the formal municipal waste management system change the context within which waste pickers function and the terms on which they relate to the broader waste management system. Perhaps most crucially, privatisation often changes the legal status of waste itself. Prior to privatisation, waste is usually seen as a common property resource through which waste pickers can sort to salvage materials to reuse and resell. However, once a municipality contracts a private company to collect, transport and/or dispose of garbage, it usually becomes the property of that company (ILO 2004, 22). This can have extremely negative consequences for waste pickers, who thus lose free access to the source of their livelihood.

This chapter looks at how privatisation has affected waste pickers in different cities and how different waste picker organisations have chosen to engage with privatisation. A range of positions has been adopted on privatisation, each of which has different implications for the form and nature of the municipal waste management system, the relationship between waste pickers and municipal waste management workers, and the relationship between waste pickers, private companies and the state.

Some questions to think about when reading this chapter are:

- How does privatisation affect the quality of waste management services and the livelihoods of waste pickers?
- Must waste pickers accept the privatisation of municipal waste management as inevitable?
- Are the interests of waste pickers and municipal waste management workers necessarily in opposition?
- How can solidarity between waste pickers and municipal waste management workers be strengthened?

## Privatising Public Spaces, Excluding Waste Pickers – the Privatisation of Waste in Delhi

In Delhi, India the municipality excluded door-to-door collection from the privatisation process as it realised that granting formal contracts for these services would displace waste pickers who were already performing these tasks informally. However, as the Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group (Chintan 2007) demonstrates, even when privatisation supposedly protects waste pickers by excluding door-to-door collection it can nonetheless have extremely negative consequences for them.<sup>43</sup>

Historically the municipality in Delhi did not provide waste collection services. Residents deposited waste in transfer stations called *dhalaos*, from which it was transported by the municipality for disposal. Waste pickers could access materials at both the household and *dhalao* levels. In some instances communities paid waste pickers a fee to remove their waste for them. The waste pickers would sort the waste, extract the recyclable materials and dispose of the rest at the *dhalaos*.

According to Chintan, a number of factors prompted the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to begin privatising waste collection. These included Supreme Court rulings that put pressure on municipalities to improve their waste management systems, the obsession with becoming a 'world class city', the desire to ensure that the city had a functioning waste management system when it hosted the Commonwealth Games to be held in 2009 and loss of confidence in the municipality's ability to provide essential services.

The Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation was contracted to oversee privatisation of the transport and disposal of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's waste. Only one consultative meeting was held, during which NGOs mounted strong opposition to privatisation. Nevertheless, three companies were awarded contracts for different parts of the city that commenced in June 2005.

Each contractor was responsible for ensuring the separation of waste in the *dhalaos* in its area. The contractors all sub-contracted the actual work to labour brokers. The labour brokers recruited workers to act as bin guides who would clean the bins, separate the waste and help load the compactors. Although the contract encouraged the companies to hire waste pickers, this was not always done. The workers were paid one-third of the legal daily minimum wage and did not receive any benefits. Officially the contractors had the right to sell the recyclable materials deposited in the *dhalaos*. However, they initially did not do so, and bin guides who worked in higher income areas supplemented their income by selling recyclable materials. In poorer areas where fewer recyclable materials reached the *dhalaos*, the workers had to take responsibility for numerous *dhalaos* in order to augment their incomes, lowering the quality of services provided.

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<sup>43</sup> The following information on privatisation of waste management in Delhi is summarised from Chintan (2007). This document can be found at [www.chintan-india.org/others/ChintanPrivatisationPaper.doc](http://www.chintan-india.org/others/ChintanPrivatisationPaper.doc). Information on Chintan's other initiatives and activities can be found at [www.chintan-india.org](http://www.chintan-india.org). Further information on privatisation of waste management in Delhi can be found in the presentation made by Bharati Chaturvedi of Chintan at the First World Congress, at [http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=143](http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=143).

Historically, waste pickers had performed the task of segregation in the *dhalaos*. Based on their own informal codes they had shared access to the *dhalaos*, leading to high levels of recovery of recyclable materials. However, once the *dhalaos* were privatised this system was disrupted. In some *dhalaos* workers allowed waste pickers to access the waste if they helped to load the compactors. However, the companies began to lay claim to the waste, threatening to completely deny the waste pickers access to their livelihood in the future. In the meantime, waste pickers were prohibited from using the *dhalao* spaces to sort their materials, thus robbing them of their historical workspace. Waste pickers who conducted door-to-door collection were even prevented from disposing of non-recyclable waste in the *dhalaos*.

The privatisation contract not only reduced the role of waste pickers in recycling but also decreased overall levels of recycling. Prior to privatisation, waste pickers retrieved between 15% and 59% of Delhi's waste. However, the contract only requires the private contractors to segregate 20% of the waste by the eighth year. As payments to the contractors are based on the weight delivered to the landfill, there remains a strong disincentive to segregate waste and remove recyclable materials from the waste-stream. Bharati Chaturvedi of Chintan points out that nevertheless, as a result of mobilisation, recently waste pickers have managed to renegotiate the form and nature of privatisation and their role within it. For example, current discussions with the company in one zone are resulting in handing over the *dhalaos* to the waste pickers, who simultaneously undertake doorstep collection. By focusing attention on the negative implications of privatisation in Delhi, Chintan and the waste pickers have also succeeded in staving off similar efforts in other cities<sup>44</sup> (Chintan 2007).

