

Hidden in plain sight: Waste pickers' environmental contributions

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(Illustrations by Phat Tale)

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Building Capacity for
Waste Picker Integration

Abstract of presentation:

Hidden in plain sight: Waste pickers' environmental contributions

Every garbage day, we all see people salvaging recyclables from our rubbish bins. Yet few of us stop to find out who they are and what they do. Ironically, reclaimers remain “hidden in plain sight”. In this presentation, Prof Melanie Samson outlines the crucial contributions reclaimers (also referred to as waste pickers) make to the environment, economy, and cities we live in. She also focuses on what you can do in your personal and professional lives to support reclaimers as they support all of us to deal with the global plastics and climate crises.

Before we can start talking about integrating waste pickers into EPR, we need to understand what exists





Reclaimers are already integrated



- They integrated themselves into the value chain
- Comparable to some European
- 70-80% post-consumer packaging and paper in 2015

(Stats from CSIR)

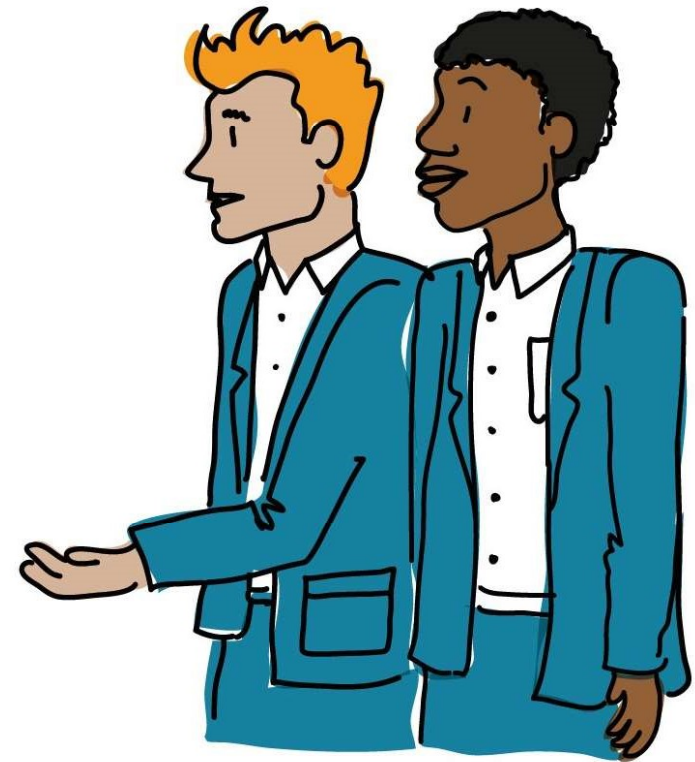
Reclaimers subsidize government and industry

We collect and transport the recyclables you need for free. We are subsidising you!

NOW



Waste pickers



Industries



With EPR industries have to stop our products from becoming waste. Our Producer Responsibility Organisations have to pay waste pickers and support integration.





.. so with EPR we should be paying YOU!

Thank you for stopping recyclables from going to landfills!

Finally we are being recognised and valued.

with EPR

We are giving your organization the recycling machinery you requested.

Waste pickers

Industries

Part 2

Waste Picker Integration Guideline for South Africa



Waste Picker Integration Guideline

- 2016 – 2019
- Supported by DSI and DFFE
- Research
- Participatory evidence-based policy making
- Participatory multi-stakeholder process including waste picker organisation, national and local government, SALGA, industry associations, NGOs, researchers
- Released in 2020
- Available at:
<http://sawic.environment.gov.za/documents/13012.pdf>



