

Lessons from Waste Picker Integration Initiatives: Development of Evidence Based Guidelines to Integrate Waste Pickers into South African Municipal Waste Management Systems

Technical report: Integrating reclaimers into our understanding
of the recycling economy

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Executive Summary

This technical report presents insights into ‘waste picker integration’ drawn from research conducted in South Africa’s Johannesburg and Metsimaholo municipalities between 2016 and 2019. In order to develop a holistic understanding of integration, twenty-one researchers employed a range of qualitative methods to analyse the experiences of waste pickers/reclaimers, officials, and residents in each municipality.

Five types of integration initiatives were analysed: 1) Johannesburg’s top-down integration and empowerment projects; 2) a collaboration between the packaging industry and the South African Waste Pickers’ Association to create a reclaimer-run recycling centre (VPRC) and separation at source (S@S) service in Metsimaholo; 3) a public-private partnership (PPP) with Sasol to support cooperatives in Metsimaholo; 4) de facto integration initiatives created by Metsimaholo officials in the absence of official programmes; and 5) the African Reclaimers Organisation’s reclaimer-resident S@S in Johannesburg.

Discussions on waste picker integration typically assume that reclaimers perform marginal work and require support to be integrated into municipal waste management systems and the recycling value chain. However, reclaimers were already deeply integrated via a well-functioning ‘separation outside source’ (SoS) system through which they salvaged recyclables disposed as waste and sold them into the recycling economy. SoS was central to the recycling economy as, according to CSIR, reclaimers across the country salvaged 80-90% of post-consumer packaging and paper inserted into the value chain.

Integration was a new area of work for municipalities and fell outside waste officials’ areas of expertise. However, the municipalities did not receive funding, targets, guidance, training, or support to design and implement integration. Officials faced numerous daily challenges that they often lacked the authority, capacity, skills, and/or resources to address, which exacerbated tensions with reclaimers. It is essential that national government create an enabling environment for integration that addresses these gaps and that industry provide resources to fund integration as part of extended producer responsibility (EPR).

Mestimaholo faced broader challenges related to municipal governance and service delivery. It focused on provision of basic waste services and did not have a policy on integration. The Johannesburg Council became a national leader when it adopted a Reclaimer Empowerment Plan and included integration in its Pikitup waste management utility’s business plans. While these were important advances, they were marginal add-ons to Pikitup’s recycling policy and strategy. Both municipalities prioritised unemployed community members for inclusion in recycling programmes, which (perhaps unknowingly) compromised and eliminated reclaimers’ self-created green jobs to create work for others deemed more worthy.

The municipalities, Pikitup, Sasol, and (to a lesser extent) industry worked within a ‘charity model’ of integration based on (explicit and implicit) assumptions that officials and professionals should design and implement integration, and that reclaimers: require charitable support (rather than payment for service provision); should be integrated via special projects (rather than systemic interventions); do not possess knowledge relevant to official recycling programmes; should not be involved in decision-making regarding their own integration or S@S; and should be compliant, appreciative participants in integration projects.

The charity model had profoundly negative implications. Reclaimers felt infantilised, denigrated, and disrespected. Discrete projects had little prospect of fostering lasting, positive changes for reclaimers. Exclusion of reclaimers from decision-making in the PPP and municipal initiatives resulted in projects that did not necessarily address reclaimers’ highest priorities, provided inadequate equipment, and offered training programmes that many reclaimers struggled to understand or see as relevant to their work. At least one pilot reduced reclaimers’ incomes and position in the value chain. Many key problems raised by reclaimers remained unresolved, and their alternative proposals were not considered. Policies and programmes did not address gender-based issues, precluding full integration of women reclaimers.

Cooperatives were upheld as the only modality for integration. Ironically, as the majority of reclaimers did not want to join cooperatives, the route to integration mitigated against its achievement. Cooperatives did not receive adequate support from the municipalities, industry, or Sasol. Problems were compounded when reclaimers formed cooperatives simply in order to be integrated. When cooperatives are a route to integration they must be properly incubated, and routes other than cooperatives must be developed.

The municipalities, industry, and Sasol exhibited a surprising level of informality in their integration work. Projects lacked detailed implementation and financial sustainability plans, written agreements, dispute resolution mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation systems. As deeply entrenched unequal power relations were not addressed, they were reproduced and precluded true partnerships. Integrating a part of the economy considered informal cannot be treated informally. Instead, as integration is new terrain, thorough participatory planning, implementation, and evaluation are essential.

