

Abstract

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Title: Barriers that prevent street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic conditions.

ABSTRACT

Street waste pickers are the most visible group of people trying to survive under poor socio-economic conditions. Despite the fact that their activities and contribution towards recycling benefit the community at large, their social and economic conditions remain poor. In a national study on the social and economic conditions of street waste pickers in thirteen major cities around South Africa, a number of social, economic and labour market barriers were identified that prevent street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic conditions. These barriers are dualistic in nature as they do not only put them in an environment that is not economically sustainable, but also keeps them trapped in that environment.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss these barriers and to emphasise the need for socio-economic support to improve the socio-economic conditions of the street waste pickers. Policy makers should take these barriers in consideration to prevent interventions, that are aimed to support these group of people do not deprive them of their livelihood. The paper is based on data collected from 914 street waste pickers in South Africa. A mixed method research approach was used to collect the data.

Key words: street waste pickers, barriers, waste, recycling, poverty, survival strategies, economic conditions, social conditions.

JEL codes: J21, J49, I39, D60

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INTRODUCTION

High unemployment rates play a significant role in the size of a country's informal labour market which serves as an alternative for formal labour market employment (Heintz and Jardine, 1998:32). In South Africa, with its high unemployment rate, the informal sector only absorbed 15.7 per cent of the total employment in South Africa in the first quarter of 2012 (StatsSa, 2012:vi). Many of the unemployed are therefore excluded from formal and informal wage employment and are forced to explore the possibilities of self-employment. The poor who lack entrepreneurial skills and capital are forced to enter the marginal forms of informal self-employment (Heintz and Jardine, 1998:32). To cope with unemployment and poverty, the poor resort to different strategies to survive and the informal economic activities, such as waste picking is one of these strategies (Khan, 2001:1; Theron, 2010:1).

There is widespread believe that the informal economy can help reduce poverty but most WPs in the informal economy earn a very low income for their work and effort and their socio-economic conditions and working conditions remain poor (Masocha, 2006:839; WIEGO, 2011:1). Many also face chronic poverty despite their attempts to generate a livelihood in the informal economy (Masocha, 2006:839). The high unemployment rate in South Africa therefore constitutes pressing socio-economic challenges (Davies and Thurlow, 2010:7).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The informal economy is seen as a job market with virtually unrestricted entry or "easy entry" activities (Fields, 1990:69). It is characterised by low productivity, low wages and low income earning opportunities, irregular working hours and a changing work place (Becker, 2004:13; Hart, 1973:68; Jütting, Parlevliet & Xenogiani, 2008:10; Schübeler, 1996:23). Many informal sector activities are labour intensive and uses low- or no skilled labour and do not create any opportunities for the workers to increase their skills, therefore decreasing their chances to find better jobs (Blaauw, 2010:36; Suharto, 2002:116).

The informal sector is also characterised by unregistered or unofficial small scale businesses, temporary employment and self-employed persons (Becker, 2004:13; Davids, 2011:12; Devey, 2003:14; Hart, 1973:68; Jütting, Parlevliet & Xenogiani, 2008:10; Schübeler, 1996:23).

According to the dualist school, the informal economy absorbs the growing number of people who cannot find economic opportunities in the more productive and remunerative formal economy (Cho, David, Margolis, Newhouse, & Robalino, 2012:3; Heintz and Jardine, 1998:32). The informal sector however, is also said to perpetuate poverty as it consists of marginal, survivalist and subsistence enterprises or activities (ESCAP, 2006:15; Gërkhani, 2004:268). The income earnings in the informal sector tend to decline as one moves closer to the subsistence activities (Wills, 2009:1). Table 1 gives an overview of the characteristics of the subsistence and unofficial enterprises.

Table 1: Characteristics of the subsistence and unofficial enterprises in the informal sector.

	Informal sector	
	Subsistence enterprises (completely informal)	Unofficial enterprises (informal)
Degree of Informality	Do not declare income, have no protection and regulation, least dynamic	Do not declare all incomes, all workers are not registered, more dynamic, informal
Type of Activity	Single street traders, micro enterprises, subsistence farmers, waste pickers	Small manufacturers, service providers, distributors, contractors
Factor intensity	Labour intensive	Mostly labour intensive
Owner profile	Poor, low education and skills levels	Poor and non-poor, well educated, high skills levels
Markets	Barriers to entry is low, highly competitive product homogeneity	Barriers to entry is low, highly competitive, some product differentiation
Finances Required	Need working capital	Need working capital. investment capital and supplier credit
Other needs	Need personal insurance and social protection	Need personal insurance and in some cases business insurance

Source: Becker, 2004:25; Djankov et al., 2002:4.

