



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

2021/CTI/SEM2/008

Session: 3

Informal Waste Pickers: Building Green and Inclusive Solid Waste Systems

Submitted by: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and
Organizing



**Webinar on Improving Waste Management
and Recycling Policies in the APEC Region
17 June 2021**



Women in Informal Employment
Globalizing and Organizing

Informal Waste Pickers : Building Green and Inclusive SW Systems

APEC Webinar

Sonia Dias - Waste Specialist, Urban Policies Programme
14 June 21



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

Source: Dias & Samson (2016)

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

IS POSSIBLE.

Source: Chikamane (2012), Dias (2011), Parra (2015), Schamber (2012)

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

Source: Bonner & Spooner (2012)





ILO estimates indicate 15-20 million people worldwide earn their living by recycling waste. Recycling reduces emissions 25 times more than incineration does.

Photo by Juan Arredondo/Reportage by Getty Images



Women in Informal Employment
Globalizing and Organizing

Waste pickers reclaim and recycle waste for raw materials and packing materials – thereby contributing to the reduction of carbon gas emissions.

Photo by Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images Reportage



Waste pickers supply solid waste collection in many cities in developing economies at little or no cost to city budgets – while diverting tons of material from landfills.

Photo by Juan Arredondo/Reportage by Getty Images



1 We extract organic materials from unlined dumpsites, which stops toxins from seeping into groundwater and ocean environments.



2 We provide a low-cost waste collection service that governments can afford so that poorer communities can also access this service, which helps to prevent informal dumping.



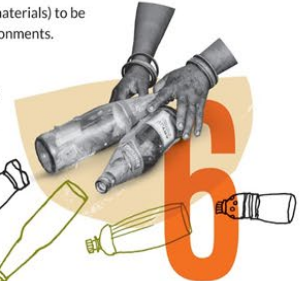
3 We provide collection services that prevent open waste burning, which can pollute the ocean.



4 We collect materials for recycling and reuse from residents, businesses, or the street and stop them from polluting the environment.



5 By recycling and reusing, we prevent the need for new materials (virgin raw materials) to be made, which can destroy environments.



6 We provide reusable dishes to prevent the use of single-use plastics that can end up in the environment.

7 We meet with residents face-to-face and work with them to advocate for better waste management practices and to communicate new initiatives like single-use plastic bans, etc.



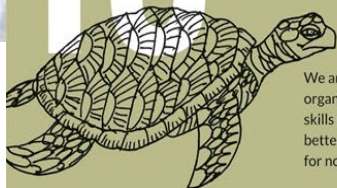
7 We push for new policies to encourage everyone's participation in the recycling, reuse, and reduction of waste.

How waste pickers prevent marine waste pollution

8 We sort and process recyclable materials locally preventing contamination when shipping to other economies where they might end up in the ocean.



10



9 We are helping ourselves by organizing and learning new skills so that we can create better waste management for non-recyclable waste.



For more information about WIEGO's Reducing Waste in Coastal Cities project, please visit www.wiego.org/rwcc

Global Networking

Since the 2008 First WP Conference in Bogota, interactions among waste pickers across the world have increased, especially through the Inclusive Cities Project, an umbrella project lead by WIEGO that engaged informal workers' MBOs. Waste pickers are being proactive in terms of trying to shape solid waste systems.

PUNE NEWSLINE — 19/01/09

Colombia to Pune: To connect with ragpickers

ROHAN SWAMY
JANUARY 18



Nohra Padilla at the office of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakar Panchayat at Pimpri. *Omam Anand*

I HAVE been collecting, rather 'picking my way' through garbage bins searching for recyclable paper, plastic, and other scrap ever since I was seven years old. My parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters were all in this business. We used to scrounge garbage dumps, landfills and streets so that we could eke a living out of it," says Nohra Padilla, a ragpicker who has come all the way from Bogotá, Colombia to interact with the ragpickers in the city.

Speaking about her experiences in Bogotá she says, "When I was small, the waste collectors, (also called as recycladores) worked in unhygienic conditions. We had to also go to the Bogotá City Dump — to collect waste paper, plastic and other things — which was a filthy stretch of land. We had lodged an agitation against the government and eventually got them to incorporate ragpickers in the recycling chain in 1987."

