

# Why the Work of Waste Pickers Matters in the Circular Economy

June 2020



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[Cover photos courtesy of WIEGO]

## Introduction and Context

Senior managers from five organizations representing waste pickers/waste collectors from around the globe met in 2019 on the Ocean Plastics Leadership Summit (OPLS). OPLS was a ship-based conference that took place in the North Atlantic Ocean. The conference was designed to accelerate solutions to the global problem of plastic waste. The goal of the participating waste picker organizations was to educate their colleagues about who waste pickers are, what they do, and why they are referred to as the “informal sector”. The *informal sector is neither taxed nor included in the GDP and Gross National Product (GNP) of a country* (Wikipedia). Waste pickers play a key role in cleaning up massive amounts of plastic waste that are otherwise likely to end up in the world’s oceans, rivers, and fields.

Companies from a range of sectors and supply chains on OPLS had a host of reasons to be interested in the informal sector. Some were primarily interested in identifying ways to mitigate the harm plastic waste causes in the oceans and other bodies of water. Others were interested in finding sources of used plastic to incorporate into new products. Still others were interested in developing relationships with waste picker communities to enable workers to become productive players in company supply chains.

### **WASTE PICKERS ARE ENVIRONMENTAL & ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTORS TO SOCIETY**

Millions of people worldwide make a living collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling materials that someone else has thrown away.

In some countries, waste pickers provide the only form of solid waste collection, providing widespread public benefits and achieving high recycling rates.

Waste pickers contribute to local economies, to public health and safety, and to environmental sustainability. While recognition for their contributions is growing in some places, they often face low social status, deplorable living and working conditions, and get little support from local governments.

-WIEGO

In addition to discussing their work in plenary sessions, the waste picker organizations on OPLS recognized exchanging insights and knowledge with each other was both exciting and beneficial. As a result of the synergy created on OPLS, these organizations have held quarterly electronic meetings and continue to explore opportunities to collaborate. Meridian Institute, also a participant on OPLS, was asked to facilitate these ongoing discussions and act as fiscal agent to distribute \$21,000 USD raised at an art auction that took place on OPLS. The purpose of the fundraiser was to generate support to make an immediate difference for some of the neediest constituents of these organizations. Each NGO was

asked to describe in writing how they would use \$4,200 USD. Meridian distributed the funds. The projects were successfully concluded, and written descriptions follow.

Just as these five organizations were exploring ways to raise awareness of work waste pickers do across the globe, Covid-19 sent shock waves thru the informal sector. Lock downs in many countries severely limited waste picker's (already tentative) access to food, clean water, shelter and personal protective equipment revealing how difficult life is for this sector. Global relief efforts are underway, but they are falling far short of the need. In the long-term, everyone involved in the waste picker discussion understands if the underlying conditions of these workers and their communities do not improve in basic ways, future pandemics and other urgent crises will further render this sector unable to play its vital part in the circular economy.

## **PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS**

**Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group (India)**

**First Mile, an initiative of Thread and WORK (Haiti, Honduras, Taiwan)**

**Mr. Green Africa (Kenya)**

**Plastics for Change (India)**

**WIEGO - *Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing* (Brazil and Globally)**

**WORK (Haiti)**

## **HOST ORGANIZATION: MERIDIAN INSTITUTE**

Meridian Institute is a mission-driven, non-profit organization that helps people from diverse perspectives develop and implement solutions to complicated, often controversial problems—big and small, global and local.

Meridian's approach brings together three elements: a deep understanding of the issues and the people, politics, and power dynamics that surround them; a dedicated, expert team; and an ability to foster constructive discussions, facilitate decision making, and support actions that shape the world for the better. We work to achieve meaningful consensus and action in the near term and to build our partners' capacity for cooperation that often continues for years, even decades.

Five services are key to Meridian's efforts: collaboration, implementation, strategy, research, and philanthropic support. Meridian works on a diverse range of issues, including environment & natural resources, climate change, agriculture & food systems, forests, health, oceans & coasts, resilience, science & technology, and water. Across issues, boundaries, and systems, our work is a catalyst for powerful impact.

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## Descriptions of Participating Organizations and Contact Person(s)

The following write-ups describe tax status of each organization, who to contact for more information, and the roles and responsibilities these organizations play in their respective communities.

### CHINTAN ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND ACTION GROUP (India)

#### Contacts:

Chitra Mukherjee, Head of Advocacy, [chitra@chintan-india.org](mailto:chitra@chintan-india.org)

Bharati Chaturvedi, Director, [bharati@chintan-india.org](mailto:bharati@chintan-india.org)

**Chintan** is a registered non-profit organization which works on Environmental Justice issues that impact the Global South. Our thematic areas are circular economy, waste, air pollution and urban ecology. In everything we do, the poor, particularly women and children, take centre stage. Chintan's model for change has five aspects.

First, our Voice for Waste program understands the challenges using participatory research as well as data from the ground. For example, our 2017 research identified both reduced earnings and increased plastics in landfills and rivers, on account of a new nation-wide fiscal reform policy. Our 2019 research showed that air pollution from waste sources was significantly higher than previously realized and required new approaches. We use data from the ground to shape implementation of our projects. Our zero waste work in the Himalayas helped us identify the type of plastics that go into rivers.

Second, we create diverse partnerships to advocate for and enhance policy change. For example, we worked with the Safai Sena, a waste pickers' association, to successfully advocate for the reduction of tax on plastic waste from 18% to 5% (we asked for no tax). [Safai Sena](#) is the registered association of over 15,000 waste pickers across 3 states in North India. Translated the name "Safai Sena" means *an army of waste recyclers*. Through local leadership, Safai Sena advocates for the recognition of waste pickers and small traders as a key aspect of waste management in India and against their stigma and exclusion. Chintan has a close working relationship with Safai Sena with whom it shares an office.