It is the severely poor, disadvantaged, desperate and vulnerable persons or groups in the labour market that are involved in the survivalist activities as a strategy of last resort (Günther and Launov, 2012:88; PIR, 1998:79). It serves as a survivalist strategy, safety net and temporary substitute for social protection (Losby et al., 2002:9). Waste picking is a survivalist activity, and a means of subsistence for the poor who have no other income generating options available to them (Carrasco, 2009:17; Chen, 2007:10; Simon, 2010:3; Ullah, 2008:10). They are usually in desperate need of money which makes them prone to exploitation (Motala, 2002:13).

The subsistence and unofficial enterprises in the informal sector are also referred to as lower-tier informal sector activities (Fields, 1990:69). Entry into these lower-tier activities is involuntary and are only done by those who cannot find work in the formal labour market and do not meet the capital and skills requirements of the upper-tier activities (Günther and Launov, 2012:89). The upper-tier activities attract people who enter the informal sector voluntary with the expectation that their earnings will be higher in the informal sector than what it will be in the formal sector (Fields, 1990:66; Günther and Launov, 2012:89; Maloney, 2004:1160).

There are however, significant barriers such as high start-up capital, difficulty obtaining capital, skills requirements as well as labour relations arrangements that prevent many from moving from the lower-tier to the higher-tier informal sector activities (ESCAP, 2006:7; Fields, 1990:66; Günther and Launov, 2012:89; House, Ikiara and McCormick, 1993:1213; Wills, 2009:2). Heintz and Posel (2008:27) suggest that it is these entry barriers that keep the informal sector in South Africa small. This two-tiered informal sector is similar to the dualistic nature of the labour market, which divide the labour market into a formal and informal labour market (Heintz and Posel, 2008:41). The diversity and heterogeneous nature of the activities in the informal sector, the informal sector can be regarded as a cause of poverty as well as a result of poverty (ESCAP, 2006:11; Günther and Launov, 2012:88-89).

Waste picking is a subsistence activity which requires no capital or start-up costs, no education or skills and the waste picker has a guaranteed buyer for the waste picked. The only requirement for a waste picker is the physical ability to pick waste and access to waste and buy-back centres (Viljoen, Schenck and Blaauw, 2012:21).

The waste picking activities in the recycling industry is therefore a feasible option for the very poor and economically disadvantaged to earn cash income (Masocha, 2006:843). As a source of raw materials, these activities are also at the bottom-end of the recycling industry's hierarchy (Ullah, 2008:2). The hierarchy of the role players in the recycling industry is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Hierarchy of role players in the recycling industry.

<p>Highest value</p>  <p>Lowest value</p>	Manufacturing industries
	Brokers, wholesalers, other processors
	Buy back centres, craftsmen, middlemen
	Informal waste collectors with own transport (hawkers)
	Individual informal waste pickers

Source: Wilson, Velis and Cheeseman, 2006:800

The level on which the informal recycling activities are organised has an influence on the income earned, working conditions and social status of the participants. People active at the lower-end of the hierarchy are less organised, lack support networks and add less value to the waste they collect. This increases their vulnerability to exploitation and it is reflected in the very low incomes they earn (Medina, 2000:67; Wilson et al., 2006:801). To improve their position, they need to move vertically up on the hierarchy (Wilson et al., 2006:800) within the recycling industry or to other higher tier informal sector activities.

According to the sustainable livelihood approach, the poor should be able to use the capabilities obtained from their assets or capital they gain, to reap the benefits from economic opportunities thereby reducing their poverty and to provide them with economic security and social well-being. (Krantz, 2001:10-11). The main categories of assets (capital) are human, financial, natural and social capital (Adato and Meinzen-Dick, 2002:6; Krantz, 2001:10-11). Gigler (2004:8) also adds information as an additional asset (or capital). These capabilities along with economic capabilities do not only refer to the ability to earn an income, but also to be able to consume and to earn assets. A lack of capabilities will constrain the poor from taking any advantages that may lift them out of poverty.

Although they contribute towards the recycling of waste products that benefits the community at large, their social and economic conditions remain poor.

Notwithstanding the challenges and the inability of the informal sector to reduce poverty, the informal sector activities still provides a source of income for the unskilled and marginalised groups of society such as the street waste pickers (GTZ, 2011:30).

