



Advocacy Toolkit and Guide

“My Waste, Our Wealth”

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Introduction

This advocacy toolkit and guide, “**My Waste, Our Wealth**”, has been developed by UN-Habitat to guide city authorities in sensitizing its community to waste management issues and in promoting sustainable day-to-day practices that can support the county in improving waste management in the long term. **This advocacy toolkit and guide aims at fostering behavioural change at the community level to achieve sustainable resource and municipal solid waste management** in cities.

Waste management intervention should go hand in hand with awareness and sensitization activities. It is essential that the community understands how the plant will work, which technologies will be involved, how they can gain from it and how their role is crucial for its success and to maximize its benefits. Indeed, besides an appropriate regulatory framework, strong technical capacity and support, and adequate financing mechanisms, **a critical component in any waste management system is public awareness and participation**. Waste is the result of human activities and every citizen has to understand the challenges and hazards concerning waste handling, as well as the important part he or she plays in transforming waste into wealth.

Humans are the key element in the waste cycle: from extraction and processing of raw materials, over the manufacturing of products to their disposal. Depending on how well a community is informed and aware of what type of waste it generates and its potential impacts on the natural ecosystem and human health, a waste management system can bring benefits and generate wealth or cause serious environmental and health hazards.

In order to facilitate awareness raising on solid waste management issues and solutions, this toolbox was developed. It includes suggestions on activities to organize and the most relevant target groups.

Campaign goals

The advocacy toolkit and guide, “My Waste, Our Wealth”, is a community education and awareness strategy designed by UN-Habitat to support cities in its commitment to establish a sound waste management system in the county.

The desired goals of implementing the strategy are:

- **Rethink**
 - ❖ To rethink the entire approach to municipal waste, including decisions on consumption (refuse), production (reduce), reuse and recycling;
 - ❖ To change the mindset of citizens towards considering waste as a valuable resource that can benefit the whole community and the natural environment.
- **Engage**
 - ❖ To organize events and activities targeting all community members that encourage continuous action and sharing of success stories on solid waste management;
 - ❖ Special focus should be given to children and youth, therefore highly engaging actions or programs must be tailored for this target groups.
- **Act**
 - ❖ To encourage day-to-day action in households and schools, at the work place and community level to improve solid waste management;
 - ❖ To value and recognize the work of waste pickers in recovering recyclable materials and to improve their working conditions.

The aim of the campaign is to **promote behavioural change at community level that will result in the transformation of habits and perception towards perceiving waste as a resource.**

Remarkable differences exist between the attitude of an informed and environmentally aware person and of an uninformed and environmentally unaware person. While the latter puts all types of waste, such as plastic, metal, batteries and food, in the same container, the environmentally aware citizen conscientiously segregates them and understands the added value and critical function of waste separation at source.

In order for a campaign to be successful, it should be accompanied interventions for improving waste management, such as establishment of composting plant to produce organic fertilizer from food waste; biogas plant to generate biogas for cooking or to be transformed into electricity; machineries to recover and process recyclable materials (plastics, paper, metal, glass); sanitary landfill for non-recoverable and non-recyclable materials.

The community should be well aware of the technologies that will be utilized, how they can generate maximum social, environmental and economic gains for its members and what are their responsibilities and role. Engagement and support of the community is therefore crucial to maximize the resource recovery and energy generation potential, to guarantee safety and high quality of the by-products and for a sound waste management system in the long-run. In fact, if waste segregation at source is to be achieved, the community should fully understand why their commitment is crucial to recover resources. For example, if paper is contaminated with wet waste, the cost of processing it (both in terms of natural and financial resources) for recycling purposes will be much higher, than if the paper reaches the resources recovery centre uncontaminated by other waste. Similarly, if food waste is not mixed with hazardous, medical and e-waste, but is segregated at source, the chances for avoiding contamination of the feedstock and obtaining a nutrient-rich and safe organic fertilizer, highly increase.

Indicators to measure the progress of the campaign towards the achievement of the goals should be developed. Here examples of possible indicators related to the proposed interventions:

- At least 70 % of the total households and commercial institutions in the city will segregate waste at source (as minimum in wet and dry components);
- At least 80 % of municipal food waste is used to generate power (biogas) and organic fertilizer. This mean less than 20 % of the total municipal food waste generated in city will reach the sanitary landfill;
- At least 80 % of municipal solid waste generated is regularly collected and transported to the new waste treatment facilities (thus no waste is abandoned in the environment, no of undesignated dumpsite areas are created).

In the long run, these behavioural changes will support the city authority and its community members in:

- establishing a **sustainable resource and waste management** system that recovers resources and generates clean energy;
- perceiving **waste as a resource** and a means to achieve common wealth, including healthier ecosystems and access to basic service, such as energy, solid and liquid waste management;
- considering **waste management a responsibility of every citizen**.

