

# Non-Governmental Institutions: Building Sustainable Waste Management in Developing Countries

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**Abstract**— Waste management is arguably the most important environmental issue in developing countries and low-income communities in particular. Hence, it should be prioritized if environmental sustainability is to be achieved. Researchers have noticed gaps in the collection of waste, especially across income and demographic levels. Using examples of developing cities in the world, this article, articulates the need for a holistic strategic change, leveraging the experience of Non-Governmental Institutions in community engagement and advocacy.

**Keywords**— Waste Management; Developing Countries; Sustainable Development; Non-Governmental Organizations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental institutions play an increasingly vital role in the push for an efficient waste management system and sustainable development. Inefficient waste management is a critical environmental justice issue. This is as a result of its burden on the meager economic and social resources of struggling low-income communities. These resources are better prioritized for daily sustenance. It is important also to note that, there is no lack of environmental regulation or policies. However, there is a need for increased awareness about waste issues, management practices as well the economic importance for social purposes, the circular economy. Non-governmental Institutions, namely non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) play a vital role in the political and social inclusion of the base of the pyramid population (low income). These organizations operate mostly in low-income communities and with the base of the pyramid populations. At states and national levels, they are able to galvanize public awareness as well as reach local populations. They can work to promote social change on a large or subsistence level, promoting citizen participation and improving communities. There is, therefore, a need for environmental collaboration between government institutions and NGOs.

## II. NGOS OPERATIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The contributions of NGOs to sustainable development in developing countries is enormous. Specifically, NGOs play two important roles in their areas of jurisdiction. Firstly, they create awareness about relevant issues through public engagement and information and, secondly, they interface with and advise policymakers. These two roles are vital for the concept of a circular economy to thrive in developing countries. NGOs are better able to balance the struggle between profit and a sustainable environment than private businesses. NGOs are less focused on profits but on operating

costs. This struggle has seen formal waste management organizations create a disparity in the collection, inefficient management, and improper disposal of unmanaged wastes. Their business is focused on the wealthy communities with little or no attention for the low-income communities. This wealth disparity is the basis of environmental justice discussions in developing countries and low-income communities. Using the tools of community engagement, training, funding, and empowerment, NGOs achieve better results than competing government agencies. However, the roles of NGOs are complementary, rather than competing with established government institutions.

## III. WASTE MANAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Waste management in developing countries is generally at the subsistence level, largely composed of the informal waste pickers and collectors. This is due to the inadequacy of informal collection and management of waste in developing countries. Informal waste pickers, therefore, complement the few formal players by concentrating on the underserved low-income communities. Their contribution to the circular economy and sustainable development is enormous. They help support and improve recyclable waste collection and processing, make income, and contribute to the national economy. However, the operation of waste pickers is limited by scope and scale. By scope, they suffer stigmatization, discrimination and are economically exploited. By scale, waste pickers lack the necessary capital and technological support to ramp up their collection and hence sustain a profitable business [1].

A common feature in communities in developing countries is the similarities they share. Some of these similarities include bad and inaccessible roads, lack of adequate social infrastructure as well as cohousing arrangements. These similarities have oftentimes helped NGOs (international) settle in and adapt relatively quickly to the new operational areas. Khulna in Bangladesh, just like Lagos in Nigeria are both located in the southwestern part of the two countries and both have significant commercial and economic importance to their countries. Due to this importance, they enjoy the continuous movement of people, increasing their population. This population pressure has also aggravated the waste issues. It is therefore easy to adapt working ideas between both cities. In Khulna, NGOs train and support informal waste workers and pickers in the areas of the organization as well as working conditions thereby increasing earnings, and access social services [2]. This approach can be explored by low-income communities in fast-growing cities in developing countries

such as Lagos and Kaduna in Nigeria, Bangalore in India, and Tianjin in China. Already, NGOs play leading roles in the provision of healthcare and education in some of Countries, extending this role to environmental issues and management will complement the social developmental roles of NGOs as well as achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [4].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

As the research and policymaking communities continue to design efficient and sustainable waste management in the developing countries, it is important to consider the potentials of integrating the Non-governmental Institutions in the operations and governance of circular economy at the local level. The continued expansion of NGOs in developing

countries can create a path for environmental responsiveness and sustainability [4]. This article suggests that NGOs can be more effective in influencing public decision and awareness as well as environmental policy.

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