

## Annex 6. Incorporating gender dimensions into national waste management strategies and policies

The UNEP International Environmental Technology Centre (UNEP-IETC) has been actively engaged in raising awareness of gender issues in waste management. As part of its efforts, UNEP-IETC organized [a webinar on how to mainstream gender into national waste management policy](#) on 28 November 2023. The current annex is developed based on the information and discussion from the named webinar.

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 (UNEP-IETC 2022a). Yet, existing waste management policies and practices often neglect the gender aspects of waste management, failing to address specific needs and issues related to gender dynamics during policy and programme development and implementation (Aidis and Khaled 2019).

This webinar was organized to support countries, including policymakers and other stakeholders such as experts and practitioners, to better understand the nexus between waste and gender and how to mainstream gender into their national waste management strategies and policies. Speakers from four countries (Bhutan, Jamaica, Nepal, and Uruguay) shared their experiences and lessons learned. The key lessons shared by the speakers during the webinar and in the individual case studies are summarized below<sup>1</sup>.

### Gender aspects of waste management

As highlighted by the presentation by UNEP-IETC, traditional gender stereotypes and norms in society are reflected in almost all aspects of waste management in many countries. At the household, women are typically the **main handlers of household waste**, including waste prevention, sorting and composting, as part of their household chores (UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal 2019; GA Circular 2019; UNEP 2023; UNEP 2024). Yet, women's contribution to household waste management is frequently overlooked, and the needs and challenges that women may have as the **main service users of waste management** are seldom considered in the design and operations of municipal waste management (UNEP-IETC 2022; UNEP 2015; GWA and WASTE 2010). Further, in the absence of adequate waste management services in many countries and cities, women are often engaged in **voluntary community activities related to waste management**, such as clean-ups, street sweeping and even primary collection of waste (UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal 2019; GWA and WASTE 2010). However, when these volunteer activities become formalized and paid, women may not necessarily have the same opportunities as men (UNEP 2015; UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal 2019). Finally, there are also significant gender differences in the roles of women and men as workers in the waste sector. Women in the waste sector are represented in greatest numbers at the **lower tiers of the job hierarchy** whether in the formal or informal sector with limited upward mobility (UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal 2019; UNEP 2015; UNEP 2024; GA Circular 2019; Aidis and Khaled 2019).

### Challenges in mainstreaming gender into national policy

The speakers from the four countries (Bhutan, Jamaica, Nepal, and Uruguay) illustrated that there are various challenges in mainstreaming gender into national waste management policies.

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<sup>1</sup> The presentation slides and case studies by the speakers, as well as the recording of the webinar and the presentation by UNEP-IETC, are accessible [here](#).

## **(1) Lack of gender data and understanding of the relevance of gender**

Sex-disaggregated data and gender information are important in identifying and addressing gender issues in waste management. However, **very little data or descriptive statistics exist on gender in waste management** (Aidis and Khaled 2019). Such absence of data significantly reduces the visibility and contributions of women in the waste sector, in addition to making it more difficult for governments, donors, and other stakeholders to track improvements (UNEP 2021).

Further, quite often, there is a **lack of understanding among the stakeholders as to what gender mainstreaming is and its relevance to development** in the first place, not to mention its **relevance to waste management**.

### **Experiences in Jamaica**

Jamaica has two overarching national policies to guide gender mainstreaming: Gender Sector Plan Vision 2030 and the National Policy for Gender Equality (2011). However, gender has not been mainstreamed into Jamaica's national waste management policies, including the National Solid Waste Management Policy (2000) and the National Solid Waste Management Act (2002). Gender stereotypes persist and there is **lack of understanding among the stakeholders as to what gender mainstreaming is and its relevance to development**, not to mention its **relevance to waste management**.

As a result, **sex-disaggregated data and gender information on waste management is rarely collected and available**. Women and men are observed to be represented in the waste sector at different levels. For example, both women and men seem to work across all levels within the government, and several of the privately owned waste management firms in the private sector are led and owned by women. In the informal sector, waste picking, sorting and recycling seem often done by women. However, there is not enough data to support this observation.

Stakeholders, including government officials, thus often **lack understanding of the gender aspects of waste management** and **lack political will and commitment** to mainstream gender into national waste policies.

## **(2) Resource allocation and capacity building**

Even when a policy is in place, implementation is another matter. Lack of political will, funding and capacity make implementation challenging. Adequate resources should be earmarked to support mainstreaming gender in the various action plans and implementation of activities and measurement of results (UNEP-IETC 2022b). This includes provision for full participation of women throughout policy planning and strategy setting, gender institutional capacity building, technical training and access to equipment for women (Section B – Element B8).

### **Experiences in Jamaica**

Despite the requirement in the National Policy for Gender Equality 2011, not all relevant ministries in Jamaica have **gender focal points**. There is also a **lack of training and technical skills as well as funding** to conduct gender analysis and implement gender action plans.

