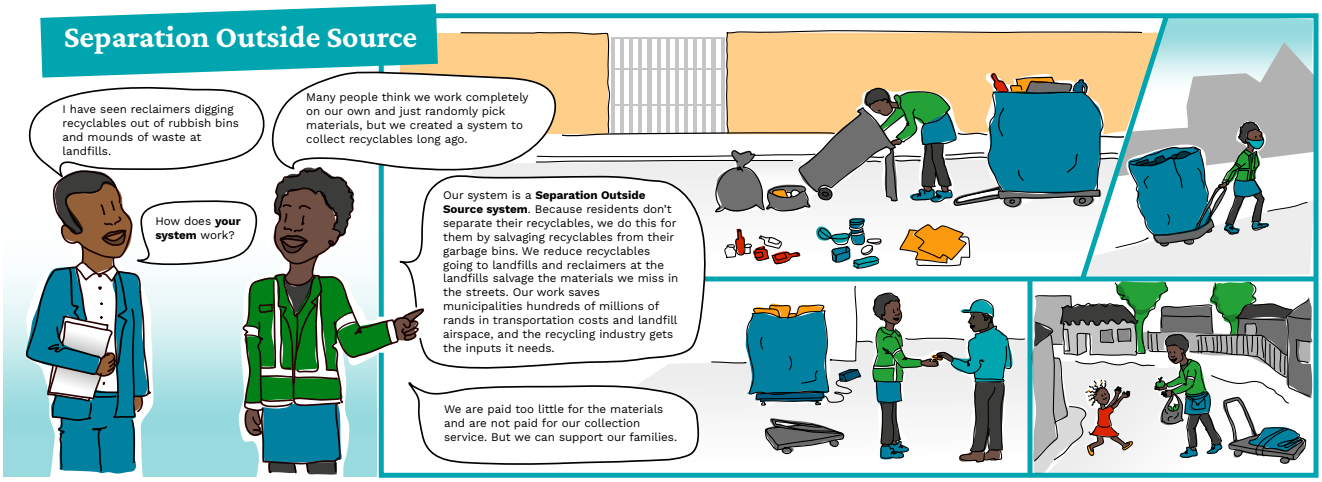
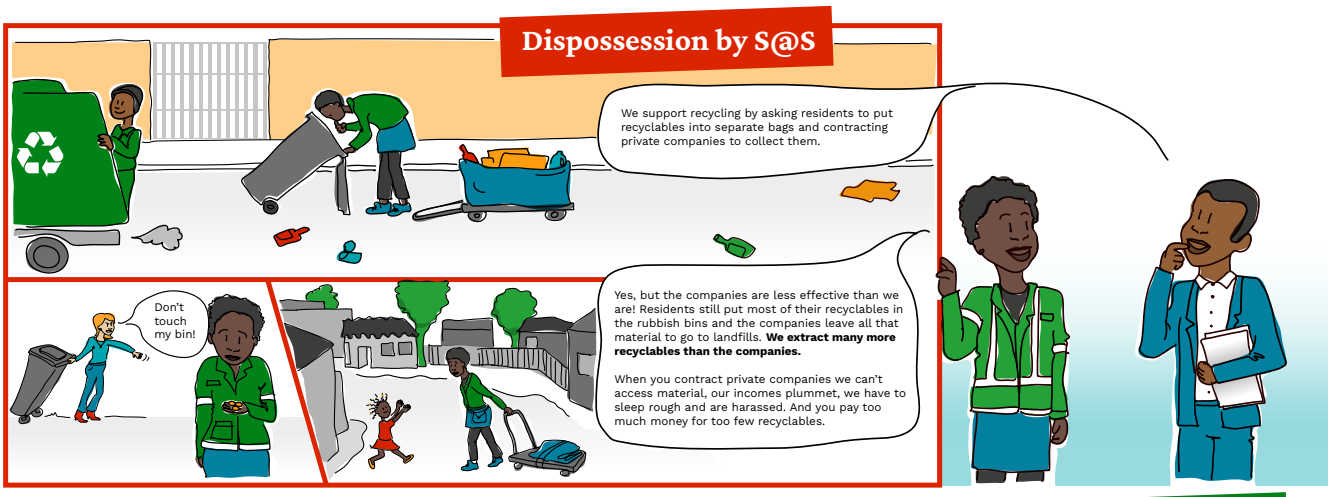
Separation at source and integration







Separation at source (S@S) is when households, factories, companies, and all other organisations and institutions that create waste separate it into different categories before it leaves their premises. This is so that less waste is sent to landfills, items that still have value can be put to good use, and the environmental harms caused by waste are decreased.

