



## INCLUSIVE WASTE GOVERNANCE AND GRASSROOTS INNOVATIONS Notes on the international conference and workshops in Kisumu

23<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2018

Between April 23 and 29, delegations composed of researchers, government agents and representatives of collectors from various countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Nicaragua and Tanzania) met in Kisumu, Kenya to exchange the results of research on governance including solid waste and basic innovations; two research initiatives coordinated by the universities of Victoria (Canada) and the university of Gothenburg (Sweden), since 2017. In addition to a representative of the Federal University of ABC (UFABC), two waste pickers, Ionara Pereira dos Santos, coordinator of the recycling cooperative Avemare, in Santana de Paraiba and member of the Sustainable Green Network of recycling cooperatives, and Cleiton Ribeiro Emboava of the waste pickers' association Associação Nova Glicério, in São Paulo.

The event began with a day of international conference, where the delegations presented the general picture of the selective collection in the respective cities and their reflections on basic social innovations in the collection and recycling of discarded materials. Present were the City Manager (mayor) of Kisumu, Ms. Doris Ombara, with her full office, and representatives of the regional government. The City Manager was extremely interested in hearing from international experiences, given that her city currently has huge problems with the accumulation of solid waste, especially in the informal neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city. According to her, 70% of the waste is not collected today, causing a serious public health and environmental problem. City Manager Doris Ombara stressed the importance of the collaboration of all researchers in the search for solutions to problems with urban waste. It asks for support in the elaboration of simple recommendations that can transform this reality in the cities. A first suggestion placed on the table was to recognize waste pickers as public servants and support their initiatives in solid waste collection and sorting.

During the discussions on the first day, it was clear to all participants, including the government representatives that the implementation of a good selective collection also requires the support of the population, which means sensitizing young people mainly to participate in the dissemination of information about 3Rs and especially the selective collection. It is the young people who need to be involved in building compromises with selective quality collection (meaning clean separation at source). According to Marcelo, a leader of the national waste picker movement, there was a great advancement for Argentinean waste pickers, with the formal recognition of the waste pickers as main actors in solid waste management; and their participation in the formulation of public policies. But the great challenges remain, for example, the increasing number of new materials that are not recycled and accumulate in the yards of waste pickers' cooperatives. Another major challenge facing the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires today is the government's proposal to introduce solid waste incineration for energy generation. According to the researchers and representatives of the collectors, this proposal



would not solve the problem of increasing solid waste generation, since it does not work to prevent generation. Waste incineration will impact the work of waste pickers and will not solve the environmental problems associated with the generation of solid waste.

In the case of Brazil, the inclusion of organized waste pickers in the national solid waste law was highlighted. However, as main obstacle was cited the difficulty in implementing inclusive selective collection at the municipal level. Many municipalities still do not have a selective collection program with waste pickers, and there are still few who actively support organized waste pickers, recognizing and remunerating their services. The recycling cooperative Avemare is presented as one of the successful experiences, with 85 members the cooperative manages to collect, sort and sell 400 tons of solid waste per month. The waste pickers act as environmental agents, informing and educating the population about issues of inclusive selective household waste collection. The support of the city council has been fundamental in consolidating the work of the cooperative, including in the improvement of the working conditions, the health of the workers and finally in the remuneration of their work. The experience of the Nova Glicério Association, brought the concern of the collectors for the lack of commitment of the local government with the selective collection made by waste pickers. Without the commitment of the government it is very difficult to have a decent income and to advance the work in terms of covering larger parts of the city with collection and implementing high quality collection. Cleiton also stressed the importance of working with organic waste, mainly for the generation of biogas and compost. With this technology, new opportunities for income generation are opened up, especially for women waste pickers, who are generally the majority in the cooperatives.



Photo 1: Presentation of Ionara and Cleiton on the experiences of waste pickers in Brazil



In Tanzania, the big challenge is related to the rapid growth of the urban population, and thus the production of solid waste (10% increase per year). Problems range from disordered urban and suburban growth, little local government investment in garbage collection and selective collection, stigmatization and marginalization of waste pickers, and the low level of organization of waste pickers. There is a network that already includes 200 intermediaries that for Tanzania, are considered an important link in the chain of the collection and destination of recyclable materials. There are, however, issues related to the dependency of the disorganized collectors of these intermediaries, and therefore the lack of perspective for a social and human development of this most disadvantaged population.