### (3) Inclusive transition of the informal sector

The transition to more sustainable waste management can further increase economic opportunities for women in recycling, as the informal sector is an important source of income, particularly for the most disadvantaged groups (UNEP 2015).

If formalization of the informal sector is implemented without hearing the voices of all the stakeholders including women, it can lead to the loss of job opportunities that women previously had. **Inclusive transition needs to take into consideration various constraints women face** as they combine work with family and household responsibilities (GRID-Arendal 2022; UNEP 2015; GA Circular 2019).

#### *Experiences in Nepal*

Despite women's extensive engagement within the informal sector as waste pickers, for example, working at waste transfer stations or open dumps, **women were previously not recognized as stakeholders** in the first place. This made it difficult in the past for the stakeholders, including the policymakers, to reflect gender aspects into national waste management policies and programmes. However, it gradually changed during the development of the draft Nepal National Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025, as described in the next section.

## Successful factors in mainstreaming gender into national policy

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to mainstreaming gender into national waste management policies. Nevertheless, there are some key elements to be considered, as shared by the speakers.

### (1) Collection of gender data and information at the initial stages

Collecting sex-disaggregated data and gender information<sup>2</sup> is one of the first steps towards developing evidence-based, gender-responsive waste management policies. Gender analysis based on data and information helps to unpack the gender dimensions in the waste management sector and informs how best to address gender barriers and monitor improvements (UNEP-IETC 2022; UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal 2019; UNEP 2021; UNDP 2018).

#### *Experiences in Nepal*

When developing the draft [Nepal National Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025](#) (which has not been approved by the cabinet as of December 2024), gender-related waste management data was collected at the initial stage in Nepal as part of the project, "[Strengthening the capacity of the waste sectors in Bhutan, Mongolia and Nepal by means of a circular economy](#)".

<sup>2</sup> This includes data and information on women's and men's roles in waste management including the informal sector, causes for division of labour, and limitation of rights and access by women. Examples of guiding questions could be (UNDP 2018):

- (1) **What is the context?** (e.g., What are the obstacles to achieve the highest protection level for women and men?)
- (2) **Who does what?** (e.g., What are the main causes for the division of labour between men and women?)
- (3) **Who has access and controls what?** (e.g., Who controls if and what kind of protection measures are applied? Do women have access to training?)
- (4) **Who decides?** (e.g., Who decides about who works where?)
- (5) **Who knows what?** (e.g., Do women have access to information about their own exposure?)

For more information, refer to UNDP (2018), UNEP-IETC and GRID-Arendal (2019), and GA Circular (2019).

[concept aimed at reducing greenhouse gases \(GHGs\) and short-lived climate pollutants \(SLCPs\)](#)”, funded by International Climate Initiative and implemented by UNEP-IETC (2017-2022).

The survey was carried out in 35 municipalities across 7 provinces, and all the municipalities were asked to provide information on the total number of staff members engaged with waste management with each role and position, for example. The survey was extended to cover transfer stations, landfill sites, and dump sites as well.

The result of the survey was published by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MOFAGA), the key ministry of Nepal’s waste management, as [Baseline Assessment of Waste Management in Nepal](#) (MoFAGA, 2020). The assessment includes analysis of gender division of labour in the waste sector and calls for actions such as collecting sex-disaggregated data and gender information further at household, community, local government and private enterprises levels and securing budgets for mainstreaming gender in waste management.

The survey made it possible for the stakeholders, including the ministries that are key in developing the national waste management policy, to understand the gender aspects of waste management at the initial stage and further discuss how to address the issues identified in the survey during the policy development.

## **(2) Multi-stakeholder consultations and government leadership**

While the impacts of waste management policies and activities tend to disproportionately fall on the most vulnerable groups including women, women’s participation is typically overlooked in consultation processes due to constraints imposed by their traditional and cultural roles as well as their domestic and economic roles (Section B – Element B3). Gender-inclusive stakeholder consultation promotes evidence-based and participatory decision-making that takes into account the different priorities and needs of women and men, including the most marginalized groups and those that are traditionally excluded from decision-making processes (EIGE 2019).

Further, engaging various stakeholders in the policy development *per se* is a process of raising gender awareness of the stakeholders involved, including the key ministry in charge of policy development and implementation.

### ***Experiences in Nepal***

When the draft [Nepal National Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025](#) was developed, various **stakeholder consultations** were organized in the forms of meetings, workshops, and interviews and with a wide range of stakeholders. These included ministries, municipalities, private sector, waste segregators and pickers, including informal workers and women.

Also, LEAD Nepal, which played a key role in the coordination during the process, made sure that the development of the strategy and action plan was **led by the government itself**. The Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, the focal ministry of Nepal’s waste management, led the overall process and chaired a technical committee. The Technical Committee consisted of 11 members from the key ministries and representatives from the Municipal Association of Nepal, as well as experts from academia. The committee was utilized as a venue to present and validate the findings from the stakeholder consultation and surveys, including the survey on waste and gender.

