

GREEN JOBS FOR YOUTH



THE PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT SECTOR

FINDINGS OF THE YOUTH-CENTERED
RESEARCH IN THE WASTE MANAGEMENT
SECTOR IN KENYA

CHALLENGE
FUND
FXR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT





Table of Contents

- 4 The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment
- 6 Green Jobs
- 8 Waste Management in Kenya
- 10 Research Methodology
- 13 Research Findings
- 33 Recommendations and Conclusions

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment



CONTRIBUTORS

Caren Kimeli
CFYE, VSO
Youth Expert

Majina Mwasezi
CFYE, VSO

Mr. Green Africa
CFYE IP

Faatimah Clarke
CFYE, The Palladium Group

Sam Tundi
CFYE, VSO
Youth Expert

Reuben Mbuve
CFYE, VSO

Aditi Singh
CFYE, The Palladium Group

Mohamed Almas
CFYE,
VSO Youth Expert

Taka Taka Solutions
CFYE IP

Camee van Kippenberg
CFYE, The Palladium Group



THE CHALLENGE FUND FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

A 7-year and €134 million programme funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and managed by The Palladium Group, Randstad, and VSO.



The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) is a 7-year and €134 million programme funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that aims to create a prosperous future for 230,000 young women and men (15 - 35 years) in the Middle East, North Africa, Sahel & West Africa, and Horn of Africa regions.

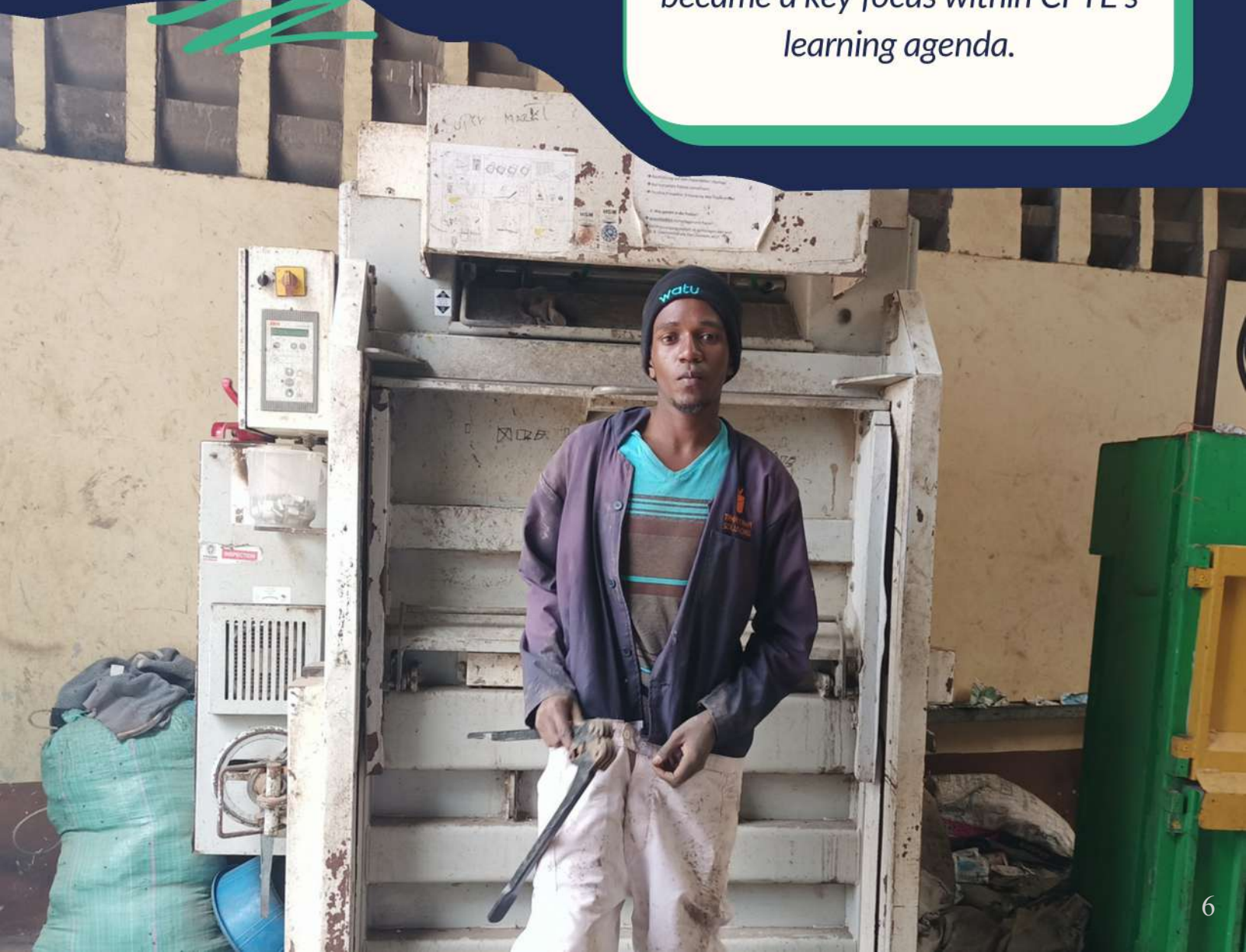
The Fund is supporting initiatives in 11 focus countries and offers youth, in particular young women, opportunities for work that is demand-driven and productive, offering a stable income and safe working conditions -

and that is contributing to their personal development and social protection. The CFYE is managed by a consortium consisting of Palladium, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), and Randstad.

**CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT**

GREEN JOBS

With a growing number of green jobs in the CFYE portfolio, they became a key focus within CFYE's learning agenda.