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the barriers that prevent specifically street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic conditions. The study covers thirteen major cities across South Africa. In order to achieve this aim, the first objective is to explore the possible labour market barriers that decrease the street waste pickers' likelihood to find employment in the higher-tier or formal labour market. The second objective is to analyse the street waste pickers' income to assess whether it provides scope for street waste pickers to improve their socio-economic conditions. The third objective is to explore the social background and social conditions of street waste pickers to see whether they are subject to social barriers that prevent them from improving their socio-economic conditions.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach was adopted for the collection and analyses of data. This approach can be used to mix quantitative and qualitative data in the collection and analyses stages in a single study or successive studies (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:5). In this study structured qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were used to collect data from street waste pickers and from the buy-back centres in the applicable cities. The analysis is based on data collected from 914 street waste pickers in 13 cities of which 4 are Metros across all provinces in South Africa. The non-metro cities selected are the capitals of the respective provinces. The data was collected between 19 April 2011 and 28 June 2012. The data was collected in Johannesburg (291), Pretoria (227), Cape Town (154), Durban (81), Bloemfontein

(58), Buffalo City (36), Port Elizabeth (21), Kimberley (15), Polokwane (11), Mafikeng (7), Upington (6), Pietermaritzburg (5) and Nelspruit (2).

Street waste pickers are regarded as an “unknown population” and a “hard-to-reach” research population in terms of their numbers and the difficulty in finding them due to the nature of their work. No data is available on the total number of street waste pickers in South Africa. Most street waste pickers also do not have a fixed address and sleep on the street and in bushes. During the day they roam the streets in search for recyclable waste. Because no sampling frame is available for this research population, non-probability sampling techniques were used for the research project as suggested by (Bhattacharjee, 2012:70). All ethical considerations were strictly adhered to and ethical clearance was obtained before the research commenced.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This section will provide insight into the labour market, economic and social barriers that make it very difficult for street waste pickers to enter higher informal income generating activities or jobs or even low paid formal jobs.

Labour market barriers

Waste pickers are characterised by poverty and joblessness (Medina 2000:58; Sentime, 2011:97). Like many other poor and marginalised people or groups, most street waste pickers are forced into insecure and informal income earning activities (Carrasco, 2009:17). Unemployment and structural barriers such as the decrease in the demand for lower and unskilled workers are contributing factors (Tobin, 1994:155). There is however certain characteristics and factors other than these that contributes to their inability to find employment in the formal labour market. As indicated by Eldering and Knorth (1998:153), the marginalised become distant from conventional institutions in society such as their family, school and the labour market.

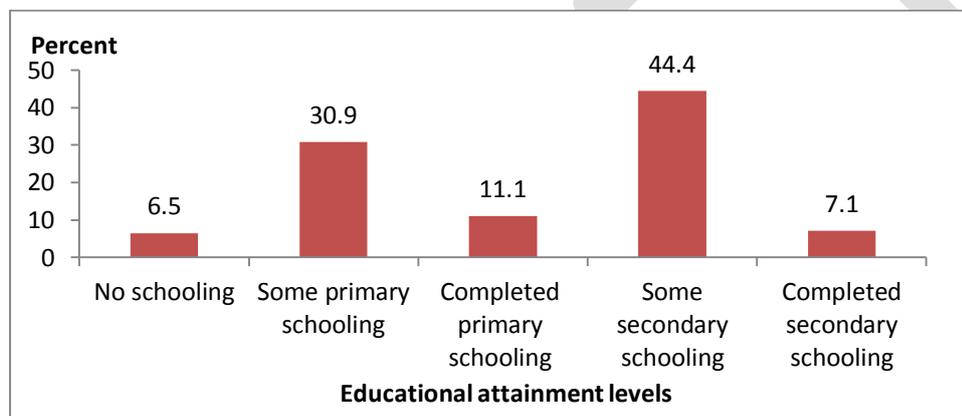
One of the major barriers that prevent the poor and marginalised groups of people to enter the labour market are the level of their human capital development and skills that includes literacy levels, educational attainment levels, reasons for leaving

school, language proficiency and previous full-time job experience. The street waste pickers also lack the capabilities and skills required to compete for the limited number of formal sector jobs.

Educational attainment levels

When people are excluded from school, they are deprived of the literacy and numeracy skills obtained from formal schooling (Berntson, 2008:26). Without these basic skills it becomes more difficult to find employment whether in the formal or informal labour market. Figure 1 reveals the results on the highest school attainment level of street waste pickers.