This way, information on the gender aspects was successfully **collected from and discussed and validated with various stakeholders including female workers** and was **mainstreamed by the government** into the development of the national waste management policy and action plans in Nepal.

From this process, key issues and challenges were identified, and gender was mainstreamed into the draft [Nepal National Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025](#). This includes the following action plans:

**Mainstreaming gender and social groups in all waste management activities (Action 5.1)**, such as:

- Collect gender and social groups disaggregated data;
- Allocate sufficient budget to gender and social groups sensitization training; and
- Develop educational and awareness materials and deliver training on mainstreaming gender in the waste sector at all levels.

**Improving the conditions of the informal waste workers (Action 5.2)**, such as:

- Enhance the entrepreneurial capacities; and
- Provide health and childcare facilities and ensure national minimum wage.

**Protecting the health and safety of waste workers (Action 5.3)**, such as:

- Provide safety gear and equipment and health facilities (immunization and accident/injury insurance).

### **(3) Strategic alliances with key gender experts**

In addition to ensuring diversity of voices through engaging various stakeholders as described above, making strategic alliances with key stakeholders specifically with gender expertise helps to mainstream gender in the national waste management policy in both its development and implementation.

#### ***Experiences in Bhutan***

Gender division of labour based on gender stereotypes is often observed in the waste sector in Bhutan. Men are often preferred for physically demanding jobs such as drivers of waste collection vehicles or jobs with higher payment such as scrape dealers, while women are more commonly employed as waste pickers and cleaners and are also the main handlers of household waste, cleaning and sorting waste.

Although the National Waste Management Strategy 2019 does not have specific gender related actions, the strategy recognizes the gender division of labour in waste management and stresses the need for doing gender analysis of waste management and for incorporating gender perspective from the planning through implementation (Section 3.2.2).

The National Environment Commission, which is responsible for monitoring the overall progress of this strategy, has been collaborating with the National Commission for Women and Children to integrate gender in waste management activities and has been conducting various capacity-building and advocacy programmes for women regarding recycling in collaboration with civil society organisations.

#### (4) Gender indicators for effective monitoring and evaluation

Gender-specific indicators provide important benchmarks against which changes and impacts can be monitored and evaluated. They ensure a thorough gender analysis, facilitate the evaluation of intended gender-related impacts, and help the development of gender-responsive recommendations (UNDP 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

##### *Experiences in Uruguay*

When National Waste Management Plan 2021 was being developed in Uruguay, gender mainstreaming was not high on the agenda at the beginning. However, with consultations with a wide range of stakeholders (social organisations, private and public sectors, etc.), of whom 73% were women, the importance of gender issues in waste management became evident. The working group of the Ministry of the Environment thus sought support from relevant gender experts (such as gender experts from within the Ministry of the Environment and from Women of Waste, a working group of the International Solid Waste Association). The Ministry of Social Development, which is responsible for gender policies in Uruguay, was also invited to the working group.

This working group conducted a survey on local government workforce dedicated to waste management to understand the gender issues, such as gender division of labour, which proved helpful in putting gender on the table.

Based on these initiatives, gender perspectives were successfully integrated into the National Waste Management Plan 2021, which includes the following:

- **Follow-up indicators** include criteria disaggregated by sex, age and ethnicity to emphasize the role and contribution of women in waste management.
- **Key interventions** reflected in the plan include the following:
  - Improve the working and living conditions of women working in the informal sector;
  - Avoid further inequalities in the distribution of domestic work; and
  - Collect sex-segregated data for monitoring processes.

Based on this, Uruguay has incorporated **gender-specific indicators** in the National Registry of Recyclers, which is a registry for the informal waste sector workers. This has allowed the government to highlight the roles and contributions of women in waste management, as well as to identify asymmetries between women and men working in the waste sector and identify possible gender biases such as wage gaps and unequal access to resources and training.

*For more information on the webinar and UNEP-IETC's work on waste and gender, please visit UNEP-IETC's [website](#).*

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<sup>3</sup> UNEP (2018) provides suggested gender indicators for chemicals and waste projects. UNEP-IETC (2022b) provides examples specifically for e-waste and plastic waste management, including:

- **Improved working conditions:** Access to support infrastructure (toilets, canteens, working spaces and childcare); Paid maternity leave; Structured hours of work and flexibility
- **Increased participation:** Improved visibility of women in the sector; Reduced gender-based violence and/or discrimination; Access to training and capacity building on technical topics
- **Economic empowerment:** Access to minimum living wage; Increased participation of women at the higher tiers of the sector (scrap dealers, aggregators and recyclers)
- **Greater agency:** Representation of women in high level sectoral decision-making; Formation and/or strengthening of collectives



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