S@S emerged as the key factor in integration. S@S programmes were implanted on top of SoS, resulting in significant deteriorations in reclaimers' incomes, working conditions, role in the recycling economy, and relationships with residents. S@S was therefore a systemic 'reclaimer dis-integration' programme that overwhelmed benefits from small integration and empowerment projects. The research revealed that S@S and reclaimer integration are inherently intertwined and cannot be treated as separate policy spheres. Successful integration and S@S both require 'integrated S@S' that is negotiated with reclaimers, includes them as equals in planning and oversight, builds on the strengths of SoS, and pays reclaimers for service provision. While municipalities struggle to roll-out S@S, integrated S@S can be implemented quite quickly by recognising reclaimers, supporting and paying them to collect recyclables, and promoting resident participation. Data gathered can then support the design of more sophisticated programmes.

Despite their exclusion from decision-making, reclaimers and residents actively shaped integration and S@S. Rather than simply deciding whether to participate in S@S programmes, residents were divided into five groups: wasters, agnostics, S@S enforcers, reclaimer integrators, and competitors. Reclaimers organised against and contested initiatives that harmed them, and demanded inclusion as equal partners in decision-making. They also implemented their own visions of integration and S@S by establishing partnerships with residents, industry, and business. Although problems were encountered, reclaimers derived the greatest benefit from these projects, affirming the importance of reclaimer leadership in all phases of integration and S@S, and the need to pilot and implement reclaimers' integration proposals.

While decisions about integration and S@S seem technical, they are highly political as they concern issues of power, governance, survival, exploitation, and social and economic transformation. The report presents an "integration spectrum" and argues that challenges emerged in the two municipalities as reclaimers, municipalities, and industry/business held starkly different positions on the spectrum. A fundamental starting point for the development of integration and S@S programmes is for all parties to negotiate agreement on the answers to the seemingly simple questions – "Who/what is being integrated into what, why, how, by whom, when and in whose interest?"

Reclaimer integration requires inversion of the charity approach and how we understand integration. Rather than integrating individual reclaimers into a wholly new S@S system, formally planned S@S and recycling programmes must be integrated with the existing SoS system through a process of learning from, and negotiating with, reclaimers. This does not mean that we must perpetuate environmentally destructive forms of production and consumption so that reclaimers have materials to collect. Instead, by insisting that we develop a holistic analysis of the current recycling system, reclaimer integration ensures that the invisible, exploited people who are pivotal to its success are acknowledged, remunerated, and recognised as needing to play a central role in the collective envisioning and forging of a just de-growth economy, polity, society, and environment in which they play important, valued, transformed roles.

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Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
ARO	African Reclaimers Organisation
COGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
CoJ	City of Johannesburg
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DA	Democratic Alliance
EISD	Environment and Infrastructure Services Department
EPR	Extended producer responsibility
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IJRC	Interim Johannesburg Reclaimers Committee
IndWMP	Industry Waste Management Plan
IWMP	Integrated Waste Management Plan
KPI	key performance indicator
MMC	Member of the Mayoral Council
MFMA	Municipal Finance Management Act
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PACSA	Packaging South Africa, now Packaging SA
PETCO	PET Recycling Company
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PPE	personal protective equipment
SAWPA	South African Waste Pickers Association
S@S	separation at source
SoS	separation outside source
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

1 Introduction

Reclaimers (also known as waste pickers) who salvage recyclable and reusable materials from trash are a common sight across South Africa. For many years reclaimers were stigmatised and derided. Policy focused on eradicating them as this was considered necessary for the forging of ‘modern’ waste management systems and world-class cities. In an important shift, the 2011 National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS) included a commitment by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA, now the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries) to provide guidance to municipalities and industry on how to improve reclaimers’ conditions.

Rather than waiting for guidelines from above, over the ensuing decade a number of municipalities created programmes to work with and integrate reclaimers, as did industry, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and waste picker/reclaimer organisations. This was within the context of the rise of ‘waste picker integration’ as a global policy trend. Predicated on the understanding that it is important to learn from these experiences, the University of the Witwatersrand conducted a three year research project on waste picker integration in the Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality in Gauteng, and the Metsimaholo Local Municipality in the Free State. The research investigated the experiences of reclaimers, residents, and officials in each municipality to develop a holistic understanding of integration. This technical research report analyses the research findings in order to consolidate insights relevant to the design and implementation of integration.

The main body of the report is divided into eleven sections: 1) introduction, 2) methodology, 3) reclaimers and separation outside source, 4) understanding reclaimer integration, 5) municipal policy on recycling and integration, 6) reclaimer integration programmes, 7) officials’ experiences of integration, 8) reclaimers’ experiences of integration, 9) residents’ experiences of integration, 10) key findings and recommendations, and 11) conclusions.

2 Methodology

The two municipalities were selected as they presented quite different integration experiences. Johannesburg is a large metropolitan municipality and at the time the research commenced integration was driven top-down by the municipality. By contrast, Metsimaholo is a relatively small local municipality in which members of the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) played a key role in proposing, negotiating, and implementing integration.

