

Gender and Informal Waste Management Cambodia Case Study

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Session 2

Gender and informal sector integration in waste management



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Outline

- Overview of gender roles in formal waste management
- Gender roles in informal waste sector
- Health, safety, stigma and social norms
- Key challenges
- Key recommendations



Overview of gender roles in formal waste management

Institutional Level – Formal Waste Collection and Recycling

Waste Management Workforce of Public Institutions



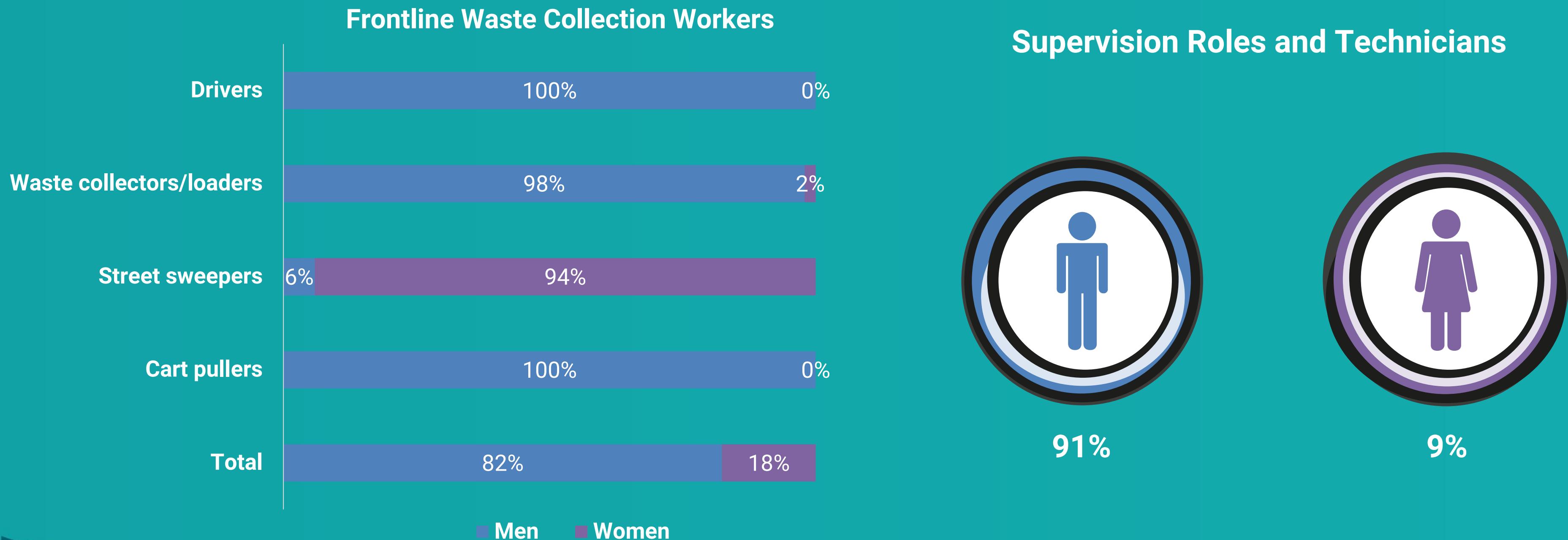
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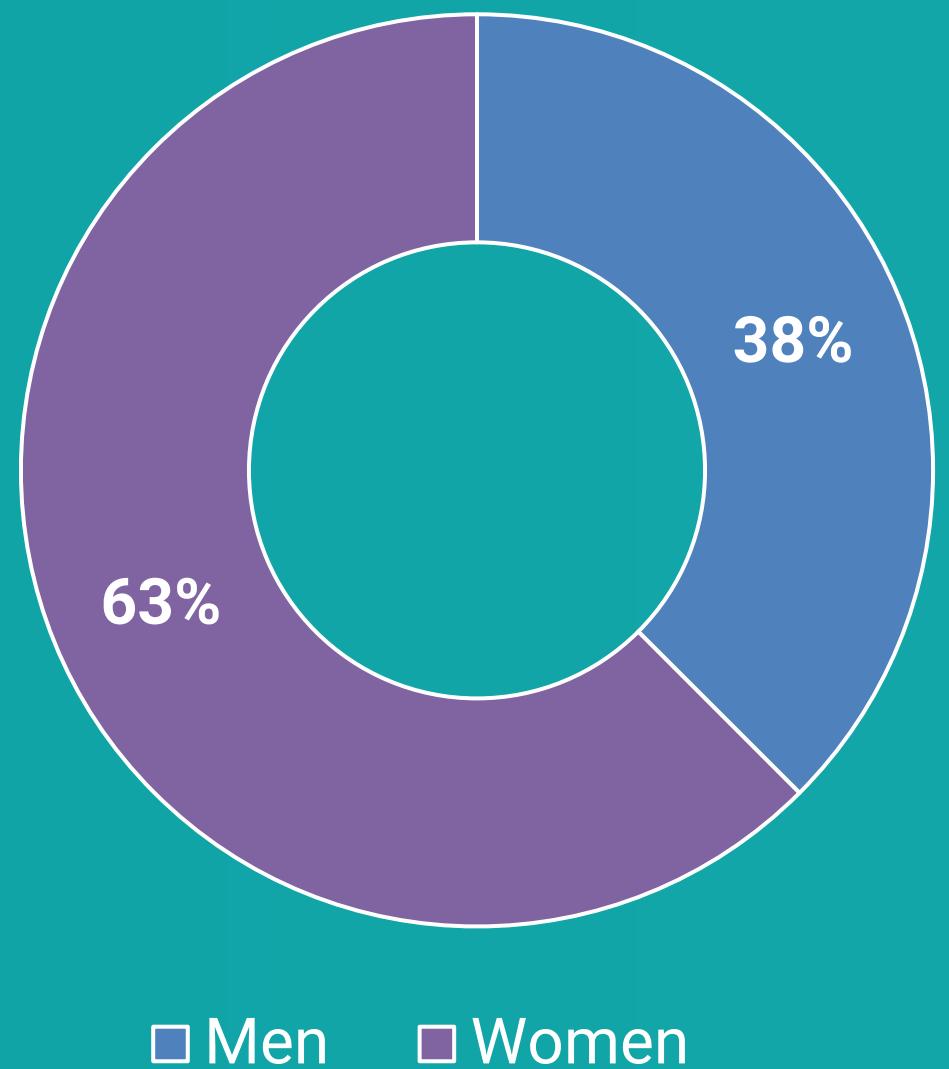
- Few women hold managerial or technical roles in waste management
- Most women work in supporting roles like finance and administration

