



## Country case study in Nigeria

# Challenges and opportunities in the informal waste sector

How can fast-moving consumer goods companies and governments engage with the informal waste sector?

A case study written by Tearfund and funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)




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 Front cover photo: Street market in Jos, Nigeria. Steve Goddard/Tearfund.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CSR	Corporate social responsibility
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
FBRA	Food and Beverage Recycling Alliance
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
FIWON	Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria
FMCG	Fast-moving consumer goods
IWS	Informal waste sector
LAWMA	Lagos Waste Management Authority
LDPE	Low-density polyethylene
NESREA	National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency
NASWON	National Association of Scrap and Waste Workers of Nigeria
PCR	Post consumer resin
PET	Polyethylene terephthalate
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PRO	Producer responsibility organisation
SWM	Solid waste management
TCCC	The Coca-Cola Company
TCCF	The Coca-Cola Foundation
VEPR	Voluntary Extended Producer Responsibility

# Section 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The production of solid waste in Nigeria is among the highest in Africa, the majority of which is collected by the informal waste sector (IWS).<sup>1</sup> Despite the crucial role waste pickers play in tackling this plastic pollution crisis, their human rights and livelihoods are not sufficiently protected by the state or respected by business. As a result, waste pickers frequently experience human rights impacts such as inadequate compensation, poor working conditions and exclusion from markets and decision-making processes which affect their livelihoods. The causes of these impacts are complex and systemic, and require governments, companies and other stakeholders to collaborate with the IWS towards environmentally and socially sound solid waste management (SWM) solutions.

This case study explores the relationship that currently exists between fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies, governments and the IWS in Nigeria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted over WhatsApp between October 2021 and July 2022 with representatives from the National Association of Scrap and Waste Workers (NASWON), industry and government in Nigeria. This paper also draws information from relevant websites, grey literature, and academic journals. Interviews conducted with representatives of NASWON were a particularly critical input into this research.

The paper begins by establishing an understanding of the wider context of the IWS, and subsequently reviews the legislative environment of SWM, extended producer responsibility (EPR) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> Next, the paper explores the challenges and human rights impacts experienced by the IWS in Nigeria. Following this, the paper analyses the role of FMCG companies, producer responsibility organisations (PROs) and governments, and specific examples of initiatives involving the IWS. Finally, this paper proposes policy recommendations for governments and FMCG companies, drawing on learning from the analysis.

## 1.2 Definitions

The production of solid waste in Nigeria is among the highest in Africa, the majority of which is collected by the informal waste sector (IWS). Despite the crucial role waste pickers play in tackling this plastic pollution crisis, their human rights

### Waste pickers

A waste picker is an informal actor within the SWM system, who earns an income through collecting, sorting, or selling waste materials.<sup>3</sup> In Nigeria, waste pickers are referred to by a variety of terms, some of which are considered to be derogatory. In south-west Nigeria, waste pickers may be referred to as ‘scavengers’ or *Baban Bola* (which can be translated as ‘father of trash’) in Hausa language.<sup>4</sup> In Northern parts of Nigeria, waste pickers are also referred to as *onye na-kpofu ihe* in Igbo language and Olugbe egbin in Yoruba. In Lagos, street waste pickers who use wheelbarrows or carts to transport collected waste may be referred to as ‘barro boys’, or cart pushers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNIDO. 2021. 22, 33; Ike, C. et al. 2018. 163.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for more detail of interviews conducted and Appendix 2 for further details of the studies consulted.

<sup>3</sup> WIEGO. 2021c.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Hausa Dictionary* at: [https://hausadictionary.com/Main\\_Page](https://hausadictionary.com/Main_Page)

<sup>5</sup> Abdullahi, S. 2021.

## Middlemen

Middlemen are stakeholders within the plastics value chain who are an intermediary between informal waste pickers and formal stakeholders. Middlemen may be scrap dealers or itinerant buyers who purchase collected recyclable materials from waste pickers. In northern Nigeria, scrap markets where waste pickers and middlemen do their trade are called *panteka*.<sup>6</sup> These may also be called *ebe ha na-ere ihe nkpoju* in Igbo or *oja egbin waste* in Yoruba.<sup>7</sup> Middlemen are also known as *maisikeli* in the Hausa language,<sup>8</sup> *Arin Awon Okunrin-Middle Men* in Yoruba and *Ndj nwoke etiti-Middle Men* in Igbo language. Middlemen are largely informal actors, but larger operations may be registered as formal businesses.

## The informal waste sector

The IWS encompasses all informal stakeholders within the waste management sector, including waste pickers, cart pushers, and middlemen who do not have a formal registered business.

# Section 2 – Understanding the context

## 2.1 Waste in Nigeria

### Scale and drivers of waste generation

Nigeria is one of the largest producers of solid waste in Africa with an estimated output of 32 million tonnes of solid waste per year, at least 13 per cent of which is plastic.<sup>9</sup> This equates to approximately 4 million tonnes of plastic waste per year. It has been predicted that, by 2025, waste generation in Nigeria will increase to an annual rate of 72 million tonnes, representing 25 per cent of Africa's total waste generation.<sup>10</sup> If plastic waste generation continues at a rate of 13 per cent of Nigeria's total waste generation, plastic waste will rise to 9 million tonnes per year by 2025.

A number of factors have contributed to the increase in plastic waste generation in Nigeria. Government policy has, in some sectors, led to an increased reliance on plastic. In 2008, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) directed all soft drinks producers to adopt the use of PET bottles instead of refillable glass bottles. By 2011, it was estimated that 200 million PET bottles were being produced in Nigeria every day.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, LDPE plastic sachets are widely used in Nigeria due to their affordability and the need to access drinking water.<sup>12</sup> In 2010, research found that more than 70 per cent of Nigerians use sachets for drinking water, resulting in an estimated 60 million sachets discarded per day.<sup>13</sup> Over the past decade, this figure is likely to have increased due to Nigeria's increased population.<sup>14</sup> Plastic pollution is also driven by the widespread use of cellophane plastic bags, and other plastic packaging, all of which contribute to the major SWM challenge Nigeria faces.

### Impact on people and planet

Lack of access to adequate SWM in Nigeria has created serious health challenges for humans and animals, and caused significant environmental degradation in Nigeria. The major method of waste treatment in landfills is open burning, which generates smoke and toxic fumes. This negatively impacts air quality and is

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<sup>6</sup> Ogwueleka, T. and Naveen, B. 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Ben Osawe, Advocacy Manager at Tearfund Nigeria. Written feedback. 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Abdullahi, S. 2021

<sup>9</sup> UNIDO. 2021. 22, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Arogundade, S. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Business Insider Africa. 2021; Abdulkarim, I. and Abiodun, A. 2012. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Dumbili, E. and Henderson, L. 2020. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Urama, N., Ukwueze, R. and Aneke G. 2012. 119.

<sup>14</sup> Graphs depicting the increase in population can be found at:

[https://datacommons.org/place/country/NGA?utm\\_medium=explore&mprop=count&popt=Person&hl=en](https://datacommons.org/place/country/NGA?utm_medium=explore&mprop=count&popt=Person&hl=en)

particularly dangerous for people who live in or around dumpsites, or who work on them. In addition, discarded plastics also cause blockages, flooding and water contamination, and attract disease-spreading insects and vermin. The impact of plastic waste in Nigeria is immense.

## 2.2 Governance and legislative context

### Solid waste management in Nigeria

The Nigerian Federal Ministry for the Environment is responsible for SWM in Nigeria through its enforcement arm, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA). Established in 2007, NESREA is responsible for enforcing all national environmental laws, policies, and regulations,<sup>15</sup> and parastatal SWM agencies at state level have devolved responsibility to implement this within individual states.<sup>16</sup> The National Policy on Environment (revised 2016), the National Policy on Solid Waste Management (2018) and the National Policy on Plastic Waste Management (2020) are of particular relevance to the issue of plastic pollution.

However, the government at both national and state levels in Nigeria tends to have limited capacity for waste management, and the proportion of waste which is collected through formal SWM systems varies in different states.<sup>17</sup> In Lagos, the World Bank has estimated that only ten per cent of households are currently covered by government collection systems.<sup>18</sup> In some states, there are no official landfill sites and residents are forced to dump waste in 'burrow pits' (unlicensed landfills in residential areas) and vacant land (which become illegal dumpsites), or otherwise leave waste to end up in sewers, water bodies and roadsides. Lack of provisions for SWM has been compounded by poor urban planning and high levels of urban migration which have overwhelmed the capacity of formal waste management systems in Nigeria.<sup>19</sup> It is estimated that as a result, the IWS carries out up to 70 percent of recyclable waste collection.<sup>20</sup>

### Extended producer responsibility (EPR)

In order to address waste packaging, in 2016, NESREA launched the extended producer responsibility (EPR) programme as part of the National Policy on Plastic Waste Management.<sup>21</sup> EPR is a policy approach by which producers are required to take responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products at end-of-life by either financing or delivering the operational and organisational aspects of a product's treatment or disposal.<sup>22</sup> To support the implementation of EPR, NESREA released operational guidelines intended as a reference guide for all stakeholders in the plastic waste value chain.<sup>23</sup> The guidelines state that producers, which include FMCG companies, must submit a plan to NESREA every three years, detailing how collection, processing and disposal of the packaging waste they generate will be funded and managed.<sup>24</sup> NESREA can approve or reject this plan,<sup>25</sup> and will periodically review producers' targets for reuse, recycling and recovery of packaging waste.<sup>26</sup> The guidelines do not delegate PROs or producers with responsibilities regarding the IWS but they do contain some guidance for recyclers and collectors. The guidelines state that recyclers are to ensure the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by all workers, including waste collectors. They are to partner with waste collectors, and pay collectors and informal collectors (though there is no guidance for appropriate remuneration).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Anukam, L. 2018.