Fieldwork was conducted between June 2016 and August 2019 by a multi-disciplinary research team that included the primary investigator, seven master’s students, nine honours students, a post-doctoral fellow, and four researchers.¹ A range of qualitative methods was employed, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, ethnography, observation, participatory mapping, timeline interviews, reflexive diaries, and policy analysis. Over 370 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

¹ Melanie Samson was the primary investigator and project leader. Research on Metsimaholo was conducted by Hayley Gewer, Jokudu Guya, Kirsten Harrison, Brittany Kesselman, Zandile Ntuli, Lethabo Pholoto, Melanie Samson, and Suzall Timm. Research on Johannesburg was conducted by: Thandiwe Chidzungu, Nomathemba Dladla, Grace Kadyamadare, Kamogelo Maema, Mahlodi Mahlase, Amogelang Mokobane, Kamogelo Molefe, Lufuno Ndlovu, Zandile Ntuli, Kabelo Phakoe, Lethabo Pholoto, Maite M. Sekhwela, Melanie Samson, Manape Shogole, and Suzall Timm. Reference details for the student research reports are included in Section 13. Copies of all student research reports and theses, as well as the two consolidated municipal case study reports, can be accessed at: <http://wasteroadmap.co.za/deliverables/01.php>.

Research in Metsimaholo was conducted in the upmarket, predominantly white and Afrikaans Vaal Park suburb; the black, predominantly poor and working class Zamdela township; the Vaal Park Recycling Centre run by the Ikageng-Ditamating (ID) waste picker cooperative; the Sasolburg landfill; and the municipal offices.

The Johannesburg fieldwork included sites stretching from Sandton in the north to Orange Farm in the south. It included informal settlements; historical townships; low, middle, and high income suburbs; predominantly white, Indian, coloured, and African areas; landfills; streets; buyback centres; cooperatives; Pikitup Head Office; the Environment, Infrastructure Services Department (EISD) office; and Pikitup depots.²

Workers who salvaged and revalued wasted materials called themselves waste pickers in Mestimaholo and reclaimers in Johannesburg. They are referred to accordingly in this report. The term reclaimer is used in overall discussion as it more clearly establishes that these workers are focused on salvaging and producing value and are being integrated for this reason.

3 Reclaimers and ‘separation outside source’

Reclaimers are typically seen as poor, marginal people eking out a meagre living by rummaging through other people’s trash. However, they are central to South Africa’s recycling economy.

Research published by CSIR in 2016 (Godfrey et al., 2016) found that reclaimers were responsible for salvaging 80-90% of post-consumer paper and packaging extracted from the waste stream, and that by doing so they extended the lifespan of landfills and saved municipalities between R300 million and R750 million a year in landfill airspace. Reclaimers also reduce municipalities’ costs related to collection and transportation of waste. As reclaimers are not paid to collect recyclables they subsidise both municipalities and industries.

Reclaimers revalue recyclable and reusable materials through a sophisticated, yet unrecognised, ‘separation outside source’ (SoS) system (Samson, 2019). Figure 1 provides a simple overview of the SoS system.

² Areas of Johannesburg where research was undertaken included: Alexandra, Auckland Park, Bekezela, Braamfischerville Phases 1 and 2 (Soweto), Franklin Roosevelt Park, Johannesburg inner city, Marie Louise Landfill, Melville, Newlands, Orange Farm Extensions 1 and 2, Robinson Deep Landfill, Zondi (Soweto), and numerous areas where reclaimers who were being accompanied collected recyclables (including the suburbs of Brixton, Emmarentia, Fairlands, Mayfair, Northcliffe, and Westdene).



Figure by M. Samson, D. Seegers and J. van den Bussche

Figure 1: Separation outside source

The SoS diagram shows reclaimers salvaging materials in two key locations: streets and landfills. Reclaimers working in the streets salvage recyclables from rubbish bins that residents place on the kerbs outside their residences for collection, and 2) reclaimers at landfills extract recyclables that are still mixed with trash when it is disposed at the landfill. Reclaimers also salvage materials from public bins, open spaces, and businesses. Reclaimers then categorise and sort the recyclables, clean them, and transport them to sell to buy-back centres that pay the reclaimers a different per kilogram rate for each type of material.³ The buy-back centres may sell the recyclables to larger buyers. The recyclables are then either sold for export or converted domestically, and used as inputs for new products, starting a new cycle of consumption, disposal, and possible extraction by waste pickers. Materials that have the potential to be recycled but are not collected or cannot be sold due to market conditions are disposed as waste, as are items that can no longer be recycled due to deterioration in the quality of the material.⁴

As elaborated in the remainder of this report, recognition of the SoS system is crucial for understanding what reclaimer integration should mean and why official integration programmes often encounter problems. In addition, understanding the SoS system provides insight into why separation at source (S@S) programmes that do not take SoS into account create significant harm for reclaimers, lose materials to reclaimers, and are not appropriate for the South African context.