During the conference the Kiwan Cooperative was launched in Kenya. This Kenyan network of players in the solid waste sector currently has 52 members, who are collectors of solid waste, waste pickers, transporters and traders of recyclable materials. The network has the function of facilitating the dialogue and cooperation between these various actors. The network also organizes community actions such as clean-ups in the neighborhood and environmental education activities. The major challenge still ahead is related to administrative issues and the lack of transparency and accountability among the members. There are also difficulties in communication between the participants, yet to overcome. The goal of the network is to modernize the solid waste sector and expand the area of garbage collection and selective waste collection, especially in the unattended districts of Kisumu.



Photo 2: The City Manager (mayor) Doris Ombara officially recognizes the creation of the Kiwan network.



In the days following the conference, workshops were held to discuss specific issues regarding solid waste governance, always bringing the experiences of each place and region to the discussion, thus enriching the universe of examples and possibilities. In particular, the following issues were discussed:

- (1) What is the role of innovation in redefining what is considered "non-recyclable" and why?
- (2) What is the role of innovation in redefining the work of the recyclers / waste pickers?
- (3) How can innovation redefine the waste market and waste policies?
- (4) Does innovation strengthen the visibility / recognition of recyclers / waste pickers?
- (5) How does innovation strengthen / redefine the organization of waste pickers?



Photo 3: During the workshop.

In parallel to these discussions, we conducted a workshop on Participatory Video and Photo-Voice, two methods of qualitative research, used in participatory action research. This workshop involved young people who work with or are connected to work with solid waste. The main theme of this workshop was to portray different perspectives on the perception of the subjects related to trash, waste, resources. As a result, three short videos were produced, portraying the ideas of the three groups that integrated this methodological workshop. One of



the videos can already be seen in the following link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=T8rohptaz\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=T8rohptaz_Q)

The other videos are still in the editing phase and will soon be available at the following link:

<https://www.cbri.uvic.ca/>

In addition to the workshops and theoretical works, the group of participants of the event also made field visits to various informal neighborhoods, meeting biogas production projects, community gardens, selective collection and recycling. We also had the opportunity to visit the city landfill, where a large number of unorganized waste pickers still work. In conversations with some of these waste pickers we were able to learn about the hard reality of working and living at the dump, to seek recyclable materials with value among the discarded materials and to be discriminated against for being a waste picker. We could see first improvements thanks to the work of our research partner from the local university, who has built trust between him and the waste pickers and has made some concrete actions e.g. introducing a manual balance for them to be able to determine the quantity of materials sorted and the construction of a shelter space next to the dump.



Photo 4: During a field visit.

The participation of Brazilian waste pickers in this conference, in the workshops, field visits and informal information exchanges was extremely rich, contributing with their everyday experiences, reflections based on their daily practices and innovations adapted to an



environment of scarcity, a lack of resources and political difficulties. The lessons learned and the benefits have also been many for the two waste pickers. Cleiton said that: *"I learned to value what we have ..... Many achievements we have for them is a huge step forward, and here we already conquered 10 years ago (but we do not give more value). .... I learned from them to give value to the human being. The valuation of work, aesthetics (appearance), right to housing, right to income, and sharing"*. Finally, *"valuing human life and sharing between different social classes"*.

For Ionara, from the cooperative Avemare, it was marked the fact that *"The people of Kisumu have shown me that despite so many daily difficulties we must never lose faith and have a smile in our face and seek day after day a solution and fight the problems without getting upset or revolted. ... The coolest of all was that Avemare sent a woman to represent Brazil. It should also be noted that, although the category of waste pickers in Brazil still faces so many difficulties, we are a step ahead... because we have several examples of reference cooperatives that show that it is worthwhile believing in this work and most importantly, the return it brings both to the environment and the social aspects in people's lives"*. This exchange also brought many new perceptions on a personal level. *"It was a shock of reality to go to the other side of the world and see that we have similar daily difficulties, but we see that there are people with more problems than ours and that many times we complain with a full belly because we have everything and we do not know how to thank, I have learned to value my shower, my bed, my family, everything, even water that is usually a everyday resource that we only learn to appreciate when we do not have it. "*

The next steps in the *Recycling Networks and Waste Governance* research project involve carrying out in-depth studies in each of the cities on the key research questions with the elaboration of the final products of documents accessible to government and technicians involved in solid waste management, on practical improvements in the management of solid waste (policy briefs). The data already collected allows the production of a research report and several academic publications, discussing specific topics on basic innovation, organization of waste picker networks, resistance and social movements, global value chains of recyclable materials and other subjects, besides the production of various videos. Updated information on this survey can be accessed through the site: <https://www.cbri.uvic.ca/> and through the social media channels of the project.

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