



Developing urban waste management in Brazil with waste picker organizations

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ABSTRACT In Brazil's large cities, more than half a million people survive by collecting and selling solid waste. Most face very poor working conditions and have very low incomes as the intermediaries to whom they sell pay low prices. Their activities are even considered illegal in some nations. But the waste pickers save city governments money, contribute to cleaner cities and reduce the volume of waste that has to be dumped (by up to 20 per cent). After describing the waste pickers and the city and national associations they have created, this paper describes the recycling industry and gives some examples of better methods of recycling. These include waste picker cooperatives that can sell the materials they collect direct to industries and that have partnerships with city governments who provide access to wastes, better prices and facilities to improve working conditions (including transferring the recycling from dumps to recycling centres).

KEYWORDS local government / National Movement of Recyclable Waste Pickers / recycling / waste picker

I. INTRODUCTION

Waste recycling has received growing recognition for its contribution to sustainable development. While in the North it has become associated with best practice for environmental management, in the South it continues to be a practice of poverty, with low-income residents making a minimum income from the trade. Throughout Latin America some of the lowest-income citizens find a living in this way, and the diversity of names by which recyclers are known reflects their ubiquitous presence: *recicladores*, *cartoneros*, *pepenadores*, *catadores*, *recuperadores*, *buzos*, *gancheros* and *cirujas*. Although workers create value from the waste generated by their society, they are rarely treated with respect for the services they provide.

To secure greater appreciation for their work and to address their needs and interests, recyclers have been organizing themselves in cooperatives, associations and national movements, with the emergence of a Latin American network. Their vision and determination has led them to legal as well as economic achievements and has caught the attention of governments, funders and NGOs. The benefits go beyond issues related to poverty reduction and social justice, to create an environmentally sustainable future. It is vital that Latin America adopts models that favour recycling over landfill or incineration and in which waste pickers are included.

The next section introduces the situation of waste pickers in Brazil, and explains its significance for the economy and for the livelihood struggles of low-income households living in towns and cities. We then summarize some key details of the industrial sector in recycling and explain why the working conditions and rates of remuneration are so exploitative. Finally, we discuss some exemplary programmes that have sought better outcomes for the waste recyclers, and include a brief summary of the work of AVINA, a foundation that is working with recyclers to improve their situation.

II. WASTE PICKERS

a. The work of waste pickers

In Brazil, more than 500,000 people survive by collecting and marketing solid waste in large Brazilian cities.⁽¹⁾ All over Brazil, these waste pickers, also known as “cart-men”, perform an invisible task. Many of them work in dumps, where they are exposed to health risks and all kinds of exploitation. Waste pickers may carry up to 300 kilos a day in crowded streets, fighting for space with motorcycle riders, buses, trucks and cars. Most of them have no alternative source of livelihood.

The waste pickers receive inadequate remuneration both from the companies buying the recyclable materials and from the city officials who are responsible for the collection services and for the sorting of solid waste. Their market operates through intermediary agents, who pay the waste collectors very little and who may pay them with food or alcohol instead of cash. Municipal administrations tend not to recognize the services rendered by waste pickers and generally do not pay them. When they do so, the amount is insignificant, much lower than that paid to the collecting companies. In one of the few examples of a relationship between recyclers and the municipal government, estimates by the Association of Paper, Cardboard and Recyclable Materials Waste Pickers from Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) suggest that, when remunerated, there is a 300 per cent difference between the value of the services rendered by waste pickers to the city administration and the value of these same services in the market, i.e. they get only one-third of what they would have received had they been sub-contracted to the formal sector and then sub-contracted to the city.

The increasing numbers looking for employment and the fierce competition for recyclable materials contribute to the waste pickers' uncertain life and working conditions. Due to the lack of alternative livelihoods, the number of workers who depend on this activity for their survival continues to grow, in part because it is easy to enter the industry. About 5 per cent of waste pickers have a contract and work under relatively good conditions; this small group has incomes that are three or four times the national minimum average. Almost two-thirds of waste pickers are men and the predominance of men is even greater (80 per cent) among those working with a contract.⁽²⁾

The work of the recyclers helps the environment and has other social benefits, including cleaner cities. Through reducing the volume of waste, the waste pickers' activities extend the useful life of landfills; in Brazil, it is estimated that they reduce the amount of waste that goes into landfills by up to 20 per cent. Despite their contribution, state institutions, laws

action by low-income and otherwise disadvantaged groups.