³ The prices are linked to global commodity markets. However, costs vary, particularly for buyback centres in towns further away from recycling plants. In addition, buyers have been found to set prices so that they pay the minimum possible in each specific area while ensuring that reclaimers will sell recyclables to them.

⁴ Herod et al. (2014) usefully differentiate between potential recyclables that do not re-enter the value chain due to 'devalorisation' (material degradation) and those that are not recycled due to 'devaluation' (lack of sufficient market value).

4 Understanding ‘waste picker integration’

‘Waste picker integration’ is promoted by organisations ranging from reclaimer movements to the World Bank, and there is no single, commonly agreed definition. Much of the research on integration is empirical and policy-oriented, focusing on documenting integration experiences, evaluating the forms and effects of integration, identifying integration interventions, and developing policy proposals. A smaller body of more conceptual and theoretically engaged research categorises integration interventions, differentiates between approaches to integration, and analyses integration to engage in broader theoretical debates in fields such as political ecology and urban theory.

Based on comprehensive literature reviews, Aparcana (2017) and Springloop Coöperatie U.A. (2015) present slightly different ways of clustering practical interventions to achieve integration.⁵

Table 1 – Types of interventions to achieve waste picker integration

Aparcana (2017)	Springloop Coöperatie U.A. (2015)
1. policy/legal	1. welfare-based
2. economic/financial	2. rights-based (including labour organising)
3. institutional/organisational	3. technical integration (formal contracts, legalisation of business arrangements, reducing harassment)
4. social	4. formalisation (legal compliance)
5. technical/operational	5. professionalisation and access to financing
	6. business to business interventions and value chain strengthening
	7. NGO recycling projects

Academics have also classified approaches to integration according to:

1. framing of the integration ‘problem’ – Dias (2016) distinguishes between approaches that analyse and address waste picker integration as: 1) a technical issue; 2) a policy issue; or 3) a sphere for participatory governance.
2. systems being integrated - Scheinberg (2012) sees waste picker integration as the integration of systems and identifies three types of integration: 1) a service model that focuses on integration into the municipal solid waste management (MSWM) system; 2) a commodities model that focuses on integration into the recycling value chain; and 3) a hybrid model that includes integration into both systems.

Velis et al. (2012) expand on Scheinberg’s approach. They develop the InterRa tool to analyse integration initiatives along four axes – integration of the informal recycling system (IRS) with: 1) the MSWM system; 2) the materials and value chain; 3) society; and 4) organisation (as they argue that waste picker organising is essential for integration). Velis

⁵ Appendix A includes a list of some typical interventions to promote integration.

et al. argue that successful integration should address each component in a balanced way, taking cognisance of how they articulate with each other.

3. political objectives - Samson (forthcoming) differentiates between approaches that frame integration as: 1) the provision of charity; 2) instrumental reclaimer participation in the integration of their recycling work; 3) central involvement of reclaimers in their integration into existing spheres of social life (social, political, economic, cultural, environmental); and 4) radical transformation of multiple spheres of social life.

These categorisations provide invaluable insights into different ways of thinking about integration and different interventions to be included in integration policies and programmes. However, they provide little concrete guidance regarding which issues must be explicitly agreed by all parties in order to create a solid foundation for integration. Section 10.5 of this report draws on both existing literature and the research findings to present an ‘integration spectrum’ that identifies a range of possible positions on each core aspect of integration. It argues that negotiating and reaching agreements on these positions ensures that all parties are aware of the political implications and effects of decisions that are often seen as purely technical, and can assist in fostering agreed, meaningful integration.

This report now turns to analysing the approaches to integration in Johannesburg and Metsimaholo.

5 Municipal policy on recycling and integration

National government had not provided municipalities with targets or guidance on the development of policy on waste picker integration, leaving each municipality to chart its own way forward. It had also not provided funding, training, or support, which placed significant constraints on the scope and depth of the integration work that the municipalities could conduct. There was significant variation in how municipal policy in Metsimaholo and Johannesburg addressed reclaimers and reclaimer integration due to the very different size and capacity of a local municipality compared to a metro, as well as the specific histories and political contexts of each municipality.

5.1 Metsimaholo

Prior to and during the research period, the Metsimaholo local municipality experienced significant challenges. A 2010 municipal turnaround strategy noted serious deficiencies related to planning, management, service provision, functioning of political structures, financial management, and staff turnover (COGTA, 2010 cited in Meyer, 2014: 629). As in many municipalities, waste management was not a priority. Challenges affecting the whole municipality were amplified in this sector, and waste management suffered from a severe shortage of staff and equipment (Metsimaholo Local Municipality, 2011: 66). In 2017 the municipality was put under administration. Fragile coalition governments created uncertainty and placed additional strain on the development and implementation of policy.