Institutional Level – Formal Waste Collection and Recycling



Institutional Level – Formal Waste Collection and Recycling

Recycling workers

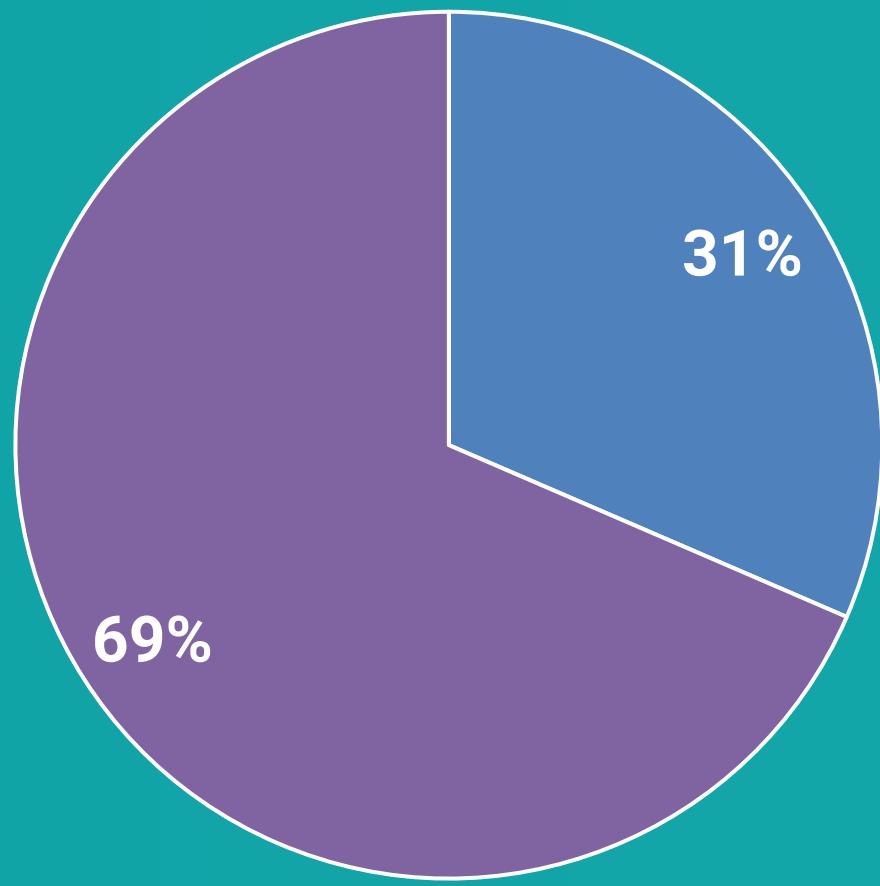


- **Women's Roles:** Sorting, cleaning, and shredding plastic before transferring it for processing.
- **Men's Roles:** Operating machines in the waste processing system.
- **Wage Disparity:** Women receive lower wages compared to men