## Renegotiating Exclusionary Forms of Privatisation in Cairo

Cairo has a vibrant and well-established informal waste management system. In a 2008 publication commissioned by the GTZ, CID Consulting<sup>45</sup> documents how, when waste was privatised, initial attempts to bypass the informal system failed and the system had to be modified to include traditional service providers.<sup>46</sup>

In Cairo, waste collection services began in the early 1940s when Muslim oasis migrants known as *waahis* began collecting paper from households to sell as fuel to both public baths and preparers of the fava bean national breakfast. In the late 1940s Christian Copts who had migrated from rural areas in the south of Egypt initiated door-to-door collection services with donkey carts. Known as *zabbaleen* (informal garbage collectors), they took the waste back to their homes at the edge of the city, separated it and fed the organic waste to their pigs and goats. In the 1950s, when metals and plastics entered the waste-stream, the *zabbaleen* began to recycle these as well.

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication with Bharati Chaturvedi.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on CID consulting please see [www.cid.com.eg](http://www.cid.com.eg).

<sup>46</sup> The following information on privatisation of waste management in Cairo is summarised from "The Informal Sector in Waste Recycling in Egypt" by CID Consulting (2008).



Sorting waste in Cairo

(picture courtesy of CID Consulting, originally published in CID, 2008)

The *waahis*, who had higher levels of education than the *zabbaleen*, retained informal ‘ownership’ of the collection routes, but the *zabbaleen* took over actual collection work. The *zabbaleen* kept the organic waste, plastic and metal, and passed the paper over to the *waahis*. As fuel oil and private bathrooms were introduced, the *waahis* eventually lost the market for their paper. However, they continued to generate income from monthly payments for residential collection services. In some cases *zabbaleen* paid a fee to the *waahis* to access the waste, and in others the *waahis* paid the *zabbaleen* for services rendered.

The Cairo Cleansing and Beautification Authority (CCBA) was established in 1986 to oversee the actors in the waste management system, license private collection companies and traditional providers such as the *zabbaleen* and extend services to low income areas. Whilst both private companies and traditional providers fell under the authority of the CCBA they received different treatment. Private companies bid for tenders, and once they succeeded were paid a fee by the CCBA for providing services. In contrast, the *zabbaleen* paid a fee to the CCBA for the right to collect waste from a certain number of apartment blocks. They were expected to continue collecting fees directly from residents and were vulnerable to losses if some apartments were vacant or residents did not pay. Because most of the *zabbaleen* were illiterate they did not know how to drive the trucks required by the CCBA and could not obtain credit. As a result, they continued to be dependent on the *waahis* who helped them to obtain their CCBA licences.

In 2003 Cairo followed the example of Alexandria and put out a tender for the collection and disposal of the city’s waste. An Italian public-private partnership and two Spanish companies were awarded contracts for three different parts of the city. In the fourth zone, the CCBA formed a public-private partnership that later sub-contracted an Egyptian company to provide services.

The contracts only require the companies to recycle 20% of the waste, far below the rate of 80% achieved by the informal sector. This has had extremely negative effects for the formal recycling industry, which has suffered a dramatic decline in inputs, and has been forced to acknowledge the importance of the informal sector.

For their part, the companies holding the privatisation contracts also had to come to terms with the the *zabbaleen*'s central role in waste management. The companies are not contracted to provide a door-to-door service, and members of the public are supposed to place their waste in communal collection points. Initially the companies wanted to hire *zabbaleen* as collection crews paid a wage to work eight hour days, collecting and loading the rubbish from the collection points for disposal without taking it home to separate and recycle. The workers were also expected to perform additional tasks required by the contract. This did not appeal to the *zabbaleen*, and so the companies instead hired unemployed youth. However, most of the youth quit because they were not used to working, and furthermore did not like working with waste.

Unable to recruit new people to the sector, the multinational companies eventually conceded to the *zabbaleen*'s terms for their employment. The *zabbaleen* are only required to complete their rounds and do not have fixed working hours. Despite the terms of the contract, the *zabbaleen* continue to use their own trucks and to divert the waste to their homes, segregating it for recycling before disposing of the rest. Both the companies and the CCBA turn a blind eye to these practices, and the CCBA does not impose fines for these breaches of the contracts.

The case in Cairo shows that privatisation processes that ignore the role of the informal sector can encounter serious problems. In order to function, the formal sector companies that won the contracts needed to acknowledge and accommodate the role of the *zabbaleen*. However, there were still strongly negative effects for the *zabbaleen*. Historically, the *zabbaleen* were subordinate to the *waahis*. When the private companies agreed to sub-contract the *zabbaleen*, who did not have companies that could enter into formal contracts, the *waahis*, who had registered companies, were awarded the contracts instead and hired the *zabbaleen*. Although many of the *waahis* were paid a fair wage, they did not extend this treatment to the *zabbaleen*. As the privatisation contract neither acknowledged nor attempted to redress existing power inequalities in the sector, it effectively exacerbated them.