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1. According to an estimate by the National Movement of Recyclable Materials Waste Pickers (MNCR).

2. WIEGO (2011), “Informal workers in focus: waste pickers in Brazil”, available at www.wiego.org, 2 pages.

and businesses have been responsible for systematically excluding waste collectors, and their activities are illegal in several Latin America countries. Their vehicles, usually based on human traction, have been banned from the streets of some large South American cities. Waste pickers may also be subject to unspeakable acts of cruelty: at the end of the 1990s, “social cleansing” groups would actually kill them and sell their bodies to the medical school of a prestigious university in the north of Colombia.

b. The creation of the national movement and the MNCR

In Brazil, the first steps towards a national voice for waste pickers took place with the first meeting of the Paper and Reusable Waste Pickers’ Popular Organizations in Santos in 1992. Seven years later, in 1999, the National Movement of Recyclable Waste Pickers (MNCR) was created during the first National Congress of Recyclable Waste Pickers, an event attended by more than 1,700 workers. At present, the MNCR represents around 300 waste picker associations and cooperatives, out of the 500 formed in the last 10 years. These organizations encompass a little over 10 per cent of the active waste pickers in Brazil. Box 1 gives an example of how waste pickers created their own cooperative and helped support state and national waste picker movements.

In 2001, the MNCR issued the Carta de Brasília to articulate their claims for support. This emphasized the need to:

- regulate the recycling trade;
- secure the social inclusion of waste pickers, with public resources for housing, health, education and work needs (including technical, technological, managerial and human development training); and
- support workers’ active participation in all aspects of the processing of recyclable materials.

The MNCR is important in representing waste pickers with the government and private companies, and has already achieved official recognition for the profession. There are now city level operations of the movement in São Paulo and some other Brazilian cities. The MNCR influenced the creation of the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Social and Economic Inclusion of Waste Pickers, which was established in September 2003. Further objectives are inclusion in the government’s Zero Hunger Programme and the eradication of dump sites.

In addition to these national policy objectives, the movement seeks to directly assist waste recyclers to be more effective in their work, through encouraging them to work in cooperatives. A study with the NGO Pangea, a Socio-environmental Study Centre and the Inter-sectoral Relations Study Group (GERI – Economic Science College at the Federal University of Bahia) showed that the effectiveness of waste picker organizations is directly related to their level of capitalization. As a result of this study, the movement is now promoting a package to increase cooperative competitiveness, which includes a warehouse, equipment and trucks. Based on these investments, the cost for the government of each job created is between R\$ 3,000 and R\$ 5,000, one of the lowest costs for job creation in Brazil. The organizations participating in the study proposed an investment of around R\$ 178 million to generate 39,000 jobs in 199 cities, which has been accepted by the national government.⁽³⁾

3. In June 2011, there were 1.6 Brazilian reals to US\$ 1.

BOX 1
Local lives, national ambitions

In 1996, Roberto Laureano da Rocha and some of his friends started to envision a different way to lead their lives. They'd been working as waste pickers on the streets of Poá (greater São Paulo area) for a couple of years, selling their materials to middlemen. They had no control over what price they would get at the end of the day and, in some instances, had no control even over the cart they needed to do their work, which was lent to them by the middlemen. They could not trust their employers. They had no labour guarantees or benefits and were aware that not only were the prices they were getting too low but also that the figures shown on the scales that weighed their materials were manipulated.

Before working as a waste picker, Roberto – who was 22 at the time – had had a couple of other small jobs, both formal and informal. Unemployed and married, he had been tempted by criminality, but the day he saw his three-year-old son carrying his gun around the house he realized there was no future for any of them in that direction. Together with six others, he decided that if the middlemen were able to make a better life for themselves in recycling, so could they. One of them had access to a family space that they could use as a warehouse and one had worked as a locksmith; so from the metal scraps they collected they made their first carts and started working together, creating their own business, CRUMA (Recycling Cooperative United for the Environment). It wasn't long before the group had grown to 20 people. Small grants, especially from international aid agencies (e.g. Misereor, GTZ) allowed them to get in touch with other colleagues from around São Paulo and beyond, sharing their experience and learning that they were not alone.