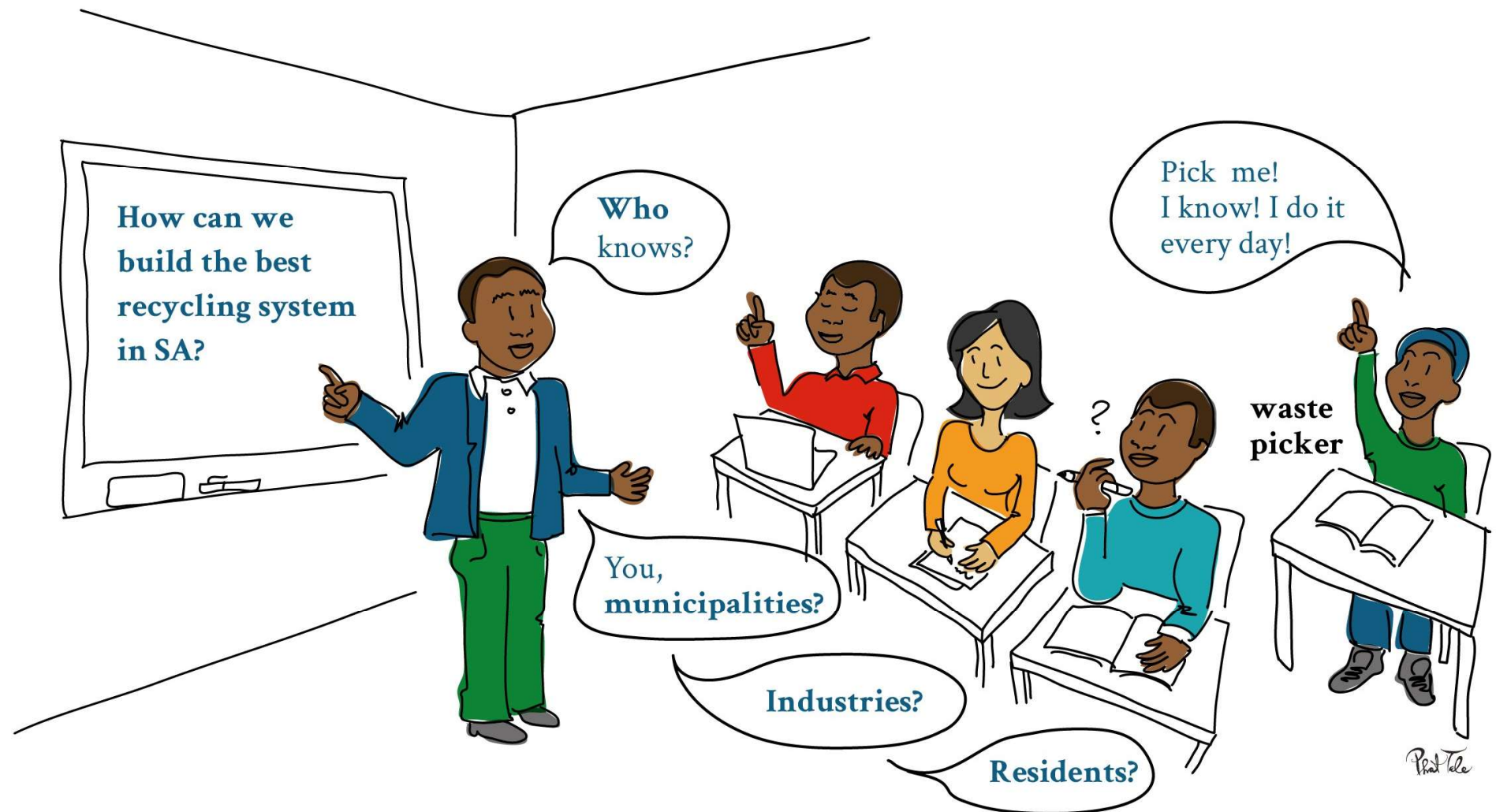
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Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries
Department of Science and Innovation



Recognising the real experts



Waste picker integration

- is the creation of a **formally planned recycling system** that **values** and **improves** the present **role of waste pickers**,



- **builds** on the **strengths of their existing system** for collecting and revaluing materials,



- **includes** waste pickers as **key partners** in its design, implementation, evaluation, revision, and



- **includes** the integration of waste pickers' **work**, as well as the **political, economic, social, legal** and **environmental integration** of waste pickers.



10 Waste Picker Integration Principles

1

Recognition, respect and redress

Waste pickers' role in the recycling system is recognised and taken into account.