In addition, even though the contract did not include door-to-door collection it generated forces that undermined provision of this service by the *zabbaleen*. Many residents who now had to pay a fee to the private companies via their electricity bills objected to continue paying for the *zabbaleen* to collect from their houses. The *zabbaleen* also live under constant threat that the CCBA and companies will start to enforce the terms of the contract, which will transform them into wage workers and deny them access to the recyclable materials on which their livelihoods depend (CID Consulting 2008).

## Waste Pickers and Municipal Workers Uniting Against Privatisation

Privatisation can potentially pit waste pickers against unionised municipal workers. Many instances have been reported of municipalities trying to use waste pickers as strike-breakers, having them deliver services when municipal unions are on strike. Sometimes waste picker co-operatives and associations bid for contracts to privatise services currently delivered by municipal workers. As discussed in Chapter Five, when municipal workers went on strike to oppose the privatisation of waste management in Bogotá, Colombia, the *Asociacion de Recicladores de Bogotá* (ARB) helped the city to collect the waste. After the strike ended and the municipal workers were defeated, it subsequently took a contract to continue collecting waste in one part of the city (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008, 2). According to Nohra Padilla, a founding member and Executive Director of the ARB, this was based on practical considerations; as the fight against privatisation had been lost, the ARB felt it would be better for the work to go to *recicladores* than to private companies. Although Padilla states that the ARB has good relations with municipal unions, she argues that since its main concern is improving the livelihoods of its members, the ARB would likely not have a problem bidding for other contracts on work currently conducted by municipal workers.<sup>47</sup>

Other waste picker organisations have a broader perspective on worker solidarity. For example, according to Poornima Chikarmane, a founding member of the KKPKP waste picker union in India, the KKPKP has not become involved in delivering waste management services that are provided by municipal workers.<sup>48</sup> Yet, as the state begins to offer contracts in new areas such as door-to-door collection that encroach on the work historically performed by waste pickers, the KKPKP has had to reflect on the stance it will take towards these developments.

In its document “From critical mass to crucial opportunity: the story of SWACH” (KKPKP 2009) the KKPKP points out that waste pickers saw a gap and began providing door-to-door collection because the municipality did not offer the service. This service provision was neither initiated by the state nor conducted within the public sector; it has always been provided privately by workers in the informal economy. When the state starts to offer contracts for these services it is not taking an activity that was previously conducted publicly and moving it into the private sector. Rather, it is taking work that had been conducted by informal workers in the private sector and potentially putting it into the hands of large private companies; that is, unless waste pickers can find a way to retain their role within the delivery of this service.

Although KKPKP members define themselves as workers, they value their autonomy and their daily earnings and often do not want to be in employment relationships. According to the KKPKP, the inefficiencies of the municipal service delivery system and the pervasiveness of neo-liberalism feed the demand for the privatisation of such services. The KKPKP has proposed alternatives (such as the SWaCH co-operative discussed in Chapter Four) that challenge corporate models of

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Nohra Padilla conducted by Melanie Samson on 15/01/2009.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication with Poornima Chikarmane.

privatisation and keep the state involved in service delivery, simultaneously taking into account the interests of waste pickers and service users (KKPKP 2009).

In other contexts waste pickers have united with unionised municipal workers to oppose privatisation processes that threaten both of their livelihoods. The case of privatisation in Cali, Colombia discussed in the previous chapter, provides useful insight into the challenges in forging these kinds of alliances. Juan Diego Gómez of Public Services International (PSI)<sup>49</sup> reports that in Cali unionised municipal workers employed by the EMSIRVA public waste management service provider and *recicladores* initially joined forces to oppose the plans to privatise service delivery and create a new, privately run dump. Through a series of workshops and meetings the two groups built solidarity to defend their work. However, once the new landfill was created, the municipality and the private company running it intervened to break this alliance. Late in 2008 the company offered *recicladores* a three-month contract to work at the landfill and the municipality offered some of the leaders of the *recicladores* jobs in the municipality. When both of these offers were accepted, the *recicladores*' organisation was weakened due to the loss of leadership, and tension was created between *recicladores* and unionised municipal workers who felt that the *recicladores* had undermined their struggle.<sup>50</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, government proceeded with its plans and privatised service delivery in three of Cali's four zones and began to liquidate EMSIRVA, resulting in 430 municipal employees losing their jobs. The landmark court victory outlined in Chapter Five forced the government to delay awarding the contract in the fourth zone. The municipal workers were neither consulted nor involved in the development of the legal case and the ruling is silent on the rights of former EMSIRVA employees in the reissuing of the tender. However, SINTRAEMSIRVA (the union that represents EMSIRVA employees) feels that the forced postponement in the awarding of the tender in the fourth zone creates space for it to continue agitating for service delivery in this zone to be retained within the public sector. SINTRAEMSIRVA has launched a campaign against the liquidation of EMSIRVA and the privatisation of services that has received support from unions around the world affiliated to PSI. It is also pursuing legal action to reverse the liquidation and privatisation processes.<sup>51</sup> The union is still hopeful that it can rebuild solidarity with the *recicladores* in the mobilisation against privatisation. However, this will be even more difficult to do in a context where the *recicladores* have already lost access to the privatised dump and have secured a Court ruling stating that they must be allowed to participate and be given priority within the revised tendering process.