The South African government has rightly identified that S@S is necessary if we are going to succeed in reducing waste that goes to landfills, expand the recycling industry, preserve the environment, and reduce contamination of recyclables by waste so that more of them can be recycled.

To date, S@S in South Africa has focused on the separation of recyclables, but separating organics would also significantly reduce waste to landfill and also reduce greenhouse gas emissions at landfills.



IF YOU DON'T KNOW, NOW YOU KNOW

Reclaimers support separation at source!

In discussions about recycling and waste picker integration, concerns have been raised that reclaimers oppose separation at source. But that is not correct. Reclaimers want separation at source to be implemented, they just want it to be done in a different, better way.

Separation at source and reclaimers

Before government thought of implementing S@S in South Africa, reclaimers had created a 'separation outside source' (SoS). In this system, because households do not separate the materials at the source (inside their homes), reclaimers separate the recyclables from the waste outside the residents' homes. This is the way that the majority of recyclables are taken out of the waste stream in South Africa.

As discussed in the examples below, one of the easiest ways to start S@S is to ask residents to separate materials for reclaimers who are already collecting their recyclables – to build on what exists. This is how the **Guideline on Waste Picker Integration** says we should approach integration.

But, instead of this, municipalities have created S@S programmes that bring in new private companies or cooperatives of non-waste pickers to collect the separated recyclables.



