WASTE PICKERS´COOPS IN BRAZIL

Content:
- Waste pickers: naming and definitions.
- Brief overview of main drivers of creation of coops in LA.
- Case study - Coops in Belo Horizonte city: creation; integration in SW systems; focus on challenges; inside a coop: types of workers; day-to-day; main challenges faced by coops.
Naming and Definition

- **Naming:** binners; scavengers, trash pickers, waste pickers
- **Provisional consensus:** avoidance of derogatory terms (scavengers); use of the term “waste pickers” in English and preferred local terms when talking about specific contexts.
- **Broad definition:** people who *reclaim reusable and recyclable materials from what others have cast aside as waste* (Samson, 2009). Some can be found collecting household waste from the curbside, commercial and industrial waste from dumpsters, and litter from the streets, as well as canals and other urban waterways. Others live and work in municipal dumps. Some work as sorters in recycling warehouses (either at conveyor belts or else) or as processors in recycling plants owned by MBOs. Some may be involved in cross-border picking such as Mexicans pickers across the US border.
- **Who are the Waste Pickers in LA?** Specificities aside, in the latin american context WP are those involved mainly in the collection/sorting of recyclables at open dumps, in the streets and/or in their cooperatives; Some are involved in semi-processing.
- **Known as:** Recicladores in Colombia; Cartoneros in Argentina, Clasificadores in Uruguay, Catadores in Brazil.
- **Numbers:** not reliable since in most countries they do not appear on official data basis. Exception for Brazil – included in official stats: 240,000 (PNAD 2007). Number by MNCR Br: 500 -800,00
Waste Pickers´ Coops
First Developments

- Work under poor working conditions, without recognition and very often harassed.
- First coops LA: social work developed, in the 1980´s, by NGOs like Fundación Social in Colombia or Catholic NGOs like Pastoral de Rua and OAF in Brazil.
- In other countries like Argentina, Peru, Chile and Uruguay the boom of organizing begins in the late 1990s early 2000 also with support from external agents such as the Instituto de Fondos Cooperativos in Argentina or the NGO San Vicente in Peru.
ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS OF WASTE PICKERS IN LATIN AMERICA

MAIN DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES

1980
First waste picker organizations:
1980’s – MBOs founded in Colombia
1980 – Association of Cochabamba, Ecuador;
1986; 1989; 1999 – first MBOs in Brazil, respectively in Porto Alegre, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte (BH).

The first MBO in the continent was founded in 1962 in Medellin, Colombia. However it was only in the 1980’s that the cooperativism began to take shape in that country catalysed by the NGO Fundación Social.

Meanwhile in Brazil NGOs linked to the Catholic Church began the organization process of waste pickers in the main capitals of the south and south-east region. The engagement of NGOs engaged in pastoral work with the urban poor was a main driver for the formation of the first MBOs of waste pickers.

1ST LEVEL ORGANIZATIONS
2ND LEVEL ORGS
NATIONAL MOVEMENTS + REGIONAL NETWORKING
TOWARDS A GLOBAL NETWORK

2010
Payment for environmental services/ Incineration threat

2000 to 2009

First experiences of integration of MBOs in municipal schemes in Brazil:
1989 – Porto Alegre and São Paulo;
1993 – Belo Horizonte;
1997 – Santo André

Unions/Federations/Association of coops:
UCRUS (Uruguay); FARRGS (Brazil);
ARB and ANR (Colombia);

In Brazil socio-environmental concerns, such as upgrading existing systems and income generation for the poor, prompted municipalities to integrate waste pickers. Also, under UNICEF’s leadership, a National Forum called Waste & Citizenship was launched and contributed to the visibility and integration of waste pickers in SW in this country.

2000 – First coops in Peru

Policymaking/ National Movements:
• 2001
National Movement of Waste Pickers - MNCR (Brazil)
• 2002
Waste picking included as a profession in the Brazilian classification of occupations
• 2003
1st LA Congress in Caxias do Sul organized by MNCR-Br with WPs from Argentina and Uruguay; And 1st Meeting of waste pickers in Buenos Aires with delegations from Chile, Colombia, Brazil and technical staff from Spain, France, Canada and Mexico.
• 2004
4th Waste and Citizenship Festival in Belo Horizonte with waste pickers from Argentina and Uruguay.
• 2006
MNT CryOS - Argentina
5940/06 Decree – Solidary Selective Collection in Brazil; W&C Festival in BH with NGO participants from India and Egypt and waste pickers from LA.
• 2007
Creation of the MRP (Peru) and MNRC (Chile)
1º BNDES Waste Picker Social Fund in Brazil;
• 2008
Creation of Networks: Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador
• 2009
Supreme Court ruling for customary rights for WP in Colombia

Next Challenges

Social Protection
Global network
Move up in the recycling chain
Strenghtening of service delivery by MBOs

2008 - 3º Latin American Congress and 1º World congress – Waste Pickers Without Frontiers

Elaborated by Sonia Dias
Source: Dias 2009; Fernandez, 2008
FORMS OF ORGANIZATION IN LA

• **1st Level Organizations:** associations, cooperatives, micro enterprises.