In Montevideo, Uruguay, co-operation between municipal workers and *clasificadores* has been more successfully sustained. Members of the *Union de Clasificadores de Residuos Urbanos Sólidos* (Urban Solid Waste Recyclers' Union), which was formed in

<sup>49</sup> Public Services International is a trade union federation of public sector unions with over 500 affiliates in more than 140 countries ([www.world-psi.org/](http://www.world-psi.org/)).

<sup>50</sup> Telephonic interview with Juan Diego Gómez designed by Melanie Samson and conducted and translated by Carmen Roca, January 2009.

<sup>51</sup> E-mail communication with Juan Diego Gómez, with translation by Lucia Fernandez and Sofia Trevino.

2002, and the *Asociación de Empleados y Obreros Municipales* (Association of Municipal Employees and Workers) have mounted a strong, collective struggle against plans to privatise the dump. The *clasificadores* are fearful that the company will either evict them from the site or force them to work as employees that are paid lower wages. Similarly, the municipal workers suspect that they will be fired or underpaid and therefore lose the benefits currently provided by the municipality. Solidarity between the two groups has also been facilitated by the fact that both are affiliated to the PIT-CNT trade union federation, which unlike trade union federations in many other countries accepts unions of informal workers as affiliates.<sup>52</sup>



Waste pickers protest against privatisation on Labour Day in India

(photo courtesy of Chintan)

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<sup>52</sup> Lucia Fernandez, personal communication.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

by Melanie Samson

This book has brought together stories about how waste pickers in different parts of the world are organising, mobilising for their rights and creating new spaces for themselves within municipal waste management systems. It has identified a number of different ways in which policy and legislation have been changed to formally integrate waste pickers. In addition, it has explored how policy developments such as privatisation threaten to undermine the positions and livelihoods of waste pickers, and how waste pickers are challenging these processes.

The book has highlighted that waste pickers across the globe share the need to struggle for their rights. In many instances they are fighting battles against processes that have their genesis at a global level. For example, privatisation of waste management is advocated by international financial institutions and donor agencies, and is part of a broader agenda of neoliberal state restructuring. Similarly, conceptions of modern sanitary waste management that exclude waste pickers have been developed in advanced capitalist countries and are being mimicked in the South. There is, therefore, much that waste pickers can gain from exchanging ideas and uniting across borders to combat shared problems.

However, the preceding chapters also revealed that policies such as privatisation and formal integration take significantly different forms in different places due to the specific social, economic and political dynamics within each city and country. The ways that waste pickers organise in relation to these policies also affect how they are designed and implemented on the ground. As the book has emphasised, although waste pickers are organising in many places, important differences exist between organised formations of waste pickers within and across countries on issues such as how they see themselves; how they organise; how they would like to relate to municipal waste management systems and the state more generally; how they understand and situate themselves within the capitalist economy; and how they engage with other mass movements. Due to these differences in both the strategic orientation of waste picker organisations and the contexts within which they are working, forms of organisation and policies that are appropriate and work well within one context may have starkly different effects in other places, and may not address the needs and aspirations of local waste pickers. Therefore, the approaches to organising and policy presented in this book cannot and should not be treated as models which could simply be transplanted to other contexts.

In addition, it is important to note that many of the stories presented here are based on limited sources. As outlined in the introduction, one of the main purposes of this book was to gather stories and debates from the First World Conference of Waste Pickers to share them with a wider audience. More thorough and detailed studies are required to surface and grapple with the complex realities in each particular place.

It is hoped, however, that by providing information on a range of experiences, the stories presented here can assist waste pickers and their allies to identify some issues that need to be interrogated when developing their own strategies and tactics, and can help them to generate innovative ideas appropriate to their own circumstances. By highlighting some key points of divergence between different groupings of waste pickers, the book may begin to clarify some of the issues that require further debate in the forging of networks and alliances between organisations. In order to assist in this process, the remainder of this chapter revisits the main points and highlights some of the key issues from each of the preceding chapters.

**Chapter One** presented profiles of waste pickers from different parts of the world. It revealed that waste pickers in a range of contexts share many common challenges and aspirations. However, it also highlighted that it is important not to make generalised assumptions regarding the identity of waste pickers. The forces that drive people to take up waste picking vary greatly from place to place, and so too do the kinds of people who take up waste picking in different locations. A number of the profiles affirmed the findings of other studies that, regardless of their background, waste pickers are often discriminated against due to the fact that they work with garbage. This discrimination is exacerbated when waste pickers come from marginalised gender, racial, ethnic, religious and national groups. All of the profiles established that around the world waste picking is an important means through which people generate their livelihoods, and that it is crucial that they and their work be valued and supported. To this effect, the box included in Chapter Four on “Breaking down barriers, changing attitudes” highlighted some of the innovative ways in which the Asmare co-operative and the municipality in Belo Horizonte, Brazil have worked together to transform attitudes towards *catadores*.