<sup>16</sup> UNIDO. 2021. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Adanikin, O. 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Kaza, S., Yao, L., Bhada-Tata P. and Van Woerden, F. 2018. 80.

<sup>19</sup> Ogwueleka, T. and Naveen, B. 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Ike, C. et al. 2018. 163.

<sup>21</sup> UNIDO. 2021. 43.

<sup>22</sup> OECD. 2016. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ajania, I. and Kunlere, I. 2019.

<sup>24</sup> NESREA. 2014. 31–32.

<sup>25</sup> NESREA. 2014. 32.

<sup>26</sup> NESREA. 2014. 17.

<sup>27</sup> NESREA. 2014. 27.

The guidelines also detail the responsibilities of collectors and informal collectors. Within them, collectors are defined as a 'person or organisation who operates a centre or point where wastes are collected or stored temporarily for the purpose of recycling'.<sup>28</sup> Informal collectors, or waste pickers, are defined as those who search and pick waste that can be reused or recycled and do not belong to any formal organisation.<sup>29</sup> Collectors must work closely with recyclers and informal collectors, and pay informal collectors (though, again, there is no indication of appropriate remuneration). Informal collectors must register with a collection centre, work closely with the operators of collection centres and consumers, use approved transportation systems/carts, ensure the use of appropriate PPE, receive compensation from collectors or operators of collection centres, provide compensation or payment for consumers and promote any other actions towards the successful implementation of the EPR programme.<sup>30</sup> It ought to be noted that this distinction between collectors and informal collectors is not necessarily comprehensive or aligned with the definition of waste pickers adopted by the International Alliance of Waste Pickers.<sup>31</sup>

### **Corporate social responsibility (CSR)**

CSR is an approach by which companies incorporate ethical considerations into their business practices. This may take the form of support for, or engagement in, voluntary or charitable initiatives. As at present, there is no law in Nigeria that makes it mandatory for companies to either incorporate CSR policies or ensure compliance,<sup>32</sup> but some individual companies have pursued involvement in a number of voluntary initiatives.

### **Enforcement of waste legislation**

A significant gap exists in the implementation of environmental regulations in Nigeria for a number of reasons.<sup>33</sup> Some states do not have the administrative, collection or recycling capacity necessary to meet targets set out in national policy.<sup>34</sup> This may be compounded by a lack of coordination between government agencies, and inadequate funding to develop SWM capacity. There is a lack of data necessary to inform SWM policy in Nigeria, and monitoring and enforcement systems for existing policies are weak.<sup>35</sup> In the revised National Policy on the Environment, released in 2016, the federal government stated that 'the volume of solid wastes is overwhelming urban administrators' capacity to plan, evacuate and dispose wastes [...] The operation of the waste management authorities is inefficient and ineffective as evidenced by mounds of decomposing rubbish that is a part of the regular landscape of many of the urban areas'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> NESREA. 2014. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> International Alliance of Waste Pickers. 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Mordi, C., Opeyemi, I., Tonbara, T. and Ojo, S. 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Ajania, I. and Kunlere, I. 2019. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Federal Government of Nigeria. 2020. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Federal Government of Nigeria. 2020. 9–10.

<sup>36</sup> Federal Government of Nigeria. 2016.

## Section 3 – The IWS in Nigeria

### 3.1 Background

#### The significant role of waste pickers in the recycling chain

It has been estimated that there are over a million people earning an income as waste pickers in Nigeria.<sup>37</sup> Given the lack of capacity in the formal SWM system, the IWS carries out the majority of recyclable waste collection, which can include metal, plastic, paper and glass.<sup>38</sup> Waste pickers in Nigeria broadly fall into one of two categories: either they are ‘street pickers’ or they pick at dumpsites.<sup>39</sup> Street pickers collect household or commercial waste, either through extracting material from bins and the streets, or through collection from households directly for a fee.<sup>40</sup> Waste pickers who work on dumpsites typically hand pick waste from landfill, both at unlicensed and government-owned sites.

Once recyclable materials have been collected, waste pickers will endeavour to sell them on. Using bags, bales, metal carts (also called a ‘push-push’) or private vehicles, waste pickers transport their materials to scrap collectors, also known as aggregators, middlemen or panteka.<sup>41</sup> Some aggregators loan out carts to waste pickers for this purpose, but most waste pickers are unable to access a cart or vehicle and will carry their collected materials in sacks or bags.<sup>42</sup>

The activities of the IWS drive Nigeria’s collection, recovery and recycling rates. Their contribution to waste collection subsidises the lack of government collection services, and, as a result, saves municipalities significant expenditure on collection. The IWS is a crucial part of the plastics value chain in Nigeria, and without the service they provide, the plastic pollution crisis would be even more severe.

Waste pickers in Nigeria are represented by the National Association of Scrap and Waste Workers of Nigeria (NASWON), an affiliate of the Federation of Informal Workers Organisation of Nigeria (FIWON). (NASWON was formerly known as the National Union of Scrap and Waste Workers of Nigeria.<sup>43</sup>) There are also many smaller associations and cooperatives through which waste pickers come together in their localities. Scrap dealers, informal aggregators and middlemen are represented by the Scrap Dealers Association of Nigeria (SAN).<sup>44</sup> There are many smaller associations which represent IWS stakeholders in a local context.

### 3.2 Challenges faced by waste pickers

#### Income

A key challenge waste pickers report is inadequate income. They are typically not compensated for their labour and often receive low remuneration for their collected materials. Waste pickers may also lack bargaining power in price setting, and experience income instability and insecurity due to the absence of fixed contracts and market exclusion.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the challenge of income insecurity is compounded by the fact that, for many, waste picking comprises the majority of their livelihood. One study in Calabar, Cross River State, found that over 80 per cent of waste pickers in the area reported that this was their sole means of livelihood.<sup>46</sup> Despite the challenges associated with income security in this occupation, with 33 per cent

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<sup>37</sup> Adepitan, A. 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Ike, C. et al. 2018. 163.

<sup>39</sup> Friday Oku, President of NASWON. Interviewed 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Mshelia, A. 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Friday Oku, President of NASWON. Interviewed 2020.

<sup>43</sup> WIEGO. 2021a.

<sup>44</sup> WIEGO. 2021b.

<sup>45</sup> Shift. 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Ajom, S. and Eteng, S. 2021.



of Nigeria's labour force unemployed,<sup>47</sup> many people become waste pickers in the absence of other income opportunities. As one interviewee said, 'Waste pickers are doing it because it is their last opportunity, it is their last resort.'<sup>48</sup> Two waste pickers recounted how the price they receive for collected materials is highly variable:

**'The price for what we collect varies. Some days, it might be a good price. Sometimes it might not be enough. It is not good, but I just have to survive. Waste pickers don't spend time thinking about it. We are putting bread on the table.'**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

**'The price – there is no standardised price as far as business is concerned. The highest bidder is the one we give our product to. There is no fixed price, it is frustrating. The intermediary between you and the company you are supplying, he sets the price.'**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

Despite the variation that exists in waste pickers' day to day income, some data on average earnings exists. One study surveyed waste pickers in Abuja and found that waste pickers typically earn N1,100 (US\$2.80) to N1,700 (\$4.20) per day.<sup>49</sup> By comparison, the national minimum wage in Nigeria equates to around N1,100 (\$2.80) per day.<sup>50</sup> However, if the national minimum wage in Nigeria assumes an eight hour working day, then many waste pickers earn at a much lower rate, due to the length of their working days and weeks.

That being said, it is important to note that the minimum daily wage in Nigeria of \$2.80 a day is only \$0.90 above the international poverty line.<sup>51</sup> The fact that IWS workers have the potential to achieve earnings which may exceed the national minimum wage does not mean that they have a living income, which enables a decent standard of living. In addition, other studies conducted elsewhere in Nigeria indicate that waste pickers' income can be much lower than this. For example, a study conducted in 2017 in Warri, Delta State, found that 88 per cent of waste pickers interviewed would say they earn less than N2,000 (\$5.60) per month. All this to say, it is clear that the income of waste pickers is both insecure and extremely variable.

### **Access to financial services and support**

Waste pickers are typically remunerated through cash in hand, and most do not have a bank account due to barriers in literacy, lacking the required documentation and, practically, being unable to spend time on the process of registration.<sup>52</sup> One waste picker from Lagos describes this challenge:

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<sup>47</sup> Trading Economics. 2021.

<sup>48</sup> FIWON Coordinator for North West. Interviewed 19/01/2022.

<sup>49</sup> Exchange rate retrieved in 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Ogwueleka, T. and Naveen, B. 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Development Initiatives. 2021.

<sup>52</sup> W.A.S.T.E Africa. Interviewed 2021.

**‘There is no bank supporting us. They will tell you to bring documentation you don't have. Some waste pickers cannot get a loan. They can't supply the paper. We are left to our fate to see what we can put on the table. It is a challenge for us.’**

**Waste picker from Yola, Adamawa State**

As a result, many waste pickers lack access to financial services and the ability to save for the future.<sup>53</sup> In Nigeria, this is particularly the case for women: 55 per cent of women do not use formal financial services, compared to 44 per cent of men.<sup>54</sup> In interviews, many waste pickers also expressed retirement and sickness as a particular concern, highlighting that, despite the fact that they have provided a public service, they have received no recognition from the government.