Nohra is also the head of the Recycladores Association of Bogotá (ARB) which works towards ensuring that ragpickers also benefit from the recycling of waste and garbage.

The Association ensures that waste is collected in a much hygienic way. The ragpickers are provided with safety equipment while collecting waste, she says.

"Close to 55 per cent of the people in Colombia live below poverty line. Out of these, close to 55,000 are ragpickers who are now officially recognised by the government," she adds. On her trip to Pune she says, "We are basically studying the problems that are faced by rag-

TIMES OF INDIA — 19/01/09

A ragpicker-activist's battle for dignity

Mansi Tewari | TNN

Pune: "The countries may be different, but the issues remain the same," said Nohra Padilla, a Colombian wastepicker who was recently in the city. Ragpickers in her country, too, she said, had to fight a great deal for dignity and respect.

One of the founder-members of Recycladores Association of Bogotá (ARB), Nohra, along with other members, fought for the rights of ragpickers in her country. "We fought for 15 years to get the government to recognise our profession and demanded a modification in the law. The organisation in Bogotá has fought to get houses, insurance and support from society," she said, speaking to TOI with an interpreter's help on Saturday.

"I inherited this occupation. I have been a wastepicker since the age of seven," said Nohra. "My whole family was into ragpicking and we have struggled a lot to earn the dignity and respect we have today."

Comparing the condition of ragpickers in India with those in Colombia, Nohra said, "There is not a lot of



Nohra Padilla

difference. The condition is almost the same. It is just that in Colombia people are proud of what they do and people respect them for their work. In India that is not the case."

While in the city, Nohra wanted to learn as much as she could about the functioning of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakar Panchayat (KKP-KP) to better understand the problems of ragpickers in India. Of the organisation she says, "It is an important organisation, and is showing the government and the ragpickers the way."

Nohra says she will return to India and fight for the cause that has motivated her to travel so far. "People must understand that ragpickers are serving society and are doing a respectable job. They must, therefore, be treated as equals," she says.

Speaking about India, Nohra said, "The infrastructure here is good and the people are peace-loving, which is not the case in Latin America. Poverty drives people towards violence, but this is not the case in India."

"We will fight all problems and stand together to get economic recognition for ragpickers," she promised.



Inclusive Recycling – Belo Horizonte City, Brazil

1. **Curbside** collection of recyclables in part of the Central and Southern Regions of the city .

- **Recyclables** collected by municipal trucks are **taken to waste pickers coops warehouses** for sorting and further processes.



2. **Recycling containers** in public areas .

- Collection by municipal trucks ; **recyclables taken to coops warehouses**
- **3. Street pickers** allowed to collect recyclables
- City contracts coops