Diagram 1



Diagram 2

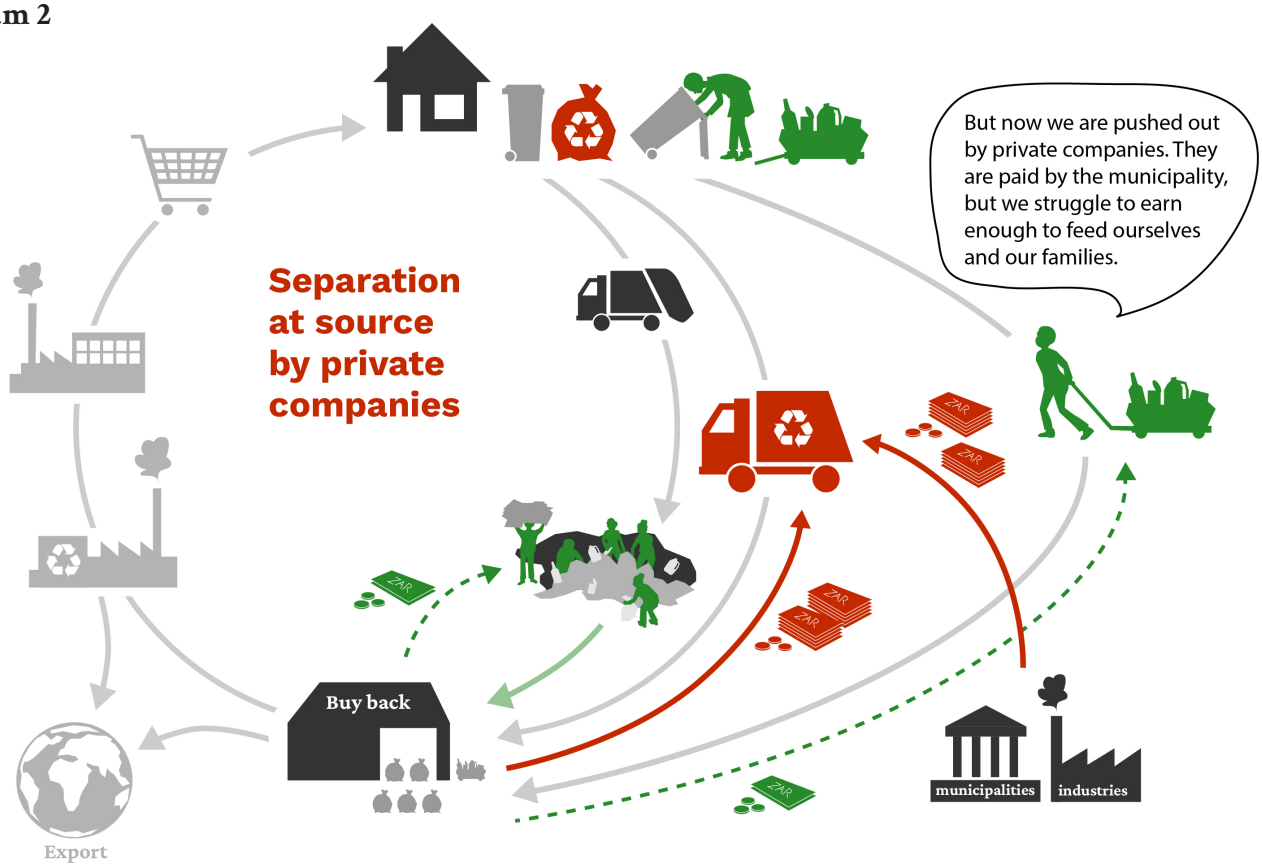


Diagram 2 shows that when they do this, reclaimers and their SoS system (shown in green) are pushed to the margin by the private company (shown in red), and that reclaimers' access to recyclables decreases and so does their incomes.

Reclaimers are also affected in other ways **when private companies do S@S:**

- they need to sleep rough near the areas where they collect or leave their homes during the night so that they can get the recyclables before the private company
- they need to work at a faster pace
- they face increased harassment from residents, security, and workers in the private company
- their work becomes more precarious
- some residents call them thieves and treat them like criminals when they take the recyclables.

Diagram 2 also shows that S@S that officially excludes reclaimers also has negative effects for the companies. They collect fewer materials than expected; are unable to report the actual recycling rate as materials collected via SoS are not captured; are implicated in loss of livelihoods; face protests and conflicts with waste pickers; and are forced to revise their programmes.

Although you cannot see it in the diagram, there are also negative effects for the municipality. Political tensions increase when reclaimers protest the contracts and relations with reclaimers are damaged. In some places, such as Johannesburg, the municipality has not been able to proceed with some contracts. Municipalities cannot get accurate data on the recycling rate because the materials that reclaimers collect are not captured. Municipalities frequently pay the private companies a set fee per household, which they pay even if the residents don't separate materials for the companies or reclaimers collect them first, resulting in unnecessary expenditure. In addition, the effects of the contracts on reclaimers undermine the municipality's goals of poverty alleviation, job creation, and economic and social inclusion.

Four approaches to integrated S@S

But there are ways to implement S@S that avoid these problems and promote waste picker integration by making reclaimers responsible for collecting the separated recyclables. Research in Johannesburg has shown that this can also lead to higher recycling rates, as private companies and non-waste picker cooperatives only collect recyclables in the separated bags, while waste pickers collect those, but also still salvage from the rubbish bins. This is particularly important to take into consideration because few South Africans separate their recyclables and it takes time to change their behaviours.

The Guideline presents four different approaches to integrated S@S:

1 Separating for reclaimers
2 Paying reclaimers for collection of separated materials;
3 Contracting reclaimer cooperatives to collect separated recyclables;
4 Integrating reclaimers into S@S contracts with private companies.

1. SEPARATING FOR RECLAIMERS

A very simple and quick way to start S@S is to encourage residents and other generators of municipal waste to separate their materials for reclaimers.

Many residents already separate their recyclables for reclaimers. On garbage collection day they put the recyclables outside their homes in a special bag or bin for reclaimers to collect. Municipalities can work with reclaimers to conduct educational campaigns for residents that explain who reclaimers are and the contributions they make, and that ask residents to separate for them. Knowing that the initiative is supported by the municipality and industry will encourage residents to participate.



Reclaimers in Johannesburg have reported that more residents start separating materials once reclaimers establish a personal relationship with them and when the residents understand how much difference it makes to reclaimers if they do not need to dig through rubbish bins.

2. INTEGRATING S@S BY PAYING RECLAIMERS FOR SERVICE PROVISION

Most reclaimers in South Africa and around the world work independently. Many collaborate informally but collect and sell materials individually.

Industry does not currently pay reclaimers for the work that they do to extract recyclables from the environment and sell them into the recycling value chain. However, South Africa's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Regulations now require industry to start paying reclaimers for the services they provide by November 2022.

Municipalities also do not pay reclaimers for the environmental and collection services they provide or for the savings they create for the municipalities. Municipalities face a particular challenge in paying reclaimers, as legal restrictions prevent them from contracting individual waste pickers as service providers.