Waste picking can be a solitary activity and most waste pickers around the world are not part of formal organisations. As Chapter One affirmed, some waste pickers consciously choose not to enter into formal associations because they value their autonomy. However, in cities across the globe other waste pickers are mobilising to form collective organisations. **Chapter Two** provided overviews of some of the different kinds of organisations formed by waste pickers. The organisations profiled included associations, co-operatives, trade unions and companies.

External professionals, NGOs, religious organisations and international donors such as the World Bank all played roles in the formation of a number of the waste picker organisations profiled. As illustrated in the case study on Coopcarmo, in Mesquita Brazil by Tuttle, Dias and Samson, the relationships between outsiders and waste pickers can be fraught with power dynamics. In the case of Coopcarmo the *catadoras* in the co-operative had to struggle to gain control from the priest who initially assisted them. Although other stories in the chapter mentioned the role of outsiders, few followed the example of the Coopcarmo piece in exploring the implications of this external involvement. More work is required to critically interrogate how the role of outside actors shapes and influences the political orientation, objectives, organisational form and functioning of waste picker groups.

The cases in Chapter Two revealed that organisational form is closely linked to organisational objective, as different organisational forms are better equipped to do different things. This was perhaps best exemplified by the piece on SEWA, which explained that SEWA in India has formed both a union and co-operatives in order to achieve related, but different, goals. In their contribution Dave, Shaw and Parikh clarified that SEWA organises as a union in order to help women working as waste pickers and in other informal trades to mobilise collectively around their work issues and to influence policy. However, a union is not well suited to gaining contracts. SEWA members therefore also set up co-operatives so that they can obtain collective working contracts. For SEWA it is important to form co-operatives, as opposed to companies, so that members can each have equal power and the employer-employee relationship can be eliminated.

The case of NIDAN, also in India, illustrated that legislative rules sometimes foster a bias towards certain kinds of organisations. In their piece, Singh and Saran revealed that the difficulties in meeting the requirements to form a co-operative seemed insurmountable to NIDAN, and so it chose to form a company instead. The extent to which the company form subsequently shaped the power relations between waste pickers and management in NIDAN was not interrogated in the piece and remains as something that could be further explored. Although co-operatives aspire towards equalising power relations, Hada Rúbia Silva from Coopcarimo emphasised that because people are not used to working co-operatively it is a difficult task to make co-operatives truly equal and democratic (cited in Tuttle, Dias and Samson, Chapter Two). It should not be assumed that just because something is called a co-operative that all members will have equal power.

A number of the stories in Chapter Two demonstrated that organising can both entrench and transform inequalities based on social divisions such as gender. Samson's story of *Ikageng Ditamating* in Metsimaholo, South Africa, revealed that initially gendered divisions of labour were crystallised organisationally when the young men who collected metal, and the women and older men who collected paper, glass and plastic, formed separate organisations. It required a focused organising campaign and an explicit commitment to eradicating the gender division of labour in order to unite these groups into one co-operative. Although members of the newly combined organisation reported that tensions have been reduced and that all members work well together, more work is required to investigate what types of gendered and other divisions persist, and what the organisation is doing to address them.

In other cases profiled in the chapter, women waste pickers consciously chose to form women only co-operatives such as Coopcarimo in Brazil (Tuttle, Dias and Samson, Chapter Two) and *Independencia de la Mujer* in Uruguay (Fernandez and Samson, Chapter Two). They did so in order to build women's confidence, provide women with greater opportunities, challenge gender stereotypes and demonstrate that women can do the same work as men. The experience of *Independencia de la Mujer* affirmed, however, that there is a need to also work towards the transformation of broader structural inequalities, since, when the economic crisis hit, women *recicladores* still had fewer alternative income generating activities than their male counterparts.

Alliances that link waste picker organisations and stretch across geographical space have a better chance at taking on these kinds of broader issues than individual organisations. **Chapter Three** looked at exchanges, alliances, networks and federations of waste pickers at city, country, continental and global levels. Some of the initiatives profiled are quite informal whilst others are structured organisations with clear political agendas.

At the more informal end of the spectrum, Slum Dwellers International has facilitated exchanges between African waste pickers from South Africa, Kenya and Egypt. The level of development of waste picker organisations varies greatly between these three countries, and the participating groups have different agendas linked to their specific circumstances and orientations. Participants therefore decided that the sharing of ideas and experiences was useful, and that the formation of joint projects was not necessary at this stage (Samson, Chapter Three).

Samson's story of nascent networking initiatives in South Africa highlighted that looser forms of organisation may be particularly appropriate during the initial stages in alliance building. South African waste pickers recently participated in the first national waste picker meeting. As the majority of participants came from dumps that did not have formal organisations and as this was the first meeting, it was far too soon for waste pickers in South Africa to begin thinking about forming a national network or more formal organisation. In order to facilitate networking and to support the building of organisations on the ground, the waste pickers decided to create a national working group with one delegate from each province.

The SWACHH National Alliance in India is also relatively new, although it emerged in a context where a larger number of waste pickers are members of formal organisations. In its contribution, the SWACHH Secretariat explained that as member organisations have a range of orientations, they decided to maintain SWACHH as a loose alliance through which members can exchange ideas, learn from and support one another, debate key issues and forge common fronts when relevant. Fernandez's story on the evolution of the Latin American Waste Picker Network (LAWPN) revealed that it shares similar goals to SWACHH in bringing together waste picker organisations from across Latin America.