Green jobs are jobs in green businesses that contribute appreciably to maintaining or restoring environmental quality and avoiding future damage to the Earth's ecosystems, while also generating and supporting the wellbeing of people.

With a growing number of these jobs in the CFYE portfolio, they became a key focus within CFYE's learning agenda. However, many of these green jobs are created in informal sectors, posing greater challenges to ensuring job quality. As the goal of the CFYE is to ensure quality jobs for young people, it is essential to understand what makes a quality job for young people.

Moreover, another challenge faced by Implementing Partners (IP's) creating green jobs is that these jobs are often situated in sectors that are traditionally less attractive to young people and bring gender disparities. The waste management sector is an example of such a sector. It is therefore important to understand what attracts, retains, or keeps young people from working in the sector and how this differs for men and women.

To gain more insights into what job quality means for young people, especially for young women, and working in the waste management sector, CFYE carried out this research to gain a deeper understanding of these elements in the waste-recycling sector in Kenya.

This magazine will present the findings of this youth-centered research in the waste management sector in Kenya. Through different chapters in the magazine, we will shed light on job quality, gender disparities, and retention.

Waste work serves as an income generating activity, acting as an adaptation measure to the rising cost of living caused by climate change effects.





Kenya, like many other countries, faces significant challenges related to waste management due to rapid urbanisation and population growth. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of sustainable waste management practices, and efforts have been made to promote waste recycling as a crucial component of environmental conservation and resource utilisation.

The Kenya Plastics Pact estimated that 22,000 tons of waste is generated in Kenya every day. It is estimated that at least 20 percent of this waste is plastic. It is further estimated that Kenyans daily plastic consumption equals 0.03 kilograms per person, through items such as straws, plastic bottles and containers.¹

Plastic Waste Management in Kenya

¹ <https://www.globalissues.org/news/2023/06/16/34031#:~:text=Kenya's%20daily%20plastic%20consumption%20through%20only%20eight%20percent%20is%20recycled>

The amount of plastic that becomes waste across the country is estimated to be between 0.5 to 1.5 million tons per year. At end-of-life plastic packaging, waste leaves 15% landfilled, 18% recycled, and 67% disposed in open dumps.² These open dumpsites or informal landfills often lack proper management and infrastructure.³

The plastic waste management system in Kenya operates primarily in an Informal Recycling Sector. Informal waste pickers collect the waste from open dumpsites and then sell to middlemen for sorting and aggregating of plastic waste.⁴

Although informal waste pickers make up the majority of the workforce, due to the informal nature of the job, they are often subject to marginalisation and exploitation.⁴ It is estimated that the total number of informal waste pickers reaches nearly 50,000, although there are no official numbers available.⁵ A large percentage of these are women,⁶ who face additional challenges, such as earning less, having less power in the workplace, competing with man for the most valuable waste, and harassment.⁷



Organising waste workers into groups, providing tailored training, and offering reliable funding facilities are essential for addressing barriers and bottlenecks.

² chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/tcsditcinf2022d3_ts2_en.pdf

³ <https://fieconsult.com/state-of-solid-waste-management-in-kenya/>

⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921344920300070t>

⁵ <https://fullerproject.org/story/women-waste-pickers-kenya-dumpsite-reproductive-health/>

⁶ <https://allianceforscience.org/blog/2024/03/kenya-women-save-capital-city-from-getting-buried-under-garbage/>

⁷ <https://borsenproject.org/women-waste-collectors/>

**CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT**

Research Methodology

To gain an understanding of the diverse contexts, aspirations, and challenges faced by young Kenyans working in the waste-recycling sector, we used youth-centered methodologies for this research. Youth-centered methodologies are approaches to research that prioritise the voices, experiences, and needs of young people.

These methodologies recognise youth as active participants rather than passive subjects, valuing their perspectives, creativity, and agency. As part of this youth-centered approach, we also decided on a format matching the youthfulness of the research, and therefore this research is presented in a magazine style.



To gather data, the youth researchers performed several research activities, such as focus group discussions, key person interviews, mixed method interviews, and collecting visual outputs. They collected data from 93 young people working in the waste-management sector. Most of the people we spoke to work as waste pickers (see Figure Accessing & Selling Waste). Therefore, the findings that will be discussed in this magazine are mainly applicable to waste pickers.

Participants Profiles

Most of these waste pickers get their waste directly from households (69%), others collect from dumpsites (24%), landfills (5%), or industries (1%). However, many of the waste pickers face the same challenges in accessing the waste, such as injuries and cuts, due to lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), harassment, verbal abuse, smells, competition in accessing the waste between groups, weather conditions, wild animals at the dumpsite, costs of transportation, and gender barriers.

The 'pecking order' at the dumpsite determines which group is supposed to access what type of waste. Every group knows their kind of valuable waste and they know when their truck arrives. Accessing waste that is not assigned to their group brings conflict among the groups. The order of picking was often decided a long time ago by the people who began waste picking and these are the people that access most of the valuable waste at the dump site. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, most trucks bring their waste; these are the busy days, and everyone gets a chance to access the waste.

Most waste pickers sell their waste to middlemen, local aggregators, local recyclers, companies, Mr. Green Africa, and/or Taka Taka Solutions. Main challenges in selling the waste are poor prices, transport, access to markets, many middlemen, or not being able to sell the waste at all.