Waste pickers are engaged respectfully. Unequal power relations between waste pickers and municipal and industry officials, as well as those rooted in gender, race, class, nationality and so on are recognised and addressed.



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2

Value waste pickers' expertise



Officials cannot presume to know what waste pickers want, how they are affected by changes in the recycling and waste management system, what the best form of integration would be, or how waste pickers work.

Successful integration programmes are **based on waste pickers' needs and interests** – as communicated by waste pickers.



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3

Meaningful engagement

Legitimate platforms are created to **meaningfully include waste pickers as equal partners** in decision-making related to recycling programmes and waste picker integration.



Waste pickers are supported to organise themselves so that they can better **represent themselves**.



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4

Build on what exists

Waste pickers' informal system for collecting, preparing and selling recyclables is **recognised and valued**, and provides the basis for the development of new formal **recycling programmes and contracts**.



5

Increased diversion and cost effectiveness

New waste picker integration and recycling initiatives increase diversion of recyclables from landfills through **cost-effective** means.



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6

Evidence-based

Waste picker integration and recycling policies and programmes are evidence-based. Piloting can assist in generating necessary evidence. Information generated through monitoring and evaluation **contributes to revisions and future developments.**



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7

Enabling environment

Enabling environments for waste picker integration are created at **national, provincial and local levels.**



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8

Improved conditions and income

Waste picker integration and recycling policies and programmes **improve waste pickers' working conditions, incomes and social security.**

Waste pickers are provided with alternatives and compensated for any displacement, deterioration of conditions, or decrease in income resulting from official waste picker integration and recycling programmes and contracts.



9

Compensation for services and savings

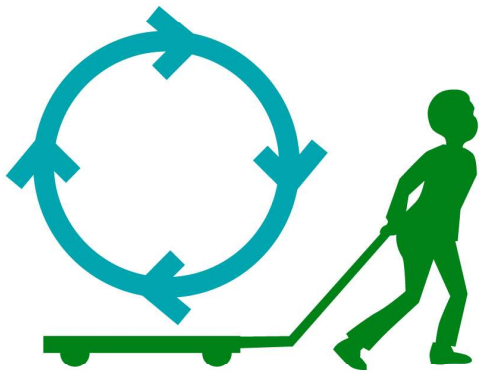
Waste pickers are remunerated for the collection **services they provide**, for **costs avoided** by municipalities and industry because of waste pickers' services, and for the **environmental benefits** they generate.



10

Holistic integration

Successful waste picker integration requires **changing how waste pickers are seen and engaged by residents, industry and government.**



Waste pickers are recognised as active and equal participants in political, economic, social, cultural and environmental processes.

7 Waste Picker Integration Questions

- Who/what is being integrated?
- Into what?
- Why?

- How?

- When?
- By whom?
- In whose interests?

Official recycling system

SoS system

They are already integrated.
Improve recycling rates, benefit municipalities, industry and reclaimers