Within this context, the waste management department focused on ensuring and expanding provision of basic services. Metsimaholo did not have a specific policy related to waste pickers. For many years the municipality’s Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) focused on measures to control waste pickers (who were seen as a “threat”) and lock them out of the Sasolburg landfill (cf Metsimaholo Local Municipality, 2011: 66). A scoping report for a new landfill stated that a proposed buffer zone would have “an additional benefit” of reducing waste picking (TerraWorks

2018: 20) and proposed the appointment of a local entrepreneur to run a recycling facility at the landfill. The 2013 Local Economic Development Plan introduced a focus on the green economy that placed emphasis on the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste (Metsimaholo Local Municipality, 2013: 29). This and all subsequent proposals to promote recycling focused on creating work for generic unemployed “community members” rather than improving the security, incomes, and conditions of waste pickers who were already doing recycling work. There was no official recognition of, or consideration that supporting new people to enter the sector would contribute to the elimination of waste pickers’ jobs.

5.2 Johannesburg

As a large, relatively well-resourced metropolitan municipality, Johannesburg had the capacity to develop more extensive and sophisticated policies and plans related to reclaimers and recycling. Despite formally distinct roles, both the municipality’s Pikitup waste management company and its Environment and Infrastructure Services Department (EISD) developed strategic direction and implemented programmes related to reclaimers and recycling.

The first policy to support reclaimers was the ‘Reclaimer Empowerment Plan’, adopted by Council in 2011 and implemented through EISD’s Reclaimer Empowerment Programme. This programme recognised that reclaimers were integral to waste minimisation, reduced waste to landfill, and saved the municipality money (Baker, Memela and Rampete, 2016). However, this acknowledgement did not underpin the objectives of the plan or the content of the programme, and did not feature in Pikitup business plans.

Like Metsimaholo, initially Pikitup focused on controlling reclaimers and reducing their numbers. Even though a 2004 report commissioned by Pikitup found that reclaimers were primarily responsible for the city achieving a recycling rate comparable to some European countries (DSM Environmental Services, 2004), prior to 2015 Pikitup did not include reclaimers as stakeholders in its business plans. When they were included, reclaimers were the only group in the “minimal effort” category (Pikitup, 2015a: 43), until they disappeared once more in 2018 (Pikitup, 2018: 36).

Pikitup’s original mandate did not include recycling. However, in 2012 Pikitup began to encroach on reclaimers’ work when it adopted “Extracting Value from Waste” as its new business model and introduced separation at source (S@S) as a flagship programme (Nair, 2012). Based on the vision of then Mayor Parks Tau, the “establishment of [a] recycling economy” was included in the 2013 Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (City of Johannesburg, 2013: 56) and enshrined as the primary goal of Pikitup’s 2013 ‘Separation at Source Policy’ (Pikitup, 2013). The 2015/16 Business Plan cemented this transformation by adopting a new corporate goal of ensuring the “realisation of value throughout the waste value chain” (Pikitup, 2015a).

This context shaped how Pikitup business plans and strategies included reclaimers and reclaimer integration. The 2011 ‘Integrated Waste Management Plan’ (IWMP) and successive S@S and business plans included commitments to “formalise”⁶ reclaimers. The position of reclaimers deteriorated in 2014 when Mayor Tau created the Jozi@Work programme through which one billion rand would be diverted from existing budgets to contract community-level cooperatives to provide basic services (Office of the Executive Mayor, 2014). The 2014/15 Pikitup Business Plan

⁶ Formalisation was not defined. However, it clearly did not entail building on, or including, reclaimers’ SoS system or making reclaimers primarily responsible for providing SoS services.

placed Jozi@Work cooperatives at the centre of establishing a recycling economy in Johannesburg (Pikitup, 2014a:5) and providing S@S services across the city, entrenching the position that the SoS system and functioning recycling economy in Johannesburg did not exist.⁷

After lobbying and interventions by private waste management companies, the 2015 Business Plan gave private companies responsibility for S@S in middle and high incomes areas so that they could contribute their knowledge and infrastructure. It was specifically noted that this would ensure that S@S would expand without “pushing the established private sector out of business” (Pikitup, 2015a: 51). No such consideration was given to reclaimers.

In 2015, Pikitup defined reclaimer integration as “the incorporation of reclaimers into the value chain of S@S” (Pikitup, 2015b: 10). However, as S@S services were provided by companies and community cooperatives, rather than directly integrating reclaimers into S@S, Pikitup increasingly outsourced responsibility for integration to the contracted companies and cooperatives (Pikitup, 2018: 24).