**‘I have been collecting for 35 years. But when I retire, I will have no support. The government does not recognise us.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

**‘There is no cover for if you are tired or sick. If you don't work for a day, you are on your own. If the government knows that you are working, then we could be left something – like social welfare.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

In addition, interviews conducted for this case study also suggested that waste pickers can often get into debt with middlemen as a result of disadvantageous deals for their collected materials, or access to equipment such as carts.

### **Working conditions**

The working conditions of waste pickers pose significant health and safety risks. Contaminated materials, sharp objects, fires, trucks, and the vermin attracted by waste can cause physical harm and disease.<sup>55</sup> Other health risks at the dumpsite include fume inhalation from decomposing materials, eyesores, exposure to sun radiation, fatigue, and risk of infectious diseases like cholera, malaria, typhoid fever and dysentery.<sup>56</sup> One study conducted in Ogun State found that half of the waste pickers reported that they walked through the dump bare footed and collect materials with their bare hands. Another study found that the majority

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<sup>53</sup> Abdullahi, S. 2021.

<sup>54</sup> The Cable. 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung. 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Mshelia, A. 2015.

(63.3 per cent) of waste pickers reported that when they had an injury they could not afford to lose income by receiving treatment, and would continue with their work.<sup>57</sup>

Tragically, it is not uncommon for people working as waste pickers to die at work due to accidents with vehicles onsite. The constant activity of bulldozers and excavators has been described as a ‘permanently life-threatening workspace’.<sup>58</sup> A waste picker interviewed gives a sobering account:

**‘Many of our boys have died. We need safety. We need access to services in emergencies and the hospital. They are dying in accidents. We do not receive any support. We have to carry them away and bury them. Sometimes, some of our pickers – everyone is searching for what they want to take. A broken bottle cuts one of our boys. It gets infected. It gets in their leg. Trucks can't see at the back, and they mow them down. Our motto is that we do everything for everybody. But before we can do anything, he has died.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

Many waste pickers seek to live in close proximity to where they work in order to maximise their working hours. Some live near or onsite as their permanent residence<sup>59</sup> and others may stay in makeshift shelters used only for working days.<sup>60</sup> Needless to say, such proximity to a dumpsite makes for very poor living conditions. At Olusosun landfill, a 100-acre dump in Lagos and the largest dumpsite in Africa, over 1,000 homes of waste pickers have been built around the dumpsite. This exposes waste pickers and their families to the fumes of burning waste and other hazards associated with a dumpsite.

Waste pickers tend to work long hours with little time off. Studies in Abuja<sup>61</sup> and Lagos<sup>62</sup> found that over 60 per cent of waste pickers work between ten and 14 hours per day. Another study surveyed waste pickers in Ogun State, and found that 90 per cent worked 7 days a week.<sup>63</sup> One waste picker recounts:

**‘In Nigeria, the way we do things, we don't have a set period for work. We are the ones who fit to our work. So the times we work are different. Sometimes we get up at 4am or 5am, if we are travelling, sometimes we can leave later. I have to leave early to beat my colleagues, or otherwise the material is gone.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

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<sup>57</sup> Amosu, A. and Tella, A. 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Holland Circular Hotspot. 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung. 2020. 46.

<sup>60</sup> Asibor, I. and Edjere, O. 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Ogwueleka, T. and Naveen, B. 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Omosimua, I., Oluranti, O., Obindah, G. and Busayo, A. 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Amosu, A. and Tella, A. 2021.

## Covid-19

Many people have suffered damage to livelihoods and poor working conditions as a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic, but informal workers, including the IWS, have been particularly at risk to these effects.<sup>64</sup> Waste pickers are regularly exposed to used discarded medical waste such as face masks, gloves and other PPE waste and, during the pandemic, this increased the risk of contracting the Covid-19 virus.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the nature of their work necessarily requires coming into contact with others (in collecting materials, travelling and selling material), which further increased their exposure to the virus. In 2020, Friday Oku, President of NASWON, urged the government to implement a comprehensive social protection programme for waste pickers in Nigeria, citing the lack of PPE, poor access to healthcare for the IWS and increased exposure to potentially contaminated waste.<sup>66</sup> A waste picker from Lagos recounts their experience of this:

**“At the dumpsite, there is no PPE. And, even if we have it, it is individually sourced. There is no assistance. Working conditions are very very bad.”**

In addition, the lack of recognition for waste pickers disadvantaged their right to work during the pandemic lockdown. LAWMA ordered waste pickers to leave all the city dumpsites, even though formal SWM activities continued to be recognised as an essential service during this time.<sup>67</sup> It is important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic did not necessarily create new challenges for waste pickers. Rather, it highlighted and exacerbated existing deficiencies in the protection afforded to waste pickers which existed before the pandemic.

### Discrimination and stigma

Unfortunately, public perceptions of waste pickers in Nigeria are overwhelmingly negative. Many waste pickers report that they have experienced harassment and hostility from civilians and law enforcement officials, adding that waste pickers are often the first suspects for any crime committed, and generally regarded as of very low social standing:

**‘Some of them are boys who are picking from the street. If they move to an estate, they may be beaten in trying to collect. The populace are against us. We don’t have any encouragement from our government.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

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<sup>64</sup> Nzeadibe, T. C. and Ejike-Alieji, A. 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Adanikin, O. 2020.

<sup>66</sup> NASWON. 2020.

<sup>67</sup> LAWMA [@Lawma\_gov]. 18/04/2020.

**‘I would say people look at waste pickers as stinky people, they are thinking, “Why should we advocate for them?” They don’t understand us. They don’t want us in their area. There is therefore discrimination attached to it. They look at us as low class. And they look at us as locusts.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

## Gender

The gender distribution of the various roles which men and women occupy within the IWS in Nigeria varies by region and context. Interviews with female waste pickers give insight into the specific challenges women face:

**‘We are not as strong as the men, so we can’t collect as much and we have no provision for health insurance to back us up. The males work more than us. They have more capacity to deliver more materials. So women have to work more for the same to survive. We need special funding for women. Women get strain on their backs from carrying. Sometimes we have to struggle with the men for the same materials and platform. Some places segregate men and women because of this. We all barge in when waste is dumped to tussle for the materials.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

**‘There are lots of challenges for being a woman as a waste picker. You face harassment in the streets, harassment at the dump. It is not safe for you.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

Studies reviewed for this paper suggest that a significantly higher proportion of waste pickers in Nigeria are male.<sup>68</sup> This difference in gender distribution can be attributed to religious norms and cultural expectations which discourage women from working as waste pickers in public.<sup>69</sup> However, a number of studies clarified that in these contexts, women may still be involved in waste picking through sorting the collected materials in the home.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>69</sup> Abdullahi, S. 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Ogwueleka, T. and Naveen, B. 2021; Abdullahi, S. 2021.

## Movement up the value chain

Waste pickers experience significant challenges in moving up the value chain. Needs commonly identified in interviews were access to finance, mobility, machinery, and training.

Lack of access to finance negatively impacts the IWS in Nigeria.<sup>71</sup> Many waste pickers interviewed identified grant schemes or other financial support as a key need in order to move up the value chain. This paper has already addressed the challenges that waste pickers experience in accessing financial services and support on a personal level, but there is also no financial support available for waste picking in general. The government does not support waste pickers in the service they provide through grants or funds, or reimbursement.

Additionally, in some contexts, government agencies have required that waste pickers change their means of collection without providing financial support to help them achieve this. For example, LAWMA requires waste pickers to use tricycles to collect and transport their waste, but this has been an additional challenge. One waste picker from Lagos described the situation: ‘We are using carts to push. They don’t want to see that. They want us to use tricycles. But it’s capital intensive to get those, we don’t have that money.’

While this change would bring some benefits to waste pickers (tricycles are less physically strenuous and would increase capacity for collection), the policy shifts the financial burden onto waste pickers and the initial investment cost of a tricycle is beyond the means of the average waste picker.

Lack of access to finance also restricts movement up the value chain because of lack of machinery. Waste pickers expressed that machinery such as crushers and balers would allow them to expand their operations and increase their income.

Waste pickers are restricted in terms of quantity of materials and speed of collection without better means of mobility. Many waste pickers only have access to bags or carts, and are only able to transport what they can physically carry or push. This restricts the scale of their operations and their potential earnings.

**‘When the waste pickers go to pick, they don’t have equipment. So they just use their hands. After picking, they are very stressed, and tired, because they have to use their hands for everything – then they have to pack it and take it to the waste collector, but they can’t pack it – they have no mobility – they can only get a sack, or carts – but sometimes they are not available.’**

### Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State

Waste pickers have noted that their operations would be able to expand if they could access vehicles or other means of transport which are less physically demanding. One waste picker from Lagos shared: ‘We need vehicles to move our waste from one location to another – it could be a pick up truck or lorry.’

Waste pickers interviewed also noted the role of training in helping them to move up the value chain. The most useful were financial literacy training, health and safety awareness and business skills.

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<sup>71</sup> Ogwueleka, T. and Naveen, B. 2021.

The challenge waste pickers face in moving up the value chain is closely linked to the challenge of income security. Lack of machinery, mobility and access to finance prevents waste pickers from becoming direct suppliers of recyclable material to formal stakeholders higher up the value chain. It is for this reason that waste pickers must sell to middlemen, who set the price that waste pickers receive. One waste picker describes this challenge: ‘They [recyclers] ask for huge volumes, which we as waste pickers cannot supply. Neither an individual or a group of waste pickers can meet their targets. That is why we have to go to an intermediary. We call it the financial capacity challenge. We need a grant to meet their capacity, then we could supply’.