Managing their own cooperative and continually fighting for their rights, three years later they organized the first São Paulo state meeting of waste pickers and the first national meeting, where the idea for the Brazilian National Network of Waste Pickers (MNCR in Portuguese) was born. More support came in, and together with the help of local NGOs they grew stronger until the MNCR was finally formalized in 2001. This time, the national congress involved more than 1,700 waste pickers from all over Brazil.

Their struggle for dignity and fair play was so compelling that in 2003, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva created a committee involving 10 federal institutions to coordinate public policies that would promote the social integration of this group of labourers. In 2004, AVINA recognized the significance of the MNCR and began financing their secretariat and some of their operations, allowing them to take an active role in negotiations with the national government and other key actors, including the private sector.

Figures demonstrate the significant value of waste picker activities. Municipalities in the global South spend between 30 and 50 per cent of their operational budget on waste management, yet they only collect between 50 and 80 per cent of the refuse. In Santa Cruz, Bolivia, these informal recyclers are responsible for collecting the litter from 37 per cent of the population. In Brazil, they provide up to 90 per cent of the materials that supply the recycling industry. In only three towns near Mexico City Federal District, informal collection generates US\$ 14 million annually.

Despite this value, the rate of solid waste usage remains very low. In Brazil, estimates indicate that waste pickers account for less than 10 per cent of recyclable materials generated in people's homes and for 3 per cent of the solid waste deposited in dumps. Only 327 of the 5,560 municipalities in Brazil adopt separate waste collection systems. Of

this total, only 142 (approximately 2.5 per cent of all municipalities) maintain partnerships with waste picker associations and cooperatives. As a consequence, approximately 80 per cent of the waste pickers still work from dumps and on the streets, with little organization.⁽⁴⁾

4. According to the National Movement of Recyclable Materials Waste Pickers (MNCR).

III. WASTE RECYCLING IN BRAZIL

Responsible consumption and the correct management of solid waste (including a focus on waste reduction) are still new topics in Brazil. There are few guides and awareness initiatives and even less regulation, especially regarding the value of recycled products and the role of the waste picker. The market is expanding quickly, with paper, aluminium and PET plastics being the fastest-growing segments. In 2006, the global rate of urban waste recycling in Brazil was 11 per cent (identical to that in 2003). In volume terms recycling increased from 5 million tonnes to 5.76 million tonnes per year. The recycling rate of the dry part of the urban waste (77,000 tonnes/day) is 18 per cent, and 55 per cent of Brazilian urban waste consists of organic materials.

With respect to the economy, there is considerable potential. Specialists provide very optimistic estimates regarding the recycling market, which already generates a turnover of US\$ 1.2 billion a year in Brazil. According to Sabetai Calderoni in a book entitled *Billions Lost in Garbage*,⁽⁵⁾ R\$ 4.6 billion is lost through insufficient recycling, and that may reach R\$ 10 billion by the end of the decade; the plastics recycling industry alone is responsible for half of this lost revenue. However, there is some indication of growing commercial interest. According to the Plastics Socio-environmental Institute, the number of recycling companies in Brazil increased by 104 per cent between 2003 and 2005.

The significance of waste picker organizations varies according to the type of product and to the characteristics of the industrial sector. According

5. Calderoni, Sabetai (2003), "Os bilhões perdidos no lixo", Humanitas, São Paulo, available at <http://www.reciclaiveis.com.br/suprim/bilhoes/bilhoes.html>, 346 pages.

TABLE 1
Waste recycling in Brazil

Recycled total	Volume (million tonnes)	Volume index (%)
2003	5.0	11
2004	5.2	10
2005	5.76	11
2006	5.76	11
Recycling rate per materials type (2005)		
Office paper (white paper)	882,400	49.5
Cardboard	2,237,000	77.4
Plastics (except PET)	290,000	20
PET	174,000	47
Aluminium (packaging)	127,600	96.2
Steel (packaging)	160,000	29
Glass (packaging)	390,000	46
ESL packaging	40,000	23
Tyres	127,000	58
Organics (composting)	843,150	3

SOURCE: Corporate Commitment for Recycling (CEMPRE), see www.cempre.org.br.

to a study commissioned by AVINA on the situation of waste pickers and the hindrances to the development of their organizations, it was found that associations and cooperatives were responsible, for example, for the recycling of only 20 to 30 per cent of paper and PET containers and for 52 per cent of the aluminium cans.⁽⁶⁾ Preliminary estimates by the MNCR show that almost 90 per cent of the waste sent to the recycling industries is collected by waste pickers who act independently, selling through intermediaries.