6 Integration programmes

This research project was designed to focus on two types of integration programmes:

1. top-down official EISD and Pikitup programmes in Johannesburg
2. bottom-up integration (now referred to as sideways integration) by the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) in collaboration with industry, all four levels of government, and other partners at Vaal Park Recycling Centre (VPRC) pilot project in Metsimaholo.

Three additional types of integration programmes were identified during the course of the research:

1. a public-private partnership between Sasol and Metsimaholo to support reclaimer cooperatives in Metsimaholo’s Zamdela township;
2. Metsimaholo officials’ de facto/informal integration programmes created in the absence of official programmes;
3. self-integration through the African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) reclaimer-resident integration initiatives in Johannesburg.

The two latter approaches are discussed respectively in Section 7 on officials’ experiences of integration and Section 8 on reclaimers’ experiences.

6.1 Top-down integration and empowerment programmes in Johannesburg

Pikitup and EISD implemented three programmes that sought to support reclaimers.

Empowerment and registration

EISD focused on ‘empowerment’ rather than integration. Its’ Reclaimer Empowerment Programme included training, provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and trolleys, a needs analysis workshop, production of a video to shift public perception of reclaimers, the creation of the Joburg Reclaimer Forum, and registration.

⁷ Although the Democratic Alliance (DA) ended Jozi@Work when it gained control of the municipality in 2016, it retained a similar programme and continued to prioritise “co-production” in low income areas (Pikitup, 2018: 12).

Registration of reclaimers was a key priority for EISD and Pikitup. Three senior officials from the two organisations explain why this was the case:

The registration is a requirement of CoJ [City of Johannesburg] waste policy and by-laws for all service providers in the City. The Waste Pickers⁸ as waste service providers are also required to register with the CoJ waste information management system. Once the registration is received by the CoJ, a permit is issued to the applicant after an audit has been conducted. The permit gives the waste service provider a right to provide service in the City (Baker, Memela, and Rampete, 2016: 173).

For EISD and Pikitup, the primary purposes of registration were to know how many reclaimers worked in the city, have a list of reclaimers to include in programmes, and gain a greater ability to control where and how reclaimers worked.

In 2014 EISD reported that 1,008 reclaimers had been registered, including 592 South Africans and 415 cross-border reclaimers (EISD, 2014: 2). In their 2016 publication, Baker, Memela, and Rampete (2016: 173) state that over 2000 reclaimers had been registered. In more recent meetings officials reported that they had registered few reclaimers and had encountered particular challenges in registering those who worked in the streets. They believed that negative treatment of reclaimers by other parts of the municipality made them distrustful of officials from EISD and Pikitup and reticent to register. Officials also reported that they had not succeeded in registering street reclaimers as they could not “find” them (EISD official, 20/02/2017).

Creating and supporting cooperatives

Both Pikitup and EISD encouraged and supported reclaimers to form cooperatives, which were deemed the only modality through which reclaimers could be integrated and receive funding. As in municipalities across the country, this approach was adopted due to its alignment with national and local government promotion of cooperatives, the relative ease with which cooperatives could be supported within the context of existing legislation, lack of exposure to other forms of integration, and the ability of cooperatives to keep reclaimers at a distance and reduce their claims to employment by Pikitup.

Integration into S@S

Pikitup implemented several projects (including a pilot project at the Robinson Deep Landfill) specifically designed to integrate reclaimers into the ‘official’ S@S system. These projects required reclaimers to form cooperatives which were provided with routes, trucks, and drivers, and were required to sell materials to a designated buyer.

6.2 Sideways integration at the Vaal Park Recycling Centre

The VPRC emerged as a collaboration between SAWPA and Packaging South Africa (PACSA, now Packaging SA). PACSA was keen to develop an initiative with waste pickers as this was a condition of the Industry Waste Management Plan (IndWMP) it was developing at the time.⁹ Based on international experiences, SAWPA supported integration through cooperatives and was piloting

⁸ Although the policy and plan refer to ‘reclaimers’, in their article Baker, Memela, and Rampete use the term ‘waste pickers’.

⁹ National government did not take that IWMP process to fruition.

different approaches across the country. After three years of meetings and planning, the VPRC officially opened on November 27, 2017.

The pilot focused on supporting the Ditamating cooperative (which subsequently merged with the Ikageng cooperative and became Ikageng-Ditamating) to establish a recycling centre and provide a free S@S service to residents in the upmarket, predominantly white, Afrikaans Vaal Park suburb. The PETCO representative played a crucial role in bringing in other industry partners, and together with SAWPA gained support from all four levels of government. A range of private and public donors contributed infrastructure, equipment, training, and support. Although Metsimaholo provided access to land for the VPRC, the initiative was primarily driven by industry and SAWPA. It was not considered a municipal project and was simply noted in the 2016/17 IDP (Metsimaholo Local Municipality, 2016: 232). Rather than a municipal integration initiative it is therefore best seen as ‘sideways’ integration, as the municipality was brought into an initiative developed by SAWPA and industry.

