



Gender and waste management

United Nations Environment Programme

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(Photo: [Tina Schoolmeester](#))



International Environmental Technology Centre (IETC)

<https://www.unep.org/ietc/>

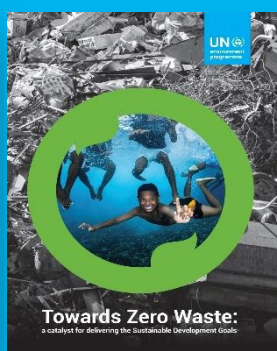
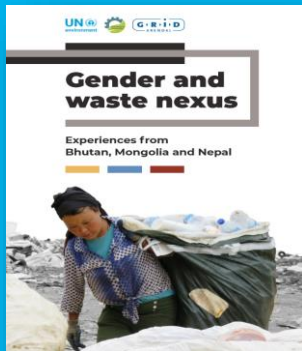
- UNEP-IETC was established in 1992 in Osaka, Japan, based on the decision of the UNEP Governing Council to facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technologies focusing on urban environmental and freshwater issues.
- In recent years, UNEP-IETC has focused its activities on environmentally sound management of solid waste.

UNEP-IETC's work on Gender and Waste

<https://www.unep.org/ietc/>



Publications and fact sheets (COVID-19 medical waste, plastic waste, e-waste)



Gender mainstreaming workshops (Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal)



Video series (Gendered state, role of household, gender-responsive waste policy, women's empowerment)

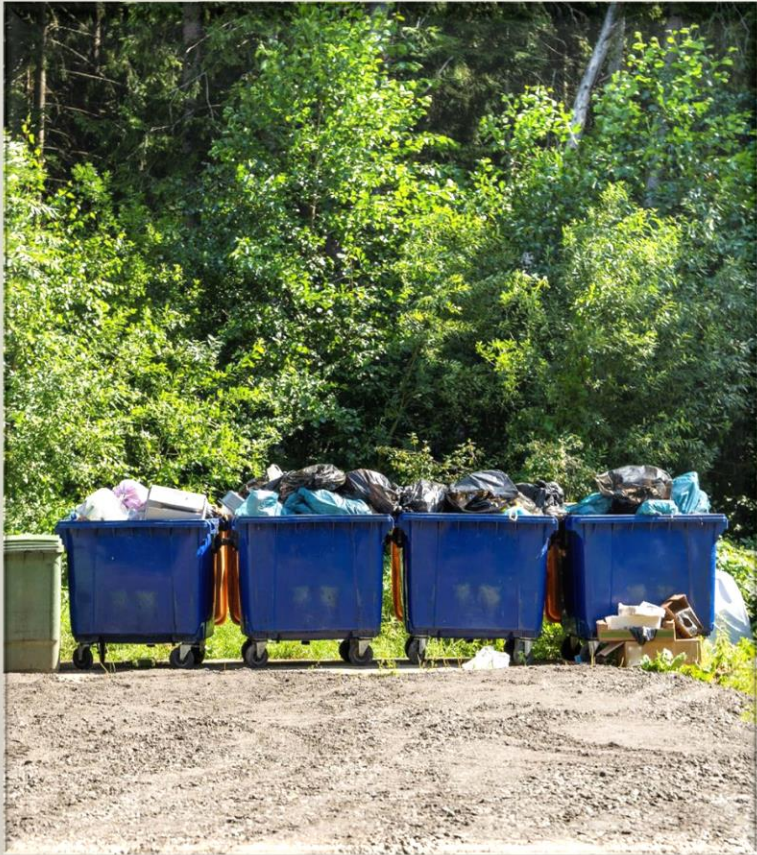


Webinars (Gender & Waste)

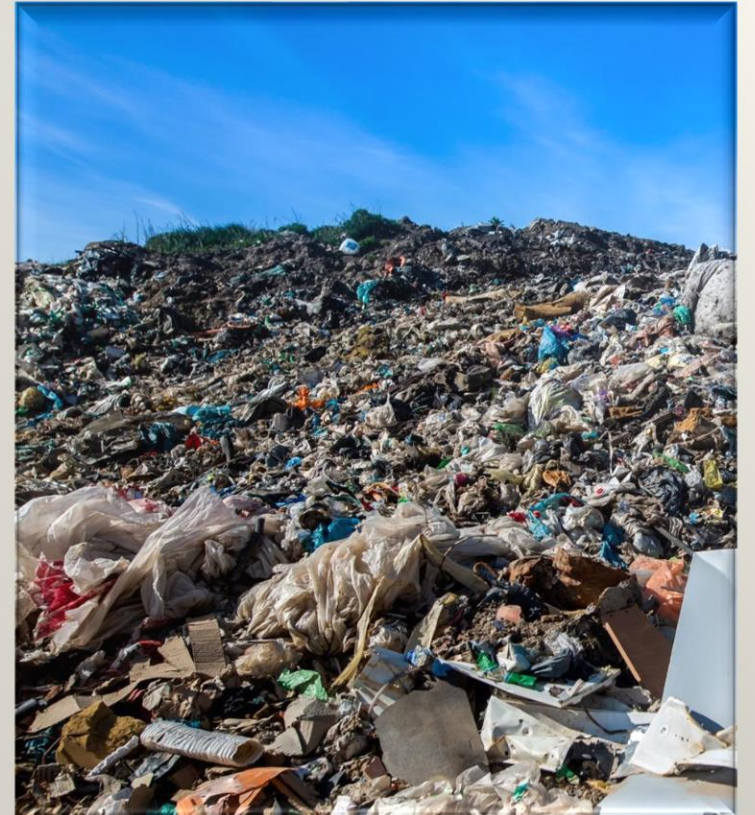


Today!