The more formally structured networks featured in Chapter Three included the Association of *Recicladores* of Bogotá (ARB) in Colombia, and the National Movement of *Catadores* (MNCR) in Brazil. The ARB focuses primarily on work-related issues. It helps *recicladores* organisations in Bogotá to unite in fighting to improve their working conditions and secure social and economic recognition of their work. It has also negotiated a contract with the city for a waste separation scheme, and has taken the city to the Constitutional Court to win the right of *recicladores* to bid for privatisation contracts (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008; Samson, Chapter Three).

The MNCR has a different and broader social and political agenda. Like the ARB, the MNCR supports initiatives by co-operatives to move up the recycling value chain. But whilst in their court cases the Colombian *recicladores* frame themselves as entrepreneurs, the MNCR sees *catadores* as workers. It is a mass-based movement

that allies with other organisations of the oppressed classes in a common quest to transform society and eradicate oppression and exploitation (www.mnrc.org).

Despite these differences, the ARB and MNCR work together on the steering committee of the LAWPN and are co-operating to create greater solidarity and support between Latin American waste pickers. What is clear, however, is that there is much to be debated and discussed, and that organisations of waste pickers with divergent orientations will pursue different approaches. This was clearly illustrated in the remaining chapters of the book that focused on more policy related issues.

**Chapter Four** explored the integration of waste pickers into municipal waste management systems. It was based on an understanding that the formal and informal waste management systems form an integrated whole, and that even when their role is not acknowledged waste pickers are still an integral part of municipal waste management systems. Formal integration entails transforming the terms, form and nature of this relationship. In this chapter, Samson drew on secondary sources to present four different ways in which waste pickers have been formally integrated into municipal waste management systems:

- memoranda of understanding between an NGO and the Council in Delhi, India that allow waste pickers to collect waste from homes and be paid directly for services rendered by the residents (Waste Matters SNTD Women's University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008);
- a social accord in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, through which the Council provides a co-operative of *catadores* with a monthly subsidy that is not directly linked to service delivery (Dias and Alves 2008);
- the payment of a *catadores* co-operative by the municipality for rendering door-to-door collection of recyclables in Diadema, Brazil (Dias and Alves 2008; Gutberlet 2008); and
- the creation of a waste picker co-operative contracted and supported by government to provide door-to-door services which is directly paid by and accountable to residents in Pune, India (Waste Matters SNTD Women's University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008).

As detailed in the chapter, each of these approaches has different ramifications for the relationships between the state, residents and waste pickers. For example, by creating a direct link between residents and waste pickers the approaches in Delhi and Pune open the opportunity for greater resident involvement in service delivery. However, particularly in the case of Delhi where the municipality is not involved in the service delivery process, they also potentially facilitate a withdrawal of the state from responsibility for the welfare of citizens and the working conditions of waste pickers.

The use of a social accord in Belo Horizonte forged a relationship between the state and *catadores* that is rooted in appreciation for the contribution that *catadores* make to the city through their informal labour. As noted in the chapter, Dias and Alves (2008) report that the payment of the subsidy from the social welfare budget has been

criticised and some parties have argued that it would be more appropriate for payment to be explicitly linked to service delivery. However, Dias and Alves (2008) further observe that *catadores* in Diadema have had difficulties adjusting to the demands of being contracted as service providers. In addition, rather than being seen as ‘charity’ the payment of a subsidy in Belo Horizonte could be understood as recognition that *catadores* are already providing a beneficial service. It also promotes a more collective approach that moves away from paying each *catadore* individually for services provided, something that can be seen as either positive or negative depending on the approach and framework adopted by waste picker organisations. The way in which waste pickers are formally integrated into municipal waste management systems is profoundly political, and it is important that waste pickers and their allies think through the implications of various models before advocating for their adoption.

**Chapter Five** highlighted how waste pickers and their supporters in different countries have secured legislative and policy changes that improve waste pickers’ status and their working conditions. In Peru the recent focus has been on securing recognition for the role of *recicladores* within municipal waste management systems (Samson, Chapter Five). In Brazil, mobilisation by *catadores* has led to policy and legislation that acknowledge their existing role and extend it into new spheres. For example, the work of *catadores* is validated by the state as it is recognized as an official occupation. Because *catadores* were the originators of programmes to collect recyclables separately from household waste, the state can contract their organisations to formally provide these services without putting them out to tender. Furthermore, all federal buildings must separate their waste and give the recyclables to *catadores*’ co-operatives (Dias and Alves 2008). Whilst in Peru and Brazil waste pickers have focused on engaging government, in Colombia *recicladores* have used the Constitutional Court to secure their legal right to bid for privatisation contracts (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008). Although Indian waste pickers have lobbied the state to win formal service delivery contracts, the KKP KP union in India exemplifies the importance of also focusing on winning social rights for waste pickers as workers whose informal labour makes important contributions to the city. For example, based on arguments that the informal work of waste pickers already provides benefits to the environment and savings for municipalities, the KKP KP secured health and education benefits for its members (Chikarmane and Narayan 2005).

