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**Six recommendations to correct the total inattention to Solid Waste and Recycling and renew international commitment to integrated sustainable waste management (ISWM). Intervention of the NGO Major Group in the First Solid Waste Thematic Session of the CSD-18 on 5 May 2010. Made by Anne Scheinberg, WASTE, the Netherlands**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Esteemed Representative of UNDESA, Esteemed Speakers and Representatives. I am making the comments on behalf of the NGO Major Group. Many of our remarks confirm or strengthen the interventions made already, specifically by the Distinguished Representative of Egypt for the Group of Africa, and the Representative of Algeria for the Group of 77 plus China. I would like to offer six NGO recommendations to correct what we see as a serious global failure of attention on the solid waste theme. Solid waste is not mentioned in the MDGs, and it has a low profile in the UN system and in multi-national organisations and bilateral donor policies. This has to change. Why? Because by ignoring solid waste, the CSD is failing the thousands of municipal authorities and their citizens for whom solid waste is a high, if not the highest, priority problem they are facing. And because improper solid waste management hurts everyone, but especially the most vulnerable groups, such as children and animals who eat plastic or organics, peri-urban and slum area dwellers, and poor, rural and indigenous communities who are forced to host landfills or other solid waste facilities. We offer six points in favour of a renewed global partnership for solid waste management and recycling, on the way to the end of waste.

**1 Improve information at city level. Collect, document, and analyse local problems and good local practices, and analyse the waste stream and what is already happening to materials.**

There is a need for better information on how much and what kind of waste. Why? Because without this information actual quantities of waste are over-estimated, and the amounts that are already being recycled or avoided or directed to the agricultural uses are under-estimated. This leads to a vicious cycle of designing and capitalising facilities that are too big, too high technology, and too expensive. Donors and national ministries may be willing to finance these facilities, but they are too large for cities to afford to operate them, and so they litter the landscape and don't work. They drive fees up and create a cycle of non-payment. They eat up local investment capital for smaller-scale initiatives. specifically:

1. Document performance of existing systems, measure and track where waste is already going and what is happening to it, especially the work of non-state actors and waste generators<sup>1</sup>
2. Measure and give credit to the daily work of informal recyclers and micro and small enterprises collecting waste and keeping the city clean.
3. Measure and track the actual amounts of waste being collected and dumped

**2 Develop, disseminate, and use better financial tools, systems, and incentives that promote affordability, fairness, and burden-sharing.**

Sustainable waste systems have to be affordable, and in the UN-Habitat book<sup>2</sup> process we confirmed that sustainable tariffs are between .03% and 2% of household income. This usually pays for household collection and removal. International institutions pressuring cities to recover more than this from households are unfair and unrealistic. National governments need to pay for safe disposal, and citizens can pay for collection. When this financial discipline is introduced, it will drive technology ambitions down, and local authorities will focus on realistic and affordable options, rather than global best practices which cost more than they can afford. Several other financial tools are extremely important as the focus of capacity development:

<sup>1</sup> For example, many developing countries have extensive livestock feeding systems based on organic waste. Strengthen these, rather than seeking to replace them with new systems for composting.

<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat's Third Global Report on Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities is entitled: Solid Waste Management in the World's Cities (2010). Available from Habitat and EarthScan.

1. promote and disseminate activity-based costing in municipal organisations
2. create output-based tariffs and diversion credits that reward prevention, repair, reuse, redesign, recycling, diversion of organic waste, and
3. implement producer responsibility and transfer payments for end of life management.
4. increase access to finance and investment for the micro, small, and informal private sector so that financing of small-scale local businesses and technologies becomes possible

### **3 Strengthen institutions and focus on political commitment, not technology**

We miss this point in almost all interventions to date. Improving waste management depends as much on the institutions as on the technologies. Consolidate solid waste and recycling functions within municipal organisations so that there is a clear point of accountability in the organogram and one clear budget section. This allows both management and financial transparency.

### **4 Build capacities for management, consultation, listening, and information exchange.**

All speakers mention this, but we have three specific areas for attention.

1. Work to professionalise, legitimise, recognise, and protect the activities of informal sector recyclers and the MSE, CBO, and NGO service providers who keep the city clean.
2. Open spaces for participation of non-state actors and the local private and NGO sector in decision-making at city and national level.
3. Build capacities of planners and municipal officials for listening to citizens and civil society via processes of consultation and participation. Two-way communication is *not* the same as a campaign to tell citizens what to do.
4. Facilitate information exchange and networking, especially where there is peer exchange or south-south information exchange ([www.cwgnet.net](http://www.cwgnet.net))
5. Create and support national solid waste and recycling platforms.

### **5 Build on what works – also in the 3Rs**

As mentioned by the Representative from China and others, build on local successes and good practices.

1. Make plans or changes only after there is a good and detailed baseline and report on existing systems
2. Integrate the informal recycling chain in municipal recycling efforts, rather than ignoring or criminalising them.
6. Support and promote (pro-poor) public private partnerships (PPPs and 5-Ps)
3. Import vehicles and machines only when there is local expertise and sources of replacement parts
4. Be critical in adapting global ideas about what good practice is. Technologies and institutions from the North may require “domestication” to be workable, sustainable, and affordable.

### **6 Work towards the end of waste**

1. Remember that waste management is an indicator of failed materials cycles and an overheated system of production and consumption.
2. Measure, document, celebrate and reward good small-scale affordable local practices, and share them with others who need the information.
3. While you keep the city clean, work on the transition to closing materials and nutrient cycles that is the real measure of sustainability. Support increased recovery in industry and agriculture.
4. Introduce extended producer responsibility, especially for complex durable and toxic products. Costa Rica just passed the first national EPR law outside of Europe for Electronic waste. Follow that example.

### **In closing: Bridge the North-South Divide**

1. Low- and middle-income countries deserve more than an imperfect copy of solid waste systems which may or may not work in Northern Europe, North America, and Australasia. Fortunately there are many good, practical solutions and approaches being used in low- and middle-income countries that can be replicated and adapted, and there is room for invention, creativity and dialogue.