Systemic planning and programmes

Clear pilots, short, med and long term

Collaborative committees

Everyone's interests



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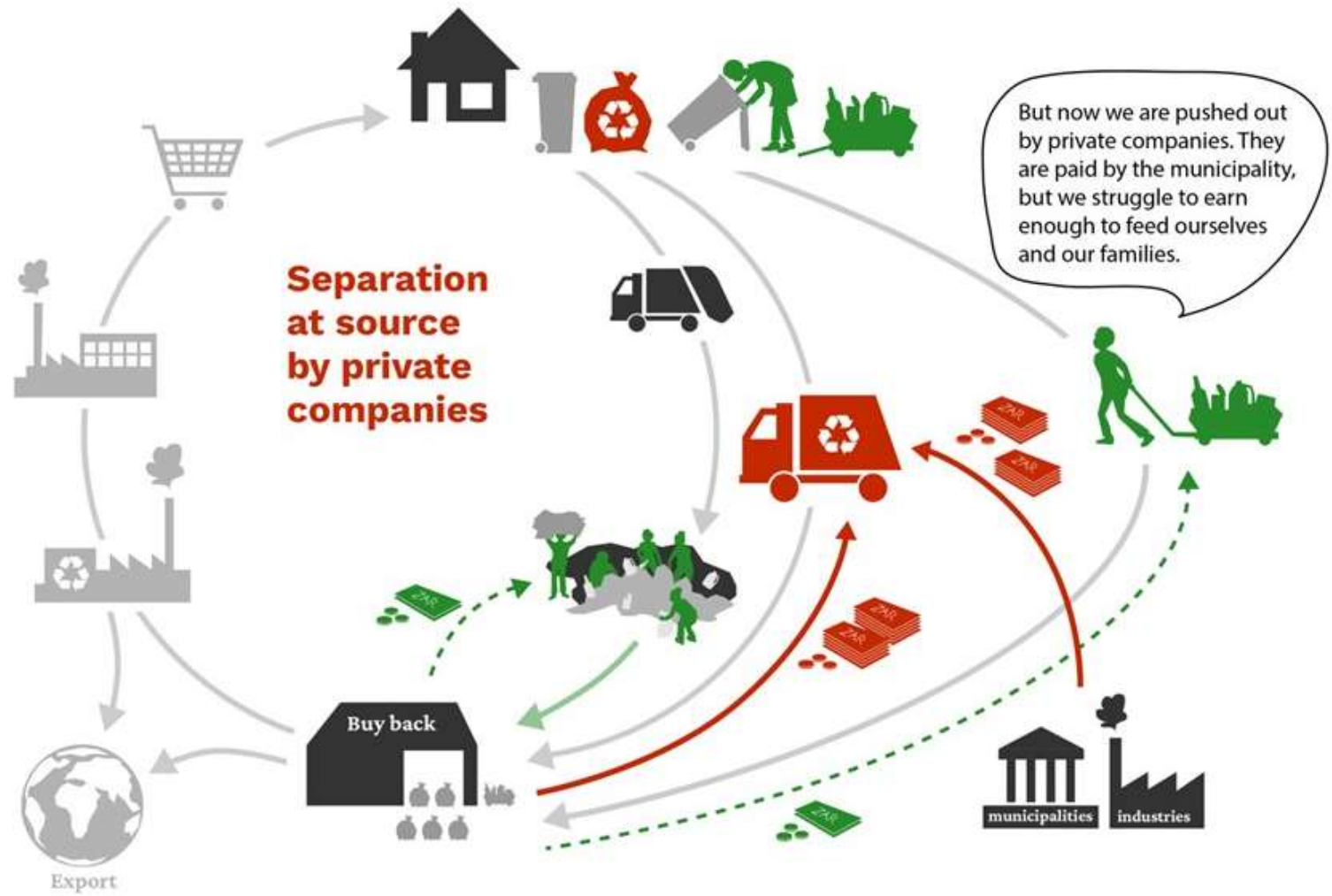


Part 3

S@S –

Waste Picker Dis-integration or Waste
Picker Integration?





Effects of exclusionary S@S

Street Reclaimers

- Lose access to material
- Decrease in income
- Increased harassment
- Deterioration in working conditions
- Sleep rough to access materials

