

# Formalization from the Ground - creating jobs within urban solid waste systems: the case of waste pickers' cooperatives



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# Who are the Waste Pickers?

- Waste pickers are those who collect, sort and/or process household or commercial/industrial waste on the street, coop recycling facilities or in open dumps. According to the ILO Green Jobs report: 20 million worldwide.
- They can be independent (non organized) or organized (coops/associations/MSEs).
- Work individually or as family unit.
- In some countries they have **national movements, unions, federations, regional networks** (LA Network; India Waste Pickers Alliance).



**WAW**

**A database of  
Waste Pickers Around the World**



# Theoretical Framework

- We interrogate the co-production and governance literature (Evans,1996; Ostrom,1996; Joshi & Moore, 2004; Mitlin, 2008; Bovaird, 2007; Fung, 2015; Samson, 2015; Meagher, 2013) with the aim to reflect on the potential of grassroots led recycling experiences to contribute to the decent work agenda and, possibly, to the framing of different routes to formalization.
- What room is there for cross-collaborative models such as co-production or co-governance to support the rights of disenfranchised groups, such as informal recyclers, to be integrated within formal solid waste management systems in ways that meet the decent work agenda?

## Theoretical Framework

- Mitlin: coproduction extends citizen action *into areas where it was previously not present, building skills and capacities, including those to recognize and realize collective will; and this is particularly significant in group and collective co-production activities* (2008: 345). **Coproduction seen as a political process that people engage with to secure changes in their relations with government and state agencies, in addition to improvements in basic services** (idem, p.352).
- Samson (2015), takes a critical standpoint on the prevailing view that the involvement of informal workers in municipal service delivery necessarily serves the neoliberal privatization agenda and argues that *when the inclusion of waste pickers in municipal waste management systems is driven by waste picker organizations with a clear agenda to transform both their status and the nature of the state, it can promote a more inclusive, democratic alternative that transforms our understanding of the public* (p. 5).

# Grassroots lead cross collaborative recycling programs – Belo Horizonte, Brazil

- Main Features:
  - Partnership since 1993: 24 years;
  - **Co-governance:** Waste & Citizenship Forum;
  - Formal agreements btw the City and coops (MoUs, contracts): trucks, recycling warehouses, equipment, capacity building, environmental education;
  - **Payment for environmental service:** Recycling bonus.



## Grassroots lead cross collaborative recycling programs – Belo Horizonte, Brazil

- **Curbside** collection of recyclables in part of the Central and Southern Regions of the city.
- **Recyclables** collected by municipal trucks are **taken to coops** warehouses for sorting and further processes.
- Designated areas where **cooperatives** are the door to door collectors by contracts.



# Grassroots lead cross collaborative recycling programs – Belo Horizonte, Brazil

- Recycling containers in public areas.
- Collection by municipal trucks; recyclables taken to coops warehouses.



## Belo Horizonte (Continued)

- Coops collect recyclables from larger generators (industries etc) with their own motorised vehicles.
- Coops collect recyclables in offices downtown using **manual push carts**.
- Recyclables from all sources are sorted, weighed, shredded, baled and commercialized by coops. Revenues split amongst members according to internal rules established by each coop.





## Grassroots lead Cross Collaborative Recycling Programs – Pune, India

- **Background:** no household collection available in the past.
- KKP KP union 6,266 members started the service.
- Residents paid them directly.
- SWACH coop got contract with city to do collection from 300,000 households.