### **Access to waste materials and land**

Waste pickers’ experience of access to waste and land on which to live and store recyclable materials is varied. Some waste pickers have reported difficulties in accessing the land on which waste is held. A waste picker from Yola, Adamawa State, recounts that residents may charge waste pickers for access to the waste on their land, having become aware of its potential value. They shared: ‘Sometimes it is community members [who charge us], because they know the value now, so when we go to their houses, they take advantage of us, and they sell at a price greater than the true value. They sell at an inflated price. And from the dumpsite, there are houses which are close to the dumpsite, so the people around that area ask for something before we can pick. They say the land belongs to them.’

Government agencies and law enforcement have also been reported to require fees from waste pickers in order to access government dumpsites.<sup>72</sup> One study of waste pickers in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State, found that 56 per cent of the IWS workers suffered extortion by security agencies. Waste pickers in Birnin Kebbi have come together as Kungiyar Yan Jari Bola Association, with retainership of a lawyer, solely to protect the IWS workers and the middlemen from extortion.<sup>73</sup> A waste picker in Lagos recounts a similar experience: ‘Sometimes the officials there keep telling us to stop picking there unless we pay money. We think this is extortion. We can’t give any money. They were increasing the money over time, up to a point which we couldn’t afford [...] If we refuse the money, they don’t allow us to work.’

There have also been reports of difficulties experienced by waste pickers seeking to live near to the dumpsites at which they collect. A journalist, describing the dumpsites in Federal Capital Territory (FCT), states, ‘Those lands [waste pickers] occupy, however, are not their own, but because of their acquaintance with the owners of the land, they stay with the agreement to leave whenever the owner wants to use his land.’<sup>74</sup> This lack of stability in access to land is a challenge for many waste pickers, and is a further barrier to their movement up the value chain due to the space needed for waste pickers to store, sort and aggregate their collected materials.

## **3.3 Root causes**

The challenges described above are undoubtedly interrelated and are the result of a variety of underlying causes. However, two particular issues which are important for understanding the context of the IWS in Nigeria emerged from interviews: the roles of child labour and education, and migration.

### **Child labour and education**

The relationship between education, waste picking and child labour in Nigeria is complex. Nigeria has the highest number of children out of school in the world: UNICEF estimates that 10.5 million children between the ages of five and fourteen are not in school.<sup>75</sup> A significant proportion of these are Almajiri, children who go to a Qur’anic boarding school. (This is a phenomenon specific to northern Nigeria.) As these schools do

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<sup>72</sup> This was testified by multiple waste pickers throughout interviews.

<sup>73</sup> Abdullahi, S. 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Gata, A. 2015.

<sup>75</sup> UNICEF. 2021.

not include basic skills in literacy or numeracy, UNICEF and the government of Nigeria consider these children to be officially out of education.<sup>76</sup> It is estimated that there are more than 9.5 million Almajiri children, many of whom live in extremely poor conditions, without adequate access to shelter, clothing, food, sanitation and healthcare. In order to pay school fees, a significant number of Almajiri are involved in waste picking as their study does not equip them for other occupations.<sup>77</sup>

Many young people who are not Almajiri also rely on waste picking in order to pay their school fees. A waste picker from Yola recounts: 'I have been picking almost every day. I had to sustain my schooling. I would go to school, and then I would pick, maybe 'til evening hour.' One study in Mubi, Adamawa State, found that 33 per cent of study respondents were students who engaged in picking to pay for school fees.<sup>78</sup>

Due to the financial instability entailed by waste picking, it is not uncommon for parents who are waste pickers to bring their children to work, either because the additional income is necessary for survival, or because they are unable to pay for child care or school fees.<sup>79</sup> A waste picker from Lagos describes the age distribution of people who waste pick in their area: 'We have old, we have young, we have kids. Everyone works together. We are many. We are working late, 24/7. Some are students part time.'

A low level of education is associated with a higher likelihood of taking up waste picking in adulthood. A literature review of seven studies into the educational background of waste pickers across Nigeria found that, on average, 32 per cent of waste pickers have no education, 37 per cent have primary education, 24 per cent have secondary education and three per cent have tertiary education.<sup>80</sup> One waste picker from Yola who was interviewed stated: '[Waste pickers] need enough money to sponsor themselves in school, so they have to stop at primary education, so they are not educated, and can't progress beyond that. So, their education stops there. People around know them, they see them, but they don't see them as valuable – they see them as useless people [...] People see them as a nuisance and they don't have a future.'

The legacy of a lack of formal education in the northern states may also contribute to the current influx of migrants from the rural north into Abuja, where it is perceived there will be more opportunities for income.<sup>81</sup> If this is the case, then the lack of education and Almajiri system which leads to children taking up waste picking may also contribute to them becoming waste pickers in urban centres as adults.

## Migration and the IWS

Many people become waste pickers as a result of migrating to urban settings in search of work. One study which surveyed 1,500 waste pickers in Abuja found that the majority are either migrants from neighbouring states (55.7 per cent) or refugees from neighbouring countries such as Chad and the Niger Republic (23.7 per cent).<sup>82</sup>

Migration from a rural to an urban setting can represent economic opportunity. However, migration can also be disadvantageous. It can be hard for migrants and refugees to find formal employment without residency status. For this reason, many take on roles in the IWS.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, although English is the official language of Nigeria, many regional languages are commonly spoken, such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Nupe and Tiv, as well as other indigenous languages. As a result, migrants from rural settings who become part of the IWS often experience a language barrier which frustrates their access to public services and ability to move up the value chain.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Iheanacho, A., Mbah, P., Onwuaha, P., Eze, E. and Nzeadibe, T. 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Mshelia, A. 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Adeniyi, T. and Olayemi, J. 2016.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>81</sup> W.A.S.T.E. Africa. Interviewed 16/11/2021.

<sup>82</sup> Ogwueleka, T. and Naveen, B. 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Nzeadibe, C. 2012. 363.

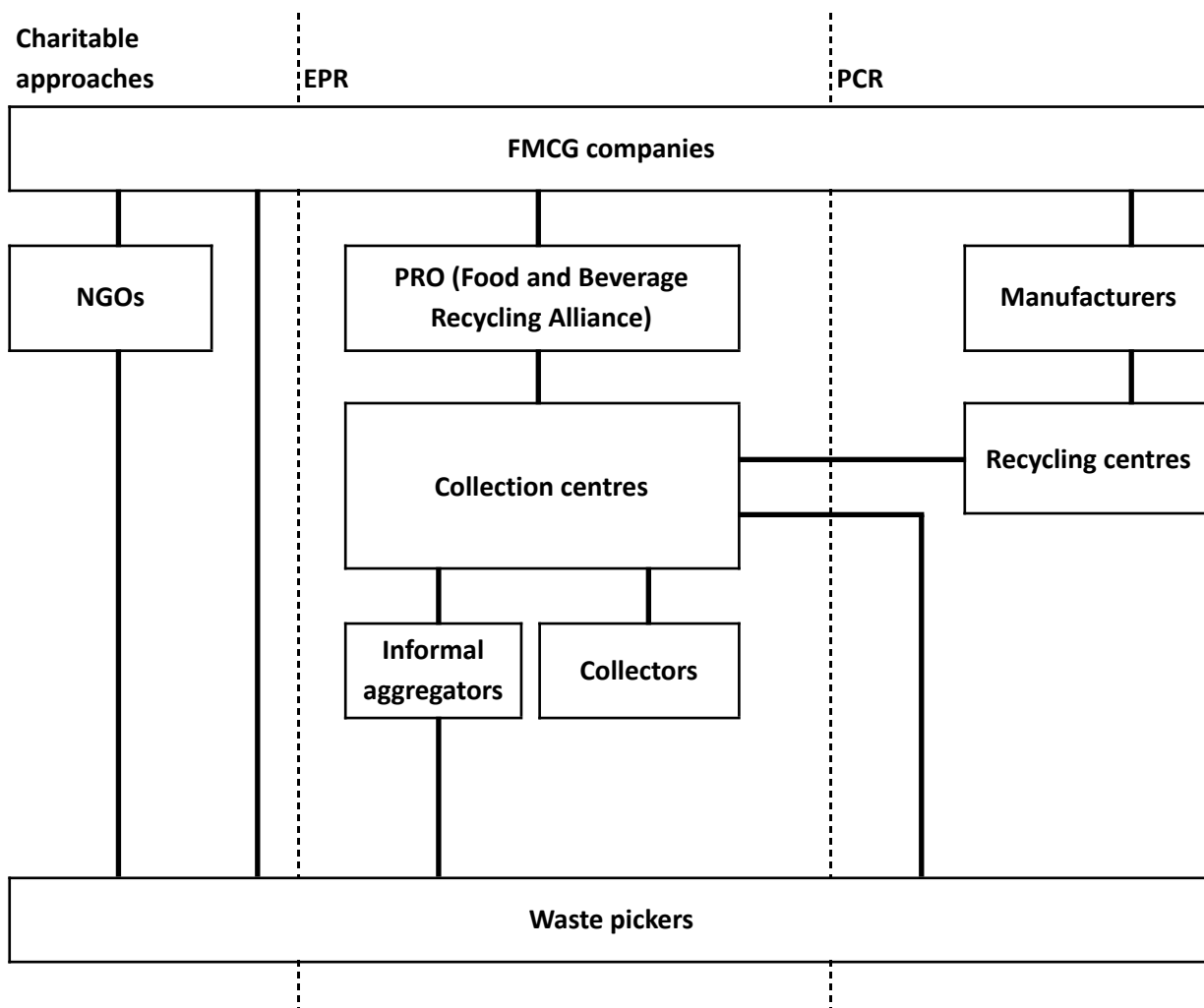
<sup>84</sup> W.A.S.T.E. Africa representative. Interviewed 16/10/2021



## Section 4 – Fast-moving consumer goods companies and the IWS in Nigeria

### 4.1 The relationship between FMCG companies and the IWS

The diagram below provides a simple representation of the types of relationship which exists between FMCG companies in Nigeria and the IWS. It ought to be noted that according to the EPR Operational Guidelines, collection centres supply recycling centres with their aggregated materials. In reality, there may be other stakeholders involved in the process of treating materials for recycling (such as crushing, baling and flaking). The diagram below is a simple representation of the recycled plastics value chain in Nigeria, intended primarily to illustrate how FMCG companies and waste pickers can be linked.



