

WASTE WISE CITIES



UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Waste Wise Cities Newsletter #8

December 2020 -
COVID-19 and Waste Management



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The impact of COVID-19 on waste management

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 almost one year ago, the effect on different sectors has been immense, and waste management is no exception. Impacts include for instance, increased pressure on already struggling waste management systems, loss of livelihoods for people in the informal waste sector, potentially increased risk of being exposed to the virus for those working with waste, and increased use of single-use plastics.

There has also been a surge in the use of personal protective equipment worldwide, underlining the need for sound solid waste management systems: facemasks and gloves are essential, but have ended up in natural environments, potentially harming wildlife, marine life, and nature, because waste management systems are not able to handle the increased generation of these types of waste. In some African countries, it is estimated that several million facemasks are used every day, e.g., 171,508,138 in Nigeria, and 65,917,193 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These countries have limited options to handle them properly after use.¹

Also medical waste in general has seen a rapid increase from hospitals and other medical facilities. In China, the daily generation of medical waste increased by around 1,000 tons per day, with about 200 tons per day increase in the city of Wuhan.² Household waste has also changed in composition and amount during COVID-19. Some cities for instance saw a reduction in total waste generated, such as Milan, with a 27% reduction in municipal solid waste generated during lockdown. People bought different types of food during lockdowns,³ affecting the amount of food waste generated in households. Food waste has also reduced from restaurants but increased in other parts of the supply chain because of interruptions.

Fortunately, waste management services have been considered essential services in many countries worldwide, ensuring that the collection rates remain stable. However, there is a need for structural changes to ensure sustainable solid waste management systems globally.



COVID-19 and Recycling



This article was provided by Aditi Ramola, Technical Director at the [International Solid Waste Association \(ISWA\)](#).

As nations reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, waste operators had to continually adapt to changing circumstances and situations. The waste and recycling industry was deemed to be an essential service fairly quickly in many countries because of the importance of properly handling waste in a sound manner that doesn't further the spread of the virus. Recycling does not happen when a consumer places a 'waste' item in a bin or when materials are sorted and processed by waste management companies but only when the 'waste' item is converted into a new product. Even before the pandemic hit, the price of virgin PET had been declining and it saw a very sharp drop in 2020. Furthermore, with the rise in the use of disposable face masks, gloves, and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the crisis highlighted a trend in the increase of plastic waste. The fall in prices of virgin material and the increase in the use of single use items put a dent in the recycling of plastics. Surveys show that in some places manual sorting was stopped with potential recyclables being sent directly to landfills.

¹ Nzediegwu & Chang: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921344920302652?via%3Dihub>

² Sarkodie & Owusu: [https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10668-020-00956-y#:~:text=Failure%20to%20properly%20manage%20the,to%20toxins%20\(WHO%202020\)](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10668-020-00956-y#:~:text=Failure%20to%20properly%20manage%20the,to%20toxins%20(WHO%202020))

³ Amsa: https://www.acrplus.org/images/project/Covid-19/AMSA_Waste_management_during_COVID-19.pdf



Additionally, there were a few instances where recycling was stopped completely. However, the pandemic also revealed the true importance of recycling as part of the

manufacturing supply chain especially as the demand for paper goods (cardboard shipping boxes, toilet paper, etc.) increased. As the approval of vaccines

against SARS-CoV-2 marks the beginning of the end of the pandemic, the impacts on the waste and recycling industry will be felt for some time to come.

Waste Pickers in COVID-19 times



This article was provided by Hasiru Dala, a waste picker organization in Bangalore, India, that is part of the [Alliance of Indian Wastepickers \(AIW\)](#). AIW is a member of the recently formed [Global Alliance of Wastepickers Advisory Committee](#). Like Hasiru Dala, other waste picker organizations around the globe used their infrastructures to provide relief to people in need during lockdowns. More information at <https://globalrec.org/>.

Hasiru Dala joined hands with many in solidarity with wastepickers when their income dried up during COVID-19 lockdown. They were on the verge of starvation and malnourishment. Sampangi, a waste picker who now operates an aggregation centre, went on the streets to find waste pickers to purchase their collects and paid them above the market price. She felt that would provide a source of income to those financially crippled while keeping their dignity intact. During the lockdown, she suffered a loss of INR 15,000 [about USD 200] due to fall in prices of recyclable materials but she is glad that she was able to make a contribution to her community.