Third, we demonstrate our theory of change by implementing projects that directly fight poverty and influence public opinion. This has enabled Chintan to build a constituency to support for our vision. Our *Scavengers to Managers* program creates green livelihoods for waste pickers, handling over 100 tons of waste daily. An offshoot, Pick my Trash, offers recycling services run by the urban poor. Many waste pickers in India are children. Chintan's *No Child in Trash* program works with waste picker communities to phase children out of this hazardous work, enable them to obtain an education and prevent gender violence, a common experience for girls. We have impacted approximately 10,000 children so far.

Forth, we build capacity in order to embed ideas of environmental justice and foster leadership and action. Across India, from workers' unions to government officials, we train people and curate exchanges of ideas that will deepen the understanding on the vital issues we work on. Chintan's funding comes from Indian and Global foundations, corporate houses and big business, the Government of India and individuals.

## **PLASTICS FOR CHANGE (India)**

**Contact:** Andrew Almack, CEO, [andrew@plasticsforchange.org](mailto:andrew@plasticsforchange.org)

**Plastics for Change** (PFC) is a for profit, fairtrade organisation that brings a standardised recycling system to India's 1.5 million informal scrap pickers who sort more than 6,000 tons of plastic per day. PFC has developed a marketplace platform that streamlines the process for global brands and manufacturers to source consistent and certified high-quality recycled plastic from responsible supply chains. PFC material is currently the world's first fairly traded plastic (World Fair Trade Organisation). The ISO certified scientific segregation process ensures the highest quality source stock in the industry and PFC is currently the only supplier from India that has EU certified food grade rPET. Plastics For Change has developed a franchise model to fortify recycling businesses that pay waste-pickers decent incomes, train them in techniques that boost their incomes, and prevent the root cause of ocean plastic. Access to working capital is one of the biggest challenges of the informal waste economy, PFC's unique program of First Loss Default Guarantee provides stakeholders access to credit through partnership with financial institutions. This is helping S&E's recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Plastics for Change India Foundation**

Millions of people in India make a living collecting, sorting, recycling and selling materials that someone else has thrown away. In India, waste-pickers provide the only form of solid waste collection, providing widespread public benefits and to environment sustainability. While recognition for their contributions is growing in some places, they often face low social status, deplorable living and working conditions and get little support from local governments. The Foundation was set up in Sept 2019 as the charitable arm of Plastics for Change Recycling Corporation. The Foundations core objective is to provide dignified sustainable economic opportunities for the urban poor and improve their quality of life through social interventions. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the Foundation has stepped in to provide immediate relief to thousands of waste-workers that have lost their income, through distribution of food staples and hygiene kits.

## **WIEGO Women in Informal Employment, Globalizing and Organizing (Brazil and Global)**

**Contact:** Sonia Maria Dias, Waste Specialist, [sonia.dias@wiego.org](mailto:sonia.dias@wiego.org)

**WIEGO** is a network of 211 individual and institutional members in over 40 countries dedicated to securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women working in the informal economy. WIEGO keeps issues associated with the informal workers in front of policy and decision makers, builds capacity among informal worker organizations, expands the knowledge base thru a website and [publication series](#), and works to Influence policies at the local, national and international levels. The [WIEGO Team](#) consists of over 50 specialists based around the world. Only a small segment work full-time for



WIEGO. Many also play important roles as teachers, researchers and consultants for other institutions. WIEGO's operations and finance team is located in Manchester, UK; the communications team is based in Ottawa, Canada. Members of WIEGO's Program Teams live and work in more than 12 countries, in both the global South and North. This allows WIEGO to create and maintain strong partnerships and alliances in many regions.

**Cataunidos** is one of many networks that work with WIEGO. It is a membership-based waste pickers' organization, based in Belo Horizonte, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. There are 25 cooperative/association members in the Cataunidos Network. The network provides a number of benefits including: researching and negotiating prices and deadlines with buyers of specific waste streams such as plastic film, glass, white paper, cardboard and mixed paper. Cataunidos helps members find jobs by contracting with organizers of festivals and at other events. It also assists workers coordinate efficiently in securing needed volumes of specific wastes and provides a limited number of trucks and drivers to transport these materials to market, and is part of WIEGO's Cuidar health risks and workers safety project. Cataunidos is funded by its members and has received funds in the past from local, state, and federal funds, and is part of the Observatory for Inclusive Recycling (ORIS), which includes cooperatives representatives, NGOs, and universities. Eventually Cataunidos would like to process materials collected by their members.

## FIRST MILE (Haiti, Honduras, Taiwan)

### Contacts:

Ian Rosenberger, Founder and CEO, Thread, [ian@threadinternational.com](mailto:ian@threadinternational.com)

Vivien Luk, Executive Director, WORK, [vivien@dowork.org](mailto:vivien@dowork.org)

**First Mile**, an initiative of Thread and WORK, supports waste collectors in Haiti, Honduras, and Taiwan to recycle plastic and earn a dignified income while diverting waste destined for oceans and landfills. These recycled materials are then sourced to First Mile Member brands to be processed into consumer products that deliver a social, environmental, and financial impact. The First Mile is housed within Thread, a certified Benefit Corporation with an expertise in developing and executing product supply chains that are both human-centered and more profitable. Thread partners with its sister organization, WORK, a nonprofit with a mission to accompany the families they serve out of poverty through good, dignified jobs. Together, they work with multinational consumer products brand partners to map recycle material waste sheds all over the world, facilitate the economic and social connections necessary in each node of the supply chain to meet demands of its collectors and brand partners; recommend programming that both increases the amount and quality of waste that can be diverted, and improves livelihoods, and implements programming that ensure the social responsibility of the supply chains.