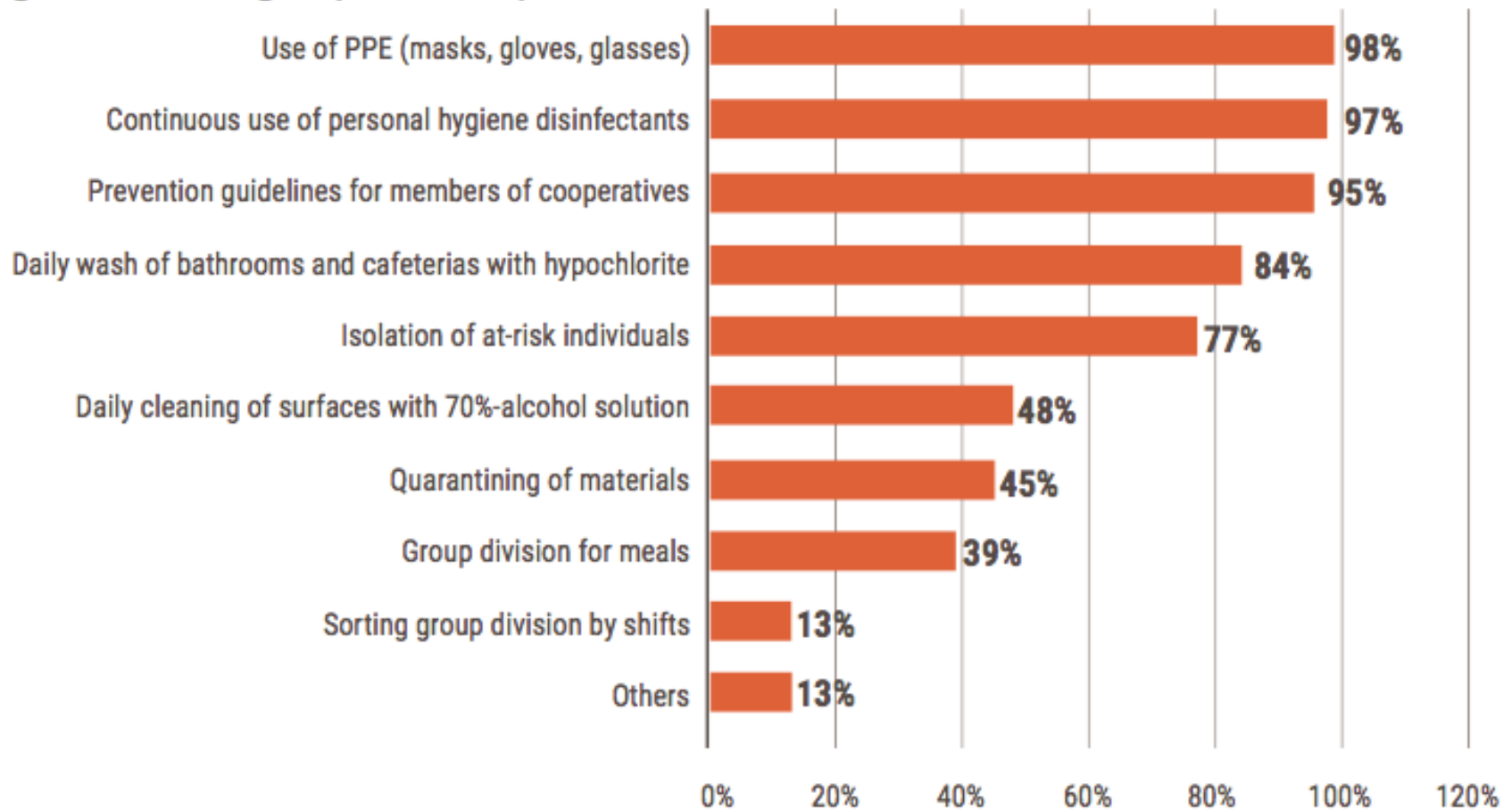
COVID19: Informal Waste Pickers

- Covid19: Unique challenges for informal waste sector
- Greater vulnerability due to insalubrious environments such as open dumps, lack of access to safety equipments such as gloves, masks etc.
- There is also the increase of medical waste from homes and office.
 - Different studies are presenting the life span of the virus and permanence on surfaces
 - Serious implications for informal waste pickers
 - Occupational health impacts derived from climatic and non climatic factors
- Thus, **Covid19 brings an additional layer of vulnerability which cannot be minimized which is even greater for women pickers**
- In addition to health challenges workers face threats of loosing their niches to big private actors and the shutting down of middlemen depots



