



The Warwick Zero Waste Project

The **Warwick Zero Waste Project** aims to create and support innovative, low tech, sustainable ways to reduce waste in the inner city, focusing on Warwick Junction in Durban. About 400 000 commuters travel through this urban hub every day and implementing zero-waste practices ensures a healthier passage and workspace for market traders and street vendors. The project intends to amplify the voices of informal workers and waste pickers and support livelihoods. The project also aims to reduce pressure on our already overloaded and toxic landfills, build solidarity between informal workers, and show how informal workers can demonstrate zero waste models for cities globally while mitigating climate change.

The project will firmly place Durban among cities across the world finding innovative and just environmental and socio-economic solutions to global challenges. Apart from reducing the tonnage of waste to landfill to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), zero-waste also impacts positively on city budgets. Working with informal workers to co-create zero-waste models for our city is a win-win for the city's social, economic, environmental and climate change goals!

If Durban recovered 80% of recyclable material in its waste stream, the city could create over 4,000 new jobs

GAIA report
<https://zerowasteworld.org/wp-content/uploads/Jobs-Report-ENGLISH-2.pdf>



Project partners are groundWork, Asiye eTafuleni and the Urban Futures Centre.

WZW Project: The first year

What has happened so far?

Participatory research

Waste pickers and reclaimers hold vast expertise on waste streams and recycling in the city. Similarly, market traders and street vendors have important in-depth knowledge of the spaces they operate in. Recognising this the project team used participatory methods that position waste pickers, market traders and street vendors not only as participants but as researchers who helped shape the research questions and data collection.

This year we participated in walkabouts, surveys, job-shadowing, photovoice and ethnographic research. These have revealed cultural and socio-environmental perceptions of waste, existing zero-waste practices, and future possibilities in the market, and how these relate to climate change and GHG emissions. This data will guide the co-design of pilot projects with informal workers in 2022.

Through workshops with waste pickers, market traders and street vendors, participants identified key questions such as: What (things, practices) would make waste management and our work better? What makes us upset in Warwick about waste? What kind of waste is produced in the market? How can we turn waste into a resource? Researchers answered these questions in words and with photographs.

Through the research, a number of waste streams have been identified along with promising existing practices such as the reuse of cardboard, paper, tins and plastics.

What do traders say?

Traders say waste is political and they have been neglected by the state. While most traders clean their own patches, often waste is simply moved around rather than collected.

Traders say waste is associated with uncleanness and tarnishes the reputation of people who work in a littered environment or who live on the streets. This prevents traders from feeling healthy and enjoying positive social engagements.

Some traders made links between burning waste and sending waste to landfill and climate change, while others had immediate concerns as the smoke from burning hurt their chests.

All market traders and street vendors recognised waste streams that could be prevented from going to landfill, for example through composting and recycling, and many valued the work of waste pickers.

"There's lots of garbage here, many kinds of it. They burn this garbage and the smoke will end up affecting climate change. There are so many things here that we can take for recycling like paper that is being burnt here" (Mxoliseni)





Organic Waste: The Early Morning Market Baseline Study

Because organics are a significant proportion of the waste generated at Warwick, the project's first pilot study focuses on the Early Morning Market (EMM), and ways to compost organic waste at its source to avoid GHG and reduce tons of compostable material clogging up landfills. The team has collected data on what types of organic waste are generated, the volume (counting and weighing bins) and how it is currently recycled, reused and managed. Apart from vegetable matter, the team has also identified other complex, but compostable waste streams that they will be working on next year. The EMM waste audit will provide a benchmark to track changes in waste volumes and waste management practices. This baseline data will show how much landfill space and money can be saved, while boosting job creation. This will help build motivation for eThekweni municipality to support zero-waste models.

The team has also, through desktop investigation, drafted a literature review, created a comprehensive resource repository, and a website which will go live in early 2022.

Sharing capacity and connections

One of the key objectives of the project is to connect, strengthen, build knowledge and expand networks of informal workers, activists, government, academia and civil society in Africa, and globally. So far the team has mapped existing partners, organised these into stakeholder groups and set up an advisory group. It has also established the African Waste Management Learning Hub to provide a virtual learning space to share knowledge, tools, and resources. Plans are on track for a documentary video and training videos to share year one's findings and methodology. The Hub is also a space to network and build solidarity, amplify wastepickers' voices on local and international platforms and improve political participation. Resources from these exciting sessions will be made available on the website in early 2022.

Thank you to all the organisations and partners who worked with us: the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) and the African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), eThekweni municipality, Melanie Samson (UJ), our Advisory Group, [GAIA](#), [Nipe Fagio](#), [Instituto Polis](#), and [GAYO](#).

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