Gender Roles in Informal Waste Sector

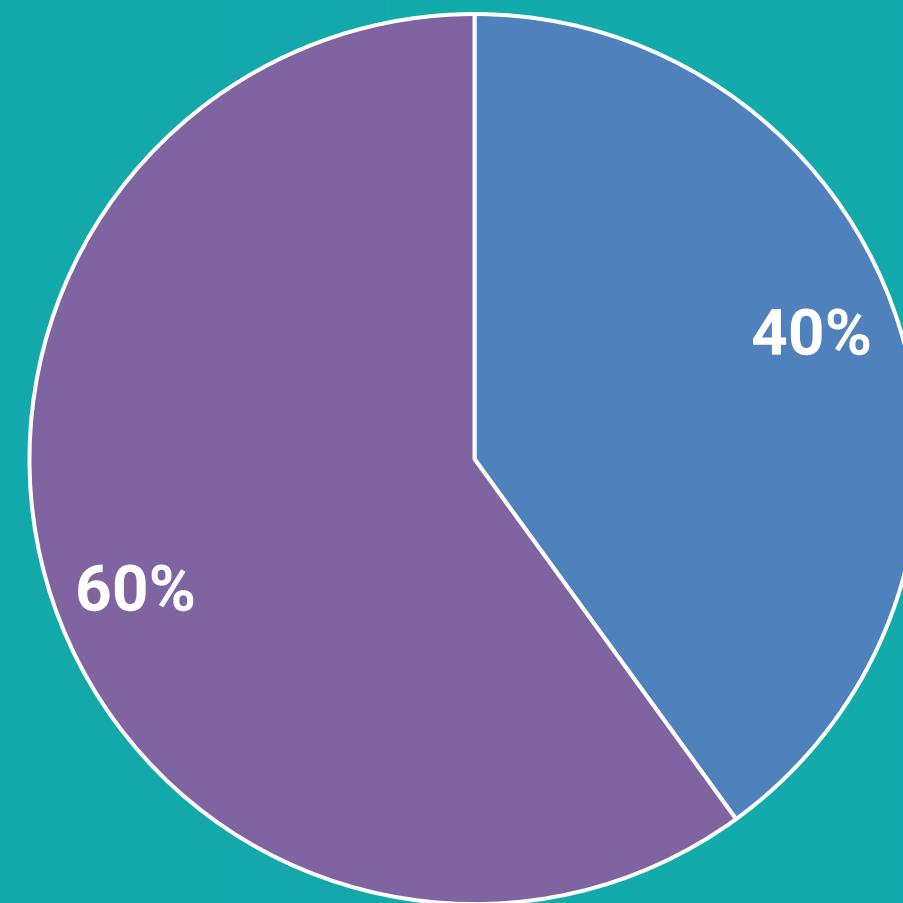
Dumpsite/landfill-based Waste Pickers/Collectors

Waste Pickers at Dangkor Dumpsite/Landfill



Men Women

Waste Pickers at Battambang
Dumpsite/Landfill



Men Women

Gender Roles in Informal Waste Sector



- **Street waste collectors:** around 3,000 (Pheakdey et al. 2022) with **majority being women**
- **Long working hours** (6 am to 10 pm): collecting door to door, sorting and selling recyclable to junkshops
- **Collectors often bring small children** along due to limited access to affordable childcare
- **Daily earnings:** 20,000-40,000 riel (\$5-\$10), but costs such as petrol or Rue Mork rental reduce net income

Health, Safety, Stigma and Social Norms



- Female street waste collectors face **high risks of sexual abuse and harassment**, especially at night, and coerced into sex.
- Waste collectors face severe health risks, handling **hazardous waste** without proper protective gear.
- Male waste collectors are often **falsely accused** of theft, face violence, and risk arrest for carrying "suspicious" tools
- Both female and male waste collectors face discrimination, abuse, and bullying as their work is seen as **low-status** (including their children)

Key challenges for informal waste pickers/collectors

- **Poor living conditions:** without basic services, increasing their burden and exposing them to health and safety risks.
- **Limited access to Social Protection/NSSF** harms women more than men, increasing health risks, financial insecurity, and caregiving burdens.
- **Unequal access to childcare:** waste collectors in Battambang have services, while those at landfills lack support
- **Lack of support for unpaid care work** hinders women in informal sector from transitioning to the formal sector.
- **Limited financial and entrepreneurship skills** restrict economic opportunities for informal waste pickers/collectors, especially women.



Key challenges for informal waste pickers/collectors



- **Structural barriers heighten livelihood vulnerabilities** for IWCs
 - Price remains stagnant
 - **Intermediaries and a few dominant buyers shape market prices**, weakening IWCs' bargaining power
 - **Lack of organized collectives, networks, or unions** limits IWCs' ability to influence policies and prices
 - Innovative **recycling solutions are limited** locally
 - **Reduced income** weakens women's economic independence and limits access to basic needs and opportunities
- Limited official recognition of IWCs' work
- Women face greater impacts due to intersecting gender inequalities and social norms.

Key recommendations

- **Support Transition to Formal Roles:** Promote inclusive engagement, skills training, childcare services, and gender-responsive technologies to build a more equitable workforce.
- Implement programs to **integrate women waste workers:** improve registration, strengthen cooperatives, and expand access to social protection (health insurance, pensions) to empower IWCs and support structural reforms
- **Enhance Recycling Initiatives:** increase **employment and ensure equal pay for women**, especially IWCs, to strengthen recycling systems and boost economic empowerment
- **Expand Childcare Access:** increase childcare support for IWCs, replicating successful models (e.g. COMPED in Battambang), and promoting workplace or community-based initiatives.
- Promote Gender-Equitable Norms: launch campaigns to challenge traditional gender roles, promote shared household responsibilities, and advance gender inclusivity across waste sector.