• **2nd Level Organizations:**
  - Federations: FECyR, Argentina (2006); FARRGS, south of Brazil (1999);
  - Unions: UCRUS, Uruguay (2002);
  - Associations of cooperatives: ARB, Colombia (1990);
  - Networks (bulk commercialization) - in Brazil: CATASAMPA, 11 cooperatives from São Paulo (2006); CATAUNIDOS, 8 cooperatives from the MR of Belo Horizonte (2006); CATABAHIA, REDESOL, CATAVIDA. In Bolivia: Red de Santa Cruz de la Sierra, (2008);

• **National Movements:** ANR, Colombia (1993); MNCR, Brazil (2001); MNT CryOs, Argentina (2006); MRP, Peru (2007); MNRC, Chile (2007).

• **Regional Movements:** Latin American Network, 15 countries amongst them: Colombia, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru (2007)

• **Towards a Global Alliance:** Interim Steering Committee with WPs from LA, Asia, Africa.

Source: Dias (2008a); Fernández (2007; 2008)
Case Study Coops in Belo Horizonte

Capital of Minas Gerais State

A planned city located in the southeast of the country

**Population:** 2,881,945 people (IBGE 2004)

City inaugurated on 12 December 1897
(113 years old)
Coops in BH

- 1990 – ASMARE: first coop. 9 members. Help from the Catholic NGO Pastoral de Rua
- 1993 – ASMARE is integrated in the municipal recycling program. 31 members
- 1998 – 3 recycling warehouses; Carpentry workshop; crèche. 350 members;
- 2000 – Other coops were created helped by different organizations: local govt agencies and NGOs.
- 2003 - New coops are integrated in the municipal recycling program.
- 2010 – 8 coops in the city
Informal Workers in Source Segregation Scheme

Mixed System

☒ Curbside collection of recyclables in part of the Central and Southern Regions of the city.

• Recyclables collected by municipal trucks are taken to coops warehouses for sorting and further processes.

☒ Recycling containers in public areas.

• 156 Voluntary Delivery Sites (435 recycling containers)

• Collection by municipal trucks; recyclables taken to coops warehouses.
Informal Workers in Source Segregation Scheme

Mixed System

- Coops collect recyclables from larger generators (industries etc) with their own motorised vehicles.

- Two of the existing 8 coops collect recyclables in offices downtown using manual pushcarts.
COOPERATIVE INTEGRATED IN THE MUNICIPAL RECYCLING SCHEME - BELO HORIZONTE CITY PROFILE

COOPERATIVES INCLUDED BY CITY REGION - SUPPORT RECEIVED BY THE MUNICIPALITY:

ASMAPR
- Recycling warehouse (public building); monthly subsidy for administrative and operational expenses of its headquarters' warehouse; destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection

ASSOCIRECICLE
- Destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection

COMARE
- Recycling warehouse (public building); 1 warehouse rented by the municipality; security service, water and electricity bills financed by the municipality; destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection

COOPEMAR
- Destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection

COOPERSOLI
- Recycling warehouse (public building); 1 warehouse rented by the municipality; security service, water and electricity bills financed by the municipality; destination of recyclables collected by SLU's door-to-door selective collection; rejects collected by SLU's conventional domestic waste collection
Collected recyclables are brought to the recycling warehouses of the waste pickers’ cooperatives, where the materials are sorted by types.
• Recyclables are weighed, shredded, baled, stored for further commercialization by coops
• Revenues are split amongst members according to internal rules established by each coop
Work Specialization

- **Street waste pickers**: reclaim recyclables from mixed wastes disposed in garbage bags placed on the streets or dumpsters. Some pickers may have arrangements with commercial and office buildings and be able to access previously segregated material.

- **Motorised pickers**: collect recyclables as part of door-to-door selective waste collection scheme run by municipalities in partnership with waste pickers MBOs. Some cooperatives may enter into direct agreements with commercial and office buildings to collect large quantities of recyclables by truck or other vehicles.

- **Sorter**: work picking and sorting by type recyclables disposed either on a conveyor belts or other sorting area or devices.

- **Operational**: Coops members who processing sorted recyclables-weighting, baling, shredding, storing and other operational activities.

- **Workshop**: Some coops run special workshops such as carpentry, crafts and therefore have members allocated in these special activities.
Networks for commercialization and/or recycling

- **REDESOL** – a network of 3 waste pickers cooperatives for bulk commercialization of recyclables.