First Mile has also expanded and improved low-value recycled polyethylene terephthalate ("rPET" or "plastic bottles") reclamation supply chains in three countries over five years to support jobs for people living in poverty. So far, these chains have diverted approximately over 100 million plastic bottles from landfills and oceans and have provided income opportunities for over 2,000 people. First Mile collectors are waste agnostic and can be incentivized to collect and aggregate a variety of waste materials.

First Mile has developed processes and programming to ensure that plastics that could otherwise end up in rivers and oceans are actually collected and recycled, and thereby channeled into the mostly

coastal and need-based communities that the team serves as community revenue and/or personal income. These supply chains are designed to lower the barrier of entry for corporations (originally apparel companies, but now any company that uses plastic) to participate in the circular plastics economy. Here are several of the issues in the First Mile the team assists with:

- Decreasing child labor
- Improving poor environmental conditions (burning landfills, flooding/standing water, higher rates of sickness and disease, injury from other waste streams, etc.)
- Undercutting punitive lending
- Mitigating price gouging and slow payment from local recyclers

Depending on the context and needs of the particular supply chain, First Mile's in-country impact teams implement a set of tools to help strengthen recyclers' and collection center owners' businesses in the First Mile.

Some tools that First Mile and its partners implement to support collection center owners include:

- Business training that covers cash management, accounting, center operations, commodity pricing, and the importance of diversifying materials for sale
- Interest free microfinance to support the growth of collection centers or aggregators and combat punitive lending or "waste mafias"
- Industry meetings as a forum for center owners to organize, pool influence and collectively address challenges
- Disaster preparedness training and relief
- Health and safety training

## MR. GREEN AFRICA (Kenya)

**Contact:** Keiran Smith, Co-Founder & CEO, [keiran@mrgreentrading.com](mailto:keiran@mrgreentrading.com)

**Mr. Green Africa** is a Nairobi-based collecting, sorting and recycling company that produces high quality recycled plastics in and for East Africa while achieving tangible social and environmental impacts. Its materials are fairly traded with a traceable social and environmental impact. Mr. Green Africa provides monetary incentives to marginalized waste pickers by offering premium prices for the plastics they collect. Mr. Green Africa believes in the importance of localized value chains with clear and long-term benefits from the sustainability angle. Therefore, they supply to a local and regional customer base, enabling them to achieve their circular economy goals.

By trading with Mr. Green Africa, waste pickers benefit from a variety of supplier loyalty programs and services as listed below. Mr. Green Africa strives to provide stable income, while also enabling a dehumanized population to regain their dignity.

**School Program:** The objective of the project is to create awareness on plastic waste and recycling, drive behavior change among the young school going generation, improve livelihoods and create a healthier and cleaner environment.



**Loyalty Program:** The Mr. Green Africa (MGA) Loyalty Program aims to improve the lives of MGA suppliers through increasing their access to goods and services (financial, educational, energy and protective equipment) which are accessed by points and status earned by selling plastics to MGA.

**Health Checks:** Health Check will be providing critical services for waste workers who typically work in high-risk environments and have very limited access to healthcare.

**Tea Parties:** Tea & biscuits after an energetic day to show appreciation for the hard work of waste collectors. The objective of these tea parties is to provide a forum for small suppliers to provide feedback to MGA on supplier programs and customer service.

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## Progress Made During the Last Twelve Months

Over the last twelve months the groups described in this report came to be known as the **Plastic Pickers' Operational Working Group (POW)**. During quarterly conference calls convened by Meridian, they have discussed actions they would like to take together to sustain and empower their workers:

- Instigate a peer-to-peer mentoring program (across continents);
- Develop a system to showcase successful entrepreneurial solutions (pertinent to waste pickers and waste collectors);
- Share best practice technologies (using simple tools to more sophisticated phone apps);
- Highlight the connection between poor nutrition, unsanitary living conditions and loss of worker productivity;
- Expand microfinancing opportunities to improve waste picker's cash flow;
- Increase access to bank accounts, education and cell phones; and
- Share information re: safeguarding children and other vulnerable populations.

Even though members of POW work and live on different continents, they share a number of *long-term* goals for waste picker communities such as: fair distribution of profits across the entire value chain; access to health care, worker safety protections; and a better future for their children.

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## How COVID–19 Has Changed the Work of These Organizations

In March 2020, when COVID-19 hit so hard, the five POW groups were immediately in contact with each other seeking “best practices” to protect waste pickers and other waste workers from COVID-19. Soon thereafter, a comprehensive educational fact sheet was produced by WIEGO and shared widely. Along with many of their peers, the POW organizations have been critically important in articulating to the

world how the pandemic is impacting their constituents, their organizations, and their own lives. What is abundantly clear is that many waste pickers, already compromised by their pre-existing living conditions and marginalized by their lack of status, are among the least equipped to deal with the consequences of COVID-19. If waste pickers are to continue to be effective participants in the circular economy, particularly in reference to recycling plastics, there is an opportunity now for industry to continue to build long-term working relationships, as well to provide meaningful emergency financial assistance.

In early May 2020, in cooperation with Meridian and others, POW organizations that were not previously listed on the [Global Giving Platform](#) were included in an urgent effort to raise emergency funds for waste pickers impacted by Covid-19 to ward off further extreme hunger and disease. Funds raised will provide food, soap, water, protective equipment, masks, and basic health treatments. *Global Giving is a global crowdfunding community connecting [nonprofits](#), [donors](#), and [companies](#) in nearly every country around the world. They help local nonprofits access the funding, tools, training, and support they need to become more effective. They help donors make safe and easy US tax-deductible donations to vetted locally-driven organizations around the world.* (Globalgiving.org). Meridian will assist POW Groups with the Global Giving effort and is positioned to wire funds expeditiously, assist with compliance, monitoring and reporting requirements. In addition, Meridian will continue to encourage industry and others to build mutually beneficial relationships with organizations that represent waste pickers.