There are three main routes by which FMCG companies can be linked with waste pickers in Nigeria. These are through EPR, the procurement of post consumer resin (PCR), and CSR or charitable approaches.

## 4.2 Food and Beverage Recycling Alliance (FBRA)

In Nigeria, the relationship between FMCG companies and the IWS under EPR is mediated through a PRO, the Food and Beverage Recycling Alliance (FBRA). FBRA was established in 2018 when the Nigerian Bottling Company, the Seven-Up Bottling Company, Nestlé and Nigerian Breweries came together to enact their EPR responsibilities as stipulated in the NESREA EPR Operational Guidelines. It ought to be noted that the Seven-Up Bottling Company is the distributor of PepsiCo products in Nigeria, and the Nigerian Bottling Company is the bottling partner of the Coca-Cola Company (TCCC). No interview with national representatives of FMCG companies was possible, however, a representative of FBRA was happy to be interviewed. As of 2021, FBRA represents around 21 food and beverage companies.

FBRA has three core objectives: to enable the collection and recovery of post-consumer packaging waste; advocacy and community engagement on the importance of proper disposal of waste; and engagement with development partners, government and policy makers to advance a circular economy.

FBRA is financed by producers' EPR fees, which include a flat fee for administrative costs and then an adjustable fee based on market share. The adjustable fee funds FBRA to work with numerous collectors and recyclers in order to fulfil producers' collection and recycling obligations. Although FBRA is a national body, it is currently most active in Lagos, as this is where the progress towards implementation of EPR is most advanced. FBRA is increasing in influence and regularly collaborates with LAWMA but it ought to be noted that, as EPR is not in full implementation in Lagos or across Nigeria, the impact of EPR on the rights and livelihoods of the IWS is yet to be seen.

## 4.3 Engagement with the IWS

### 4.3.1 The IWS in the recyclable plastics supply chain

FBRA holds a relationship with a number of collection centres, which supply recycling centres with collected material. Examples of formal collection organisations (or centres) include private companies such as Wecyclers and RecyclePoints. Private companies typically run collection hubs and provide door to door collection to citizens who are not covered by government collection services. Informal aggregators, also called 'middlemen' or scrap dealers, purchase collected recyclable materials from waste pickers in order to sell on to stakeholders higher up the value chain, such as collection centres. It is primarily through informal aggregators that the IWS may be linked to private waste management companies. Under EPR, the IWS and FMCG companies are linked through FBRA, as waste pickers can work with informal aggregators, who in turn may supply collection centres which are contracted to FBRA. Alternatively, a small number of waste pickers may work with collectors directly through specific collection initiatives (unfortunately, no waste pickers who are part of any collection initiatives were able to be interviewed). As this paper has noted, it has been estimated that upwards of 70 per cent of waste collection is carried out by the IWS in Nigeria: they operate the primary collection infrastructure. For this reason, FBRA is exploring how the IWS can be integrated into the roll out of EPR. Both NASWON and FBRA concur that without integrating the IWS, increasing collection rates in Nigeria will not be possible.

### 4.3.2 Initiatives for integration and capacity building in the IWS

#### *World Waste Pickers' Day session*

On March 1st 2020, which is World Waste Pickers' Day, FBRA held a discussion session with NASWON, Heinrich Boll, Rethinking Cities and Sankofa Policy Lab. During the session, they sought to hear from NASWON representatives about their conditions of work, their experiences with the public and ideas on

how waste pickers could move up the value chain. The key issues that came out of the session included waste pickers' desire for recognition, and the provision of welfare, PPE and medical insurance. As a result of these discussions, FBRA and partners delivered a number of training sessions for the IWS to address these issues in Lagos. FBRA hosted a second workshop with NASWON in the latter half of 2021, and has regularly engaged with NASWON since.

### *Trainings*

FBRA has supported numerous trainings for waste pickers in 2021. In March 2020, in partnership with the Fair Plastic Alliance, a training focused on health and safety awareness took place on Olusosun dumpsite in Lagos. In December 2021, again in partnership with the Fair Plastic Alliance, FBRA helped to deliver a training session on health, which included a health screening for registered waste pickers. Both of these themes are aligned with the results of the consultation with NASWON representatives on World Waste Pickers' Day.

### *Collectors*

FBRA currently works with ten formal collectors, and aspires to increase operations as compliance to EPR increases among producers. Examples of collectors that FBRA has worked with include Chanja Datti, Recycle Points, West African Energy, and Wecyclers.

FBRA audits collectors against international best practice standards, and requires monthly reports on tonnage of packaging collected. FBRA collectors are audited against requirements related to conditions of work, such as sun exposure of workers, health and safety, and child labour. FBRA also requires information on each aggregators' direct and indirect staff. Indirect staff can include waste pickers and other IWS actors who supply materials to a centre or organisation, but are not employed by them.

### *Covid-19 subsidy scheme*

In July of 2020, FBRA introduced a subsidy initiative to ensure that waste pickers were paid fairly for their recyclable materials despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. As this paper has noted, the prices waste pickers receive can be highly variable and the pandemic complicated waste pickers' access to materials and buyers in some instances. It was arranged that waste pickers could bring their material to collection agents and get a set price for their weight of material. FBRA agreed to stabilise prices by subsidising 50 per cent of the cost. Initially, the model was intended to be short term, but it was extended until the end of 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic. FBRA reports that the scheme greatly increased collection rates, seeing an increase from 40 tonnes to over 200 tonnes reported by their collectors.

### *Community engagement*

As part of FBRA's objective related to advocacy, they also work with over 50 communities, partnering with NGOs based in Nigeria and small scale collectors to raise awareness on the importance of proper waste disposal. As part of this awareness raising, FBRA points communities to local collectors they can use. This awareness raising is partly intended to improve public perceptions of waste pickers, and to increase recognition and acceptance of the service they provide.

### *Prospective plans*

The activities of FBRA continue to expand as the organisation gains more members and EPR is rolled out in states across Nigeria. As a result, FBRA has some prospective plans which are yet to be implemented. They intend to establish a large aggregation hall for waste pickers in Lagos, and to encourage informal aggregators to start formally recognised collection centres which can pass the criteria necessary for audits.

## 4.4 Waste picker perspectives

A number of the waste pickers in Lagos are encouraged by engagement with FBRA and are hopeful that they will be able to ensure waste picker integration into the enactment of EPR policy.

**‘Yes, waste pickers are in the [EPR] policy in principle. But practically, we are not benefiting from it at all. That is why we are engaging the FBRA, the institution responsible for the EPR for the packaging is the FBRA [...] FBRA is the one that is engaging waste pickers the most. There are a lot of plans in the pipeline. We don’t have a direct link with the companies, our relationship with them is through FBRA. We had a global waste picker workshop in March last year. It educated us on our rights and financial literacy. It was definitely useful for the waste pickers who attended. It was good for capacity building.’**

### **Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

FBRA has an ongoing relationship with NASWON, and FBRA is supporting them to explore how waste pickers in Lagos can be registered and integrated into LAWMA’s roll out of EPR.

In all, it may be seen that FBRA is proactive in engaging with waste pickers, and is actively seeking to work with NASWON. In particular, the decision to subsidise prices of collected plastics during the Covid-19 pandemic illustrates that FBRA have made a sincere effort to be responsive to the challenges that waste pickers face. However, as compliance to EPR is still low, many of their activities are still relatively small scale and the size of the IWS in Nigeria means that the vast majority of waste pickers are still yet to benefit.

### *Waste pickers’ concerns*

Waste pickers interviewed highlighted concerns that organisations (both private and NGOs) can claim they are working with waste pickers for publicity, in order to gain funding from donor agencies. Of one recycling start up, one waste picker from Lagos said: ‘They are working with waste pickers in the videos they make, but the only thing we can see is that they are working on the road [...] They are not on the dumpsite, they are not working with us. They are just using the opportunity they have to get funds from foreign agencies.’ This issue was raised in a number of interviews, and contributes to the concern that many waste pickers share around sharing their names and data with organisations that could use this to mislead donors, government and consumers about their engagement with the informal waste sector.

In addition to this, there is also a significant risk that private waste management companies will negatively impact waste picker livelihoods. For instance, if households and businesses defer to private pick up services in place of waste pickers, or come into competition for the same materials, waste picker livelihoods are threatened. For this reason, it is crucial that waste pickers are integrated into the roll out of EPR in Nigeria and into existing PCR supply chains.

