

# Social Plans for Landfill Waste Pickers



A significant number of waste pickers work on landfills across the country. They are the last line of defense against the burial of recyclables in the environment. But despite their efforts, many landfills are reaching full capacity. When these landfills close, the waste pickers will be left without an income.

Landfill waste pickers are also negatively affected by separation at source, because its whole purpose is to prevent recyclables from being thrown away and ending up in landfills.

It is important to ensure that these people who laboured for many years to extend the lives of landfills and made important contributions to the economy and environment are not left destitute.

The NGO Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) sets out key principles to support reclaimers' livelihoods in the face of dump closures (Dias, 2018). **The core principle establishes that:**

**Any change to the way solid waste is managed—whether upgrading from dumps to controlled landfills, introducing recycling schemes or 'modernizing' a system—must begin with a comprehensive plan that considers the needs of the informal workers who are already engaged in gathering, sorting and recycling waste. Any suppressed activity should be replaced with another of at least equal value to waste pickers. And waste pickers must be involved as equal partners in all phases of planning and implementation (Dias, 2018: 2).**

The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) acknowledges that efforts must be made to minimise harm to reclaimers when landfills are closed. The same should apply when separation at source projects minimize recyclables going to landfills, which has profoundly negative consequences for landfill reclaimers.

The IADB also identifies that including reclaimers in landfill closure plans can create an opportunity to improve their conditions and incomes, provide them with new opportunities, support reclaimer organising and advance reclaimers' inclusion in solid waste management systems (IADB 2013, 10). The IADB therefore developed an Operational Guide on Preparing Informal Recycling Inclusion Plans that presents steps to follow to develop an inclusion plan (IADB, 2013). The Guide has been used in several countries and many of the ideas can be incorporated into processes to develop integration programmes and social plans for waste pickers in South Africa.

## References

Dias, S.M. 2018. WIEGO's Position on Dump Closures. June 2018.

Available online at:

<https://www.wiego.org/resources/wiegos-position-dump-closures>

IADB (Inter-American Development Bank). 2013. Preparing Informal Sector Inclusion Plans: An Operational Guide. Available online at:

<https://publications.iadb.org/en/preparing-informal-recycler-inclusion-plans-operational-guide>



**Building Capacity for  
Waste Picker Integration**

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