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## What Will It Take to Keep Waste Pickers in The Long-Term Circular Economy?

Unless one spends time in a waste picker community, it is difficult to understand how challenging life is for waste pickers. Many waste pickers are highly motivated to work and succeed. However, lack of basic services can make life exceptionally difficult for these individuals. Improving access to basic services will go a long way to enabling waste pickers to be more effective in performing their work. This is true with or without a pandemic.

In the past several years, awareness of how of waste pickers collect and sell used plastics and reduce the quantity of plastics discharged into the world's oceans and rivers has become more widely understood. Corporations interested in adding recycled plastic to their global supply chains have taken note. Some companies are investing in waste picker communities in anticipation of creating a mutually beneficial long-term working relationship.

The participants in the Plastic Pickers' Operational Working Group (POW) have expressed an interest in exploring ways to match the abilities of their constituents with the needs of brands. They are eager to continue to explore effective ways to work together.

Contact information for each participating group is provided in the **Description of Participating Organizations** section in this report. Anyone interested in learning more is encouraged to reach out to

one or more of these organizations. Meridian can also respond to questions and make further introductions, contact: Debbie Welles, [dwelles@merid.org](mailto:dwelles@merid.org) or John Ehrmann, [jehrmann@merid.org](mailto:jehrmann@merid.org).

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## OPLS Funded Waste Pickers Project Reports

### PROJECT REPORT FROM: CHINTAN ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND ACTION GROUP

#### What was the need, or project the OPLS funds supported?

In June 2019, Delhi, India entered into a period of elections and significant governmental change. Data driven facts were needed to advocate for a number of issues, including four key items that most waste pickers lack:

- **Bank Accounts:** Although law requires every Indian be able to have a basic bank account, the bank account process requires proof of address. People living in unauthorized slums etc. are unable to provide evidence such as telephone connections and electricity bills. Consequently, they do not have bank accounts.
- **Drinking Water:** Delhi's ground water is unfit to drink, and many slums do not have piped water. The Delhi Jal (i.e. Water) Board supplies tankers to such slums for drinking water. However, the caste system and hierarchies inside a slum are such that there is no water available for waste pickers. This is because tankers are asked by dominant communities to be parked on their side of a slum, where wastepickers cannot access them. Chintan has piloted getting additional water tankers which must be parked on the side inhabited by wastepickers. This works well, and the Jal Board has been very interested in the partnership, but it requires intensive data about the population in need, to show that the norms are not being met.
- **Toilets:** In at least 10 areas in Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), despite the Clean India Mission, there is no access to toilets. Many common facilities such as toilets and baths do not exist and those that do, are not cleaned and therefore, become unusable. Waste pickers want these to be cleaned and lighting improved. In some areas, they want additional toilets for women. To get these in place, a significant amount of data is needed describing the users in order to show that the norms are far from being met.
- **Education:** Many waste pickers engage in waste handling at an early age indicating lower educational qualification and lower income earned by the younger generation. Additionally, not all the children from waste handling have access to schools and other learning platforms. Ascertaining this data will help in bringing more interventions to better educational status of children as well as of youth.

### What action was taken to meet the need described above?

Chintan used the OPLS fund to create and implement a survey of 10,472 individuals which was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 was conducted in between August and December 2018 and Phase 2 from February to August 2019. The survey was conducted in Delhi NCR in the following areas:

Behlolpur Crc	Mulla Colony
Behlolpur Noida	Narela
Bela Mayur Vihar	Nizamuddin
Bhalswa Dairy	Okhla Phase 1
Bhopura Mangal Bazar	Palam
Bhuapur	Panchsheel Vihar
Chaman Vihar	Pillanji Antram Dairy
Chilla Village	Raghuveer Nagar
Connaught Place	Rk Puram
Dallupura	Sahbad Dairy
Dwarka	Sangam Vihar
Faridabad	Sarojani Nagar Market
Ghazipur	Shastri Park
Ina	Shastri Park Iron Bridge
Ito Azad Bhawan	Sihani Chungi
Jahangir Puri	Sobhapur
Jangpura	Takiya Kale Khan
Jangpura Chakka Park	Tehkhand
Jhangirpuri	Tila Mod
Khanpur	Tughalkabad Gaon
Khichripur	Tughlakabad Extension
Khirki Gaon	Usmanpur 2nd Pushta
Kotla Mubarakpur	Usmanpur 3rd Pushta
Lodhi Garden	Vijay Nagar
Madanpur Khadar	Vivekanand Camp
Mahipalpur	Zakhira
Mangal Bazar 2	Zakir Nagar
Mayur Vihar	

The complete survey was conducted by 10 people in two phases with 5 in each phase. The survey instrument was designed by Chintan, tested by professionals from Chintan and Safai Sena, and the data was analyzed by Frametrics Consulting, a New Delhi based company specializing in survey and research services. A synopsis of the findings relative to bank accounts, access to water, toilets, and education is provided below.

## How was this specific project chosen?

In one of its regularly scheduled meetings in June 2019, seventeen key leaders of Safai Sena and three Chintan staff decided to use the OPLS funds to support the completion and analysis of the survey.

## Survey Results

In order to advocate effectively for change in the waste picker community hard data was needed. The survey found:

### Bank Accounts:

- 65% of the survey respondents said they do not have a bank account.
- Of the 35% who do have a bank account, approximately half were male, and half female.
- Additional observations:
  - Among total respondents, 6% do not have official proof of identity or address. This means they do not possess any of the following official documents: Aadhaar, PAN, Ration Card, Bank Account, or Voter ID Card. [see glossary for a description of these forms of ID]
  - Of the 10,472 survey participants, only 2130 individuals (20%) asserted that they have one officially recognized proof of identity.
  - Approximately, 39% of the respondents do not have a phone number belonging to them, perhaps they don't have necessary documents (address and ID proof) to get a SIM card.
- Conclusion: Without an official documentation, it is not possible to open a bank account, obtain a phone number, etc.