## 4.5 Charitable approaches

In addition to the link FMCG companies have with the IWS through FBRA, there are also a number of projects which represent examples of charitable approaches.

### *Trash 4 Cash Initiative*

Through its philanthropic arm, The Coca-Cola Foundation (TCCF), TCCC provided a grant to W.A.S.T.E Africa, an NGO based in Abuja, to establish recycling hubs in 2020. W.A.S.T.E. Africa were interviewed as part of this case study.

In total, the Trash 4 Cash Initiative has constructed twelve recycling hubs in FCT, of which TCCF has funded eight. The hubs are made from refurbished shipping containers, and are financially self-sufficient. Through the scheme, waste pickers are able to bring collected materials to the hub facilities in exchange for immediate payment. The collected material is then sold on to a third party, such as Chanja Datti in Abuja, or RecyclePoints in Lagos. For each hub, two roles are employed: a full time inventory officer and a sorter.

In addition to waste reduction, W.A.S.T.E Africa states that the purpose of the initiative is to provide livelihood opportunities to 3,000 waste pickers, in particular female waste pickers. Female waste pickers are also provided with financial literacy training, safety training and PPE.

### *Protect 10,000 Initiative*

TCCF also provided start-up funding for the Protect 10,000 Initiative, also implemented by W.A.S.T.E Africa. W.A.S.T.E Africa is collaborating with the Association of Bola-Bola (Metal, Scrap) and Craftsmanship Abuja to implement this project, the purpose of which is to equip waste pickers with training and resources to improve their livelihoods and living conditions.

### *Access to finance*

The project has improved waste picker access to finance through financial literacy training. As this paper has noted, access to financial services is often restricted for waste pickers due to lack of documentation. In September 2021, it was estimated that over 1,000 waste pickers had been benefited by this financial literacy programme. The initiative came from the observation that, as many of the waste pickers in Abuja live in unregistered housing, many are unable to open bank accounts due to lack of proof of address. In addition, W.A.S.T.E Africa states that the language barrier some waste pickers experience can make the process of registration difficult, and that the expense of the time it takes to register is not possible for them. As a result, W.A.S.T.E Africa facilitated waste pickers opening 'Green bank accounts' with Jaiz Bank Plc, which have a low 'know your customer' requirement. To open an account, an individual only needs one form of ID instead of proof of address. The Protect 10,000 Initiative is also facilitating members of the Association of Bola-Bola (Metal, Scrap) and Craftsmanship Abuja to obtain ID cards.

### *Trainings*

The project has also delivered health and safety training for the Association of Bola-Bola (Metal, Scrap) and Craftsmanship Abuja and waste pickers in FCT. At trainings, they have also been able to provide PPE including face masks, gloves, goggles, uniforms, safety vests and ID tags through the grant money, and to provide health screenings onsite.

### *Medical outreach*

W.A.S.T.E Africa delivered a medical outreach day for waste pickers in March 2021 in Lagos, partnering with Wecyclers. This outreach included blood tests, malaria tests, fitness tests, a visit to a doctor for a general health check and an onsite pharmacy for the collection of any medication.

## Section 5 – Learning

The following section draws on the findings of Sections 2–4, noting areas for learning and challenges, and suggesting the degree to which further action needs to be taken by governments and FMCG companies.

### 5.1 Enabling income security

There is some evidence that progress has been made towards enabling income security for a small proportion of the IWS in the case of specific initiatives. Most notable is FBRA's Covid-19 subsidy initiative, which stabilised prices for waste pickers and, consequently, collection rates throughout 2021. However, this initiative did not reach a scale that any of the waste pickers interviewed had benefited from it, and it was only a temporary measure. Still, this initiative shows that income security among waste pickers can be advanced through using EPR fees to stabilise prices for collected materials, and have the additional benefit of driving increased collection rates.

Overwhelmingly, waste pickers continue to subsidise the cost of collection for both governments and producers, and experience highly variable incomes, and often unfair prices for their collected materials. This was consistently expressed as a concern in interviews with waste pickers, who highlighted that, despite the fact they perform a service which benefits both producers and the government, they receive nothing from them for their labour.

**‘Waste pickers are cleaning the environment, but we are receiving nothing in return. No payout, no funds.’**

**Waste picker from Yola, Adamawa state**

As this paper has noted, waste pickers can be extorted and given an unfair price for their collected materials. This issue is particularly difficult to address because the majority of waste pickers lack access to a bank account, and are paid cash in hand. There is no record of the price they have received. Digital platforms for waste collection can provide transparency: a record of the price that waste pickers receive. This gives them an opportunity for increased bargaining power and income security. An example of a digital platform for waste collection currently engaging with waste pickers in Nigeria is the Pakam app, whereby waste pickers and aggregators can use the platform to collect and trade materials, and track payments.

### 5.2 Supporting safe, fair and beneficial working conditions for waste pickers

Waste pickers in Nigeria frequently experience very poor working conditions. Harassment and injury are common at work and, although no interviewees reported abuse, it ought to be noted that there is known to be a strong link between informal work and risk of violence and abuse. In addition, the dumpsites in which many waste pickers work can be extremely physically dangerous, with the risk of injury and death. There is some evidence to show that FBRA and charitable organisations acting on behalf of FMCG companies have sought to respond to these challenges through distributing PPE to waste pickers, giving health and safety training, and organising medical check ups. However, the proportion of waste pickers actually benefiting from this is limited. There is not yet any evidence of initiatives from FMCG companies which contribute to preventing waste pickers from experiencing these extremely poor working conditions through more systematic human rights due diligence processes in their PCR supply chains, or through lobbying the government to improve health and safety at dumpsites.

As this paper has explored, a significant driver behind the unsafe working conditions is the poor organisation of the government's SWM system. The closure of formal government dumpsites has caused

informal and unregulated dumpsites to arise, and the lack of coordination with IWS workers in formal government dumpsites has led to serious risks of injury and death from vehicles and waste, as well as the harassment of waste pickers. Improved working conditions for waste pickers in Nigeria is closely related to gaining recognition from the government for the role they play in waste collection and recycling, and improvements in the government's SWM system more generally. The EPR Operational Guidelines which address informal collectors appear to be referencing only street collectors, when in fact many waste pickers operate exclusively at dumpsites.

### **5.3 Enabling participation and movement up the value chain**

There is evidence that FBRA has supported and delivered numerous training sessions for waste pickers in Lagos. In interviews, waste pickers recounted these trainings as useful, and aligned with the needs of waste pickers for PPE, medical services, health and safety training and financial literacy.

Two issues, however, must be raised. First, it ought to be noted that, of the trainings surveyed in this paper, the number of waste pickers reached currently amounts to less than 10,000. While these initiatives are commendable and have been well received by waste pickers, it ought to be noted that this means less than one per cent of waste pickers in Nigeria have been reached so far. Secondly, while these trainings are clearly meeting a need, only financial literacy training can be considered to be part of enabling waste pickers to move up the value chain. The other trainings substitute for the lack of access to government welfare and enforcement of health and safety standards.

Initiatives related to financial inclusion have been repeatedly identified by both waste pickers and industry as a key to enabling transparent and rapid payments to waste pickers. NGOs and private waste management companies have been able to assist a limited number of waste pickers in becoming registered at banks with low 'know your customer' requirements, which in turn will allow them to benefit from digital payments. Transparency in the price waste pickers receive for their collected materials ought to help ensure they are not taken advantage of, and, ultimately, contribute to their achieving income security.

Finally, there is no evidence that FMCG companies or the government has supported waste pickers in securing machinery, mobility or access to finance. Many waste pickers expressed the need for equipment (such as tricycles) for collecting and transporting waste, as well as crushing and baling machines in order to allow them to sell to recyclers directly. Waste pickers also need access to land on which to sort, store and treat their collected materials in order to achieve this. FBRA has noted plans to pilot a large aggregation hall for waste pickers in Lagos which would enable this, but as of yet, waste pickers are not being supported by government or industry to move up the value chain.

### **5.4 Working towards ending child labour in plastic waste supply chains**

FBRA audits their collection centres and collectors for child labour. However, action to end child labour must be taken with great care, as disengaging with waste pickers for this reason may further negatively impact families who are already extremely financially vulnerable. FMCG companies, governments and PROs ought to work with waste pickers to develop contextually appropriate schemes to provide income security to waste pickers so that children are no longer required to work to provide additional income. In the context of Nigeria, child waste picking is closely linked to lack of education, whether this be due to parents' difficulty in paying school fees, or because children attend Almajiri schools and must support themselves. Working towards ending child labour in waste picking in Nigeria will necessarily require engagement with these two issues.

## 5.5 Promoting waste picker agency

Under the EPR Operational Guidelines, the only right that waste pickers are considered to have is to ‘receive compensation from major collectors or operators of collection centres’. Waste picker rights and livelihoods are not protected anywhere in law, and the guidelines which pertain to their compensation do not specify the level of compensation waste pickers are entitled to, or any other terms of payment.

Furthermore, as this paper has explored, the relationship which exists between municipalities and waste pickers varies considerably by state and, in some places, waste pickers are subject to bans which restrict where they can pick. Therefore, it is necessary that the EPR Operational Guidelines are amended to include waste pickers’ right to work, and that the government subsequently ensures that this right is protected. Producers and all other stakeholders in the value chain can support mechanisms to inform waste pickers of their rights, and actively promote their agency; in particular, freedom of association and collective bargaining.

