

# Palmer Street Recycling Facility

Reclaim  
Revalue  
Reframe

training programme



## Photo Essay

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#08



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**Professionalizing reclaiming with high quality working space, equipment and organized collections and sales**

There are few initiatives that have sought to provide infrastructure to ensure that reclaimers' work is done in clean, dignified and safe environments. Infrastructure including land, access to services (toilets, electricity, water), basic shelter and storage, provision for transport vehicles to collect and equipment (scales, PPE) can improve the conditions of waste sorting and selling and dignify the work of reclaimers.

### **Negative treatment of reclaimers**

Despite being responsible for 150 tons of recycled material daily in Durban, the negative perceptions remain. For women recyclers in particular, exploitation and harassment are often extreme. Inner city recyclers are overly policed and the police have an unsympathetic attitude towards informal workers. The police have regular clean up missions and residents have bad attitudes towards recyclers. Reclaimers are at times exploited by businesses – who may require them to offload goods or do other ‘free labour’ tasks in exchange for materials.



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### **Asiye eTafuleni (AeT)**

It is a facility that has been created through the joint efforts of an NGO and the City. Asiye eTafuleni (AeT) is an NGO that works alongside informal workers who use public spaces for their livelihoods and this includes wood sellers, recyclers, water providers and others. In AeT's work with informal workers and waste recyclers particularly, they have responded to the prejudiced and disrespectful treatment that street recyclers are subject to.





### **Establishing the Palmer Street Recycling Facility and upgrading an inner city park**

AeT went through a process with recyclers to find a piece of land. The site they identified was an unused site that the City had earmarked for a pocket park. “A ton of saved cardboard is the equivalent of 17 trees saved, says Richard Dobson of AeT. And so the plan for the park has been to have a 17-tree park with the facility on the side of it. This vision has been realized.



### **Palmer Street Recycling Facility**

Sibongile Muthwa is standing inside the cage she uses to store her cart and plastics at Palmer Street Recycling Facility. She is surrounded by plastics and wrapped in plastic...she's protected her clothing while she sorts by wrapping a layer of plastic around her waist. Her uniform of an apron and hat that indicates she's part of the Friends of Recyclers team offer further protection. Sibongile is working inside the recently opened Palmer Street Recycling Facility.

Sibongile says, 'People store plastics and cardboard for me and I collect and bring it here to sort. I go to a business that sells car parts, and to a big shop and to other businesses and bring the plastics here. There is a hotel that calls us to collect from them. And we usually sell from here on a Thursday', she says.



### **Working with private buyers**

Reclaimers set up efficient arrangements with buyers who come to the facility to buy the materials they have collected. This means there is little on-site storage and what storage there is, is short term.



### Prices

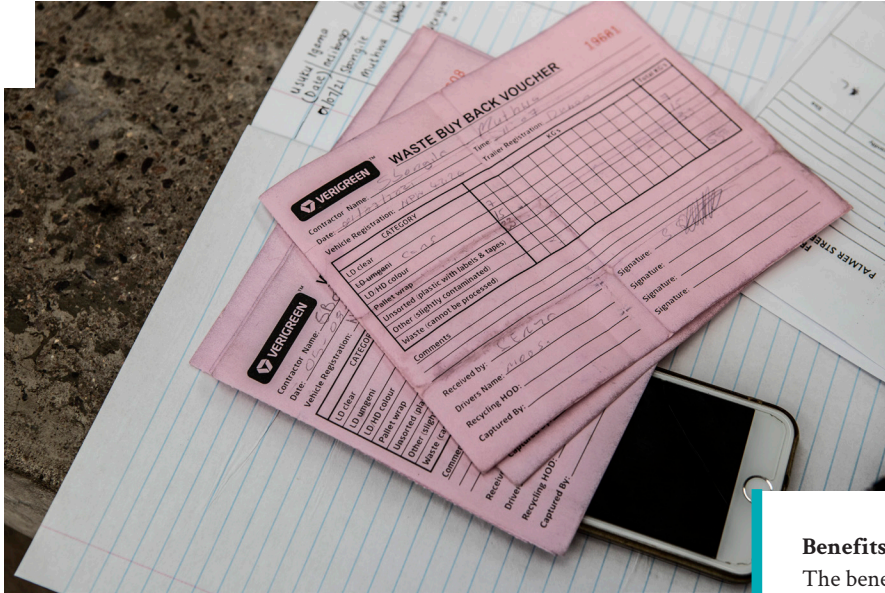
Prices for different materials can vary greatly between different places and at different times. In August 2021 these were the prices at Palmer Street - wrapping plastics – R3/kg; clear plastic – R6/kg; coloured plastics – R5/kg; cans – R17/kg and cardboard – R1.50/kg.



## Working with the municipality

For ongoing maintenance and operations AeT work with the municipality's Business Support Unit EM and the Parks Department. AET is managing the facility with the City's support. It is co-managed by the Parks Department who manage the toilets and the adjacent park. The , Business Support Unit manages the informal recyclers and issues the permits. The City also provides security for the premises.





### Benefits

The benefits of the facility include: the provision of a professional environment with a safe space, the possibility of increasing the quantity of recyclable materials they collect and provision of a space for organizing. It is an empowering model. The reclaimers can determine the price at which they want to sell and call buyers who meet their price.

Sibongile says it is good to have space to sort her materials, and to store her material and equipment safely. She is able to sell weekly from Palmer Street. And she earns as much in a week as she was earning in a month when she used to collect materials and store them at her home in Illovo township. She feels safe in the facility and appreciates that Parks Department looks after the facility and park. It's a clean and pleasant environment.





She says her work with other women, under the banner of Friends of Recyclers, and their uniforms and ID cards, and the formal place to work make it like a business.