Waste and
GENDER??



Women in the household



Common role for women in many societies:

- Primary household responsibilities
- Tend to be **responsible for, and thus have knowledge on, managing household waste** (including waste prevention, sorting and composting)
- **Main service users of municipal waste management**



- It is important that women's contribution to household waste management (and thus potential to significantly reducing waste through recycling / composting) is properly acknowledged in waste management.
- It is also important to understand the **different needs, preferences and challenges** that women and men might have based on their **gender responsibilities and roles**, to achieve more efficient and effective waste management operations.



(Photo: [Tina Schoolmeester](#))

Example: While male-dominated decision makers might prefer a system that collects household waste in one place (drop-off point) from the efficiency perspective, women, as the one responsible for taking out the household waste, might prefer a door-to-door collection. Women face **time constraints** due to their multiple roles and, in some cultures, mobility limitations.

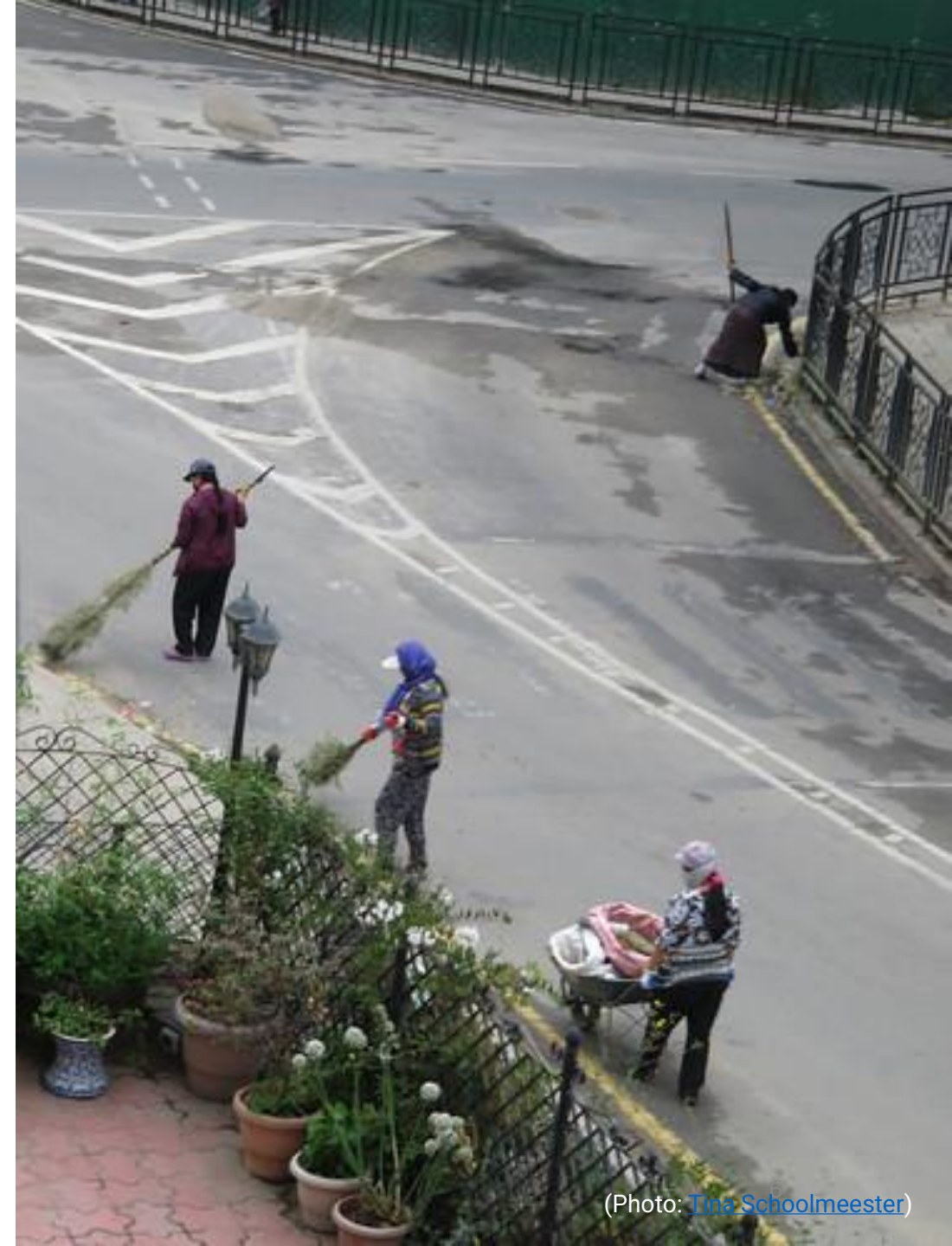
Women's responsibilities in the household