## 5.6 Supporting the organisation of the IWS

Industry and NGOs consider that the lack of registration of waste pickers is a major barrier to their integration. However, this is a contentious issue because some waste pickers are understandably wary of registering with the government; citing concerns of taxation, that their details will be used to secure funding for formal organisations, and that registration may actually result in their right to pick being taken away. FBRA is currently exploring with NASWON the possibility of establishing a database of their members.

While the concerns that waste pickers have around registration are well founded, data on the IWS is necessary to advance their integration into EPR and formal SWM systems. For instance, the Protect 10,000 Initiative was designed to ‘protect 10,000 waste pickers’ on the basis of the data that the Association of Bola-Bola (Metal, Scrap) and Craftsmanship Abuja was able to supply to W.A.S.T.E Africa. As FBRA also noted, the design of waste picker integration projects is reliant to an extent on the availability of data.

The degree of organisation of the IWS also varies considerably across different states. NASWON is based in Lagos, but in the North-East of Nigeria, waste pickers are less organised. While cooperatives and associations exist, there is a lack of coordination between them, which has resulted in a lack of opportunities to become integrated into initiatives. Organisation of the IWS requires funds for expenses such as administration, time of personnel, equipment such as phones or computers, a work space, and access to the internet. No producers are currently financially supporting the IWS to organise in Nigeria.

## 5.7 Promoting public awareness and recognition of the IWS and their contribution

Some measures have been taken to improve public awareness and acceptance of the IWS in Nigeria by FBRA and formal collectors. Supporting World Waste Pickers’ Day is one example. While this kind of public recognition of waste pickers does not represent the scale of change that is needed, it does have a role to play in shifting public attitudes towards waste pickers. In interviews, waste pickers did identify public events of this nature as one way to improve public perceptions about them.

In addition, TCCF funding W.A.S.T.E Africa to provide ID cards to waste pickers is also a positive advancement in promoting awareness of and respect for waste pickers. ID cards have an important role to play in protecting waste pickers’ right to work (in that they can be shown in order to prove their right to pick) and reducing harassment.

Training days have also represented a way in which recognition of waste pickers has been advanced. During one of the financial literacy training days funded by TCCF, a NESREA representative in attendance stated the crucial role of waste pickers. While this is still a long way from the formal recognition and support needed



from the government, this does illustrate the potential value in bringing together waste pickers, government representatives and industry representatives in training events or workshops.

Despite these examples of progress, public perceptions of waste pickers are still overwhelmingly negative in Nigeria and, as this paper has noted, this issue is frequently cited as a significant challenge experienced by waste pickers. Many waste pickers view that recognition from the government is the key to shifting public perceptions around waste picking, but FMCG companies can also support this.

## 5.8 Engaging in multi-stakeholder collaboration

There is evidence that FBRA has endeavoured to consult and work with NASWON as EPR continues to be rolled out in Lagos. As this paper has noted, EPR roll out occurs at the level of municipalities, so it is key that in each context, waste pickers are included in the design, implementation and monitoring of EPR programmes and are able to contribute to stakeholder forums.

Some waste pickers interviewed note that they are not consistently invited to multi-stakeholder forums by the government and industry: 'They do invite us, but they don't really invite us that often. We want it to be up front. We need to know about where we are going, we need to know the policies that have been agreed.'

Producers can advocate for waste picker participation in these forums. It ought to be noted that waste pickers must be reimbursed for time and any other expenses incurred as a result of engaging in these forums. Waste pickers' participation should not be at a cost to them.

## 5.9 Working towards government-mandated EPR frameworks

As this paper has noted, EPR in Nigeria has not yet been implemented nationally, although the policies do exist. Lagos is at the forefront of the roll out of EPR, and even there, there is low compliance among producers: In 2020, FBRA represented just 21 food and beverage companies in Nigeria. This is an issue of government and state-level enforcement, as well as producer compliance. Producers are able to comply with the requirements of EPR, even in absence of enforcement, and government and state authorities must roll out EPR in partnership with the IWS.

## 5.10 Recommendations

This paper has drawn on interviews with waste pickers and organisations in the waste sector, as well as desk-based research to explore the relationship that exists between FMCG companies in Nigeria and the IWS. It has been shown that while there is some positive progress in engaging with the IWS, the rights and livelihoods of waste pickers in Nigeria are not upheld by governments or FMCG companies. Due to slow enforcement of EPR, the activities of FBRA have not yet achieved their potential scale.

In 2022, the leading centre of expertise on the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights worked with four FMCGs, the Coca-Cola Company, PepsiCo, Unilever and Nestlé, and Tearfund, to apply the responsibilities outlined in the UNGPs to the IWS. The Fair Circulatory Principles and the Fair Circulatory Initiative were subsequently launched, with a commitment by the four founding FMCG companies to advance and adopt the guiding principles in their value chains in collaboration with waste picker organisations, report on their progress annually and encourage others to join the Initiative. The following provides a number of recommendations relevant for all FMCG companies that can be considered in the application of the Fair Circularity Principles in the context of Nigeria. FMCG companies should:

- Comply with EPR requirements through registering with an accredited PRO.

- Enable income security for waste pickers through working with their PRO to ensure that waste pickers in their supply chain receive a fair remuneration for their collected materials and their labour. One way that this could be achieved is by scaling up FBRA's Covid-19 subsidy initiative, and making use of technology which can make payments to waste pickers traceable and cashless.
- Support safe, fair and beneficial working conditions for waste pickers by using their leverage to impact the working conditions of existing collection centres, and supporting waste pickers to establish their own collection centres.
- Lobby governments to improve SWM, including the urgent improvement of health and safety at dumpsites.
- Support waste pickers in gaining recognition from the government through registration with municipalities, the acquisition of data about the IWS in Nigeria and other measures to protect waste pickers' recognition, such as ID cards.
- Support waste pickers' financial inclusion through facilitating bank registration and financial literacy training.
- Provide funding for waste picker organisations to cover administration costs, internet access, office space, and other work related expenses.
- Publicly recognise the IWS and their contribution to their EPR obligations and PCR supply chains in Nigeria.
- Scale up training on health and safety and financial literacy across the country, and expand into training on topics such as business management and bookkeeping.
- Provide finance for equipment and infrastructure to enable waste pickers to move up the value chain.
- Insist that waste pickers are included in multi-stakeholder forums related to the roll out of EPR.
- Ensure that waste pickers are compensated for their time in the design and implementation of integration initiatives.
- Lobby governments to improve children's access to education.

## Section 6 – The government and the IWS in Nigeria

### 6.1 The relationship between the government and the IWS

This paper has highlighted a number of the human rights impacts experienced by waste pickers in Nigeria. Under international human rights law, states have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. The state duty to protect requires taking appropriate steps to prevent, investigate, punish and redress human rights impacts through enacting policies, legislation and adjudication. Despite this, the relationship between government, government agencies and the IWS in Nigeria is variable between localities, and at different levels of governance. The waste pickers interviewed raised a number of specific issues which illustrate some of the most common challenges experienced in their engagement with government.

#### *Lack of recognition*

Many waste pickers cited the lack of recognition, or ‘recommendation’, from the government as a key challenge. There is a lack of formal acknowledgement of the role and contribution of waste pickers – this would increase their acceptance among the general public and end the harassment waste pickers face from law enforcement. One waste picker states:

**‘A challenge is the lack of support from the government, lack of recommendation. If we were recommended by the government, [other stakeholders] would know we are working. If we were recommended, the populace would also recommend us. It is not just that we are working on our own, we support government. Because we are waste picking on the street, we are sanitising the community, we are achieving a cleanliness of the community. Waste picking is a work. We are an agent of government. But there is a lack of funds, and we are struggling.’**

A representative of a government environmental agency from Nigeria highlighted that the lack of recognition in Nigeria’s national SWM policy was a barrier to engagement with the IWS at the regional and local level. Without recognition at the national level, individual states and municipalities are left to set their own agenda in terms of waste picker recognition and integration. This has led to different levels of engagement, and no legal obligation for states and municipalities to engage. Therefore, going forward it will be important to ensure that the role of the IWS is formally acknowledged in all national policy pertaining to waste going forward.

#### *Organisation and data*

A number of waste pickers highlighted the fact that some state waste agencies had declined to dialogue with them until they had achieved a sufficient level of organisation. One waste picker recounts:

**‘As waste pickers, our government does not recognise us. After some time, they started oppressing us, and saying we are nobody. We try to meet up with fellow pickers and talk to them on how we can organise, so that the people will know us and see what we are doing.’**

#### **Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

Members of waste picker associations also stated that lacking a database of their membership and a record of the volume of material they processed was a major barrier to engaging with the government. Both FBRA and government agencies expressed that they have significant difficulty in engaging with the sector without this kind of information. This problem is circular in the sense that waste picker associations often do not have the equipment or administrative capacity to obtain this kind of data without further support, and therefore miss out on opportunities to expand their operations and move up the value chain. This in turn means that waste pickers lack the resources necessary to organise, buy value-adding equipment and maintain databases.

One representative of an environmental agency also remarked that lack of traceability in waste pickers’ transactions also prevented the government from being able to accurately quantify the true contribution that the IWS makes to the country’s GDP, which is likely to be significant. While some state agencies appear to perceive the value and contribution of the IWS, other states are reluctant to do so. It has been suggested that quantifying the contribution of the informal sector could strengthen the mandate to engage among municipalities and states which are otherwise averse to considering this. Language barriers and lack of education were also cited as a challenge when engaging with workers in the IWS, and in particular facilitating their organisation.