Another hopeful story was of Kumuda, a small scrap dealer now operating a States's aggregation centre, who created awareness videos about the effect of irresponsible disposal of PPE on workers with a clear instruction on appropriate disposal of PPE. This went viral over social media, the government, elected representatives and citizens retweeted and supported the cause. The bio medical waste generation doubled from households in the city.

Hasiru Dala supported more than 12,000 wastepicker families with 2-month groceries, nutritional food to pregnant, lactating mothers and infants. It also supported many with medication that the public health system failed to provide.

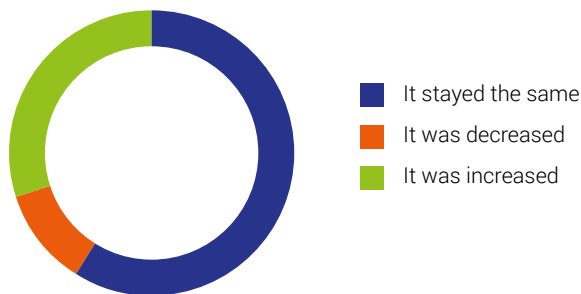
What our member cities say

A survey was carried out with Waste Wise Cities members on the impact of COVID-19 on waste management. 37 members participated, 20 from Africa, 8 from Asia and Pacific, 2 from Arab States, 3 from Europe and 4 from Latin America and the Caribbean. The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) carried out a similar survey with African Clean Cities Platform members. A total of 24 member cities and countries replied to that survey.

What is clear from the surveys is that the member cities have experienced many changes in waste management as a result of COVID-19. Both found that around 50% of the respondents reported changes in waste collection, either increases or decreases, and that the types and composition of waste changed in most of the cities, such as increased proportion of plastic waste, reduced amount of waste from commercial institutions and increased amounts of waste generated from households.

The surveys also looked at the impact on waste pickers and found similar results. Around 75% of the cities allowed waste pickers to keep working, for many with increased use of personal protective equipment and focus on handwashing. In the JICA survey, it was further emphasized that 83% of the respondents did not think they have enough resources to fully include the wanted prevention measures for waste pickers.

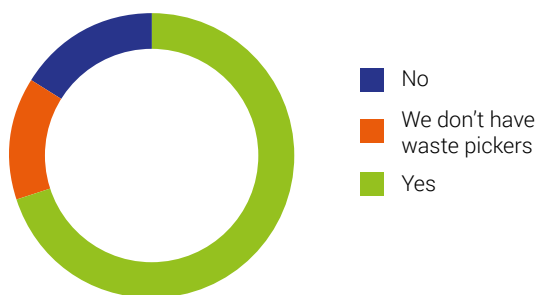
Has the budget allocation for municipal solid waste management been changed during COVID-19?



Half of the Waste Wise Cities respondents reported that they had not taken any specific measures for SWM during COVID-19, while the rest mentioned different regulations, some of which are stated here:

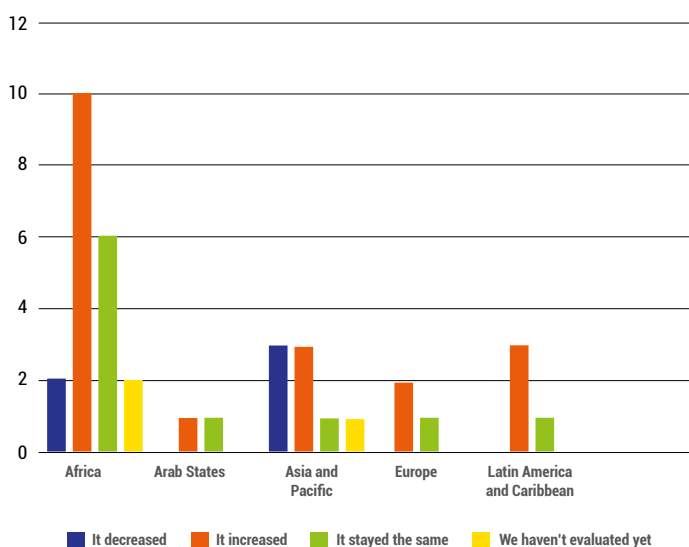
- Disinfection of offices and equipment;
- education and advocacy of proper disposal of facemasks;
- improved availability and use of handwashing or hand sanitizing stations;
- sharing of information in local languages;
- continuous medical controls of staff;
- preparation of waste guidelines; and
- distribution of personal protective equipment.