Mean Age

27.65

Gender



Accessing & Selling Waste



Picking

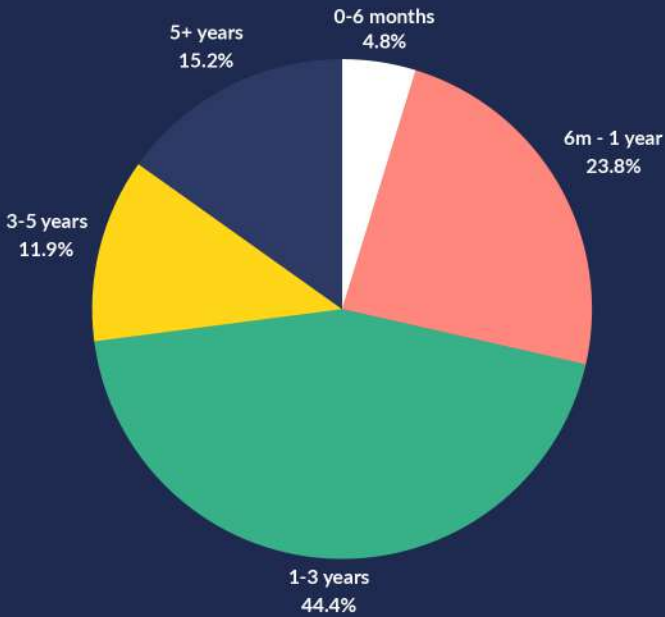


Sorting

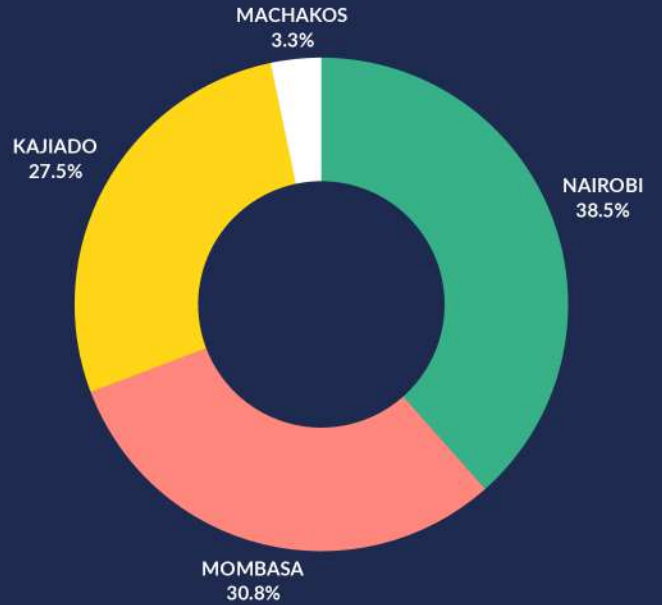


Supervision

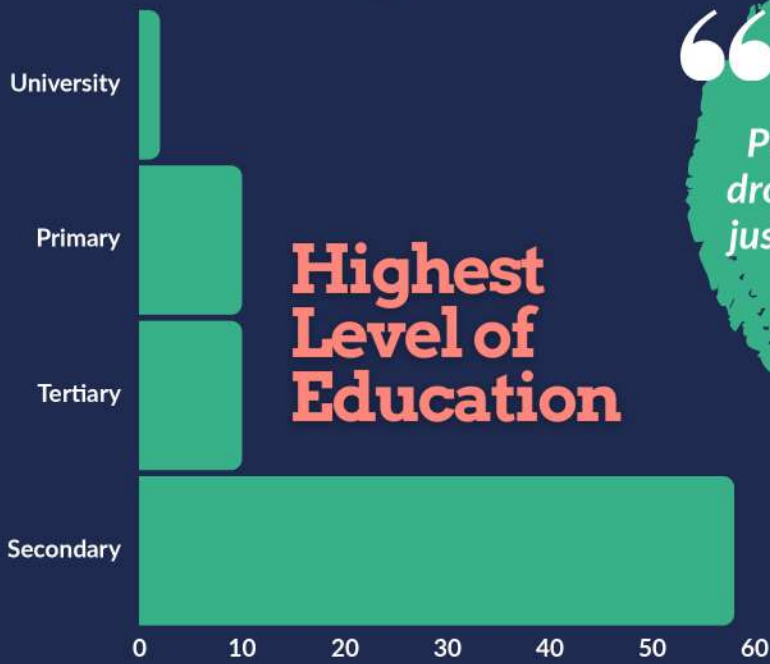
Years Worked in Waste Sector



County



Frequency



Highest Level of Education



People often think we're dropouts or troublemakers just because we work with wastes

Job Quality

We should be provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and trained on how to use so that people out there can know that we are professionals.



CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT

Joschua was trained to be a plumber. However, coming from a poor background, he realised that working as a freelance plumber was not bringing in enough money and it was hard to find a stable job in his field. Furthermore, he had debts that he needed to pay off and he was worried that being unemployed might lead him into bad habits like using drugs or getting involved with the wrong crowd. And so, he had to find other ways to earn an income, resulting in him finding work in the waste sector.

This sector was appealing to him as his community did not handle waste well and he wanted to help keep his area clean. At first, he sold waste to local middlemen who paid very little. He would clean streets to find plastic waste but this was not very rewarding. Things, however, improved when he joined a group that collected waste and sold it to Mr. Green Africa at slightly better prices. This allowed him to explore bigger places like the Dandora dumpsite.

Even so, Joschua is still facing several challenges. He does not have a reliable way to transport large amounts of plastic waste that could make more money. He also struggles with access to proper protective gear.

As became clear in Joschua's story, waste pickers face several challenges that affect the quality of their jobs. Lack of protective gear, lack of transport, and health risks are few examples of the challenges faced while working as a waste picker. In the next sections, these and other challenges, and potential solutions will be addressed.

I mostly use gloves for picking waste, and sometimes I have to do it with my bare hands if my gloves are worn out. I don't have a full set of gear, just rough clothes i use for work. It's even tougher when it rains because I don't have boots or a raincoat. This puts me at risk of injuries and illnesses, but I can't give up this work – it's how i earn for food and my rent



Health Risks

We don't have the right gear to stay safe and we don't have clean places to wash up after work. This puts our health at risk.



