

Gender and waste management

Did you know...?



1. Waste is not necessarily a gender-neutral concept

Given women's primary household responsibility in many societies (such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and family health), women and men may have different perceptions of what should be considered waste. For example, what looks like dirt to men could be compost or fertilizer to women. When launching a waste management project, it may be necessary to develop a locally valid classification of waste, considering different gender views and what categories of waste are used in local discourse and practice.

2. Women may have different needs and preferences on waste management services

Given different responsibilities, resources and barriers, women and men often have different needs and preferences. For example, while men may prefer a drop-off central collection point system, women, as the primary users of waste management services due to their responsibility of managing the household waste, may prefer door-to-door collection. This is because women face time constraints due to their multiple roles and in certain cultures they have mobility limitations. To maximize the quality and efficiency of waste management services, it is important to know the needs and challenges of women. (Photo: [Tina Schoolmeester](#))



3. There is a clear gender division of labour in the waste sector

Waste management is often regarded as gender-neutral, but gender inequalities and gender divided roles are deeply embedded in many aspects of current waste management. We see a division of labour in the waste sector based on conventional gender roles and stereotypes. Whereas men tend to be able to assume positions of higher authority, dealing with the buying and reselling of recyclables, for example, women are often limited to lower-income tasks, such as waste picking, sweeping and waste separation. Throughout the formal sector as well, women are also typically excluded from higher-income and decision-making positions. (Photo: [Tina Schoolmeester](#))



4. Women's gender responsibility for community cleanliness is often uncompensated, and when these voluntary activities become paid, women are often left out

In the absence of adequate waste management services, in many communities women are often involved in voluntary community clean-ups, street sweeping and even primary collection of waste. However, when these volunteer activities become legitimized and paid, it is overwhelmingly men who get selected to participate. Men are also more likely to become waste or recycling business owners, as women face greater constraints to access credit than men. The implications of this include the need for women to be consulted when improvement schemes are planned so that their insights and status are protected. For example, deliberately preserving women's access to cleaning activities or enhancing women's access to credit. (Photo: [Tina Schoolmeester](#))



5. Formalizing waste activities can also force women out of work

Women working in the informal sector are also likely to be marginalized when the informal activities become formalized. In the informal sector, men usually take control over waste materials with higher value for recycling. It is also common to find that men mainly collect waste and sell the segregated materials, while women segregate the collected waste items at home and are responsible for disposing of those with no value. Such a division of labour makes women's work invisible or less valued, resulting in a lack of recognition of the economic contributions by women and inclusion in public policies. Consequently, when waste-picking activities become legitimized, women tend to be excluded or do not enjoy the same opportunities as men. It is important to analyze the potential threat to groups of women and discuss special measures to safeguard women's interests and protect their access to and control of the resources. (Photo: [Tina Schoolmeester](#))



6. Gender aspects are left out in the selection of technology

While selection of technology is often considered gender neutral, it is relevant to ask some gender questions. For example, in the case of technology for waste collection and recycling machinery:

- Are women-owned enterprises able to generate a high work volume to pay for the higher investment to introduce new technology?
- Do women have equal access to the necessary training?
- Can women continue with income earning activities such as sorting the waste with the introduction of the new technology and services?

To ensure that technological solutions do not result in reinforcing, or even increasing, women's socio-economic disadvantages, gender aspects need to be addressed. (Photo: UNEP)



7. Women are exposed to specific health risks in various ways

As women are often care takers of the house and responsible for household waste management, they are more exposed than men to human excreta or other raw waste materials, thereby increasing their risk of contracting diseases such as hepatitis, diarrhoea and eye/skin infections. In many small-scale gold mining areas, women are engaged in the most dangerous jobs in a toxic environment since these jobs do not require physical strength. These include mixing the mercury in panning and burning the amalgam (mercury combined with gold containing ores) with the added risk of often having their children or babies nearby. When women are exposed to bio-accumulative chemicals persistently, they remain in the body long after exposure and can be passed from mother to baby. (Photo: UNEP)



All these lead to the need for gender perspectives to be incorporated into waste management!

Further resources:

If you are interested in learning more, read the following resources, from which valuable insights were taken for this sheet:

Section 1

AIT. (2015). Module 4, Course 4.3, Section III: Gender and Waste Management, 2069-2089.

<http://www.rrcap.ait.ac.th/Course%20Package/Module%204.pdf>

GWA and WASTE. (2010). No Capacity to Waste: Training Module Gender and Waste.

<http://genderandwater.org/en/gwa-products/capacity-building/no-capacity-to-waste/view>

Muller, M. and Schienberg, A. (1997). Gender and Urban Waste Management.