Were waste pickers still allowed to work during COVID-19?



The results from the surveys show that waste management systems are fragile many places, and often not resilient enough to remain fully functional during a large crisis such as a pandemic. Waste pickers are especially vulnerable in this situation, being those with the least security and therefore most likely to lose their job during a crisis.

Has the waste generation from households changed COVID-19?



Get to know our Affiliates

In this section we give our Waste Wise Cities Affiliates the possibility to introduce themselves.



Circular Asia

"If we want a circular economy, we need a workforce trained in circular skills" Ms Adrienna Zsakay, CEO of Circular Economy Asia

Our free online course 'The Essentials of the Circular Economy' delves into the history of the industrial evolution and how it led the way towards our current linear economy. There is one thread that unites the past with the sustainable and circular future we want. The single most remarkable feature that enabled the industrial revolution was skills training. A skilled workforce across every single sector of every industry was vital for the innovations and inventions to become part of society.

Skills development is part of any career trajectory; either as an exercise for self-improvement for a broader range of job opportunities or promotion within a company or employers maintaining skills and training to keep their competitive advantage. But are we training for the circular economy or sustainability? Do staff know what is expected of them to participate in a company's sustainability and circular ambitions?

What's the difference between recycling and Waste-as-a-Resource?

Recycling is an action

Waste-as-a-Resource is an outcome requiring a strategy to fit an economically viable circular system



While many people and organisations focus on education and awareness, the real work is in implementation, and the truth is most companies have no idea how to get started with the circular economy other than recycling. Even at that most basic level staff are ill-equipped to participate in waste-as-a-resource programs.

However, a company's participation in resource management will, before long, become a necessity to future proof their supply chain. Basic training for all staff will be critical to achieve sustainability and circular goals. This can be found at the Circular Skills website."

SOSO CARE

"At SOSO CARE we accept cash or recyclables as premium to provide low cost health insurance across 1170 hospitals in Nigeria for millions of people living below the poverty line which works for health inclusion and environmental sustainability.



We are looking to collaborate with institutions and companies to provide us with recyclables which can be sold and the proceeds converted into a health fund to finance the health insurance of the poor living in slums and suburbs in their host communities. With an average of 150 tons of recyclable waste of any form be it Plastics, paper, metallic waste or pet bottles of which Nigeria generates roughly 30 million tons and 20 billion pet bottles annually which causes environmental pollution and public health issues, we hope to finance health insurance for an average of 1000 people which works for the company, their host communities and environmental sustainability.



I am asking for your collaboration and support to reach corporations/ companies based in Nigeria on sustainability. I believe the shared value will be a win-win for these companies towards sustainability."

Waste Wise Cities Affiliates

Do you want to:

- Support Waste Wise Cities and improve waste management in cities around the world?
- Be an official partner of Waste Wise Cities and UN-Habitat?
- Show up on the soon to be updated Waste Wise Cities website (after the update)?
- Implement the Waste Wise Cities Tool?
- Read about your activities in this newsletter?
- Do much more?

Then [contact us](#) and become a Waste Wise Cities Affiliate! Together we can become Waste Wise!

Waste Wise Cities Achievements 2020



Waste Wise Cities Challenge



In the past months, our Waste Wise Cities Challenge Twins worked on identifying similarities and differences in their solid waste management systems. This exercise gave them an idea of areas they can support each other in, and where they can look together for outside knowledge. Additionally, on 21st and 22nd of October

they were trained by the Waste Wise Cities team on the application of the Waste Wise Cities Tool. This will allow them to do a rapid assessment of their solid waste management systems, based on the datapoints necessary to monitor SDG indicator 11.6.1 "Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed in a controlled facility, out of total waste generated, by the city". Building on the results of the assessment,

intervention areas for the improvement of the municipal solid waste management system will then be identified in a participatory approach.