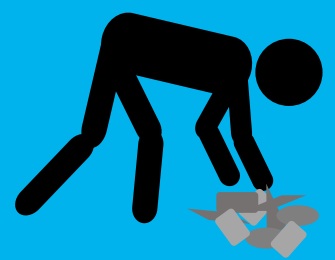
Women in the community



- In the absence of adequate waste management services, in many communities **women** are often engaged in **voluntary community activities** (such as clean-ups, street sweeping and even primary collection of waste).
 - However, when these volunteer activities become legitimised and paid, it is overwhelmingly **men** who get selected for **paid labour**.
- ➔ Women, as well as men, need to be consulted when improvement schemes are planned so that their insights and status are protected.




Women in the waste sector



- Women often work at the **lower tiers of the job hierarchy** both in the formal and informal sectors.
- The **division of labour** across the waste sector reflects **traditional stereotypes and gender roles** in everyday life.
- 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 **lack of inclusion** of women in public policies.



- **Decision-making and higher-income positions**
- **Ownership of businesses and other authoritative positions**
- Control over waste materials with **higher value for recycling**



- **Excluded** from higher-income and decision-making positions
- **Lower-wage tasks** such as waste picking, sweeping and waste separation
- **Less access** to equipment, vehicles and higher-value recyclables.
- Segregates the collected waste items **at home** and dispose those **with no value**



Recommendations

Collection of gender-disaggregated data: Collecting gender-disaggregated data is crucial as the first step towards developing evidence-based, gender responsive waste management policies.

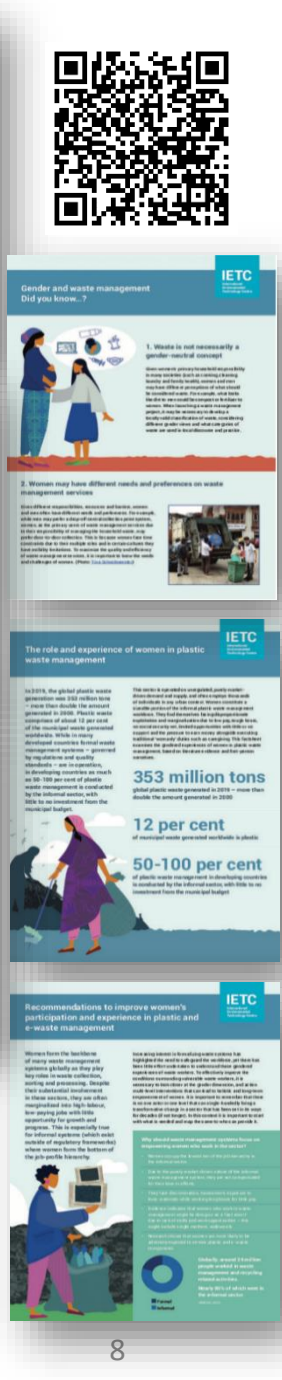
Representation and stakeholder consultation: Gender needs to be taken into consideration throughout the design, implementation and monitoring phases of any waste management policies and projects, with equal gender representation and stakeholder consultation.

Inclusive transition of the informal waste sector: Transition to more sustainable waste management can further increase economic opportunities for women in the sector. Working conditions need to be improved, including by providing legal recognition and support for informal waste workers (social security benefits, higher income, access to health care, etc.).

Safety and health: Informal waste workers suffer from injuries and health risks from their daily contact with waste that includes hazardous waste and chemicals. Adequate training and safety gear, as well as access to healthcare system, need to be provided.

Finance and business: As the waste sector modernizes with new technologies, to ensure that technological solutions do not result in reinforcing, or even increasing, women's socio-economic disadvantages, gender aspects need to be addressed and access to finance and business support need to be considered.

Education: Particularly those working in the informal waste sector have very little formal education. Further, as the waste sector modernizes and applies new technologies, higher levels of education and training will be required.



Women as well as men as agents of change



“I started to segregate and recycle my own waste by teaching my kids as well. But then I realized that doing it on my own won't be enough. I decided that I must find a way to influence younger generation.”

- A founder of zero waste NGO, Mongolia



“What I could do is to participate equally in the household chores and gradually make my children understand that cleaning the house and doing household chores is not a gender-specific role.”

- Government officer, Bhutan



“Being a woman myself, I have come to realize that women are just as capable as men. As a waste instructor, I teach people how to reduce waste through weaving. These people, in turn, teach other people the same, and in this way, waste gets reduced.”

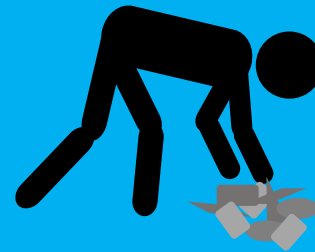
- Upcycling NGO instructor, Bhutan

Video series,
“Gender and Waste Nexus”
([UNEP-IETC, 2020](#))



Thank you

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