Almost all waste pickers (97%) indicated that they are exposed to health risks during their work. Health risks vary from being caused by weather conditions, such as a cold due to rain and weather or a headache due to the hot sun, to health risks caused by the waste, such as cuts and injuries from sharp objects, skin infections, exposure to chemicals, fumes, odours, and dust causing respiratory complications, infections due to biohazard waste or waterborne diseases. Moreover, waste pickers are often exposed to hazardous waste from hospitals and pharmaceuticals, which are toxic to waste workers. Since collecting waste also entails lifting heavy weights, backpain is mentioned as another common symptom.

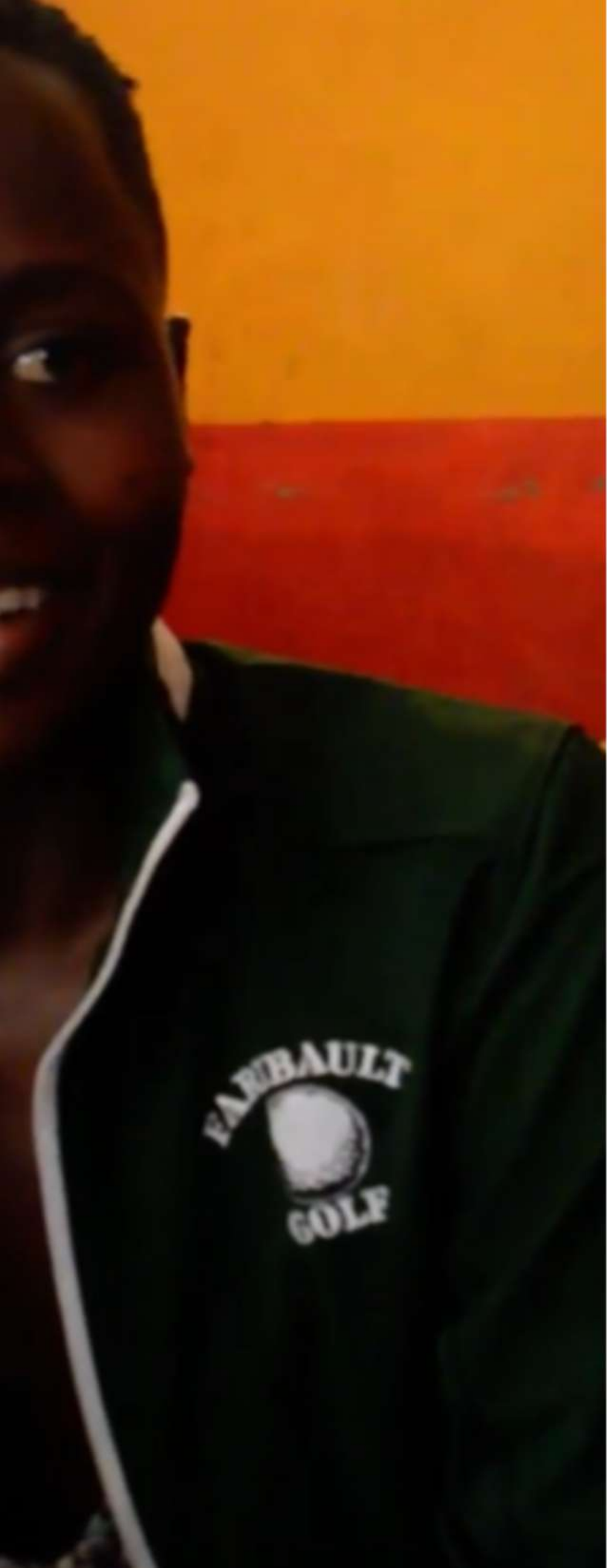
Only half of the waste pickers (53%) use safety gear, such as gloves and gumboots, while picking waste. However, the need for PPEs is underlined in interviews with the young people and several other stakeholders:

"Most people come to me concerning safety, for example that they get injured or hurt while working. Every week we have different cases of safety concerns at the dump sites. For example, a few weeks ago, someone came to me who was pierced by a needle while working at the dump site. This really affected him because his hands were swollen for several weeks. In this case, he was injured because he didn't have safety gloves while working," (Gatekeeper-Abdi, Kitengela).

However, only providing the PPEs is not enough. To prevent youth from not selling the PPEs, they need to understand the importance of them. Therefore, training on the importance and correct use of PPEs should be provided. Providing PPEs to groups instead of individuals can also help as multiple people in the group can use the materials and people who sell the PPEs will be held accountable.



Most of the time I have headaches because of walking when the sun is hot and scorching so I also walk with water and pain killers (that's a challenge) and also people we meet with often say you are smelling.



The need for PPEs, such as gumboots, masks, overalls, gloves, and dustcoats, is further underlined by the fact that 82% of the waste pickers do not have access to health care and only 29% are enrolled in health insurance, as health care is expensive:

“It would be best that there is provision of insurance to waste workers to address any injuries while at work. Also, first aid training among waste workers so that they have the capacity to help one another in case of health emergency while at work,” (Aggregator, Kitengela).

Other measures that organisations could take include providing regular free health check services, ensuring first aid is available, providing injections such as for tetanus, providing drinking water at the buyback centres, and providing water and soap so that waste pickers can wash themselves after work. The need for these last two is further underlined by the fact that 43% of the waste pickers indicated that they do not have access to an appropriate toilet nor clean drinking water while at work.

CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT

Safety

Next to health risks, waste pickers frequently also experience other constraints to their safety, such as physical assault, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse, which often affects their mental wellbeing. Women especially face the risk of harassment, which makes them avoid certain places where they would have otherwise gotten valuable waste. Also, refugees often perceive the working conditions as unsafe as they experience more verbal abuse:

“Sometimes they ask us: what are you Congolese doing here? Have you come to steal?”