Also, one of our twins Kushtia, Bangladesh, and Sunkoshi, Nepal, contributed to #UrbanOctober with a virtual tour of the waste management facilities in Kushtia. You can have a look [here](#).

UNESCO World Science Day 2020

On 10th of November 2020, UN-Habitat participated at the celebration of [The World Science Day for Peace and Development](#), organized by UNESCO Science Division, Bangkok.

This year's theme was "Science with and for Society in dealing with the global pandemic" and focused on UNESCO Green Academies, which augment the knowledge and skills of people via science and education as a key element to mitigate the adverse impacts of biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution and water calamities.

UN-Habitat contributed to the discussion by presenting its work towards open science and how it contributes to mobilise society to participate. Among others, the examples of the Waste Wise Cities Academy and its open online course were presented. UN-Habitat invites stakeholders working in science and innovation sectors to get in touch with us and explore collaboration to foster sustainable urbanization and circular economy, to restore human and nature balance.

If you missed it out, no worries, the recording will be made available [here](#)!



Webinar series Waste Technology Deep Dives

WEBINAR SERIES
WASTE TECHNOLOGY DEEP DIVES
Treatment of Organic Waste - Anaerobic Digestion

November 10, 2020
9:30 am (CET)
11:30 am (EAT)

REGISTER NOW!

Urban Pathways | UN-HABITAT | Wuppertal Institut | UN | WASTE WISE CITIES

On 10th of November 2020 we took another deep dive into waste technologies, this time starting with a focus on organic waste management. We had an expert from Sandec / eawag explain the fundamentals of Anaerobic Digestion, what it is, what it can be used for, when it makes sense, etc. followed by a practitioner’s perspective from Kochi, India.

The webinar is part of a series of Deep Dives into selected waste management technologies, organized by UN-Habitat’s Waste Wise Cities, African Clean Cities Platform and the Wuppertal Institute, under the [Urban Pathways](#)

[Project](#). The presented technologies are supposed to give local and regional government officials, as well as interested stakeholders, an overview of available technology options (which of course have to be assessed regarding their compatibility with the local situation before implementation).

You can find the recordings of past webinars and the registration for upcoming webinars [here](#). The next webinar will look at Black Soldier Fly Larvae Composting, don’t miss it!

African Cities become a member of African Clean Cities Platform!



On behalf of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, (UN-Habitat), we are happy to invite all African cities to join the African Clean Cities Platform, (ACCP). In 2017, UN-Habitat together with the Ministry of the Environment of Japan, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

and City of Yokohama, established the ACCP with the aim of promoting the Sustainable Development Goals, on waste management.

Both WWC and ACCP offer opportunities to cities for knowledge and good practice sharing, waste data collection for evidence-based decision making

and solid waste management (SWM) improvement project development facilitation. While WWC is a global programme, ACCP has a geographical focus on Africa with strong emphasis on major SWM improvement project development supported by the Japanese government: opportunities for trainings both in Africa and Japan, enhanced



Beach pollution at Kuta beach, Bali, Indonesia.
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access to funding opportunities from Japan and other donors and invitations to general meetings will be provided through ACCP. UN-Habitat, will play a central role in managing ACCP, aiming to develop major SWM projects by the 8th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 8) scheduled for 2022.

The first ACCP training opportunity will be Waste Wise Cities Tool online training, planned for January, 2021.

In view of the foregoing, should you be interested in joining the ACCP, please send an e-mail to WasteWiseCities@un.org with the name of the focal person and his/her email address (if you are already a WWC member) or sign and submit the [letter of intent for WWC and ACCP](#) by 31 December 2020. Membership to ACCP does not imply any financial obligation or otherwise.



Call to Action

- Follow local COVID-19 Guidelines!
- Use re-usable masks (properly)!
- Refuse single-use plastic as much as possible!
- Recognize and support waste workers!