The four cases demonstrated that there are a number of different kinds of rights that waste pickers can struggle for, and a number of different means to achieve them. Whether particular groups of waste pickers fight for commercial or social rights, for example, will depend not only on the context and the type of policies their governments are pursuing, but also on their own political orientations and objectives, as well as whether they see themselves primarily as entrepreneurs or as workers. It should be noted that some organisations pursue multi-pronged strategies focusing on both commercial and social rights.

Though much can be gained from securing legislative and policy changes, the cases discussed in Chapter Five also illuminated a number of challenges related to using

legal approaches. The first task is ensuring that changes in legislation are actually implemented on the ground. Waste picker organisations may lack the resources and capacity to participate in new processes and to hold the government accountable. This affirms the importance of making sure that legislative and policy challenges are embedded within broader organisational strategies. It is crucial that waste picker organisations and their allies think through, in advance, what will be required to establish that waste pickers take ownership of, and are capable of exploiting changes in policy and legislation, and that engagement in these processes strengthens organising by waste pickers.

The chapter also highlighted concerns regarding whether legislative and policy changes can create new divisions between waste pickers. In Peru the amendments did not have the support of all *recicladores* (Albina Ruiz, cited in Samson, Chapter Five). Implementing new laws therefore opens up the possibility of creating divisions within waste picker organisations by serving some waste pickers more than others. This is a particular concern when it comes to independent waste pickers whom Dias (2008) argues are often excluded when policy and legislation focus on the inclusion of waste picker organisations as opposed to individual waste pickers.

In **Chapter Six** Samson brought together a number of cases to explore how waste pickers are affected by, and engage with, the global trend towards the privatisation of waste management. The chapter reported that in Delhi, India the authorities were conscious that granting contracts for door-to-door collection would displace waste pickers who provide this service informally, and so excluded these activities from the contracts. Nevertheless, the privatisation of the *dhaloes* (communal waste disposal sites) disrupted and ultimately hindered the work of the waste pickers, who had previously sorted their waste in these spaces. The companies' assertion of ownership over the waste in the *dhaloes* also threatened to deny waste pickers access to the recyclable materials on which their livelihoods depend (Chintan 2007).

In Cairo, Egypt the municipality and the companies that it contracted to transport waste from communal collection points initially ignored the well-established informal household collection system run by the *zabbaleen* and *wahiya*. When it proved impossible to simply impose the new formal system, the companies had to modify their plans and adjust the terms of the contracts in order to secure the participation of the *zabbaleen* and *wahiya*. Although the *zabbaleen*'s key demands that they be able to control their own labour and take the waste home for sorting and recycling were met, the new system still had negative implications for them. Some residents did not want to pay twice for collection services and their historically subordinate position to the *wahiya* was entrenched. Moreover, like their counterparts in Delhi, the *zabbaleen* live under constant threat that the companies will enforce ownership rights over the recyclables (CID Consulting 2008).

The cases of Delhi and Cairo affirmed that efforts to implement privatisation in the formal system will necessarily affect, and be affected by, the dynamics in the informal system. As was demonstrated in Cairo, failure to acknowledge this can undermine and derail privatisation processes. It is therefore crucial that the development of

policy in all spheres of waste management, including privatisation, be underpinned by an understanding of the entire waste management system, including the complex relations within and between its formal and informal components. Waste pickers must be seen as stakeholders in these policy processes and be included in negotiations as equal partners.

For their part, waste pickers must be sensitive to how their actions impact on others involved in waste management, particularly municipal waste management workers whose livelihoods are also linked to the waste management system. As the discussion in Chapter Six highlighted, the roles of waste pickers and municipal employees within waste management systems vary depending on the historical development of waste management in different cities. In some cities, such as Delhi and Cairo, door-to-door collection was never performed by municipal workers and has always been the domain of waste pickers (Chintan 2007; CID Consulting 2008). Privatising such services encroaches on the territory of waste pickers. As the example of the KKKPKP in Pune, India established, there are ways that waste pickers can engage with such privatisation processes that will not only maintain their role within service delivery, but will also challenge corporate-oriented contracting models and furthermore will continue to involve the state within waste management services (KKPKP 2009).

In other countries, such as Colombia, door-to-door collection has long been a part of the formal waste management system (Ruiz-Restrepo 2008). Privatising collection in this context undermines municipal unions and threatens municipal workers with job loss or deterioration in wages and working conditions. In such circumstances, if waste pickers demand to receive contracts for door-to-door collection whilst unions are still struggling against privatisation, then they could be complicit in displacing municipal workers and supporting state agendas to neo-liberalise the state and weaken the union movement. Building solidarity between waste pickers and municipal workers will require both groups to address negative stereotypes and attitudes that they may have towards each other and overcome historical divides that often separate them in order to work towards forging common agendas and visions. They will also need to resist attempts by municipalities and private companies to pit them against each other. Though this may be difficult, some of the examples in Chapter Six demonstrated that it is possible.