The structure of the recycling chain resembles that of a shallow pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are a small number of recycling companies. Below them are the intermediaries, generally formal companies who work with vast networks of agents, including small middlemen, yard owners and large cartels associated with contractors. These, in turn, impose difficult working conditions on the waste pickers, who mainly work on their own. This industrial structure is a result of recycling companies favouring suppliers with the capability to deliver, on a regular basis, adequate volumes of clean, pressed and bundled materials. The recycling industry is concentrated in a few regions and a small number of cities; as a consequence, the great majority of waste pickers do not have direct access to recycling companies but are dependent on intermediaries and agents.

Some specialists claim that there is a "perverse solidarity" between intermediaries, agents and industry, which allows the generation of a more than 500 per cent surplus between the value of the recycled materials that are collected and the final value of the recycled "products", with only 10 per cent being secured by waste pickers. The intermediaries enforce dependency relations, paying little for the collected materials. In Bahia, for example, PET containers are sold by waste pickers for R\$ 0.15/kilo and are passed on by the intermediaries for R\$ 0.90/kilo. Working individually, waste pickers do not have access to protective equipment or training, nor do they observe basic principles of hygiene and occupational health and correct waste handling. They lack the capital to scale up their productivity.

The solution lies in entering the higher levels of the recycling process, including the collection, sorting, processing and marketing of the final product. Some such initiatives have now been formed and they include the Environmental Agent Waste Picker Cooperative from Canabrava (Caec) in Bahia, which processes plastics for the production of bleach bottles. In future, this product will be packaged and marketed by the cooperative. However, in general, recycling cooperatives lack financial resources. Cooperatives have limited access to loans and the credit lines that are available are incompatible with the characteristics of waste picker organizations.

Waste picker associations and cooperatives now aim to improve the situation of waste pickers, placing themselves in the middle of the pyramid. To achieve this, they will establish partnerships with NGOs, companies and governments to access the resources that they need. The national government has already begun to respond to waste pickers needs by launching financing lines through the Brazilian Development Bank and the Bank of Brazil, which focuses on recyclable waste picker cooperatives and aims to generate jobs for waste pickers in cities across Brazil. Marketing networks that bring together associations and cooperatives have been

6. Peixoto Calil, Lúcia (2006), *Sustainable and Solidarity Recycling*, available at <http://www.avina.net/web/siteavina.nsf/0/FA8AC9A80121705D0325731E00699ED8?opendocument&systema=1&plantilla=2&idoma=eng&cate=Publicaciones&>, 15 pages.

created, which allow a large volume of quality materials to be gathered and go direct to the industry. Networks are already active in São Paulo, Bahia, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul, and others are being implemented.

Commercial companies are also realizing the benefits of working with waste picker organizations and are beginning to build direct relationships. Examples include the steel group Gerdau in Chile and Brazil and the cosmetics company Natura, which has asked cooperatives to provide them with packaging collection in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Colombia. The Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB-MIF) is interested in developing waste management models that are more inclusive, and is implementing several pilot projects in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Peru.

Less positive for waste pickers is that in the past years, “new” kinds of entities have entered this production process. Housing condominiums, recreational clubs, commercial establishments and other agencies now deliver solid waste direct to the intermediaries, eliminating the contribution of waste pickers and reducing their possibilities of work and income.

IV. THE RECYCLING ECONOMY TODAY

a. Obstacles to the work of the waste pickers

Private companies control most of the processing and transformation of recycled materials in the industrial sector. There is little transparency with respect to the volume and price of materials, the resources used and, consequently, the economic significance. The social costs associated with the product are also not accounted for. This situation is a result of several factors. First, there is a lack of legal frameworks to attribute responsibility for waste and few tax incentives to encourage responsible behaviour. Second, waste pickers lack citizenship rights. Third, there are few controls over the volume and types of recycled materials and the associated social and environmental costs. Finally, there are few studies on the future development of the market for recycling products and hence it is difficult to predict what is needed. In this context, it is not possible to formulate strategies to secure greater economies of scale and development in the market. These obstacles reduce the number of corporate social responsibility initiatives and compromise the sustainability of the waste pickers’ participation in the recycling chain.