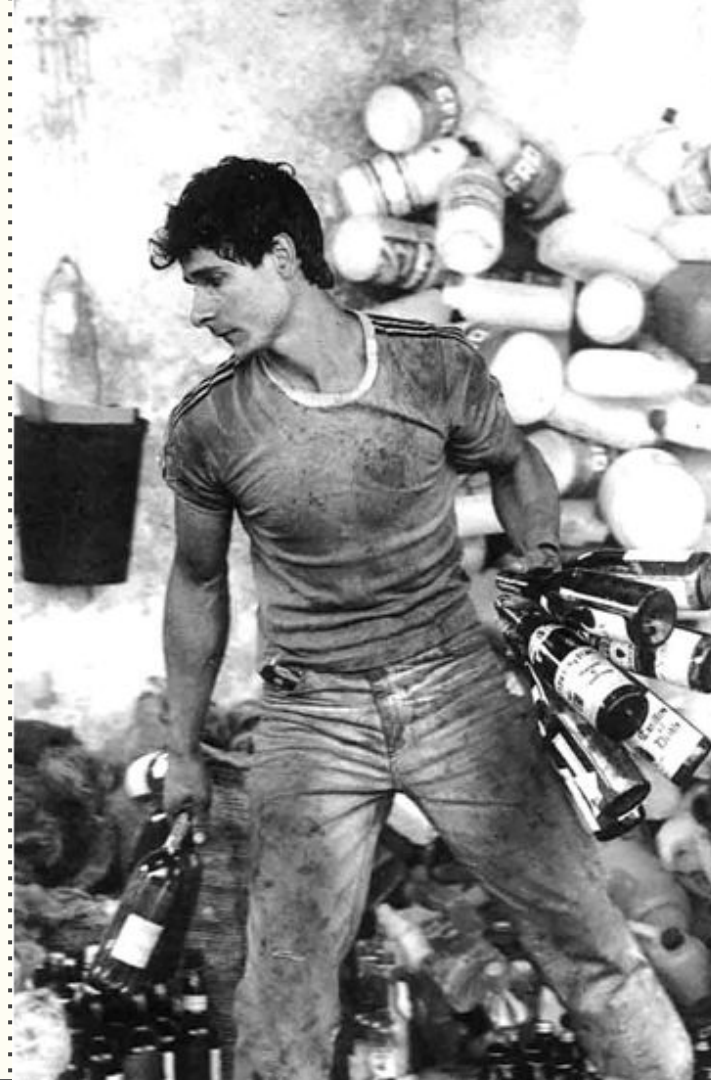
## SWaCH model addresses

- Conditions of Work (PMC pays for equipment and mgt costs)
- Health issues
- Contribution to recycling sector
- Climate change mitigation
- Compliance of MSW 2000 rules and Mah Acts
- Poverty Alleviation
- PPP
- Better waste management



## Grassroots lead cross collaborative recycling programs – Bogota, Colombia

- In 2011 the tender service collection and transportation of garbage, worth over 1.7 billion dollars, was canceled for not including properly waste pickers.
- 1800 waste pickers who drive a cart-horses, receive in replacement, little and middle trucks to continue doing his work.



## Current administration of Bogota actions, trying to construct a recycling model

- 8250 waste pickers received a payment.
- Census + qualitative recognition of wp's.
- Enabling 250 private collection centers, as weighing points.
- Daily Record of recovered recyclables are transported to recyclers.
- Easy access to banking services.
- Single payment every two months by the total of recovered waste, equivalent to USD 40 per tonne.
- Replacing 1800 (Universe 2600) animal-drawn vehicles, for trucks and business plans with seed capital).
- Promoting source separation, and the role of waste pickers in the collection.

## **Bogota... Special Feature - The constitutional court orders 275**

- Recognizes the wp's as a subject of special state protection given their poverty and vulnerability.
- **Recognizes its participation in public service** of collection and transport recyclable waste as a means to overcome their vulnerability, and recognizes the need of payment.
- Recognizes and encourages the entrepreneurial potential of wp's, their environmental and economic contribution, and their right to grow up in the value chain.
- Responsibility to local authorities as responsible for these affirmative action.

## Three cases - Lessons

- Grassroots organizations had a **role in creating decent jobs and in shaping alternatives routes for formalization** through their political struggles to be acknowledged as service providers in municipal recycling schemes.
- While cooperatives and co-production models can be often associated with the neo-liberalization agenda we argue that there are also examples of transformative experiences in the waste sector.
- In many developing cities, in the absence of municipal recycling systems, waste pickers' organizations have been formed and have been fighting for integration into waste management schemes and by doing so have contributed to **challenge conventional modes of SW governance**.

## Conclusions

- Cooperatives can contribute to decent work by: tackling social and economic exclusion of marginalized groups; creating ways to extend social protection for informal workers; playing a role in enhancing channels of social dialogue and political negotiations; contributing to rights at work by helping in the mitigation of economically vulnerable and physically risky work conditions, and by being a source for building women's empowerment.
- **Grassroots led coproduction** - Inclusive recycling can offer **alternative paths for formalization** and improve working conditions that eventually meet the decent work agenda.

# Conclusions

- **Formalization requires:**
  - Legal framework that recognizes access to waste as a livelihood resource;
  - Provision of proper contracts (covenants, memoranda of understanding, and others);
  - Payment for collection and environmental services (“diversion rate”);
  - Provision of infrastructure for sorting and capacity-building;
  - Social protection schemes;
  - Programmes to address gender equality and specific risks (child labour, childcare);
  - Platform that ensures fair representation and real influence for workers.

The identification of and support for grassroots strategies for waste pickers as service providers within solid waste systems may hold the key to the future of their important work.



# Thank You!

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