



Health and Safety Guidelines for Waste Pickers in South Sudan

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ACRONYMS

HHCW	Hazardous Healthcare Waste
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ID	Identification
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISWM	Integrated Solid Waste Management
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MSWM	Municipal Solid Waste Management
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PET	Polyethylene Terephthalate
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SME	Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise
SSDO	South Sudan Development Organisation
SWM	Solid Waste Management
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objective

This document reviews the practices of waste pickers at selected waste disposal sites in South Sudan and makes recommendations to improve their health and safety. The recommendations include steps that UNEP and other international organizations can take to improve the conditions for waste pickers’.

The report draws on information from the two dump sites serving the capitol city, Juba—the Lagoon dump site and the Digala dump site—and from the sites serving the municipalities of Wau, in the northwest, and Malakal, in the northeast of the country.

1.2 Methodology

This report is based on a number of activities undertaken throughout 2012 and 2013:

- Field work done on numerous visits to both the Lagoon and Digala dump sites;
- Observations made by Jada Albert, a consultant for UNEP, on dump sites close to Wau and Malakal;¹
- Review of relevant reports and documentation, including the South Sudan Development Organisation report *Survey of Health and safety of Waste Pickers at Lagoon Dump Site, Juba* (the report is provided in Attachment 3);
- Interviews with key stakeholders, including:
 - Waste pickers at the Lagoon dump site and Digala dump site (the Digala site is no longer functional);
 - Senior representatives of the Juba City Council;
 - Senior officials of the administrative division of Rajaf Payam;
 - Senior representatives of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA);
 - Project staff from UNEP’s South Sudan office and other UN agencies.

¹ Albert, Jada. 2012. Solid Waste Management Plans for the Municipalities of Malakal and Wau. Juba: UNEP.

1.3 Implementation of Proposed Guidelines

Section two describes the health and safety hazards faced by waste pickers. Section three proposes guidelines to address those hazards. To be effective, these guidelines will require the cooperation of numerous entities, principally:

- The legal entity responsible for the operation of the individual waste disposal site, which in most instances is the county or the payam where the site is located. (A payam is the administrative division below the county level.)
- Relevant government ministries and local authorities, such as the Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Labour, Public Service and Human Resource Management; Rajaf Payam; and Juba County, all of which can provide on-site toilet and wash facilities.
- Waste pickers, whether acting individually or in a cooperative, who are responsible for complying with these guidelines to the extent practicable.
- International humanitarian and development agencies, which can assist with educational and livelihood initiatives to support women and children engaged in waste picking.

2. BACKGROUND

In South Sudan, as is the case throughout most of the developing world, a significant and growing number of individuals—known as waste pickers—earn a living by salvaging recyclables from the waste stream for income or personal consumption.² Waste pickers are often uneducated rural migrants who sift through trash heaps or dump sites looking for plastics, metal, and glass to sell to middlemen, who then send the materials to be recycled. These informal workers represent a significant proportion of the world’s working poor. In general, they have low and insecure incomes, and lack legal protections and social security.

It is estimated that this informal system results in recycling rates of almost 50% for plastics across the developing world, compared to less than 10% in the United States—which is why waste pickers have been called the “invisible environmentalists.”³ Both within South Sudan and globally, waste pickers also contribute to the conservation of natural resources and energy by reducing the use of virgin materials and reducing air and water pollution from dump sites. They also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the reuse of materials.

Waste picking provides a cushion for many who lose their jobs during times of war, crisis, and economic downturn in countries that do not have welfare systems. It is also one of the few work opportunities available to people who lack formal education or job experience.⁴ Rapid urbanization in South Sudan, coupled with the long-standing conflict with Sudan, has facilitated the expansion of waste picking by creating a large pool of unemployed and underemployed residents with few other means of earning a livelihood.

Further, and equally important in the local context, waste pickers divert significant amounts of waste away from the tipping cells (where trucks dump the waste) at the dump sites and therefore extend the operational life of the dumps—thus saving considerable costs to the authorities by delaying the need for investment in new disposal facilities.

² Many different terms are used to refer to people who salvage recyclables from the waste stream for sale or personal consumption. In 2008, however, participants of the First World Conference of Waste Pickers chose to use the term “waste picker” for English usage to facilitate global communication. The term “scavenger” is also commonly used, but many waste pickers find the implied comparison with animals demeaning. See Samson, Melanie. 2008. *Refusing to be Cast Aside: Waste pickers Organizing Around the World*. Cambridge, MA: WIEGO.

³ http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/12/out-of-indias-trash-heaps-more-than-a-shred-of-dignity/?_r=0.

⁴ Christine Booner and Dave Spooner (2012). *The Only School We Have. Learning from Organizing Experiences Across the Informal Economy*. Cambridge, MA: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organising (WIEGO).

3. HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS FOR WASTE PICKERS

3.1 General

Health and safety is primarily concerned with the adaptation of work and the workplace to the physical and mental capacities, limits, and needs of workers.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) jointly adopted a definition of health and safety in 1950 and revised it by mutual consent in 1995:

The promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations; the prevention amongst workers of departures from health caused by their working conditions; the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health; the placing and maintenance of the worker in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities; and, to summarize, the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job.

In practice, health and safety involves assessing risk and then modifying systems to mitigate or eliminate it. In determining levels of risk, there are a number of factors to be considered:

- The nature of the work being undertaken;
- The environmental conditions under which that work is conducted;
- The preexisting health of the individual worker; and
- The availability of resources to improve a given working situation.

The development and adoption of appropriate health and safety practices for waste pickers in South Sudan is a challenging undertaking, but is central to their well-being.

3.2 The Risks of Waste Picking

Waste pickers within South Sudan, and indeed around the globe, face many serious risks to their health and safety.

- They risk being killed or severely injured by moving equipment, such as bulldozers or trucks carrying waste, particularly when the vehicles are reversing. It was reported by the site supervisor, and confirmed by numerous waste pickers, that a small child was recently

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