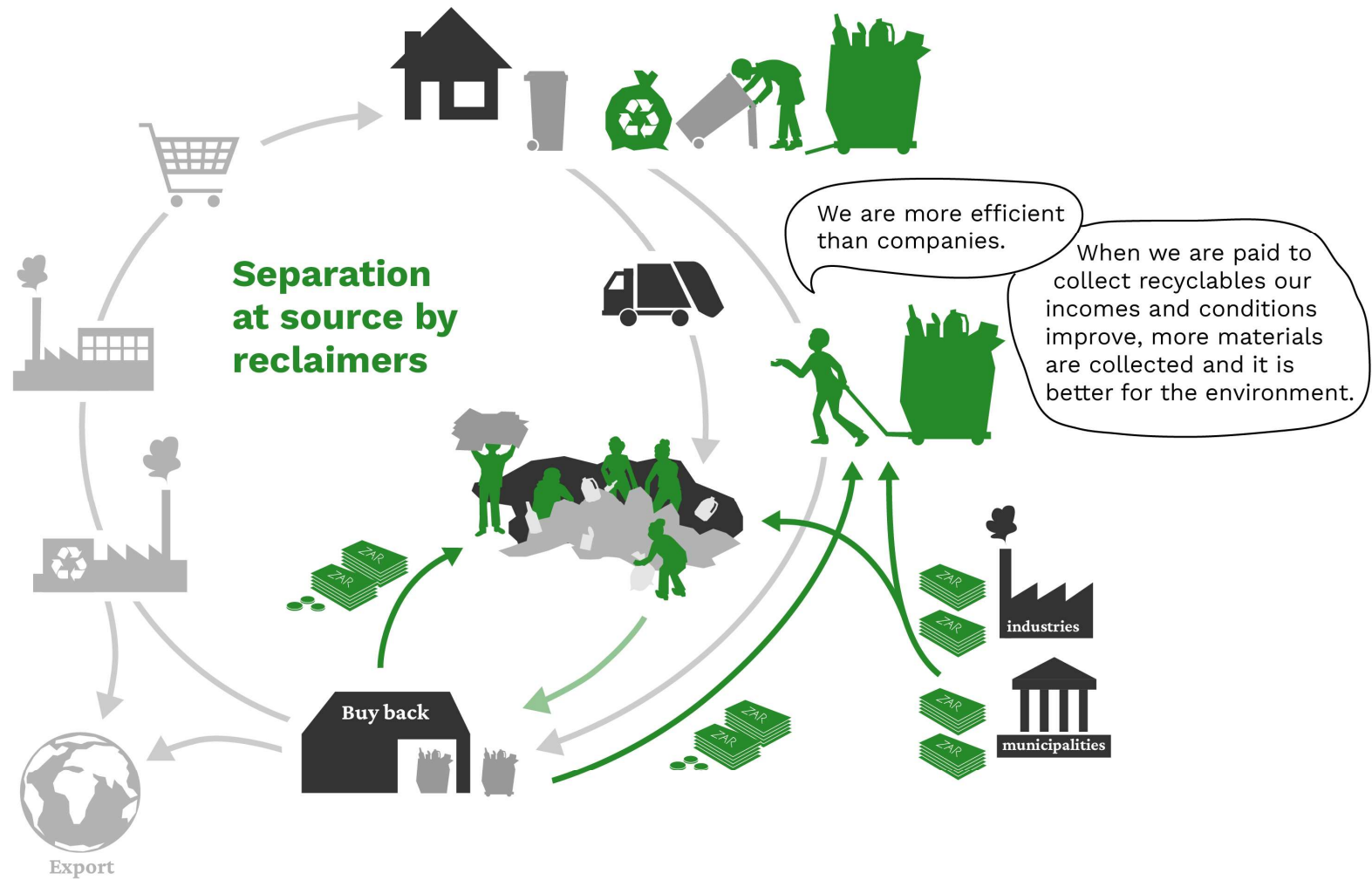
Landfill Reclaimers

- Source dries up
- Decrease in earning
- Fewer options to compensate

Effects of exclusionary S@S

Municipalities

- Reclaimers don't disappear, it is their job and their income:
 - Who can get their the earliest
 - Don't measure everything being collected
 - Tensions and protests
 - Increase poverty
 - Pay companies to collect materials they aren't collecting



Waste Picker Integration must be systemic

- Municipalities can capture tonnages that are already being diverted, but not recorded.
- Can more easily scale up
- It advances other objectives rather than being in competition with them
- Align with policy and legislative requirements
- Meet other objectives
- **Right now, this is a key challenge:**
 - **Separate policy spheres**
 - **Vested interests (ideological, patronage, corruption)**

Need evidence-based approaches
Willingness to learn and try new things



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Part 4

New legal requirements



2020 National Waste Management Strategy

- 2020: Guidelines adopted and implemented
- 2021: All metros have integration programmes in place
- 2024: All secondary cities have integration programmes in place
- 2024: 500 jobs created/decent livelihoods created in collecting recyclables.