b. Weak policies towards the social inclusion of waste pickers

Dumps are violent and unhealthy places, generally located in remote areas, with little visibility and far from public services such as education and health. In such a working (and sometimes living) environment, waste pickers may be considered to be at an apex of exclusion. With the Growth Acceleration Programme (Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento – PAC) of the government, 12 metropolitan regions are being prioritized for solid waste activities. Of the R\$ 40 billion allocated to public health improvements (R\$ 32 billion from the federal government and R\$ 8 billion from the states, municipalities and the private sector), some will be for initiatives dealing with treatment and re-use of waste. São Paulo,

Baixada Santista, Campinas, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Fortaleza, Salvador, Belém, Curitiba, Porto Alegre and the Federal District will be served by this programme. However, this step is only a beginning, and alternative income sources will be needed for families removed from the dumps; children in particular will need to have access to the resources they need to enable them to stay away from recycling.

c. Dispersion and lack of information regarding the sector

Little information is available and/or publicized with respect to waste pickers, and particularly the recycling market. The economic significance of recycling is unknown, as is the market price for different products, the technology used for processing them and the organizational and incubation costs of associations and cooperatives. There are few studies of organizations. Municipalities are at many different stages and there is no exchange of information. During the first National Congress of Recyclable Materials Pickers, there was an attempt to gather information but it was difficult to establish a common information system.

Environmentalists are concerned about the methodology used by the federal government for a database of appropriate information; this constitutes a first step in gathering information about the sector.

d. Limitations of the corporate social responsibility practices

A limited number of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices have helped to reduce the significance of intermediaries and give waste pickers an advantage. Helpful strategies include:

- encouraging domestic consumers to donate their recyclables to cooperatives;
- donating corporate waste direct to the waste picker cooperatives (housing condominiums may also take part in this initiative);
- direct purchasing of materials from associations and cooperatives;
- agreements to support the development of networks for marketing and for the transportation of materials, benefiting waste picker organizations;
- supporting training for waste pickers in materials preparation; and
- supplying machinery and work equipment (uniforms and safety gear, presses, scales, etc.).

Companies need to accept greater social responsibility, transforming their internal processes to have greater positive impacts for waste pickers. The establishment of a legal framework to ensure that the generators of waste are responsible for waste management will help in this regard.

V. EXEMPLARY PROJECTS

a. Seeking public policies to support waste picker inclusion

There are several successful initiatives that have secured the social inclusion of workers. However, these actions are both isolated and too

small in scale. Recognizing the work performed by waste pickers by paying fair wages for their services is an important step towards providing an improved livelihood for these workers. However, there is still much to be done to create public policies that can ensure the effective inclusion of this population in the formal labour market (which recognizes their preference not to be employees). Some of the projects supported by AVINA include:

- establishing the Northeast Co-financing Committee with the participation of several local companies;
- promoting a national network of recyclable materials marketing by waste pickers; this is a collaboration between AVINA, Petrobras and the Banco do Brazil Foundation;
- creating the Recyclable Investment Fund, a revolving fund for investments in cooperatives; this is a collaboration between ABN-AMRO Real Bank (now Santander), the Suzano Paper Company and the Ecofuturo Institute;
- support for the Solid Bonds Project by the Ethos Institute, which stimulates the involvement of companies with recycling and the social inclusion of waste pickers; and
- exchanges with recyclers across Latin America.

These interventions recognize the political, economic and social performance of different players; they also strengthen waste picker organizations and foster dialogue with other agents.

Prior to 2003, the AVINA Foundation focused on supporting the MNCR and other waste picker organizations. Box 2 describes the work of the foundation in more detail. More recently, AVINA has expanded its activities to encourage innovative partnerships that offer new options to waste pickers. AVINA's objective in this work is to promote intra- and multi-sector plans and programmes that demonstrate collaboration models with the potential to have an impact. The organization collaborates with the waste picker movement, building alliances and partnerships committed to the process. Some positive experiences, including those not directly connected to AVINA, are presented below.