Figure 1: Highest school attainment levels of street waste pickers, 2012 (n=903)



Source: Survey data

An overwhelming majority (92.9 per cent) of the street waste did not complete their formal schooling. The largest percentage (44.4 per cent) obtained some secondary schooling, 11.1 per cent completed their primary schooling, 30.9 per cent started school but did not even completed their primary schooling while 6.5 per cent have no formal schooling at all. There are few job prospects for people with low educational attainment levels (Fryer and Hepburn, 2010:6). The mean educational attainment levels differ between the cities as indicated in Table 3. The mean level of education is lower in the smaller cities than in the larger cities, except for Port Elizabeth.

Table 3: Mean level of school education completed by the waste pickers per area, 2012 (n=903).

Cities	Mean school grade obtained
Nelspruit	2
Bloemfontein, East London, Kimberley, Pietermaritzburg	6
Cape Town, Johannesburg, Polokwane, Upington and Mafikeng	7
Pretoria and Durban	8
Port Elizabeth	9

Source: Survey data

The largest percentages of street waste pickers without any schooling are the street waste pickers aged between 35 and 54 years as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Percentage of street waste pickers according to highest school attainment level and age group.

Age group	Total	Percentage of unemployed in SA	14-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55+ years
n	903	4 470 000	n=338	n=100	n=401	n=64
No schooling	14.0	1.5	10.1	19	17.0	7.8
Some primary schooling	27.7	6.6	23.1	18	30.9	46.9
Completed primary schooling	24.4	4.4	19.5	25	27.9	26.6
Some secondary schooling	19.4	46.9	23.1	25	16.2	10.9
Completed secondary schooling	14.6	33.5	24.3	13	8.0	7.8
Other		7.1				

Source: Survey data

The higher levels of educational attainment levels of the youth street waste pickers are a reflection of the worldwide employment crisis which impacts heaviest on the youth. Young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and globally almost 73 million youth are unemployed and are looking for work (ILO, 2013:1). The current employment crisis makes it even more difficult for the youth with low educational attainment levels to compete for jobs.

The low educational attainment levels are a major barrier for street waste pickers to find employment and therefore serve as a barrier preventing street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic conditions.

Reasons for leaving school

The reasons why so many of the street waste pickers left school early provides a qualitative perspective of the socio-economic circumstances of the street waste pickers and why they found themselves in their current entrapped situation. The reasons as reported in an open ended qualitative question relates to seven themes of which financial difficulties is most common. The majority (68 per cent) of the street waste pickers left school early due to financial difficulties as indicated by Table 5.

Table 5: Types of financial difficulties, (n=527)

Type of financial difficulties	f	%
Financial hardship / Poverty	294	37.9
Both parents died (no money or no-one to support them)	98	12.6
Father died - no money	41	5.3
Had to go and work due to money problems	43	5.5
Raised by welfare - no money for education	1	0.1
Parents, grandparents/ other family could not provide support	37	6.6
Total	527	68

Source: Survey data

What is of concern is the fact that 17.9 per cent of those who left school because of financial problems has lost one or both parents and had no-one to care for them. Poverty has, according to Fryer and Hepburn (2010:6), a detrimental effect on the capability of an individual to achieve productive functioning such as schooling.

The other reasons for leaving school before completion of grade twelve are categorised in themes as shown in Table 6. From the non-financial reasons for leaving school early, family related issues were the most frequent reason reported. Some of these family related reasons might also be related to financial difficulties. Problems at home were the most common family related reason in this category. Problems at school, behavioural issues, health, age, and general issues were raised by only a few street waste pickers.

Table 6: Thematic analysis of the other reasons why street waste pickers left school, 2012 (n=248)

Themes	Thematic analysis of reasons for leaving school	Street waste pickers N=248	
		f	%
School-related	Failed too many times, too far from school (farm/village), bad treatment, abuse and beating by teachers, school burnt down, problems at school, quitted school, school was difficult, new syllabus was introduced	42	16.9
Family-related	Problems at home, had to work on a farm, mother passed away, had a child, abandoned by parents, no support, did not have to go to school, were not send to school, parents had too many children, grandparents passed away, got married, parents not serious, father moved away	121	48.8
Behavioural issues	Expelled from school, did not like school, did not want to go to school, disciplinary problems, just left school, bad influence, just naughty, jail sentence, became a gangster, became a street kid, drinking problem, got arrested for selling dagga and had to go for rehabilitation, lack of motivation, lazy, peer pressure, run away from home.	42	16.9
Health-related	Health problems, illness, disability	7	2.8
Age related	Too old	1	0.4
General reasons	circumstances, problems, political reasons, was abused and ran away, no transport to school, run away because of hunger, they made me mad at school, things did not work out for me.	35	14.1
Grand Total		248	100

Source: Survey data

It is however clear that 16.9 per cent of the street waste pickers showed behavioural problems which might make it difficult of these street waste pickers to find employment or to stay in their work for long periods. Such behavioural problems might also in itself serve as a barrier to improve their socio-economic conditions.