### Drinking Water:

- 58% of survey respondents said they do not have their own drinking water facility at their location. 42% (n: 4424) of the respondents have their own drinking water facility and their source of water is their own tap facility.
- Of the 58% of survey respondents who do have access to water,
  - 30% obtained drinking water from other sources which includes people purchasing water from water filtration plant at Rs. 20 – Rs. 25 per water can. People own their own plastic cans ranging from 20 – 30 liters of capacity which they get refilled from the plant.
  - 20% have access to a water tanker, supplying water from the state actors.
  - 8% use a hand pump to pump put water from ground water reservoir. This is likely to be contaminated.
- Conclusion: There are fewer than required water tankers than needed which makes it difficult for people to fetch water. This has increased their dependency on hand pumps and pushed them purchasing water.

### Toilets:

- When asked where “do you go to the toilet”
  - 40% said public toilet
  - 30% said they defecate in the open
  - 29% said own toilet which means it is used only by the family

- Conclusion: The survey indicates that 70% of wastepickers must leave the safety of their home to relieve themselves.

#### Education:

- Education status of waste handlers:
  - 20% of the waste handlers are working since the age of 18
  - 55% of waste handlers are educated up to middle school while only 4% complete senior secondary education
- Education status of children of waste handlers:
  - 45% (n: 1882) children of the respondents do not go to school. Of them, 60% are boys and the rest are girls.
  - While only 8% (n: 334) of the children are engaged in waste handling, 83% (n: 318) of them do not study
- Conclusion: Most of the waste handlers haven't completed school education leading to lowered income. Low education amongst women impacts their children's health and education.

#### **The results of this survey are being used to effect change in the following ways:**

- Chintan will support Safai Sena to advocate with both the Clean India Mission and Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) for better facilities of toilets and bathing areas in non-recognized slums.
- We are undertaking one more survey with 140 persons to understand the lists of the current banking facilities in order to combine the everyday needs with their necessities during crisis. We will work with a nationalized bank and the GNCTD to enable increased access to the most useful banking services for the waste pickers communities.
- For the children who do not go to school, we have connected with the Department of Education to track each child and help them get into the schooling system. Chintan works with 2300 children already. It will work with about 1000 additional children this year, ideally those below 10 years old. Additional advocacy is being undertaken to scale up the Sarva Sikha Abhiyan, or the Right to Education, to proactively add a section on identifying waste picker children and helping them enroll and stay in school across 400 Indian cities.

## **PROJECT REPORT FROM: PLASTICS FOR CHANGE**

### **What was the need, or project the OPLS funds supported?**

One of the biggest challenges in an informal supply chain is access to capital for the waste pickers and other scrap shop dealers. With the right intervention wastepickers themselves have every opportunity to become entrepreneurs and realise profitable recycling rates. However the informal economy largely deals in cash and waste-pickers fall prey to loan sharks that charge massive interest rate – this leads them to get stuck in an endless loop of debt and poverty.

PFC is looking to use the funds as a surety and first default guarantee to enable 5 scrap shop owners to access bank loans. This will give them access to working capital finance at low interest rates. An integrated financial literacy program will enable low risk of default and behavioural change in moving out of debt.



### What action was taken to meet the need described above?

Our first step was to partner with the right financial institution to extend this service as part of compliance. This proved to be harder than anticipated initially. Most of the micro-finance organizations charge high interest rates that would be counter-productive to the benefit of wastepickers (above 25%). We undertook a research study to assess the market. Based on various assessments we've now identified a regional bank that meets all the requirements (reducing interest rate to as low as 9%). We are now in the process of signing a tri-partite agreement with them (Plastics For Change, bank and identified scrap shop owners) to begin extending the loan facility.

### How was this specific project chosen?

The idea of improving access to credit towards financial inclusion for waste-pickers has been a blueprint plan for a long time. We really believe that financial inclusion is a fundamental requirement to develop and improve the lives of waste pickers. However a model case study does not exist to help make this a standardized service facility for the informal sector India. Plastics For Change will incentivize socially and environmentally responsible supply chains by providing access financial inclusion to the scrap shops who comply with the fair trade principles.

### Who did this project help (# of people) and in what way?

We have selected 5 scrap shops to extend this unique access to capital. The full impact of this project can only be practically analyzed at the end of 2020. At the end of the year, we will have quantifiable data on:

- Validated behavioral change though repayment assessment.
- Increased income of scrap shops.
- Hedging market risk due to price volatility.
- New buyers freeing them from loan sharks that have some of these scrap shops bonded in supply.
- Meeting silver rating compliance.



**Identified scrap shop owner:** Durga's Scrap Shop  
**Location:** Bengaluru, India



**Identified scrap shop owner:** Chinna's Scrap Shop  
**Location:** Bengaluru, India

## PROJECT REPORT FROM: RECYCLING COOPERATIVE OF THE WASTE PICKERS OF THE SOLIDARY ECONOMY NETWORK - CATAUNIDOS

Cataunidos is a waste picker cooperative that works with WIEGO; this report was prepared by Livia Cristine Dutra Ferreira in cooperation with Sonia Maria Dias ([soniamdias2010@gmail.com](mailto:soniamdias2010@gmail.com)) and Ana Carolina Ogando of WIEGO.