#### *Specific policies*

In Nigeria, policy and legislation is not consistent in its treatment of IWS workers at national and municipal level. Some waste pickers report their relationship with the waste management government body in their municipality is progressing in the right direction, but at a slow pace:

**‘The Lagos state government is trying to work with waste pickers. We are a stakeholder in the system. We have been trying to engage with the government and LAWMA. We want to input, as we have not really felt the impacts of the government initiatives. We are trying to engage the government and the national and regional waste management agencies - sometimes the only thing is if they are having a seminar or workshop, they do invite us. But don’t really invite us that often. We want it to be up front. We need to know about where we are going, we need to know the national policy that has been agreed’**

#### **Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

Furthermore, a number of policies include provisions to engage with the IWS. For example, the Lagos State Plastic Waste Management policy (2021) includes the requirement to ‘incorporate the informal sector into the plastic waste management approach’. Indeed, since the advent of the Lagos Recycle Initiative (2020) and invention of the Pakam app, LAWMA is working to integrate the IWS into the new waste management system. LAWMA plans to enable waste pickers to register, train and work with local recyclers, and has noted the benefit this will have on collection rates as well as the quality of the material collected. One waste picker reflects on LAWMA’s engagement with waste pickers so far:

**‘LAWMA does work with waste pickers in an interim arrangement. The Lagos state government are trying to work with waste pickers. We are a stakeholder in this system, and have been trying to engage with the government for a long time. We want to input. In the past, we have not really felt the impacts of the government initiatives. But we are now trying to engage with LAWMA.’**

#### **Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

In contrast, other policies have had an extremely negative impact on the IWS. For example, the Abuja Environmental Protection Board has a policy to provide job opportunities for informal workers, but has passed a number of rules and regulations to govern waste pickers’ activities in FCT. In 2018, this led to the FCT Administration banning waste pickers from operating in Abuja, except those who were authorised to work at government approved dump sites. The proportion of waste pickers that were approved to operate at these dumpsites was a fraction of the total number of waste pickers operating in FCT at the time. The ban effectively restricted street pickers and cart pushers from working, despite the fact that the majority of Abuja’s residents rely on these workers for waste collection. As such, many waste pickers continue to operate in defiance of the ban years later. The Abuja Environmental Protection Board has an enforcement team who will arrest waste pickers, despite the fact that no alternative provisions for SWM currently exist. LAWMA in Lagos has also banned waste pickers’ activities in the past. Staff at government environmental agencies have remarked that it is concern for security, criminal activity and the social stigmatisation of waste pickers which motivates these bans.

Furthermore, some government policies require waste pickers to meet requirements which are impossible for them. In the EPR operational guidelines, there is a requirement for informal workers to use only approved means of transport such as carts. However, this can be beyond the economic means of some waste pickers. One waste picker details how NESREA registration requirements for waste collection represent a huge barrier for waste picker livelihoods:

**‘Waste pickers are experiencing psychological trauma. The trauma of having what you have collected away from you. Law enforcement confiscated it from waste pickers [...] they say that waste pickers are not permitted or authorised to collect [...] there is no social support, no moral support, no government support. The law enforcement want you to register with them, but you have to pay for their certificate. You have to pay N5,000 (equivalent to \$11) [ ...] a lot of people who are waste picking don't have that kind of money. They are just putting food on the table every day. They don't have the money for it.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

This requirement for registration and its accompanying fee appears to be applied inconsistently. Representatives of an environmental agency in Nigeria expressed that waste pickers ought to be excluded from the requirement of a fee as they are not producers. However, while some waste pickers reported never having been requested certification, some waste pickers have reported being asked to pay this.

The government has a vital role to play in protecting waste picker rights and incomes in Nigeria, not only through integrating waste pickers into waste management policy and systems, but through supporting other stakeholders in the value chain to do the same.

### *Confiscation and exclusion*

Waste pickers have also highlighted the injustice and the challenge of confiscation of their waste and the exclusion faced as a result of government policy, or stakeholders acting on behalf of the government. For example, waste pickers consulted for this case study reported a strained relationship with law enforcement. In general, there appears to be discrimination faced by waste pickers from law enforcement agencies, who assume they are thieves, or public nuisances. One survey found that 34 per cent of waste pickers report experiencing harassment by police or local government officials. Two waste pickers recount their experiences:

**‘There is harassment from law enforcement. And embarrassment. They look at us as if we do not fit here. But we try to show them that without us, society won't be comfortable. We are helping to keep the environment clean. We are very very important, we play a crucial environmental role.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

**‘The government does not support waste pickers [...] when they go into communities. If anything is missing when the police are called, they will harass the waste pickers first. Police usually harass them, the government does not give them the support they need to protect them in doing their job. When they go to areas that have been developed, they send them away.’**

### **Waste picker from Yola, Adamawa State**

Furthermore, waste pickers’ rights and livelihoods are seriously threatened by systematic market exclusion. SWM initiatives, as well as EPR, which are designed, implemented and monitored without integration and collaboration with the IWS can have a hugely negative impact by seriously restricting their income opportunities.

One waste picker from Lagos recounts: ‘The government is working more with the recyclers. The recyclers are more recognised than the waste pickers. We want to work with the government. Without the waste pickers there are no recyclers. They need to recognise us so we can take our place.’

A representative of an environmental agency in Nigeria also remarked that looking ahead, there are significant opportunities to improve the life and livelihoods of workers in the IWS in Nigeria. Through enabling their organisation and capacity building, waste pickers would be able to dialogue with government and private sector actors more effectively, and be integrated into SWM and EPR policy.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

**The following recommendations can be made to government:**

- Recognise the IWS in Nigeria’s National Solid Waste Management policy, and, in consultation with waste pickers, include provisions to mandate engagement with the IWS at state and municipal level.
- Enforce and monitor EPR throughout Nigeria.
- Amend the EPR Operational Guidelines in consultation with waste pickers to reflect the responsibilities that other stakeholders have with respect to waste pickers.
- Clarify the role of waste pickers as acknowledged in the EPR Operational Guidelines with states and municipal waste management authorities.
- Urgently work to improve health and safety measures at all dumpsites (government owned and unlicensed), including enabling waste picker access to PPE.
- Make grants available to waste picker associations to enable them to organise and access machinery, mobility and land on which to conduct their operations.
- Amend the EPR Operational Guidelines to remove the responsibility of informal collectors to ‘use approved transportation system/carts’ unless the government, municipalities, producers or collectors will incur this expense.
- Conduct a sensitisation campaign to increase public awareness and appreciation for the environmental service which the IWS provides.

- Ensure that the registration for the informal waste collector is free, and that the registration documentation for informal collectors is available in languages besides English, such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other languages.
- Enable waste pickers to gain ID cards where desired, and ensure the process for obtaining ID cards is free and available in languages besides English, such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other languages.
- Ensure that waste pickers are always included in key stakeholder meetings on EPR matters where their livelihoods or rights are likely to be impacted, and that their time and any other expenses are reimbursed.
- Tackle the low education attendance in Nigeria: in particular, address children needing to waste pick in order to support themselves through school, and children accompanying their parents to work because school fees are unaffordable.
- Ensure that waste pickers are compensated for their time in the design and implementation of integration initiatives.
- Help waste pickers establish databases and administrative capacity to register membership and track business activity.

## Appendix 1 – Record of interviews

Role / Organisation	Date of Interview	Location
Waste Picker, Anonymous	22nd October 2021	Yola, Adamawa State
Waste Picker, Anonymous	16th October 2021	Lagos, Lagos State
Friday Oku, President of NASWON	Numerous	Lagos, Lagos State
Kabiru Ibrahim, FIWON Coordinator for North West	19th January 2022	Abuja, FCT
Waste Picker, Anonymous	22nd October 2021	Lagos, Lagos State
Waste Picker, Anonymous	15th October 2021	Lagos, Lagos State
Waste Picker, Anonymous	16th October 2021	Lagos, Lagos State
Waste Picker, Anonymous	Numerous	Lagos, Lagos State
Waste Picker, Anonymous	15th October 2021	Lagos, Lagos State
Waste Picker, Anonymous	22nd January 2022	Nasarawa State
W.A.S.T.E Africa, NGO	16th November 2021	Abuja, FCT
FBRA, PRO	12th November 2021	Lagos, Lagos State
Yola Renewal Foundation	16th November 2021	Yola, Adamawa State



## Appendix 2 – Survey of studies

Location	Men (%)	Women (%)	No Education (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Tertiary (%)	Sample size
Ogun, Ogun State <sup>85</sup>	100	0	35	53.3	6.7	5	60
Abuja, FCT <sup>86</sup>	92.6	7.4	24.6	53.3	22.1	0	1500
Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State <sup>87</sup>	100	0	40	24	N/A	0	25
Calabar, Cross River State <sup>88</sup>	100	0	32	42	22	4	50
Warri, Delta State <sup>89</sup>	58	42	29	42	24	5	98
Warri, Delta State <sup>90</sup>	68	32	6	22	62	10	50
Port Harcourt, Rivers State <sup>91</sup>	100	0	59.8	27.6	12.1	0	180
Average (%)	88.37	11.62	32.34	37.74	24.81	3.42	

<sup>85</sup> Amosu, A. and Tella, A. 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Chibueze, T. and Naveen, O. 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Abdullahi, S. 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Ajom, S. and Eteng, S. 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Asibor, I. and Edjere, O. 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Alade, M. 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Ikechukwu, E. 2015.

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**‘Every time I pick up waste, I have done something good for the environment. But we are not recognised.’**

**Waste picker from Lagos, Lagos State**

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