<https://www.gdrc.org/uem/waste/swm-gender.html>

Scheinberg, A., Muller, M., and Tasheva, E. (1999). Gender and Waste: Integrating gender into community waste management: project management insights and tips from an e-mail conference, 9-13 May 1998.
<http://www.ircwash.org/resources/gender-and-waste-integrating-gender-community-waste-management-project-management-insights>

Woroniuk, B. and Schalkwyk, J. (1998). Waste disposal & equality between women and men.
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/1849277.pdf>

Section 2

GWA and WASTE. (2010). No Capacity to Waste: Training Module Gender and Waste.
<http://genderandwater.org/en/gwa-products/capacity-building/no-capacity-to-waste/view>

Muller, M. and Schienberg, A. (1997). Gender and Urban Waste Management.
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<http://www.ircwash.org/resources/gender-and-waste-integrating-gender-community-waste-management-project-management-insights>

UNEP. (2015). Global Waste Management Outlook.
<https://www.unep.org/ietc/ja/node/68?%2Fresources%2Fpublication%2Fglobal-waste-management-outlook=>

UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal. (2019). Gender and waste nexus: Experiences from Bhutan, Mongolia and Nepal.
<https://www.unep.org/ietc/resources/publication/gender-and-waste-nexus-experiences-bhutan-mongolia-and-nepal>

Woroniuk, B. and Schalkwyk, J. (1998). Waste disposal & equality between women and men.
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/1849277.pdf>

Section 3

GA Circular. (2019). The Role of Gender in Waste Management: Gender Perspectives on Waste in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam.
<https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Role-of-Gender-in-Waste-Management.pdf>

UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal. (2019). Gender and waste nexus: Experiences from Bhutan, Mongolia and Nepal.
<https://www.unep.org/ietc/resources/publication/gender-and-waste-nexus-experiences-bhutan-mongolia-and-nepal>

Section 4

GWA and WASTE. (2010). No Capacity to Waste: Training Module Gender and Waste.
<http://genderandwater.org/en/gwa-products/capacity-building/no-capacity-to-waste/view>

Scheinberg, A., Muller, M., and Tasheva, E. (1999). Gender and Waste: Integrating gender into community waste management: project management insights and tips from an e-mail conference, 9-13 May 1998.
<http://www.ircwash.org/resources/gender-and-waste-integrating-gender-community-waste-management-project-management-insights>

UNEP. (2015). Global Waste Management Outlook.
<https://www.unep.org/ietc/ja/node/68?%2Fresources%2Fpublication%2Fglobal-waste-management-outlook=>

UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal. (2019). Gender and waste nexus: Experiences from Bhutan, Mongolia and Nepal.
<https://www.unep.org/ietc/resources/publication/gender-and-waste-nexus-experiences-bhutan-mongolia-and-nepal>

Section 5

AIT. (2015). Module 4, Course 4.3, Section III: Gender and Waste Management. In Curriculum Resource Package: Holistic Waste management, Waste for Sustainable Development (WSD) Asia Pacific University Consortium, 2069-2089. <http://www.rrcap.ait.ac.th/Course%20Package/Module%204.pdf>

GWA and WASTE. (2010). No Capacity to Waste: Training Module Gender and Waste. <http://genderandwater.org/en/gwa-products/capacity-building/no-capacity-to-waste/view>

Scheinberg, A., Muller, M., and Tasheva, E. (1999). Gender and Waste: Integrating gender into community waste management: project management insights and tips from an e-mail conference, 9-13 May 1998. <http://www.ircwash.org/resources/gender-and-waste-integrating-gender-community-waste-management-project-management-insights>

UNEP. (2015). Global Waste Management Outlook. <https://www.unep.org/ietc/ja/node/68?%2Fresources%2Fpublication%2Fglobal-waste-management-outlook=>

UNEP. (2016). Recycling for Life – and a Living. In GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A Guide to UNEP's Work, 30-31. <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7642>

UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal (2019). Gender and waste nexus: Experiences from Bhutan, Mongolia and Nepal. <https://www.unep.org/ietc/resources/publication/gender-and-waste-nexus-experiences-bhutan-mongolia-and-nepal>

Section 6

Muller, M. and Schienberg, A. (1997). Gender and Urban Waste Management. <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/waste/swm-gender.html>

Section 7

GWA and WASTE. (2010). No Capacity to Waste: Training Module Gender and Waste. <http://genderandwater.org/en/gwa-products/capacity-building/no-capacity-to-waste/view>

Muller, M. and Schienberg, A. (1997). Gender and Urban Waste Management. <https://www.gdrc.org/uem/waste/swm-gender.html>

WECF. (2016). Women and Chemicals: The impact of hazardous chemicals on women – A thought starter based on an experts' workshop. <https://www.wecf.org/77912/>

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