### What was the need, or project the OPLS funds supported?

The resource transferred to Cataunidos by the Meridian Institute during the second week of November 2019 was effectively released for use on January 15, 2020. This resulted from a lengthy evaluation period required by the *Banco do Brasil*, which involved the thorough analysis of substantiating documentation and a technical visit to the cooperative to confirm the integrity and legitimacy of the information sent as per Brazilian regulations on foreign transactions. During the aforementioned period, Cataunidos had to present specific documents in both English and Portuguese, including the project proposal submitted to Meridian and the Donation Declaration provided by Meridian. Despite these efforts, the process involved various re-submissions in order to meet the bank's innumerable requests for additional documentation. During this process, the director and treasurer of Cataunidos, along with administrative and technical staff that support waste pickers in Belo Horizonte, Brazil helped mediate the process between Cataunidos and *Banco do Brasil*.

Upon the effective release of the resource, the following actions were taken as of January 16, 2020:

- Reestablishing the supply of electricity in the warehouse through the payment of a residual debt to the state energy supplier - CEMIG (*Companhia Energética de Minas Gerais*). Without energy in the warehouse, the waste pickers were unable to use electrical equipment that facilitates the sorting process and lights up the common areas, particularly the kitchen. This seriously impacted operational work processes and routines at the warehouses, resulting in less decent work conditions.
- Repair service of the cooperative's truck that is responsible for collecting and commercializing plastic materials and other recyclables in Belo Horizonte.

### What action was taken to meet the need described above?

With a focus on reestablishing the supply of electricity, the Cataunidos Board negotiated the financial pending issues, scheduled an appointment with the energy Concessionaire (CEMIG), opened proceedings for reconnecting the power and paid debts in the total amount of R\$ 4,246.01. The invoice was paid on February 6, 2020 with a 72-hour power reconnection period.

It was important to obtain different quotes for the maintenance of the truck, as well the decision over what professional would perform the services within the schedule established by Cataunidos to normalize its recyclable collection operation with partners. After analyzing several quotes, the company responsible for vehicle maintenance was chosen and the total cost of repair amounted in R\$ 8,659.77.

To understand the scenario, we have prepared a descriptive table:

Item	Before	After
Electricity	Non-operation of electrical machines in the warehouse.	Machines (hydraulic press and digital scale) in operation.
	Canteen with no use of steam table, drinking fountain and refrigerator.	Canteen with steam table, drinking fountain and refrigerator in operation, bringing better working and health conditions for the members.
	Administrative management written in notebook.	Digital administrative management with production data entry in a production flow control spreadsheet.
	Insufficient physical space for stocking loose recyclable materials.	Compressed recyclable material and process optimization. Better use of physical space; expansion of stock capacity; improved transport of recyclables. Better ergonomics favoring the health of workers.
	Low value of the material sold by Cataunidos due to it being sold loosely (without baling).	Compressed material as standard required by buyers. Increase in the value of the material sold with a consequent increase in the income of waste pickers.
Truck	Reduction in the volume of recovered and commercialized plastics.	Increase in the volume of plastics collected and sold.
	Reduction in the volume of material recovered by Cataunidos in the city of Belo Horizonte.	Resumption of service to large generators and increase in collection points and volume of recycled and sold materials. Strengthening relationships with potential customers.
	Freight payment to third parties when selling recyclable materials.	Logistic commercialization operation assumed by the Cooperative truck. Increase in the value of the material sold with a consequent increase in the income of waste pickers

### How was this specific project chosen?

Cataunidos is established within the principles of popular solidarity economy, and according to its Participative Management Plan, it prioritizes spaces for dialogue with all its members and management. With this project, the current needs of the cooperative were identified and deliberated upon collectively. Upon discussions, members decided to resolve the debt settlement to regularize the electricity supply and repair the cooperative truck.

In addition, Cataunidos leaders held three meetings to discuss the administration and monitoring of project plans with WIEGO - a global advocacy network focused on guaranteeing the livelihoods of the working poor, especially women in the informal economy and INSEA – a local support and technical advisory organization.

### Who did this project help (# of people) and in what way?

The project directly benefited **82** waste pickers, **52 women and 30 men** who secure their families' livelihoods through their work. More specifically, the resources targeted improvements in workplace physical conditions and organizational work routines that would be capable of securing a more decent work environment for the waste pickers. It is important to note that the project also indirectly impacted the **332 family members** of the referred to cooperative members. With the strengthening of the Cataunidos network, 700 associated members were also indirectly impacted.

The truck repair has allowed waste pickers to resume collection service and plastic recovery from medium to large recyclable generators such as: **7 condominiums (with a high plastic collection rate**, according to the waste pickers observations of the work practice), **12 bars, 2 hospitals, 2 breweries, 1 post office, 1 supermarket, 1 television station, 1 local business**. Resuming this collection helps divert waste to the landfills. Estimates reveal that the work carried out by Cataunidos diverts **30 tons/month** of recyclable materials and with the truck repair there is potential for an increase in this rate.

The entire process of receiving, implementing and monitoring the funds was greatly facilitated by all partners (INSEA, WIEGO and Meridian) involved in supporting Cataunidos. As a result, Cataunidos' leaders have improved their knowledge and skills on implementing resources from international projects and budget management practices. Leaders also highlighted that the process helped them both improve the ways in which they negotiate deadlines with suppliers and scope out new clients and collection sites.

It is worth stating that Cataunidos' local and global connections and activities are guided by the objectives set by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG/2015). Particularly, Cataunidos prioritizes institutional transparency and data monitoring. To this end, Cataunidos will propose further reporting and an impact monitoring plan for the next three months as outlined below:

Indicator	Monitoring Unit	Periodicity
Increased collection of recyclable materials	Invoices for commercialized materials	February, March and April 2020
Increased processing of recyclables	Invoices for commercialized materials	February, March and April 2020
Increased commercialization of recyclables	Invoices for commercialized materials	February, March and April 2020
Quantity of plastics sent for sale	Invoices for commercialized materials	February, March and April 2020

**Photographic records:**



Above: Meetings and collective decision-making processes.



Above: Meetings with partners.



Left: Maintenance of the truck.



Right: Scoping of new clients.