BOX 2 **AVINA**

AVINA is a Latin American organization founded in 1994 by the Swiss entrepreneur Stephan Schmidheiny. The aim was to contribute to sustainable development by encouraging alliances among social and business leaders and by brokering consensus around shared agendas for action, with the support of people and institutions from around the world. It is supported by the VIVA Trust and has 24 offices, and is associated with more than 1,000 social and business leaders committed to the sustainable development of the region. AVINA works in four areas: equity of opportunities, democratic governance and the rule of law, sustainable economic development, and the conservation and management of natural resources. Since 2003, AVINA has been working closely with its partners to enable the recycling sector to develop its full potential to simultaneously deliver solid economic results, meaningful environmental benefits and decent work to the greatest possible number of low-income people.

b. Londrina: partnership between government and waste pickers

In Londrina (Paraná), a partnership between city officials and waste pickers has received national recognition because it has achieved the highest recycling rates in the country. One innovation is the door-to-door collection, which builds a bond between waste pickers and the community, reinforcing their skilled contribution. This increases the quality of the materials collected and reduces the waste that is collected but that cannot be recycled.

The first programme started in 2001, in part to remove waste pickers from the city landfill. Twenty-nine sorting centres were created where 500 waste pickers sort and sell jointly. The creation of these centres is instrumental to the success of the project as it reduces the distances that the waste pickers have to cover. The centres are used for the temporary storage of the collected materials, which are then taken by city trucks to another centre where they are pressed and sold. Since the quality of the materials is now higher, so are the prices achieved.

The success of this initiative can also be measured by the increase in the number of recyclable materials-processing industries in the metropolitan area of Londrina. One of the challenges the organizers now face is guaranteeing services to the population given the increased demand for waste collection. To do this requires constant reviewing of collection timetables, and the reassignment of waste pickers is often necessary.

c. The CAEC partnership with Wal-Mart in Salvador

Since 2005, Wal-Mart stores in the Salvador (Bahia) metropolitan region have recycling “stations” for their clients. More than 200 waste pickers from the Cooperative of Ecological Agents and Waste Pickers from Canabrava (CAEC) collect the materials and take them to the cooperative’s headquarters, where they are sorted, pressed and sold. The partnership involves Wal-Mart – which is seeking a more environmentally responsible performance – the waste pickers, residents and the Pangea Centre of Socio-environmental Studies (which supports the collection logistics and associated environmental education).

The programme received an international award from Wal-Mart in the category Helping People for a Better World, for being one of the top four sustainability projects in the retail chain throughout the world.

VI. THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE RECYCLING

Recycling is considered one of the propellers of the sustainable development process, achieving clear gains in economic, social and environmental spheres. There is a need for more effective communication about current practices and potential gains from recycling. Currently, the burden of recycling falls on society and the environment. Companies should be taxed according to the environmental consequences of their production processes.

For many companies, recycling brings clear benefits. Eco-efficient production processes save energy and raw materials and improve the

company's reputation. However, these organizations must become more informed about recycling in order to avoid making life more difficult for recyclers.

"The organized waste pickers reconcile the relation between human beings and nature in a perspective that is, at the same time, socially fair, environmentally sustainable, sanitarily correct and economically solidary."

Bertrand Sampaio de Alencar, Nature Defence Association from Pernambuco (ASPAN)

"In dumps, people live off trash, they live in trash and are treated like trash. That is everyone's problem, but the government transfers it solely to waste pickers."

Luiz Henrique da Silva, President of the Association of Paper, Cardboard and Recyclable Materials Waste Pickers (Asmare) and MNCR coordinator

"It's necessary that the government support research and surveys about the sector, mapping data regarding the production chain in its totality. Without this information, we are still basing ourselves on estimates and approximations that do not precisely reproduce the reality of this predatory market."

Elizabeth Grimberg, Pólis Institute, urban environment area coordinator

"With the partnership with Wal-Mart, our income has almost doubled, reaching almost R\$ 500 monthly. After all, we collect the materials from the stores and sell direct to the final buyer, without a middleman. Furthermore, the network offers breakfast and lunch to its cooperative members. In addition to these advantages, given that the task required a lot of labour, it was possible to increase the number of members from 125 to over 200."

Sônia dos Santos, president of CAEC

"In Diadema, waste pickers are responsible for the selective collection and they are supported by the city administration and by the population, which created a bond between community and waste pickers, similarly to what happens to the postman."

Carlos Henrique Oliveira, Clean Life Programme coordinator

"Here we have statutes and mixed work hours that we must follow. I know that this brings some problems to those waste pickers that would rather remain self-employed. On the other hand, we sell for a much higher price and do it directly to the companies that buy recyclable materials. Besides, we are required to comply with the demand to contribute with social security (INSS) and receive a fixed remuneration from the city administration, which has been very helpful to us."

José Lacerda Borges, Environmental Pact Association president and waste picker

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