

# Solid Waste Management

WATER AND SANITATION IN THE WORLD'S CITIES 2010

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## FOREWORD

Regardless of the context, managing solid waste is one of biggest challenges of the urban areas of all sizes, from mega-cities to the small towns and large villages, which are home to the majority of humankind. It is almost always in the top five of the most challenging problems for city managers. It is somewhat strange that it receives so little attention compared to other urban management issues. The quality of waste management services is a good indicator of a city's governance. The way in which waste is produced and discarded gives us a key insight into how people live. In fact if a city is dirty, the local administration may be considered ineffective or its residents may be accused of littering. Available data show that cities spend a substantial proportion of their available recurrent budget on solid waste management, yet waste collection rates for cities in low- and middle-income countries range from a low of 10 per cent in peri-urban areas to a high of 90 per cent in commercial city centres.

Many developing and transitional country cities have active informal sector recycling, reuse and repair systems, which are achieving recycling rates comparable to those in the West, at no cost to the formal waste management sector. Not only does the informal recycling sector provide livelihoods to huge numbers of the urban poor, but they may save the city as much as 15 to 20 per cent of its waste management budget by reducing the amount of waste that would otherwise have to be collected and disposed of by the city. This form of inclusion in solid waste management shows how spectacular results can be achieved where the involvement of the informal sector is promoted.

The struggle for achieving the Millennium Development Goal and related targets for water and sanitation is being waged in our cities, towns and villages where solid wastes are generated. It is at this level that policy initiatives on solid waste management become operational reality and an eminently political affair: conflicts have to be resolved and consensus found among competing interests and parties.

This publication, *Solid Waste Management in the World Cities*, is the third edition in UN-HABITAT's State of Water and Sanitation in the World Cities series. It aims to capture the world's current waste management trends and draw attention to the importance of waste management, especially regarding its role in reaching the UN Millennium Development Goals. The publication acknowledges the escalating challenges in solid waste management across the globe. It seeks to showcase the good work that is being done on solid waste by cities around the world, large and small, rich and poor. It achieves this by looking at what drives change in solid waste management, how cities find local solutions and what seems to work best under different circumstances. The publication endeavours to help decision-makers, practitioners and ordinary citizens understand how a solid waste management system works and to inspire people everywhere to make their own decisions on the next steps in developing a solution appropriate to their own city's particular circumstances and needs. Most readers will never travel to all the 20 cities featured in this report, but through this publication they will have access to real experiences of people working on the ground. We hope it will provide a reference point for managing solid waste in the world's cities and towns, and that many will follow in the footsteps of our authors, and we can move to an improved set of global reference data.

And Cycle Tilbery



Anna Tibaijuka Under-Secretary General, United Nations Executive Director, UN-Habitat

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