Language proficiency

Language proficiency is also an educational attribute that have an impact on the employability of an individual. A lack of language proficiency can be a barrier for entry into the formal and informal labour market.

The language proficiency of street waste pickers as presented in Table 7 shows that the majority (53.7 per cent) of the street waste pickers cannot understand English well and 56 per cent cannot speak English well. The same trend is observed with Afrikaans where (51.8 per cent) of the street waste pickers cannot understand Afrikaans well and 53.7 per cent cannot speak Afrikaans well. These results could however be an overestimation of street waste pickers who are proficient in English as the language proficiency were not evaluated but are the street waste pickers' own perception of their level of proficiency. Notwithstanding this, it is clear that language proficiency can be a major barrier for finding other employment.

Table 7: Language proficiency of street waste pickers, 2012 (n=914)

Category	N	Not at all		Somewhat		Well	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
How well can you understand English	896	100	11.2	381	42.5	415	46.3
How well can you speak English	898	132	14.7	371	41.3	395	44.0
How well can you understand Afrikaans	898	233	25.9	232	25.8	433	48.2
How well can you speak Afrikaans	898	285	31.7	197	21.9	416	46.3

Source: Survey data

Previous full-time job experience

The lack of human capital development and the effect thereof on the employability of the street waste pickers are reflected in the analysis of their previous full-time job experience. Just over half (52.4 per cent) of the street waste pickers previously had a full-time job with benefits. Almost half of the street waste pickers therefore lack full-time job experience which also makes them more vulnerable in terms of competing for and finding a full-time job. The majority of the street waste pickers, who had a previous full-time job, did not have it for long periods of time as indicated in Table 8.

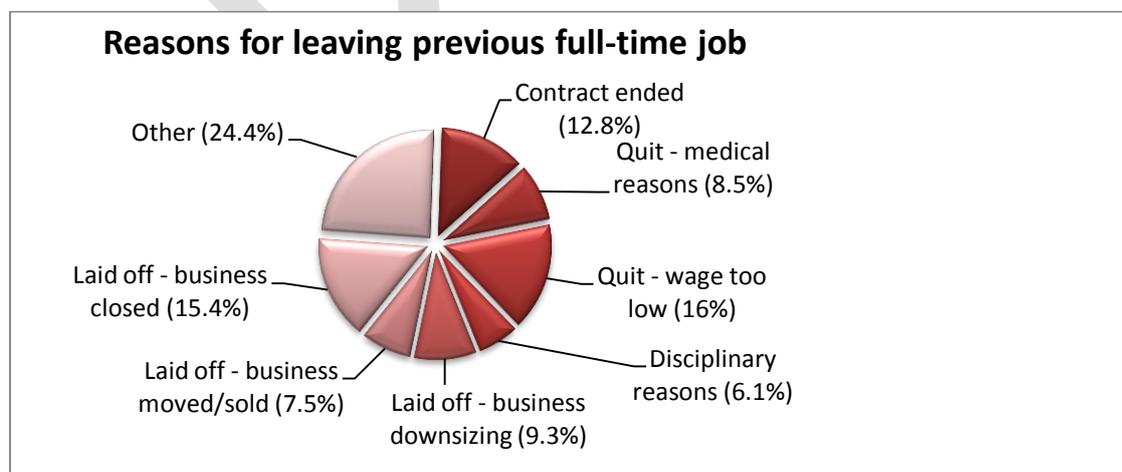
Table 8: Previous full-time job experience (n=480)

Period employed	<i>f</i>	%
Less than a year	87	18.1
1 to 2 years	74	15.4
2 to 5 years	145	30.2
5-10 years	97	20.2
More than 10 years	77	16.1
Total	480	100

Source: Survey data

Almost 63.7 per cent of the street waste pickers held their previous full time for less than 5 years. The highest percentage of street waste pickers (30.2 per cent) had their previous full time job for between two and five years followed by 87 (18.1 per cent) who had their previous full-time job for less than a year. Another 15.4 per cent were only employed for 1 to 2 years. Only 16.1 per cent of the street waste pickers held their previous full time job for longer than ten years. From these, eight street waste pickers held their jobs for between 30 and 40 years and two held their previous full time job for between 40 and 50 years. These are the older street waste pickers who only pick waste to supplement their pension or old age grants. Apart from the period of employment, the reasons for leaving their last full-time job might also have an effect on their chances to find employment elsewhere. The reasons for leaving their last full-time job, as presented in Figure 1, relates to disciplinary actions, quitting of jobs, lay-offs and other reasons.