- **CATAUNIDOS** – a network for bulk selling of recyclables and plastic recycling of PET (production of pellets) formed by ASMARE from Belo Horizonte and 8 waste pickers’ organizations from cities within the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte involving around 500 waste pickers in total.
Recycling Chain in BH

Source/Type | Collection | Sorting | Storage | Processing | Sale 1 | Sale 2 | Sale 3
---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---
Drop-off system | SLU truck | Sorting Recycling Warehouse Cooperatives | Storage Recycling Warehouse Cooperatives | Plastic Recycling Plants CATAUINDOS | Comercialization to small/medium junk shops | Comercialization to large junk shops | Comercialization to industries
Residencial and commercial areas | Organized waste picker: push-carts and/or by truck | Sorting: small and medium junk shops | Storage: small and medium junk shops | Bulk sale CATAUINDOS | Bulk sale REDESOL | |
Big generators | Non-organized waste picker | Sorting: streets | |
Source segregation: residential and commercial areas (SLU) | |

INTEGRATED OFFICIAL SYSTEM 1 (FORMAL COLLECTION + SEMI-FORMAL PROCESSING)
INTEGRATED OFFICIAL SYSTEM 2 (SEMIFORMAL COLLECTION + SEMI-FORMAL PROCESSING)
INFORMAL SYSTEM
PREFERRED SALES SCENARIO
SALE- ASIANE

SOURCE: Elaborated by Sónia Dias (PhD forthcoming)
Participatory Planning

The Municipal Waste & Citizenship Forum

• Stakeholder platform with representatives from coops; NGOs, municipal govt and others
Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

1. *Low business turnover* - one of the main obstacles for sustainability, with direct consequences on income of coop members (1,5 minimum salaries –MS- on average) when compared to non-organized WPs (3-4 MS).

- *However*, coop members enjoy indirect benefits which make up for this ‘economic disadvantage’, such as: better working conditions, support to schooling to children, housing programs, etc.
Coops & Its Dynamics – Key Issues

2. Difficulty for long term investments – due to low turnover reserve funds are small and used mainly for emergencies, i.e. is not used as investment K to better the productive process.

- As a result most coops are caught in a vicious circle of different nature but of all interrelated factors that affects business growth: low income increases members turnover, and makes the cooperative less attractive to more productive individuals; this increases internal tensions (internal competition or lack of motivation) and the circle goes on...
Coops & its Dynamics – Key Issues

3. Nature of activity as it is today: labour intensive work not K intensive – so productivity depends on direct activities done by the worker (the more efficient his work be more value will be added to the product).

Rationale of waste picking need to be understood in order to help coops escape this vicious circle

4. Average 50% are women: work done at coops are generally more favourable to women as many coops provides child care and are keen on equity issues.

5. Social function: by including women and other vulnerable groups coops have a social function in terms of poverty reduction. And this socially relevant work needs to be value as a by-product.
6. Coops as environmental agents: many coops promote and/or take part in joint environmental campaigns in the city.

Waste picker playing in environmental event

ASMARE’s Recycling fashion show
Challenges

- Low productivity in manual sorting is considered as a bottleneck as it limits investments and/or improvements in other points of the recycling services performed by coops (Lima & Oliveira, 2008).

Low productivity in sorting can be attributed to: low use of mechanization; no functional internal flow of materials; lack of adequate sorting devices (silos, conveyor belt etc); poor training; low-quality of recyclables (dirty); poor planning of collection (driving away members who could be sorting); difficulties of members deal with work innovations.

**CAPACITY BUILDING PLUS INVESTMENTS ON LOGISTICS - ESSENTIAL**
Challenges

- Demands for efficiency in service provision (in collection and/or sorting) represents, in some cases, a strain on some individual members. Some members have difficulty in complying with demands for discipline and work schedule (no drinking in the premises; standardization on recyclables; opening and closing hours of warehouses etc). As work becomes more complex (administrative skills required) this may be a strain to people with low educational level, which comprises the majority of the coops.

*How to balance efficiency and its social functions is key to sustainability*
Challenges

- Payment for environmental service: establishment of indicators for payment of environmental services so that municipalities can switch from subsidies to contracting coops based on service delivery.
- Upgrading of coops in the recycling chain also essential (semi-processing of materials adds value – production of pellets etc)
- Floor prices for recyclables important to fight market volatility.
Conclusions

- By giving incentives to organizations of waste pickers such as associations, cooperatives and unions their social and economical condition can be enhanced.
- These organizations can voice demands of WPs, represent their interests, fight for visibility and validity.
- Data from Brazil shows that organized WPs enjoy better work and living conditions (Dias PhD thesis, 2010).
Further Reading