## PROJECT REPORT FROM: **WORK**

WORK has established a partnership with collectors in Haiti to accomplish two objectives: to end child labor in the supply chain and to accompany adult collectors out of poverty by earning a living wage through collection. As such, WORK and its network of collectors are using the funds to support skill-based training for a cohort of 10 collectors and providing a full educational scholarship for 10 children from this cohort.

Using the funds, we're implementing our job assessment with our collectors to enroll them into our training program, while ensuring that they have access to medical care. Health is a basic need in order to succeed in learning. They've all had an initial health screening to have a medical file created at our partner clinic. Additionally, we've enrolled their kids to school and provided all payments and supplies, including uniforms needed for them to complete the school year. They're also enrolled into our afterschool program for tutoring support and they also receive access to medical care.

This project is driven by the needs of our collectors based on data from our intake survey and from our discussions with our collectors at our monthly meetings. We also consulted with our local team and our collection partners in Haiti.

Ten waste collectors and 10 children are supported through this project directly with access to training and an education, respectively. Indirectly, this also supports their nuclear families. Professional training can result in an increase in income for our collectors, which will be directed towards the family. With our kids in school instead of in the landfill, this frees up time and relieves stress for our collectors so they can focus on work and learning.

Below are photos of our kids in our after-school program. We'll send photos of our adults in training once we receive them from our team.





## PROJECT REPORT FROM: MR. GREEN AFRICA



MR. GREEN AFRICA

## HEALTH DAYS REPORT

MGA & ACCESS AFYA

### MR. GREEN AFRICA



*Mr. Green Africa incentivizes marginalized waste pickers & base of the pyramid stakeholders by offering premium prices and added benefits, to provide a continuous supply of valuable recyclables which in turn creates pathways out of poverty for them, while simultaneously creating a positive environmental impact.*



Mr. Green Africa is applying the global trend of circular economy into the plastic supply chain in African markets. We are at the frontier, Mr. Green Africa is the first company that produces high quality recycled plastics in East Africa, while achieving tangible social impact.

ACCESS AFYA

Access Afya is a **social enterprise** based in Nairobi **providing health care** services through a chain of low-cost, high-quality clinics and field care programs.

Their mission is to create **access to quality health** for the global mass market through **sustainable** health care models.



### PARTNERSHIP GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

Access Afya partnered with Mr. Green Africa to provide screening and care to 172 suppliers of plastic waste in December 2019 in 8 locations.

WHAT WILL BE CHECKED?	BENEFITS OF HEALTH CHECKS	THE SETUP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood Pressure</li> <li>Blood Sugar</li> <li>Nutritional assessment</li> <li>Deworming</li> <li>Anemia</li> <li>HIV STI</li> <li>All systems checks</li> </ul>	<p>Health Checks will be providing critical services for waste workers who typically work in high-risk environments and have very limited access to healthcare. Our Partner will provide treatment, as well as individual counselling and health education on preventing common conditions.</p> <p>A comprehensive check will help identify conditions such as Asthma, high/low Blood Pressure, Diabetes, Anemia etc. that require constant monitoring. Timely identification is key to reducing health and financial risks.</p>	<p>Professional setup with all necessary equipment to provide health services held during 1 day at one of Mr. Green Africa's Trading Points.</p> <p>Organisation of necessary permits &amp; licences from Ministry of Health and local counties to conduct the health checks.</p> <p>Highly trained and qualified staff</p> <p>After the health day, Mr. Green Africa will receive an overview of conditions treated, medication &amp; laboratory tests provided and details of customer feedback about services provided.</p>

### HEALTH OUTCOMES



**68%**  
**(123)**

suppliers had a normal health screen.

**32%**  
**(57)**

diagnosed with a condition or symptoms.



**75%**  
**(43)**

suppliers treated on the days of screening.



**25%**  
**(14)**

referred to nearby public institutions treatment.

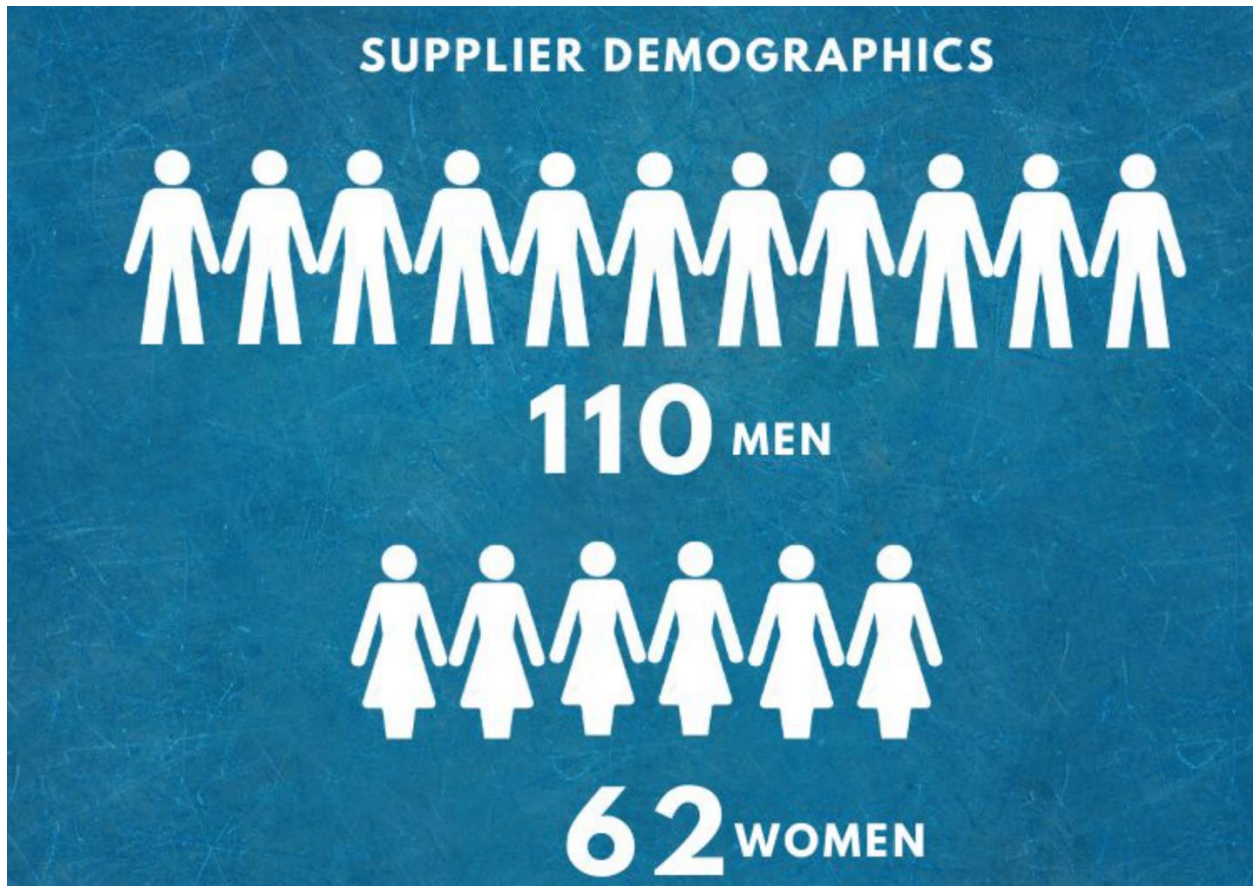
They were referred for were dental issues, abnormal uterine bleeding, high blood pressure, low blood sugar, severe respiratory infections and sexually transmitted infections.