In general, due to cartels that rule the dumpsites and the high drug use, safety is a concern for the young people working in the dumpsites. Sometimes, waste pickers use drugs which invokes fighting and insulting when provoked, making it unsafe for others. Moreover, due to hierarchy on the dumpsites, there is often little room for young people to speak up or ask questions.

“Laws and regulations at the dump site, made possible by involving all stakeholders in the waste sector and dissolvment of cartels and groups, will help break barriers of inequality, ensuring that everyone gets equal access to the waste and thus an income, without exploitation and oppression,” (Gatekeeper, Kitengela). Police patrols within the dump site is mentioned as a solution that would help with safety on the dumpsite. Police or other organisations should also handle incidents, to make sure that troublemakers are arrested and face the consequences.



“

Dealing with verbal abuse and harassment takes a toll on our mental well-being. It's not easy to cope with.



“

I do not want to leave this job. I need more training so that I can continue working in this sector

“We also need training to do this job as a professional. So that when I am sorting, picking, or collecting, I should do it with professionalism.”

As indicated by the quote above, training is essential to learn and do a job with professionalism. 76% of the waste pickers indicated that they received training in the past year and these trainings seem to be useful for them as 71% indicate that they are using the skills learned in the training:

“The training helped me to know the valuable plastics and now I put more effort in getting them.” The waste pickers attended training on topics varying from waste handling, financial literacy and entrepreneurship.

Training needs are in operational safety at work, waste handling, innovative waste management methods, first aid, gender-based violence, and health and safety training. Furthermore, waste pickers mention financial management, business development, saving as a group, and accessing loans so that they can develop themselves and start their own businesses.

Training is also important given that only very few people answer to the question ‘where do you want to be in 5 years?’ outside of the waste sector. Most of the youth see their career in the sector and would like to grow within the sector.

Personal Development

Perception

Negative perceptions in the community hinder waste pickers in their job. Most people in the community undermine and do not value young people working in the waste sector, mainly because they do not see it as a form of valuable work and it is mostly seen as a dirty job. However, waste pickers themselves see the importance of their jobs:

"I see myself as a hero for keeping our environment clean by picking that waste instead of burning it and having it affect us health wise."

"Waste workers play a crucial role in the proper handling of waste, and therefore in climate change mitigation: recycling and reusing are vital for reducing energy usage and, consequently, the carbon footprint."
(National Environment Management Authority, Mombasa).

But when people are valued in their job, they feel safe, work harder, are loyal, and willing to grow in the sector. Although waste pickers themselves see the positive impact of their work, many people look down upon them:

"The community looks down at us; they call us names when they see us picking from trash. They see us as if we don't understand what we are doing or we don't have anything to do."

Changing the public perception requires continuous awareness creation and sensitisation efforts. Therefore, there should be awareness created regarding the waste sector so that the community understands the value and the impact of people working in the waste sector.

Ideas on how to do this include community cleanups to create awareness in the community on the environmental impact young waste pickers create, road shows and training the community on the value of the waste sector, branding of the waste pickers, such as 'waste is gold', providing uniforms while at work so that the community is aware of their work, sharing success testimonies of waste workers, and formalisation of the jobs so that people recognise the jobs and give it the value it deserves.

"People often think we're dropouts or troublemakers just because we work with wastes. It's really not fair, and it can be demoralising."

Transport & Storage “

Waste pickers often face challenges in transporting their waste to the aggregators due to the bulky nature of the waste. Public service vehicles often do not allow the waste pickers with their waste because of the smell and the dirty looks. However, accessing reliable transport is difficult and very costly and affects the potential income. Therefore, waste pickers often walk a long way back home carrying their waste. Having aggregators close to the waste pickers or transport picking up waste from the pickers could be potential solutions.

Another challenge that the waste pickers face is the storage place for the waste. The unavailability of aggregators has left workers holding onto collected plastic, exacerbating storage challenges. Renting a storage place is very expensive, but waste pickers are often unable or allowed to store their collected waste in their houses. Often, neighbours or landlords complain if they leave the waste in their houses or balconies.

To address these challenges, waste pickers could be organised into groups, mobilising joint transporting resources with support from NGOs and governments.

We start from morning to evening. We carry a huge luggage just to get a few kilograms (kgs). If we pay transport costs, there are no earnings left.

However, being organised in a group comes with challenges, such as trust and logistical complexities:

“It is a challenge knowing the kilograms brought in by each one of us. Also, how can we trust each other, that someone cannot sell from what I have collected.”

Half of the waste pickers work in groups (51%), whereas 49% of the waste pickers work in an individual mode. However, only 26% of the waste pickers are part of a group that stands for their rights. *“Organising waste workers into groups, providing tailored training and offering reliable funding facilities are essential for addressing barriers and bottlenecks in the waste sector.”*

**CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT**

Income & Working Hours

On average, waste pickers work around 5 hours per day in the waste sector, for 3,5 days a week, where 92% of them indicate that this leaves them with sufficient time for other life-activities. The average being only 3,5 days makes sense as almost half of the waste pickers (47%) have another source of income. These other activities vary from hair dressing, grocery shopping for the group, running a small business to selling food, and running a street kiosk.

The need for other activities next to working in the waste sector is underlined by the income that people get from their waste collection and given that the average number of dependents is 4. However, 95% of the workers are able to meet their need for food with their income from activities in the waste sector, while only 31% are able to meet their need for shelter, and only 29% are able to meet their need for clean water. The average monthly income from activities in the waste sector is 4502 KES (=32 euro).