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EPR Regulations – May 5, 2021 Amendments

5A1(m) – The Producer Responsibility Organisation must integrate informal waste collectors, reclaimers and pickers into the post consumer collection value chain.

5A1(p) compensate waste collectors, reclaimers or pickers, who register with the National Registration Database, for collection services and environmental benefits, through the collection service fee by November 2022. The collection service fee and the National Registration Database shall be reviewed annually by the national Department responsible for Environmental Affairs;

<http://sawic.environment.gov.za/documents/13172.pdf>



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EPR Payment System

- Payment approach based on ARO-Unilever-Wits pilot
- Payment per kg collected (R0.15/kg – not agreed)
- In order to make payment:
 1. Register reclaimers on SAWPRS
 2. Register reclaimer on tracking systems
 3. Register reclaimer on payment system
 4. Register buyback centre on tracking systems

SA Waste Picker Registration System

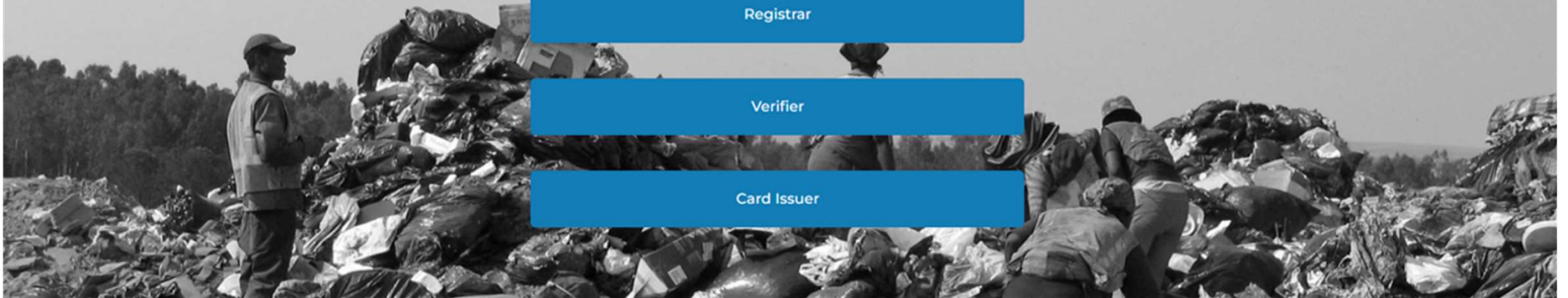
Welcome to the South African Waste Picker Registration System

Login As:

Registrar

Verifier

Card Issuer



EPR Payments and Integration Programmes

- Regular meetings
- BUT to date, no action and no expenditure
- No PRO is compliant with integration aspects of Regulations
- Only starting to register for payment now
- No disclosure of budgets
- No discussion at all on integration programmes or municipal access
- To date, no effective monitoring by government and no enforcement
- Need for government oversight and penalties
- Need government-led waste picker integration committee

The real experts are leading the way



What can you do?

1. Get to know the reclaimers who collect from your home and workplace. Greet them and engage with them as people in your community. Invite them to resident association meetings.
2. Ask what they collect. Separate those materials for them.
3. Talk to your neighbours and residents' association about creating a recycling with reclaimers programme in your area.
4. Find out who your company gives its recyclables to and when the contract is ending. See if it is possible to give them to reclaimers/a reclaimers cooperative or reclaimers company.
5. Reduce the amount of packaged goods you buy.

UNIDO Reclaim, Revalue Reframe Project and Website www.wastepickerintegration.org



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About and
contact

Understanding
reclaimers
and waste
pickers

Understanding
Waste picker
Integration

7 Steps for
Waste Picker
Integration

Case studies

Visual
resources

Written
resources

External
resources



- What
- Why
- How
- Registration
- Integration
- Toolkit

*"If women are not integrated
then it is not waste picker
integration!"*

This website

Who are reclaimers?

What is integration?

Thank you!

Contact details:

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