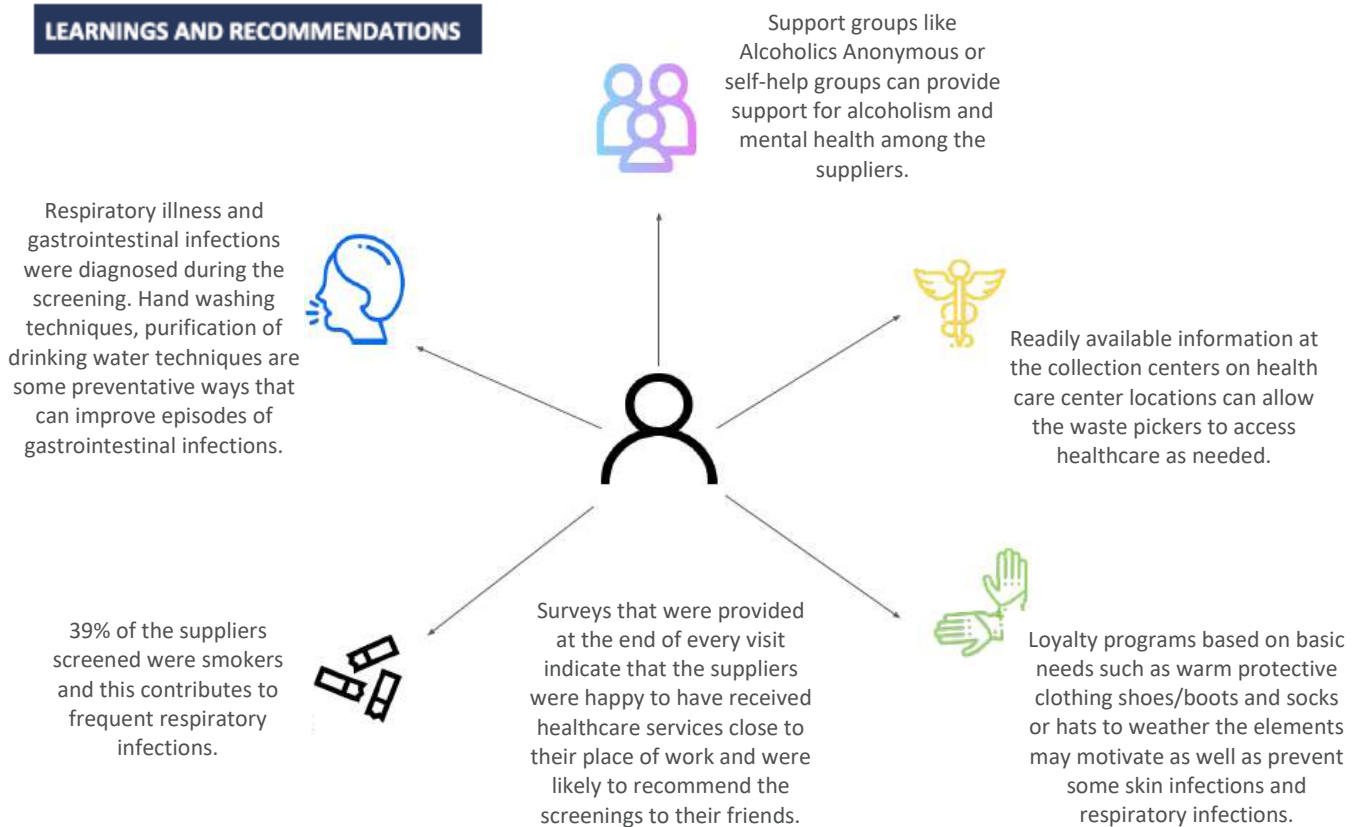
**67%**  
**(115)**

of the suppliers were dewormed.





**LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**





For additional information about the role waste pickers play in recycling plastics please contact Debbie Welles, [dwelles@merid.org](mailto:dwelles@merid.org) or John Ehrmann, [jehrmann@merid.org](mailto:jehrmann@merid.org) at the Meridian Institute.