

Recycling Governance and Livelihoods

A Survey of Informal Waste Picker Incomes in Ouagadougou, 2000–2024

Fati Traoré^{1,2}, Jean-Baptiste Kaboré³, Adama Sawadogo^{1,4}

Aminata Ouédraogo^{5,6}

Department of Research, Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, Ouagadougou | Institut de Recherche en Sciences de la Santé (IRSS) | Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, Ouagadougou | International Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering (2iE) | Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, International Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering (2iE) | Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, Ouagadougou

Correspondence: ftraor@aol.com

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ABSTRACT

Informal waste pickers are a critical yet marginalised component of urban solid waste management in African cities. In Ouagadougou, municipal recycling initiatives have been introduced, yet their impact on the livelihoods of these workers remains poorly documented and understood. This study assesses the effect of municipal solid waste recycling programmes on the incomes of informal waste pickers in Ouagadougou. It aims to determine whether formalised initiatives have improved, stabilised, or diminished their economic welfare over time. A structured survey was administered to a stratified random sample of informal waste pickers operating across the city's major dumpsites and collection zones. The survey collected quantitative data on income, market access, and operational constraints, complemented by targeted focus group discussions for contextual depth. Survey data indicate a complex and largely negative relationship. While a minority (approximately 15%) integrated into formalised collection schemes reported income stability, the majority experienced a decline in real earnings due to increased competition for high-value materials and exclusion from profitable supply chains. A key theme was the consolidation of buyer power, reducing pickers' bargaining leverage. Municipal recycling governance, as implemented, has failed to enhance livelihoods for most informal waste pickers. Instead, it has inadvertently reinforced their economic precarity by restructuring value chains without ensuring equitable inclusion. Urban policy must explicitly centre livelihood protection. Recommendations include establishing co-operative models for waste pickers, guaranteeing access to recyclables via municipal contracts, and creating price support mechanisms for collected materials. informal economy, solid waste management, recycling governance, livelihoods, urban Africa, Burkina Faso This paper provides the first longitudinal analysis of waste picker incomes in Ouagadougou, offering a novel dataset that traces the livelihood impacts of evolving municipal recycling policies over two decades.

Keywords: *informal economy, urban livelihoods, solid waste management, Sub-Saharan Africa, survey methodology*

Article Highlights

- Longitudinal survey reveals decline in real earnings for majority of waste pickers post-formalisation.
- Only 15% integrated into formal schemes reported income stability; most faced increased competition.
- Policy restructuring consolidated buyer power, reducing pickers' bargaining leverage.
- Study recommends co-operative models and price support

Core Finding

Formal municipal recycling initiatives in Ouagadougou have largely diminished economic welfare for informal waste pickers, restructuring value chains without ensuring equitable inclusion.

This analysis provides a novel longitudinal dataset tracing policy impacts over two decades.

mechanisms for equitable inclusion.	
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