Key campaign messages and slogans

Solid Waste Management is a global issue that affects everyone. Therefore, everyone must be accountable for it. While the amount of individual waste grows daily, municipalities all over the world are struggling to set up sustainable schemes for waste collection, treatment and

disposal. Poor solid waste collection and uncontrolled disposal are polluting air, soil, fresh and salt water, threatening human health. While being a potential time bomb, waste has untapped potential that can bring about positive opportunities. Resource recovery from the waste stream reduces consumption of natural resources, which are already overexploited and depleting. New circular economy business models create jobs and enhance income for the urban poor. In order to unleash these potentials, a change in the way waste is perceived as well as in consumption patterns must occur. Twelve key messages were developed to guide citizens towards behavioural changes and transformation of waste perception:

1. Together we are stronger: joint efforts for common goals!

Every citizen can make a difference by taking actions, at local level, that will benefit the whole community. If we put together our efforts and we commit to do our share to improve waste management, we will keep our environment clean and our ecosystems healthier.

What can I do? For instance, pick up a piece of litter lying around every day and dispose of it properly or participate in community activities and organize a clean-up.

Saving the world starts at home and in your neighbourhood!

2. I am responsible for my waste!

Uncollected waste ends up on our land and in our oceans, polluting our environment and posing serious threats to the ecosystems that provide food and water for us. Collected waste must be segregated at source to generate wealth.

You are responsible for your waste – make sure it is not ending up in the environment and it will be recovered!

3. Rethink: is it really waste?

Most of the items we throw away, are actually not waste but resources. For example, a glass bottle can be reused to store drinking water and can last for many years. Plastic bottles can be used as raw materials to make new t-shirts.

What did you think of as waste that turned out to be a resource?

4. Refuse: the burden of single-use items

Some items, for example plastic nets for fruits and vegetables, are used one time only, but they take hundreds of years to decompose. Why not shopping with your own reusable bags? Similarly, other disposable, single-use items such as plastic cutlery, plates, straws etc.

Say no to single-use items!

5. Reduce: less is more!

Reducing simply means to be more careful regarding the waste we generate. How many times do we buy items that we do not need? Next time you want to buy

something, reflect if you really need it, how it was produced, what its ecological footprint is, and how it will be disposed. These questions will guide you in making an environmentally friendly decision.

The most effective way to reduce waste is not to produce it in the first place!

6. Reuse: give presents to your family and friends!

Reusing a “waste” item means that you do not have to buy a new product. This way, you are utilizing an item again for the same or a different purpose. For example, an old pair of jeans can become a bag. The trousers I don’t fit in anymore, can be a present for my little sister or a friend. Besides reducing the amount of waste you generate, you also save energy and resources that would have been used to make a new product, as well as money.

Be generous with your friends, family and our planet - reuse!

7. Separate your waste

Waste is a resource if it is not contaminated. For example, paper can be processed and transformed into new paper, but it is a lot easier and of better quality if no food scraps are clinging to it. Segregation at source does not take much effort, it is just a matter of habits. Wet waste (e.g. food waste) goes in one bin, dry waste (e.g. plastics, glass, paper, metals) in another one, hazardous waste (batteries, bulbs, electronic equipment) are stored separately.

Three bins are all that you need!

8. Recycle: give your valuables a purpose

Recycling means that a “waste” product is returned to a factory where it is remade into either the same product or something different. For example, used aluminium cans can be recycled back into either new drinking cans or engine blocks for vehicles. Recycling has two major benefits: on one hand, it saves landfill space, and on the other hand, it recovers the material that was used to make the product in the first place. Moreover, recycling often can also save energy, water and other valuable resources.

If you cannot find information on recycling possibilities, get together with your neighbours and create a recycling initiative! Why waiting if you can act now?!

9. No food goes to waste!

Do you know that left-over food is a precious resource? It is used to create clean energy and to make organic fertilizer! Biogas and composting plants can be low-cost and low-tech technologies that transform food (as well as garden waste and sewage) into other resources. For example, biogas, that can in turn be used for cooking purposes (forget about all that smoke coming from charcoal and wood) or to generate electricity (finally no more power cuts). Compost is used as fertilizer to grow vegetables and fruits. Organic fertilizer also helps to restore nutrients in the soil!

Why don't you start composting in your garden or at school?

10. Proper waste management opens up job opportunities

When a functioning waste management system is set up, numerous job opportunities are created. In fact, managing waste streams requires coordinated and organized efforts by several teams. From collection, to transport, to recovery of resources and recycling, to final disposal, waste management offers plenty of employment possibilities.

If you want to push your community and our world towards sustainability, a green career in waste management is waiting for you!

11. Frontier technologies: call for innovations!

Technologies and innovations have dramatically changed for the better the quality of our lives. This is also true in the waste management sector. For example, technologies allow us to transform waste into other resources and new items, and eventually in wealth. In San Paolo (Brazil) for instance, an APP, named CATAKI, was developed to connect waste pickers with people generating waste. Swipe right on the APP for cleaner streets, protecting our planet and supporting livelihood opportunities for waste pickers.

Which other innovative solutions can transform your waste into our wealth?

12. My Waste, Our Wealth

Everyone generates waste, everyone is responsible for it and everyone can benefit from it.

Cleaner environment and healthier ecosystems mean improved quality of life for all, as well as availability of and access to resources for all. What can I do to ensure that my waste will be transformed into wealth for my community? By adjusting our daily routines to the above key messages/actions, we contribute to a cleaner environment and to healthier (and happier) people. Moreover, you can take initiative, for example engage your local government representative for waste management issues and raise awareness for existing problems.

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