Most workers get paid on the spot (46%), followed by monthly (14%), and weekly (9%) payments. On the spot is also the preferred payment frequency (52%), followed by monthly (18%), and weekly (18%). Most workers prefer to get paid in cash (65%), followed by mobile wallet (33%). 68% of the waste pickers find that the payment is usually timely. This is important as they indicate that untimely payment leads to late fulfilment of responsibilities and increase in debt: *"I am unable to meet my needs, such as for food. I end up in debt"* and demotivation: *"Sometimes that was your only expectation for the day."*



"I am happy because I am not dependent on someone; I get an earning. Before, I used to burn or even throw away plastic; now it is of use to me. If I sell my own plastic, I get my earning. Besides that, this job I do it at my comfort. I don't wait for anyone to call me and get paid later. I collect, sell, and get paid. I can't stay hungry"

Gender Disparities

It is a common perception that the waste job is not for women. It is for school dropouts, dirty men and criminal gangs.



Virginia, a young mother, shares her story about working in the waste industry since 2019. She collects valuable waste from the Dandora dumpsite, which is not very safe. She owns a pair of gloves, but they have started to wear out because of her frequent use. She mentions that organisations in the waste industry do not always provide protective gear.

She explains that there are risks involved in her work. The dumpsite is mainly run by men, and on her way to sell the waste she collects, she is worried about gangs stealing her belongings. Women like her are more likely to be talked down to, intimidated, or even hurt at the dumpsite. Some people think that waste jobs are only for men, dropouts from school, or troublemakers.

She narrates, *“At the dumpsite, it is male dominated and while on your way to the selling point, there are gangs who may steal the bag of goods you have collected. While at the dumpsite, women are more vulnerable to verbal abuse, intimidation, and even sexual abuse. It is a common perception that the waste job is not for women. It is for school dropouts, dirty men, and criminal gangs.”*

Her typical day starts early. She leaves her child with a neighbor because she does not trust local daycare centers. By 6 am, she is at the dumpsite, sorting through plastic waste. If she is lucky and does not run into any thieves, she takes the waste to the aggregator. They check and weigh her collection, and then pay her. She is not satisfied with how little she gets paid because she cannot carry a lot of waste.

As became clear in Virginia's story, women working in the waste sector may face additional gender-related challenges. In the next section, these specific gender-related challenges will be discussed.



In the focus group discussions, the women unanimously agreed that men make more money than women in the waste collection sector. This is due to several reasons, such as women not being able to access the most valuable items at the dumpsite because of safety concerns, differences in physical strength, and spending less time at work because of other duties.



Accessibility & Transport

"For us as ladies, there are some places we cannot reach because it is unsafe for us, especially insecure places where they can take advantage of women. But men can easily find their way through and collect the waste. This means they have more access to waste than women, so they end up making more money."

At the dumpsite there are boundaries for each group, causing certain areas, where the more valuable materials can be found, to be inaccessible for women. Due to the security concerns, women do not go to these areas and are therefore forced to pick waste in areas with less valuable materials.

Another difference between men and women is that men are able to carry more waste than women can manage to carry. As public service vehicles will not allow waste pickers to enter because of the smell and dirty looks, waste pickers have to walk long distances with their collected waste. However, for women this is often challenging.

Moreover, women cannot pick waste at any time because some hours are unsafe for them: *"We cannot start picking waste very early like the men. It is unsafe for women, because you can meet with the street people who can easily attack us because we are women. You also cannot go beyond some hours, because there is the risk of sexual abuse."*



This means they [men] have more access to waste than women, so they end up making more money.

**CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT**

Safety

The dumpsite is a male dominated place with many cartels. It has proven to be very dangerous to women, even such that some women stopped picking waste from dump sites. Women are not respected at these sites because it is perceived as a man's job and therefore, men are more respectable at the dumpsite. Consequently, women are not appreciated and are prone to physical, sexual, and mental abuse.

"As women, we face challenges everyday. Yesterday, me and my friend met with a young man who asked me why a beautiful pretty young lady like me would be in this sector. So, he asked me to marry him and told me I should leave the waste picking work. I explained to him that I am comfortable and that he should leave me alone to do my job. Then he asked me to give him the waste I had picked, I had to leave it as he said that otherwise I will get harassed or even get physically or sexually assaulted. The challenge is that these people that use drugs are capable of doing anything."

Dealing with this constant threat of abuse and harassment, also takes a toll on the mental wellbeing of women. Therefore, next to general increased police patrol to improve safety, women also need counselling services to talk about their experiences and become comfortable again to go back to work with the assurance of being mentally stable.



I have personally gone through it, I was beaten up by two men at the dumpsite, while I was carrying my picked waste at my back. Their main intention was to steal my picked plastic. Ever since that day, I have avoided to return to the dumpsite. Now, I usually go and pick from the road side and the landfills.

Household Duties & Childcare

Another challenge that women face is that they have domestic duties to take care of, whereas men can work all day without major breaks. Women have to take care of responsibilities such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of their children before they can start their workday, which leaves them with less time for waste collection and affects their earnings compared to men with more time. Moreover, these duties do not leave time for leisure or relaxation.

“As women, we are different than men. The amount of hard work they put in is different from us. Remember as young women, we have domestic work to do in the morning. We wake up, we have to clean dishes, clean the house, do laundry. While the men, just wake up, dress up, take breakfast, and leave the house. Some of us have children and we have to also prepare the children and take them to school before we leave for the work.

So, you find that, by the time we go for work, so many hours have been spent on the domestic work. So we just spend about 2 to 3 hours only on collecting the plastics. Sometimes, you even find that people have collected from the spots you would have wished to collect the waste. This makes it a different experience for us as ladies in the waste sector.