Figure 1: Reasons why street waste pickers left their previous full-time job, 2012 (n=493).



Source: Survey data

The majority (45 per cent) of the street waste pickers were laid off. The reasons for being laid off include business downsizing (9.3 per cent), businesses that were moved or were sold (7.5 per cent), and business that closed down (5.4 per cent). Another 12.8 per cent of the street waste pickers' contracts ended without being renewed. Almost a quarter (24.5 per cent) of the street waste pickers quitted their previous full time job. Some (16 per cent) quitted because their wage was too low, disciplinary reasons caused 6.1 per cent to lose their jobs and 8.5 per cent quitted because of medical reasons. The most frequent other reasons were family matters (3.7 per cent), conflict at work (2.4 per cent) and injuries on duty and accidents (1 per cent). Some of these reasons might also have a negative effect on their employability and coping abilities or adaptability in a job environment.

The results on a qualitative question on whether the street waste pickers are looking for and would like to have a full-time job, 85.7 per cent indicated that they are indeed looking for another job. More than a third (345) of the street waste pickers indicated that they will take anything they can get. Some of the qualitative responses also show that street waste picking is just a survival activity and not something that they prefer to do. It also shows that most of them prefer another job. As the street waste pickers themselves responded:

"I would rather have a decent job"

"I want to find a job"

"Not a good way of making a living"

"I just want a good job"

The responses of the street waste pickers also imply that the street waste picking activities does not yield high incomes.

The level of the street waste pickers' human capital development, in terms of their educational attainment levels, their work experience, their skills and language proficiency makes them vulnerable in terms of finding formal employment or higher paid informal jobs. This in turn decreases their ability to improve their socio-economic conditions. According to standard labour market theory, education and

training are also two important factors of human capital development, which can improve a person's earnings (Berntson, 2008:26). Human capital, which street waste pickers lack, enable people to initiate and use other assets (Adato and Meinzen-Dick, 2002:6; Krantz, 2001:10-11).

Economic barriers

The economic barriers that might prevent the street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic conditions relates to their income and expenditures.

Income barriers

The street waste pickers either earn their income on the day on which they have collected their waste, or after a week's waste collected. Most of the street waste pickers namely 751 reported income for a day's waste collected while only 122 reported it for a week's waste collected. The income analysis show that half of the street waste pickers earn a usual day income of R50 or below which is the median usual day income, while another 25 per cent earn a usual day income between R51 and R85. The mean income for a usual day is only R67-26 showing that it is very difficult for street waste pickers to earn high incomes. The median usual week income is R300 with a mean usual week income of R505.06.

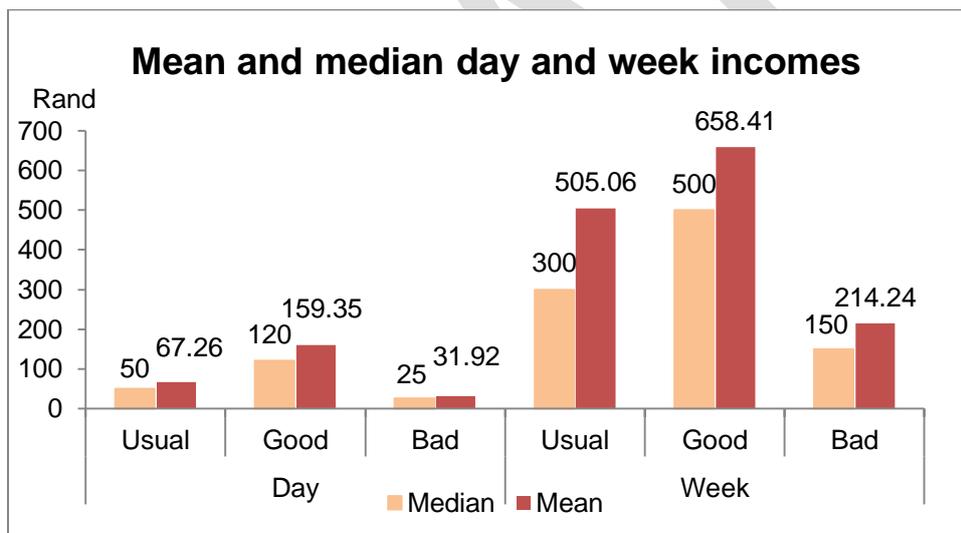
Comparing the street waste pickers' income with the global, uniform absolute poverty measure of \$2 per day to allow for global comparison (World Bank, 2010:1) reveals that the street waste pickers and their dependants are indeed living below the poverty line. The \$2 per day poverty line represents the income necessary for one person to survive and not for a whole household (McLean, 2000:20; World Bank, 2010:1).

