

Waste Pickers: Why are they there?

Suzan Oelofse, PhD

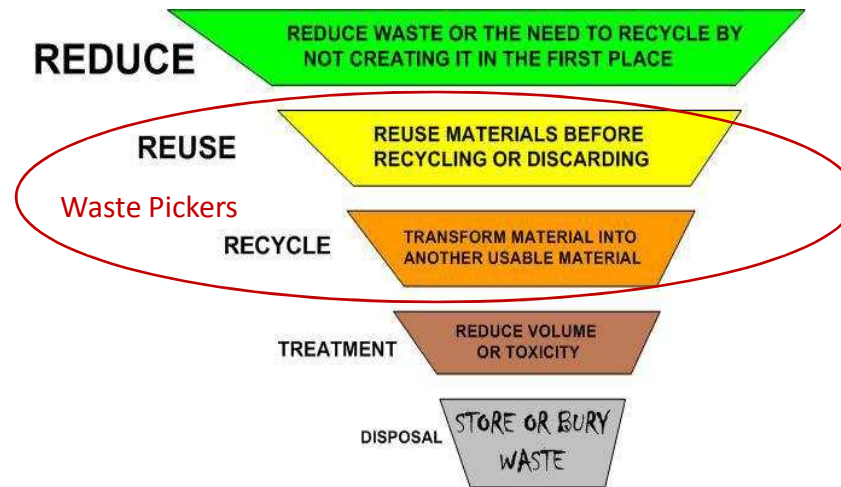
Principle Scientist : Pollution and Waste

CSIR: Natural Resources and the Environment

South Africa



Waste Management Hierarchy



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

our future through science

Introduction

- Picking is a survival strategy
 - Poverty driven
 - Response to unemployment (25.2% in 2010)
- No minimum education level required
- No age limit to picking
- Low skill required
- Comes with "on-the-job training"
- More than 90% of all payments are in cash
- Failing waste systems creates favourable conditions for picking
- Up to 2% of population in urban Asian and Latin American countries survive through picking
- In 2004 there were about 4 400 pickers operational in Johannesburg

© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

CSIR
our future through science

Informal sector waste pickers and entrepreneurs

- Do not pay taxes
- No trading license
- No social welfare or government insurance scheme
- Low-paid
- Unrecorded
- Unregulated work
- Individuals or family groups



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

Method

- Literature review
- Observations
 - Site visits to municipal waste facilities
 - Photographic records of activities
- Discussions with “entrepreneurs”



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

Results



Bad weather conditions does not deter pickers from picking



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

Results



No age limit to pickers selling recyclables at buy-back centres



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

Results



The importance of pickers are recognised – facilities are provided to store separated waste

© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za



Results



Building material and household items are recovered and sold

© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za



Results



Furniture and electronic goods are recovered and sold

© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za



Results



Plants are “rescued”, potted and offered for sale

© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za



Results



Shade netting protects salvaged plants in a make shift “nursery”



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

Results



Constructing and painting dog kennels – creating jobs on site



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

Discussion

- Subsistence
 - Number and age of pickers varies per facility
 - Children are common pickers at landfills
 - Informal pickers can earn up to R120/day
 - Waste with highest value are most sought after
 - Earning a daily cash income is important for subsistence living
 - Formal recycling sector recognise the importance of the informal sector
 - provide lock-up facilities for sorted waste at landfills
 - Allow picking at transfer stations

© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za



Discussion

- Entrepreneurial activities
 - Several entrepreneurial activities were recorded
 - No middlemen involved
 - Entrepreneurs can offer employment to others
 - Change in social status from pickers to craftsmen
 - Earnings are higher than from picking
 - Items of high value are recovered and sometimes repaired for resale
 - New items are manufactured using waste materials
 - Activities have potential to be developed further into formal businesses

© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za



Discussion

- Formalising the waste sector
 - Banning picking at landfills sends them to the streets
 - Street pickers are less productive and earn less due to distances to walk between bins
 - Encouraging scavengers to engage in other occupations usually fail
 - Licencing pickers could minimise problems
 - Mexico, Thailand, Egypt, South Korea
 - Supportive strategies can include:
 - Legislation of picker activities
 - Encouraging formation of cooperatives
 - Awarding of contracts for collection of recyclables
 - Public private partnerships with pickers



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za

Conclusions

- Informal recycling systems play an important role in waste management and subsistence living
- Formal recycling systems must build on informal systems
- Formation of cooperatives and micro-enterprises with organisational and technical support could assist with:
 - Social rehabilitation of pickers
 - Increase job stability and earnings of pickers
 - Enhance the effectiveness of their contribution to waste management
- Entrepreneurial activities as observed require a level of organisation in the informal sector
- Research are required to understand the dynamics of this system if such activities are to be encouraged and formalised.



© CSIR 2011 www.csir.co.za



Thank You

Soelofse@csir.co.za

Tel: 012 841 4333

Fax: 012 842 7017

www.csir.co.za