The discussions on privatisation highlighted that although, in all of the cases reviewed, waste pickers were negatively affected by privatisation, they made different choices regarding how to respond and what demands to make. In turn, privatisation processes were shaped differently by their mobilisation. This reaffirmed the broader point made throughout the book that an intimate relationship exists between organising by waste pickers and the development and implementation of policy and legislation. Each of these processes is profoundly political and it is crucial that all parties think through the implications of the approaches that they adopt within particular contexts. To this end it is hoped that this book sparks some ideas, inspires further research, generates debate and discussions on these issues and is of use to waste pickers as they struggle to build democratic organisations, networks and alliances.

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## Appendix: Declarations

In March 2008 participants from 34 countries gathered in Bogotá, Colombia for the First World Conference of Waste Pickers and the Third Conference of Latin American Waste Pickers which was timed to coincide with the global event. In addition to waste pickers, the event was attended by researchers and representatives of development agencies, NGOs, private enterprise and government.

Led by waste pickers, the conference participants developed and endorsed a Global Declaration of the First World Conference of Waste Pickers. The Latin American waste pickers also developed and endorsed the Declaration of the Third Regional Conference of Latin American Waste Pickers. Both declarations focus on increasing recognition of the work done by waste pickers, improving their position within the waste management system and value chain, transforming waste management systems to make them more environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive, and increasing the organising and networking capabilities of waste pickers around the world.

### Declaration of the Third Regional Conference of Latin American Waste Pickers

In Bogotá, between the 1st and 4th of March 2008, the delegates of 15 Latin American countries –Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, Paraguay, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haití, and Colombia– gathered as members of grassroots organisations of waste pickers, also known as *pepenadores*, *cartoneros*, *cirujas*, *clasificadores*, *buceadores*, *guajeros*, *minadores*, *catadores*, *thawis*, *barequeros* and countless other denominations according to where they come from. We declare the following commitments in the framework of the Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers to the public, governments, communities, society in general, co-operation agencies and our own organisations:

- To promote globally recognition of the profession of waste pickers and our organisations through creating spaces for discussion and to develop strategies for having an active presence in those spaces.
- Generate actions and strategies for the recognition of the Latin American Network of waste picker organisations and to certify the work and the profession of waste pickers and our organisations.
- Commitment to share and socialise knowledge to waste pickers and their national organisations, their local structures and the members of the different movements.
- Promote the progress of waste pickers and their organisations in the value chain to gain access and share in the benefits generated by the activity.
- Contribute to a world mobilisation from each country in a connected effort that seeks to have a World Day of the Waste Picker aimed at recognition of the activity and of the people who work as such.

- The congress participants demand from governments that they prioritise waste pickers' organisations in the solid waste management system, giving the required conditions for their inclusion, through the development of social, financial and environmental affirmative actions.
- Review laws and public policies so that they include waste pickers organisations in their formulation, considering them as actors in decision-making
- The participant organisations commit to generating the capacity-building, training and knowledge to professionalise the activity.
- The global commitment to promote contact with as many waste pickers and waste picker organisations as possible.
- Advance together with the world, regional and local committees with the aim of controlling the value chain and its income, through networks and production centres.
- To work to implement the commitments of the Declaration of the Second Latin American Congress of Waste Pickers.

March, 2008

## Global Declaration of the First World Conference of Waste Pickers

At the First World Conference of Waste Pickers, grassroots organisations of waste pickers from around the world gathered in Bogotá, Colombia, from March 1st to 4th, 2008, representing waste pickers from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, make a declaration to the public, governments, support organisations, society in general, and their own organisations, joined by technical advisor delegates, technical support organisations, government representatives, non-governmental organisations, universities, enterprises, micro-enterprises and other civil society groups.

We Declare:

- Our commitment to work for the social and economic inclusion of the waste picker population, promote and strengthen their organisations, to help them move forward in the value chain, and link with the formal Solid Waste Management systems, which should give priority to waste pickers and their organisations.
- Our agreement to reject incineration and burial based processing technologies and to demand and work on schemes of maximum utilisation of waste, as activities of re-use, re-cycling and composting represent popular economy alternatives for informal and marginalised sectors of the world population.
- Our commitment to continue sharing knowledge, experience and technology, as these actions will promote and accelerate contact with the greatest possible number of waste pickers and their organisations across the world, making visible their living and working conditions and their contributions to sustainable development.
- Our commitment to advocate for improved laws and public policies so that their formulation effectively involves waste picker organisations. Waste pickers should become actors in decision-making, searching for improved common conditions, and for capacity-building activities and knowledge for the recognition and professionalisation of their work.

March, 2008



## Refusing to be Cast Aside: Waste Pickers Organising Around the World

Edited by Melanie Samson

In cities across the world, millions of people sustain themselves and their families by reclaiming reusable and recyclable materials from what others have cast aside as waste. They are frequently ignored within public policy processes and harassed and persecuted by authorities. However, waste pickers from around the world are beginning to organise. They are demanding recognition for the contributions that they make to the environment and the economy, and they are fighting to ensure that their role within municipal waste management systems is valued and made more secure. This book profiles waste pickers, the organisations and networks that they have formed and the struggles that they are waging in a number of countries. It looks at how the law has been used to advance waste pickers' rights and how municipal waste management systems in some cities have been transformed to formally integrate waste pickers. It also explores how waste pickers in different places have been affected by, and responded to, privatisation.