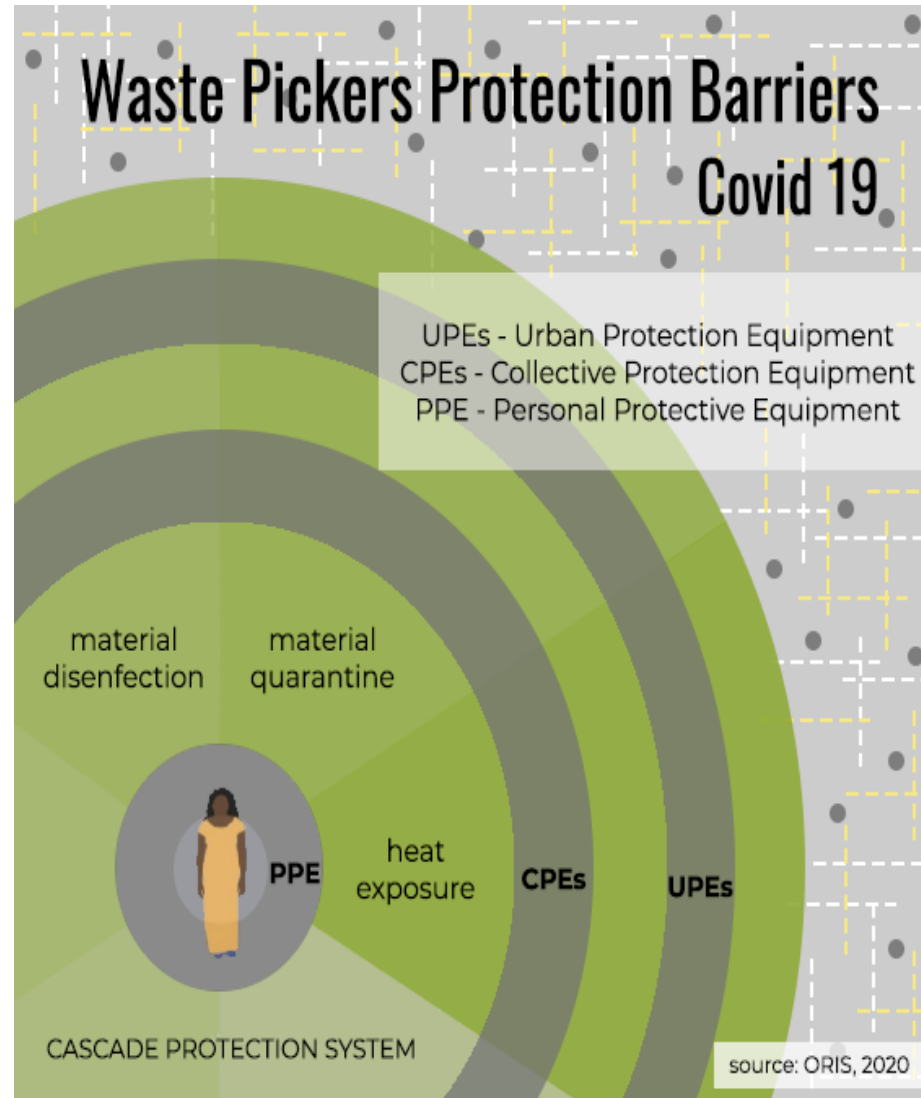
Waste pickers readiness to improve safety protocols – WIEGO research (Brazil)

Figure 10: Contagion prevention protocols



Source: Authors, 2020.

Multiple protection barriers instead of PPE only



Building Green Jobs Systems

COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY AND DIGNIFIED LIFE

Pillars of Waste Pickers' Health

- ✓ Physical well-being
- ✓ Emotional well-being
- ✓ Good nutrition
- ✓ Access to Information
- ✓ Socio-economic security
- ✓ Recognition

Components of Healthy Workplace

- ✓ Organized workspace
- ✓ Adequate infrastructure and equipment
- ✓ Adequate and durable protective equipment
- ✓ Ventilation, proper lighting
- ✓ Common spaces

Holistic Understanding of Waste Pickers' Health

Important Allies

- ✓ Municipal, state and federal governments
- ✓ Health professionals
- ✓ Communities
- ✓ Businesses/Generators of waste
- ✓ Research centers on ergonomics, architecture, planning workers' health

Important Attitudes among Cooperative Members

- ✓ Respect for others
- ✓ Solidarity
- ✓ Friendship
- ✓ Patience
- ✓ Recognition for co-worker

Important Attitudes within Cooperatives

- ✓ Better Hygiene
- ✓ Organized workspace
- ✓ Respect for others
- ✓ Spaces for dialogue
- ✓ Breaks to stretch
- ✓ Breaks to drink water and eat
- ✓ Breaks to go to the restroom
- ✓ Understanding



Cuidar Project
Waste Pickers'
Health Risk Mapping



Photo: B. Greco

Thinking Forward

1. Build from what already exists: with informal waste pickers
2. Invest in building informal workers' capacity to deliver in complementarity with formal systems. Factor in gender equality.
3. Strengthen WP capacity to withstand or recover from all sorts of impacts – health, economic, climate change.
 - a. The notion of resilience has been associated with climate change, but it is a useful notion in the current outbreak. There is an interconnection between health, economic, and environmental crisis that needs to be explored.
4. Rethink and reshape solid waste systems to understand role of informal workers => feeding recycling markets with raw material that sustain production. **Industries have a responsibility**
5. Recognize waste pickers, especially women as contributors to public health, circular economies, and environmental stewards.

THANKS

sonia.dias@wiego.org