The results of the mean number of people who has to be supported by a street waste picker is 3.2 excluding themselves. The \$2 per day income discounted at the annual average Rand Dollar exchange rate of R8.55 for 2012, amounts to R17.10 per person per day. The income for 4.2 persons needed for survival is therefore R71.82. Comparing the mean and median usual day income with the R7.10 per person per day, both fall short of the \$2 per person per day required. The income needed to support 4.2 people for a week amounts to R502.74. Again the usual week

median income of R300 falls short of this amount. This mean that half of the street waste pickers and their families who receive a weekly income lives in poverty. The usual week mean income is just above at R505.06. There are however very few street waste pickers who earn an income equal or above the poverty line.

Another aspect that makes it difficult for street waste pickers to improve their socio-economic conditions is the uncertainty of their income. The street waste pickers' income differs from day to day. On some days, they might earn high incomes and on other days, they might earn low incomes as indicated by the mean and median incomes received on a good and bad day or good and bad week as illustrated in Figure 2. The street waste pickers are therefore never certain of the income they will be earning collecting waste on any given day or week.

Figure 2: Mean and median incomes earned by street waste pickers on a good and bad day and good and bad week, 2012



Source: Survey data

As evident from Figure 2, there are significant differences in the incomes earned. The uncertainty of the income is a real concern for the street waste pickers who remarked on this issue as follow:

“The uncertainty of my income worries me”
“Sometimes you don’t make enough to buy food”

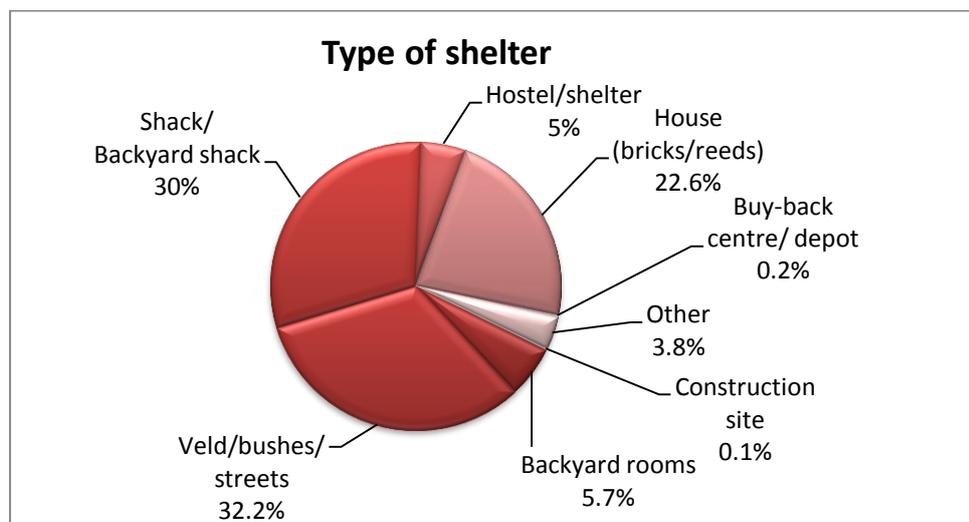
The results on the expenditures of street waste pickers show that food is the major consumable item. The second mostly bought products are cleaning materials and cigarettes, tobacco, snuff or other items for smoking. Fewer street waste pickers buy clothes, shoes, blankets, transport and energy. Only 26.2 per cent pay for the place where they sleep and a mere 4.2 per cent spend money on medical expenses. A large percentage (41.6 per cent) of the street waste pickers also spent some of their money on alcoholic beverages like beer, wine and spirits. Very few (4.7 per cent) pay school/college fees and only 4,2 per cent make contributions to a stokvel or burial society. The expenditure pattern proves that street waste pickers lives below the poverty line and cannot afford the basic necessities. The income earned by the street waste pickers is not enough to enable them to fully participate in their community. Street waste pickers are also inhibited by social barriers from translating their earnings into improved standards of living (Furedy, 1990:10).