6.3 Public-private partnership in Metsimaholo

Sasol, the formerly state-owned energy and chemical company, dominated the economy in Sasolburg and the entire region. It supported integration projects in Metsimaholo as part of an offset programme it was required to implement when it received a postponement to meet minimum emission standards (Centre for Environmental Rights, 2017:4; Sasol, 2016: 15). Discussions between Sasol, the local and district municipalities, and waste pickers resulted in a decision to provide eight waste picker cooperatives¹⁰ each with their own land and infrastructure to sort and store their recyclables. The project also included plans to create a recycling hub that would receive the materials from these sites (Sasol, 2018: 15). Although reclaimers were consulted about the project, they were not involved in its management and did not have basic information such as the project budget. The project should therefore be seen as a public-private partnership between Sasol and the municipality intended to benefit waste pickers.

7 Officials’ experiences of integration

7.1 Practical norms, de facto strategies, and informal integration initiatives

Despite the lack of official policies and plans for integration in Metsimaholo, the officials encountered waste pickers on a daily basis. In the absence of formal guidance, officials developed ‘practical norms’ (de Sardan, 2013)¹¹ and de facto strategies to work with waste pickers (Guya, 2019).

The practical norms were informed by the absence of a budget to work with waste pickers and a shortage of staff. The three practical norms were that: support for waste pickers should be limited to cooperatives; work with waste pickers should not require financial support from the municipality; and the waste management department should not carry primary responsibility for integration.

The six de facto strategies were to:

1. integrate waste pickers via cooperatives

¹⁰ Two cooperatives merged, bringing the total number of cooperatives down to seven.

¹¹ de Sardan argues that in the absence of “official norms” that “express the rights and obligations explicitly recognized by public and professional institutions” (de Sardan, 2013: 5), state officials must rely on “practical norms” which are “the various informal, de facto, tacit or latent norms that underlie the practices of actors that diverge from the official norms (or social norms)” (de Sardan, 2013: 8, emphasis in the original).

2. foster inter-departmental relations to draw on each department's strengths
3. foster inter-governmental linkages and multi-scalar collaborations
4. implement temporary measures to assist landfill waste pickers
5. seek ways to engage waste pickers
6. collaborate with corporates and industry associations to broker in financial resources.

Officials in Johannesburg had the benefit of guidance from policies, business plans, and strategies. However, due to inconsistencies within these official documents and lack of detail regarding how work with reclaimers should be operationalised, officials also relied on practical norms and de facto strategies to a certain extent. This meant that when staff changed the emphasis in programmes and ways of relating to reclaimers changed as well.

7.2 Officials' challenges related to integration

Officials in Metsimaholo and Johannesburg encountered a number of similar challenges related to reclaimers and integration. Officials were frequently required to deal with issues such as reclaimers sleeping in parks, leaving streets untidy, and getting in the way of machinery at landfills. Addressing these issues consumed a significant amount of officials' time. However, the issues kept re-emerging as their underlying causes (such as insecure access to materials and lack of access to sorting and storage spaces) were not adequately addressed. Doing so would have required increased budgets, support from other departments, and a significant shift in official positions on the allocation of rights to recyclables and reclaimers' role in the recycling economy.

Due to the low official priority given to reclaimers, reclaimer integration did not feature in the key performance indicators (KPIs) for officials in Metsimaholo or Pikitup, and in 2016 EISD officials had only two small KPIs related to reclaimer empowerment (Dladla, 2018; Guya, 2019). As a result, officials did not receive sufficient time or budgets for reclaimer integration/empowerment. In Johannesburg, officials deployed to engage reclaimers in key processes (such as the task team discussed in Section 8.6) lacked the seniority required to make decisions on critical issues.

Officials who worked with reclaimers were employed in departments/organisations dedicated to cleansing and the collection and disposal of waste. Reclaimers, the informal economy, participatory governance, and ways to implement reclaimer integration fell quite far outside the officials' areas of expertise. However, they were not provided with opportunities to deepen their knowledge and skills in these areas. Officials often struggled with complex issues such as how to engage cross-border reclaimers and develop legally compliant modalities for integration other than cooperatives. They reported that they would welcome guidance and support from national government, as well as national integration targets, as this would require municipalities to set their own targets and allocate budgets to ensure their achievement.

