ACADEMY ON SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY
(12th EDITION)
BUILDING BACK BETTER: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN A HUMAN-CENTRED AND PLANET-SENSITIVE RECOVERY

15-26 NOVEMBER 2021
WASTE PICKERS’ COOPS

Outline:

- About WIEGO
- Who are waste pickers
- Overview: Coops in LA.
- Case study - Coops in Belo Horizonte city
- Coops dynamics and key issues
Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

- WIEGO is a global action-research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy through:
  - increased organization and representation
  - improved statistics and research
  - more inclusive policy processes
  - more equitable trade, labor, urban planning, and social protection policies
WASTE PICKERS AROUND THE WORLD

20 MILLION Estimates indicate close to 20 million PEOPLE WORLDWIDE EARN THEIR LIVING FROM RECYCLING WASTE.

Source: ILO (2013)

Waste pickers COLLECT, SORT, RECYCLE, REPURPOSE AND/OR SELL MATERIALS thrown away by others.

WASTE PICKERS CONTRIBUTE to city life through:

- PROVIDING WASTE COLLECTION SERVICES
- REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS
- CREATING THEIR OWN EMPLOYMENT

INTEGRATE WASTE PICKERS INTO CITY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Research shows WASTE PICKERS' LIVELIHOODS are negatively affected by:

- INCINERATORS
- FLUCTUATING PRICES
- PRIVATIZATION OF WASTE MANAGEMENT
- STigmatization

Cities around the world have demonstrated that INCLUDING WASTE PICKERS IN CITY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT IS POSSIBLE.


Waste pickers around the world are organizing for RECOGNITION, PAYMENT FOR THEIR SERVICES & SOCIAL INCLUSION

Source: Bonner & Spooner (2012)
Belo Horizonte

Capital of Minas Gerais State

A planned city located in the southeast of the country
**Population:** 2,881,945 people (IBGE 2004)

First coop founded in 1990 and integrated as city partner in 1993
Today: 8 coops integrated
Informal Workers in Source Segregation Scheme

Mixed System

✧ **Curbside** collection of recyclables in part of the Central and Southern Regions of the city.
  
  • Recyclables collected by municipal trucks are taken to coops warehouses for sorting and further processes.

✧ **Recycling containers** in public areas.
  
  • 156 Voluntary Delivery Sites (435 recycling containers)
  
  • Collection by municipal trucks; recyclables taken to coops warehouses
Informal Workers in Source Segregation Scheme

Mixed System

◆ Coops collect recyclables from larger generators (industries etc) with their own motorised vehicles

◆ Two of the existing 8 coops collect recyclables in offices downtown using manual pushcarts
Moving up the value chain collectively:

- **REDESOL** – a network of 3 waste pickers cooperatives for bulk selling of recyclables.

- **CATAUNIDOS** – a network for bulk selling of recyclables and plastic recycling of PET (production of pellets) formed by ASMARE from Belo Horizonte and 8 waste pickers’ organizations from cities within the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte involving around 500 waste pickers in total.
Gender and Waste Project - Brazil

Aims:
- To provide women with the tools to work towards equality in the workplace and their personal lives in order to strengthen their capacities and voices;
- To increase women’s leadership roles in waste picker representative organizations; and within the National Waste Pickers Movement.
- To contribute to the economic, political and symbolic empowerment of women waste pickers.

How
- Learning gender workshops, popular and academic gender toolkits, coaching program on leadership, mapping of health risks, ergonomic workshops, gender strategic work plans
Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

- Low business turnover - one of the main obstacles for sustainability, with direct consequences on income of coop members (1,5 minimum salaries – MS - on average) when compared to non-organized WPs (3-4 MS).

  However, coop members enjoy indirect benefits which make up for this ‘economic disadvantage’, such as: better working conditions, support to schooling to children, housing programs, etc.
Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

- Nature of activity as it is today: labour intensive work not capital intensive – so productivity depends on direct activities done by the worker (the more efficient his work be more value will be added to the product).

- Average 50% are women: work done at coops are generally more favourable to women as many coops provides child care and are keen on equity issues.

- **Social function**: by including women and other vulnerable groups coops have a social function in terms of poverty reduction. And this socially relevant work needs to be valued as a by-product.
Coops &its Dynamics – Key Issues

Coops as environmental agents: many coops promote and/or take part in joint environmental campaigns.

Waste picker playing in environmental event

ASMARE´s Recycling fashion show
Challenges

- Demands for efficiency in service provision represents, in some cases, a strain on some individual members.
- Some members have difficulty in complying with demands for discipline and work schedule
- As work becomes more complex (administrative skills required) this may be a strain to people with low educational level, which comprises the majority of the coops.

*How to balance efficiency and its social functions is key to sustainability*
Cooperative Movement – Main Achievements

- Social solidarity economy principles: workers’ identity; links of solidarity organized & non-organized workers; visibility and recognition
- Inclusion of pickers of recyclables: Brazil’s national classification of occupation
- Approval of 2010 National Solid Waste Policy with recognition of workers
- Inclusive Extended Producers’ Responsibility
- Gender & waste action plan
Conclusions

- By giving incentives to organizations of waste pickers such as associations, cooperatives and unions their social and economical condition can be enhanced.

- These organizations can voice demands of WPs, represent their interests, fight for visibility and validity.

- Data from Brazil shows that organized WPs enjoy better work and living conditions (Dias PhD thesis, 2010)
Thank You!

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Learn More - WIEGO’s action research:
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