Social barriers

Indicators that contextualise the social conditions of street waste pickers are access to basic human needs in terms of the type of structure or shelter where they usually sleep, access to food and access or availability of other basic household services. A lack of these social needs inhibits the street waste pickers' capability to be productive.

The results on the type of structure or shelter where the street waste pickers usually sleep are illustrated in Figure 3. It reveals that 32.2 per cent of the street waste pickers sleep on the street or in the veld or bush. A further 30.3 per cent sleep in shacks and only 22.6 per cent sleep in a house and 5 per cent at a hostel.

Figure 3: Type of shelter in which the street waste pickers usually sleep, 2012 (n=901)



Source: Survey data

The lack of proper housing is therefore a serious problem amongst street waste pickers. The street waste pickers who sleep on the street or in the veld or bush also lack access to other basic household services such as drinking water, sanitary facilities, cooking facilities and washing facilities as indicated by Table 9. As one of the street waste pickers put it:

“... My concern is a place to live and a place to bath...”

Table 9: Street waste pickers' access to basic services

No access to basic facilities such as	%
Drinking water	10.8
Toilet	20
Place to wash yourself	30.5
Additional food sources	%
From dustbins/waste	32.88
From other waste pickers	13.9
Somebody else, e.g. church/ individuals/restaurants etc.	43.6

Source: Survey data

Table 9 also gives a breakdown of the sources of food for street waste pickers. The results show that almost a third of the street waste pickers (32.78 per cent) get some

of their food from the dustbins. Another 13.9 per cent get food from other street waste pickers and 43.6 per cent of the street waste pickers also sometimes get food from other people, organisations, or businesses. The street waste pickers indicated that they are very grateful for the food that they receive as expressed by one of the street waste pickers.

"I am thankful to all the people who bring food to us after hours"

The social barriers prevents street waste pickers to obtain social capital that will enable them to become part of the community, to integrate them into society and to make them part of the larger group. It further deprives them of the ability to build the trust and relationships needed to function efficiently within a group or community (Adato and Meinzen-Dick, 2002:6; Krantz, 2001:10-11).

The reasons given by waste pickers for becoming a street waste picker also indicates that the street waste pickers are indeed marginalised. The single most important reason raised by 36.4 per cent of the street waste pickers for becoming a street waste picker, was that they had no other option. Another 14 per cent also said they are doing it because they could not find work. For 19.4 per cent the motive for becoming a street waste picker was to get some income and some pick waste just to be able to buy food. All these reasons points to the fact that they are involved in these activities to make a living.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of the street waste pickers come from poor social backgrounds in terms of poverty and financial difficulties. This was the main cause for the majority of the street waste pickers not to complete their formal schooling. The low educational attainment levels of the street waste pickers makes it difficult for them to compete for formal and informal employment which forced them into the marginalised and low-income informal waste picking activities. The low income earning opportunities which is lower than the poverty level of \$2 per person per day, keeps them marginalised.

This together with the lack of proper housing, the lack of access to basic services and in some instances the lack of food, prevents them from improving their socio-economic conditions. Most street waste pickers are caught in a poverty trap from which it is difficult to escape.

The labour market barriers that prevent the street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic conditions are related to their human capital development, exclusion from formal and informal employment, as well as the characteristics peculiar to the lower-tier informal sector activities. The economic barriers relates to the low and uncertain income of the street waste pickers which, for the majority of the street waste pickers, is lower than the global poverty line of \$2 per person per day.

The labour market, economic and social barriers are therefore dualistic in nature as they do not only put them in an environment that is not economically sustainable, but also keeps them trapped in that environment. Policies should be designed to reach out to these vulnerable groups within the informal economy to ensure improvement in their productivity, incomes and socio-economic conditions (Jütting, Parlevliet and Xenogiani, 2008:10). It is more complex to design policies, strategies and approaches to address the socio-economic challenges in the informal economy than what is required in the formal economy (Chen, Jhabvala, Kanbur and Richards, 2007:6; Davies and Thurlow, 2009:8). Policy makers should therefore take these barriers in consideration so that the interventions aimed at supporting them, do not deprive them of their livelihood. Any policy interventions to improve the socio-economic conditions of street waste pickers will therefore have to address, almost simultaneously, the poverty, economic, social, labour market and informal sector challenges that restrict street waste pickers from improving their socio-economic conditions.

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