Another thing, I would like to say is that, as women, when we go out to work, picking the plastics, we can't stay overtime. With the hours we have, we have to work hard and so much but we can and have to come back early. We have to finish working early and come back home by 8:00pm or 9:00pm so that we can come to take care of the children.”



Another difference is that as a woman, you have to take care of your children, unlike a man who has a wife who will be taking care of the children. If women do not have access to daycare, they are forced to take their children to work. However, children are affected health wise, as the environment is not conducive for them and they often pick up infections or fall sick due to contaminations.

However, even having access to daycare brings challenges. Bringing your children to daycare means that at the end of the day, you will have to pay 50 Ksh. Moreover, women are often not satisfied with the quality of the daycare, as for example, they find that the diapers did not get changed or the children did not get any food. Because of these concerns, women stay relatively close to the daycare, so that they can pick up their child in case needed. This, however, limits their distance in terms of getting more plastic, which affects their earnings. Support in provision of daycare services would therefore be beneficial to the women working in the waste sector.

“When I don't have money for daycare, I have to carry my child on my back as I work. I have to go look for money to buy milk for my child. I cannot decide to leave my child hungry because I don't have a place to leave her, I simply have to carry her to work.”

“Having reliable childcare would be a great help. it's challenging to juggle work and taking care of my child.”

“I started this daycare when I found that there were women who were facing a challenge on where to leave their children while going to work, so I decided to open a daycare since I love children and am passionate about children. I started the daycare with one room, and parents would pay me twenty shillings and some may pay half and you just accept it. The waste pickers are my clients too and they bring their children while dirty and not well fed, most of them are single parents. They have a challenge in how to raise their children.

We face different challenges, like a child may fall sick while under your care and you have to take that child to the hospital. Some parents are not able to pay you, but you don't turn them away. One day there was a parent who brought her child and never came back for two weeks I tried to reach out but it wasn't easy I had to stay with that child for 2 weeks just for the parent to show up and say she had been arrested while at work. Others bring their children without even diapers or food and you have to change the child and feed them too. By now we are charging them 50 shillings per day, so I cook for them porridge.

It would be beneficial if we would get assisted by anyone on getting food, diapers and mattresses so that the children can sleep comfortably and feed them a proper diet. Some parents bring their children with black tea and plain white rice, which is not a right diet, but these parents are not able to give anything else. Also, deworming nutrition and baby wellness checkups would be important.” (Childcare provider)

Perception

As we read in the previous sections, perception is a challenge for all that are working in waste collection. However, because of their gender, women are looked down upon and face even more challenges related to perception.

"There was a day I went to the dumpsite and found this young man and they tell you that if you are working in this sector, you can't manage a family and a husband. This just lowers your self-esteem, you feel unfit for that job. But since you don't have any other job, you just still continue and work".

Another barrier that women face is when they have their period. They often do not have access to pads or toilets, which is a challenge, both in terms of going to work and earning an income, as well as their self-esteem. Accessibility to sanitary towels would provide a solution to this challenge.

These challenges shed light on significant barriers faced by women working in the waste sector. The lack of proper personal equipment, gender discrimination, vulnerability to assaults, limited access to justice, and disparities in physical capabilities all contribute to a hostile environment for women. Additionally, time constraints and lower earnings compared to men underscore the need for targeted interventions.

However, despite these challenges, the work in the waste sector is also attractive for women, as it offers them an income and allows them to be independent. Furthermore, women also recognise and value the importance of making a difference when it comes to environmental cleanliness in their communities.



This waste work is attractive because as a mother I don't depend on any one to bring me anything. This is my main work and it provides all my basic needs like school for my children and the rest. Besides, it's very flexible, since you can go any time.

CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT

Attracting Youth to the Sector

I wanted to do something meaningful with my time and keep out of trouble. Cleaning up the environment felt important, and I wanted to be part of that change.



There are various reasons why young people work in the waste sector. The reason that is most often given is the income: *“The fact that I can earn income from it is satisfying for me. Especially that I didn’t have source of income before, now I can leave my house, go to work and earn some income.”*

Financial struggles (debt burdens and poverty) and a lack of formal job options drive young people towards waste-related work. Also, the fact that there is already a ready market where they can sell the plastics is especially appealing: *“It makes me work hard because I have a ready market for the plastics that I collect.”*

However, social engagement and the environment are also drivers to work in the waste-sector. While some individuals are motivated by the desire to stay away from idleness, which could lead to criminal activities, others are drawn to contribute positively to environmental cleanliness.

“If there were fun workshops and events showcasing how to recycle creatively, I believe more young people might want to join in.”

To engage more young people in the waste sector, the youth that are already working in the sector see several opportunities:





"It has been one year since I joined this sector. At first, I didn't value this job. My husband has been in this sector for quite some time. I could see him collecting the plastics and I would ask myself, what kind of job is this and ask him to look for another job. As time went by, I came to discover that it is a job that has good money, and I can earn from it to be able to pay fees for my children and buy milk for my family. It has really contributed to our family income."

Young people working in the waste sector give several reasons why they stay in the sector. First and foremost, it provides financial stability. Waste collection provides a source of income, allowing the youth active in the sector to pay for, for example, their children's education and provide for their families.

Moreover, the job offers flexibility: *"This job offers me flexibility. As much as it is a difficult job, after collecting the plastics for like 3 hours, I still have some time to do other things like running my small business, selling watermelon."*

Others mention reasons such as group savings, which offers financial stability, and recognition and rewards:

"The fact that I am part of a group where we can grow in savings, is really helping me. After getting my earnings from selling the plastics, I can save in the group. Also, through partnerships working in this waste sector, I have been able to receive rewards and promotions in recognition of the work I do in the waste sector. This makes me happy and is fulfilling, making me work harder to earn more rewards."

Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

Exploring different kinds of waste could open up new opportunities for us to earn more income.

CHALLENGE
FUND
FOR
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT

Most of the waste workers (68%) in the sample work with a waste management organisation like Mr. Green Africa or Taka Taka Solutions. Career opportunities, improved working conditions, reliability, education, availability of a market, and additional benefits are the main reasons why workers would like to work with a waste management organisation. Furthermore, the price, timely payment, and additional benefits are valued: *"They pay well, they give loyalty points, they provide food as incentive and motivation."*

Moreover, these waste organisations also create awareness: *"I feel good working with them, they have brought awareness on recycling the plastic. I am inspired by them."* While waste workers are generally positive about and loyal to working with waste management organisations -

there are factors that would make youth stop working with them. These include prices: *"When the prices go lower than what we have now, end of the loyalty program, or delayed payments."*

Overall, it has become clear throughout this magazine that a job in the waste sector can bring fulfillment and support the needs of young people. However, it is also clear that it is a job that comes with risks and challenges.

Organisations in the waste sector are often aware of these barriers, resulting in already taking steps to improve job quality. Despite these steps towards improvement, this research highlighted that there are several more (general) recommendations, that will contribute to improving job quality and retaining youth in the waste sector:



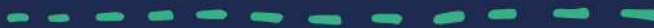
"If we were paid better prices and had more places to sell our waste, our lives would improve significantly."

One of the main points for improvement mentioned is the pricing per kilogram. Youth mention that the price per kilogram is currently very low and an increase in the price would be appreciated.



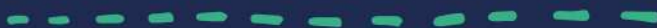
"Exploring different kinds of waste could open up new opportunities for us to earn more income."

Another often heard point for job improvement is market diversification, expanding the market for a wider range of waste materials. There are some types of valuable waste like carton, metal, or clothes, that waste workers always find in the land field, but there are no companies that deal with these types of waste. However, being able to sell more types of waste is advantageous for the waste workers, as they have an opportunity to earn more. Youth would also like to be supported in exploring different waste materials and plastic for innovative and creative use, such as in craftwork.



"Teaching us how to start and run businesses based on waste work would keep us in the sector longer and we could contribute even more."

Offering continuous training and skill development programs that could lead to career progressing will encourage youth to see a future and grow within the waste sector. The same goes for offering mentorship programs and avenues for growth, including business development guidance, as this will nurture the entrepreneurial spirit within the youth workforce and again, will help them see a future in the waste sector. In addition, the need for financial support to start a business and increase income is expressed by youth.



"In some cases when we go collect the waste, we get exposed to hazardous waste which affects us. Sometimes, we get injured while working. We want to request if we can get safety gear and health care insurance while at work, because the job is quite risky."



In terms of improving working conditions, enhancing safety standards, providing the necessary protective gear, and ensuring better facilities at waste collection sites to create a safer and more conducive working environment are often mentioned. Additionally, health care is often mentioned, given the risks associated with the job. Women specifically also highlighted the need for counselling services, particularly for dealing with trauma or challenges they encounter while collecting waste: *"We also need counselling services. When we go to collect the plastics, we encounter challenges a lot and sometimes we need the counselling services to be able to get back to work. For example, the rape cases really need counselling, so that we can be able to get back to work being mentally stable."*



Partnerships with local authorities

It is suggested that organisations can partner with local administration to enhance safety in insecure areas, for example, by having police patrols. Organisations should also advocate for inclusive policies and laws responsive to waste workers' needs.



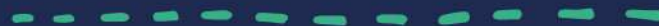
Awareness creation

Help to create awareness for improving public perception towards waste workers in order to create a more supportive ecosystem.



Support group aspirations

Recognise the collective perspective and provide assistance to group's aspirations, such as common storage places, transport, and shared responsibilities.



Empowerment and inclusivity

Encouraging youth participation in decision-making processes and fostering an inclusive work culture that values their opinions and contributions.





Besides these recommendations, the roadmap on the following page presents an overview of steps that organisations in the waste sector can take to improve the job quality for young people. At the top part of the roadmap, we can find smaller and more achievable steps, such as providing water and soap at the end of the working day, to more complex and time intensive improvements towards the bottom of the road map.

Organisations in the waste sector are already taking a lot of measures to improve job quality in the sector. In this research, we have seen that engaging with youth and understanding the challenges that they face and what their aspirations are, will help to make these interventions more tailored to the needs of young people.

In conclusion, this research emphasises the importance of a multifaceted approach to improving job quality for young people in the waste sector. By following the recommended steps in the roadmap, organisations can enhance working conditions, from simple measures like providing hygiene equipment to more comprehensive strategies.

Engaging with young workers to understand their challenges and aspirations is crucial. Tailoring interventions to their needs fosters a supportive work environment and promotes long-term satisfaction and retention. By prioritising the well-being of their young workforce, organisations contribute to the sustainability and efficiency of the waste sector, creating a more equitable and thriving industry.



Provide water and soap at end of the day

Provide drinking water at end of the day

More aggregatos

Community campaigns, share success stories of waste workers

Organise community clean-up days

Pay higher prices

Pick-up service

Toilets, first aid, and health checks

Provide uniforms

Diversification of markets

Provide sanitary pads

Provide business training to workers

Provide carts and storage place for groups

Provide first-aid training

Insurance and vaccinations

Day-care for waste workers' children

Organise waste workers into groups

Assist in accessing loans

Assist in group savings

Fomalisation of the jobs

Roadmap to Improve Waste Sector Jobs



*A warm appreciation and thank you to
all the participants of this study, Mr.
Green Africa, and Taka Taka Solutions.*

CHALLENGE
FUND
F&R
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT