

Cooperativa Recicla Ourinhos

Ourinhos, Brazil



COOPERATIVA RECICLA OURINHOS
Nossa cidade mais limpa e sustentável



Recicla Ourinhos members mobilize to increase awareness of the valuable service they provide.
Photo: Recicla Ourinhos

Recicla Ourinhos Ourinhos, Brazil

Recicla Ourinhos is a cooperative whose 80 members are contracted by the municipality to provide services for collection, assessment, improvement and commercialization of recyclable solid wastes in the Brazilian city of Ourinhos.

Origins in Struggle

Recicla Ourinhos grew out of the determined efforts of about 100 *catadores* working at the city landfill. These women and men collected recyclables under terrible conditions that exposed them to infections and diseases.

Aware that they needed to unite in order to achieve more dignity and better working conditions, the *catadores* – with the support of the Department of Social Welfare in Ourinhos – founded an association in 2003.

Sixty members, most of them women, then started providing recyclable material collection, separation, pressing, and marketing services for the municipality.

The service was initially implemented in only a small portion of the city, so only some of the *catadores* were able to work outside the landfill. In 2009, the *catadores'* association, in collaboration with professors and students of the University of Sao Paulo and members of the NGO Cáritas Diocesana, launched a forum on Selective Collection that was widely attended by municipal authorities and the public. This sparked the creation of the cooperative association in 2010, which then became an official part of the city's urban cleaning system. A contract was signed with the SAE (Superintendent of Water and Sewage), giving the members a monthly payment for their services. This inclusive model made it possible for all waste pickers to leave the landfill.

The *catadores* went on to increase their monthly earnings and production, and to gain guaranteed Social Security benefits.

The city's Selective Collection Law ensures social and economic inclusion for *catadores* in the years ahead.

Recognition and Support for Important Work

The mayor of Ourinhos, Toshio Misato, and his government have supported the *catadores* status as professionals. The city has provided the cooperative association with an area that was developed into a warehouse, offices, a cafeteria, washrooms and locker rooms to provide a welcoming, dignified workspace. The Recicla Ourinhos space is an outward sign of the respect and support that the *catadores* have won.

In addition to their service to the municipality, the *catadores'* work in segregating and recycling materials offers environmental benefits. Today, in addition to its core work, Recicla Ourinhos makes presentations in schools about the importance of selective collection for the environment and for social inclusion.

Recicla Ourinhos has signed an agreement with the Bank of Brazil Foundation (FBB) through which the cooperative is receiving funds to invest in the purchase of new equipment (for example a shredder, a forklift, and hydraulic presses). This equipment will lead to an increase in the productive capacity of the cooperative, allowing it to increase billing and income, and include new jobs.

National Network

An affiliate of the MNCR (National Movement of *Catadores*), Recicla Ourinhos works to help other groups of *catadores* strengthen and set up associations or cooperatives. Recicla Ourinhos also plays a major role in the fight to implement selective collection models that involve the *catadores*, and to establish networks of *catadores'* cooperatives for commercialization in other cities.

Among the most important achievements of the waste pickers in Brazil has been the creation of a National Solid Waste Policy, which allows for better recognition of the profession. Through this achievement, municipal governments have been able to contract *catadores* cooperatives to participate in the selective waste collection in municipalities. "That changed our lives," says Matilde Ramos da Silva, president of Recicla Ourinhos (she is also president of the Western Sao Paulo Regional Association of Waste Pickers). She hopes ongoing struggle and solidarity will rescue thousands of other *catadores* in other municipalities from the dangerous conditions of landfills.

MNCR is advocating for *catadores'* right to create cooperatives and for the government to help *catadores* gain greater income from the solid waste they collect so that their livelihoods will be improved.



Recicla Ourinhos works with regional and national organizations, including the National Movement of *Catadores*. Photo: Recicla Ourinhos

Relevant Publication

Refusing to be Cast Aside: Waste Pickers Organizing Around the World
edited by Melanie Samson, 2009, WIEGO.

All WIEGO publications and resources are available on our website, www.wiego.org, and can be downloaded for free.



Recicla Ourinhos president with the president of Brazil at an MNCR event. Photo: Recicla Ourinhos

Cooperatives for Informal Workers' Rights and Sustainable Livelihoods!

Cooperatives create jobs and help improve livelihoods. But cooperatives are more than economic entities; they are an essential part of an alternative economy in which strength lies in social solidarity. Cooperatives allow workers to raise their voices together in the fight for recognition, political power and social protection. Just as pooled resources can achieve better economic outcomes and offer more stable livelihoods for informal workers, united voices can create political change and improve social standing.

WIEGO supports informal workers' cooperatives in their struggle for a better life.