There are, however, ways of paying or compensating individual reclaimers that do not require a contract or direct payment to each individual waste picker. The African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) piloted an innovative approach in Johannesburg in which reclaimers work individually to collect recyclables and are paid individually based on the weight they collected. However, the reclaimers are coordinated by ARO which oversaw and managed the project and continues to play that role in the

continuation of the project. ARO also partnered with Unilever, the University of the Witwatersrand, and two local resident associations to fund, design, implement, and revise the pilot. You can learn more about this approach by going to the Recycling with Reclaimers case study on the Reclaim, Revalue, Reframe website.

LINK TO: CASE STUDIES

Diagram 3



3. INTEGRATING S@S BY CONTRACTING WASTE PICKER COOPERATIVES

Waste picker cooperatives provide S@S collection services many cities around the world. There are many good examples in Brazil and Colombia (You can learn more about cooperatives providing separation at source collection services at www.wiego.org and globalrec.org). The South African Waste Picker Association (SAWPA) supports this model and has piloted it in the municipality of Metsimaholo in the Free State province.

The Vaal Park pilot project was also a partnership – in this case with local and provincial government, the packaging industry, producer responsibility organisations, and Sasol. Support for the cooperative included infrastructure, equipment, a truck, and training. The cooperative collects separated materials from the high income Vaal Park suburb, which it sorts and aggregates at the Vaal Park Recycling Centre (VPRC). Residents also drop their recyclables at the VPRC. There is no formal contract or



agreement with the municipality, and the cooperative is not paid to provide the service. The Vaal Park Recycling Centre case study on the Reclaim, Revalue, Reframe website provides more insight into this approach.

LINK TO: CASE STUDIES

IF YOU DON'T KNOW, NOW YOU KNOW

Conditions for successful cooperatives

The South African government encourages people to create cooperatives and provides funding and support to cooperatives in the waste and recycling sector. However, reclaimers tend to prefer to work individually, and the cooperatives that have been formed have encountered a number of problems. In fact, research by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) found that 92% of cooperatives in the sector fail.

If cooperatives provide separation at source collection services, a number of conditions should be meet to ensure their success:

- An evidence-based decision that cooperatives are the best modality for S@S
- The members of the cooperative should be interested in and committed to working collectively as a democratic worker cooperative
- A formal contract between the cooperative and the industry/municipality that sets out commitments, roles, responsibilities, budget, duration, monitoring and evaluation, revision, dispute resolution, and so on
- A fully developed and properly funded multi-year programme plan
- Support for waste picker cooperatives to develop bids for tenders
- Payment to the cooperative for the collection and/or environmental service
- An area for S@S collection large enough to be economically viable

- Agreements between the cooperative and independent waste pickers to work together
- A comprehensive capacity building and mentorship programme specifically designed to support waste picker cooperatives providing S@S services
- Provision of space for sorting, storage, baling and possibly processing that has all required services, facilities and infrastructure

4. INTEGRATING RECLAIMERS INTO S@S CONTRACTS WITH PRIVATE COMPANIES

Contracting companies to provide separation at source services negatively affects the incomes and working conditions of waste pickers working areas covered by the contract. It is essential that waste pickers in the area are meaningfully engaged and given the opportunity to present alternatives before a contract is awarded. Effects on waste pickers should be a key criteria in the evaluation of different approaches to S@S and bids by different companies if companies are being considered as service providers.

When contracts with companies are already in place or if it is decided that contracting companies is the best way forward, the companies must be required to meaningfully integrate waste pickers, and their compliance must be monitored. Some possible options that could be considered with waste pickers include:

- employing registered waste pickers in full compliance with labour laws and minimum wages (although this has worked in other contexts, it should be noted that waste pickers in South Africa frequently report that they are not interested in becoming employees);
- contracting and paying waste pickers to collect recyclables, instead of drivers with trucks;
- permitting waste pickers to continue to collect materials and paying them a collection fee on top of the market price. Because they are collecting, the company will need to deploy fewer trucks, so the savings should be passed on to the waste pickers.

NOTE

Important takeaway – all separation at source contracts should integrate reclaimers. If existing contracts do not, then they should be modified to do so.

References

See the Case Studies referred to in this document.

Reclaim Revalue Reframe training programme

Building Capacity for Waste Picker Integration

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