Officials in both municipalities developed creative ways to secure funding for work with reclaimers, including partnering with companies and industry associations, and accessing Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) funds. They were aware that these funds were inadequate and included restrictions that were not appropriate for the sector. However, they did not know of others ways to fund work with reclaimers, and felt that reclaimers were not appreciative of their efforts. Officials in both municipalities thought that reclaimers did not understand the constraints they worked within, and that they were subjected to unfair criticism for issues over which they had little if any control. As a senior official from Fezile Dabi shared:

[w]hen I attend conferences, all I hear when people speak is how municipalities are not participating, but they never think about what leads to those circumstances (7/9/2017; cited in Ntuli, 2019: 74).

7.3 Officials' understandings of integration

Due to the absence of official integration programmes in Metsimaholo, officials' understandings of integration remained highly abstract. Senior officials at both local and district levels believed that cooperatives were the only modality for integration. The local official saw the municipality's role as supporting the formation of cooperatives and then creating an enabling environment "to be conducive for them to thrive" (11/10/2017; cited in Guya, 2019: 86). This was a pragmatic understanding aligned with the shortage of financial and human resources and the practical norms discussed above. The district official saw integration as "a chain interconnected with different links" between officials, residents, and waste pickers, and framed the district's role as finding and strengthening these links (06/08/2017; cited in Ntuli, 2019: 75).

Officials in Johannesburg had different ways of relating to reclaimers. They also had internal disagreements regarding some aspects of integration (cf Dladla, 2018: 97). Nevertheless, it was possible to discern some common assumptions about integration that were informed by, and aligned with policy. Officials recognised that individual reclaimers extended the lifespan of landfills as they extracted materials from the waste stream. However, officials believed that reclaimers should not be paid a service fee, arguing that this would mean that they would be paid twice for the same recyclables (although the same logic was not applied to payments to private companies). In addition, the dominant assumption was that reclaimers did not have a special claim to work in official recycling and S@S programmes. As reclaimers were seen as marginal people in need of 'empowerment', it was asserted that EISD and Pikitup were best placed to decide how reclaimers should be integrated without involving reclaimers in decision-making. It was also assumed that cooperatives were the only modality for integration, which was understood as integration into the municipal solid waste management (MSWM) system and S@S in particular. These points are elaborated in the following section.

8 Reclaimers' experiences of integration

8.1 Denigration, erasure, and infantilisation

As in other parts of the country and the world, there was a long history of acrimonious relationships between the municipalities and reclaimers. At the time of the research, reclaimers in Metsimaholo and Johannesburg continued to feel denigrated by how they were framed and engaged. Key issues raised by reclaimers centred on the erasures of their: 1) knowledge and expertise; 2) profession; 3) SoS system and contributions; 4) needs and interests; 5) adulthood; and 6) dignity.

Erasure of reclaimers' knowledge and expertise

Reclaimers were deeply offended by the municipalities' failure to recognise their knowledge and expertise. Reclaimers in Johannesburg understood their exclusion from decision-making as a powerful indication that Pikitup and EISD did not think that they had knowledge or ideas to contribute to the development of integration and S@S programmes. In the early 2000s, reclaimers in Metsimaholo were informed that they had not been awarded a contract to extract recyclables from the landfill as they did not possess the requisite skills, yet the municipality awarded the contract to two professionals with no experience in the sector who were then mentored and supported by Sasol Rejuvenation Trust (Samson, 2009). In addition to erasing reclaimers'

knowledge, the municipality therefore cast reclaimers as incapable of developing skills and knowledge through training and support.

Erasure of reclaimers' profession and place in the sector

Many reclaimers hid the work that they did from their families and friends. However, others were proud of their work and the contributions they made. A reclaimer in Metsimaholo emphasised that the municipality “should be highly impressed with what we are doing and supporting us” (08/08/2017; cited in Ntuli, 2020: 68). Instead, as noted in Section 5, official plans and programmes prioritised unemployed community members over reclaimers for inclusion in new official recycling programmes. Almost three years after a meeting with Pikitup and ESID, reclaimers in Johannesburg still bitterly recalled when a Pikitup official told them:

Being a waste picker is not a ... you don't need a license. Anyone can be a waste picker. When we say to the service provider “find waste pickers” they will find these people. And they will hire these people and we will take these people (17/05/2017).

The municipalities and officials therefore asserted not only that reclaimers could be replaced by unemployed community members with no experience in the sector, but that they were no different from these community members. The implication was that reclaimers could have their work taken away to create work for unemployed people deemed more worthy. Politicians and officials did not necessarily understand the issue in this way, as they did not recognise SoS or the jobs reclaimers had created for themselves. This re-affirms the importance of developing a comprehensive analysis of the existing recycling economy prior to intervening in it.

Erasure of reclaimers' SoS system and contributions

Erasure of reclaimers' SoS system in the development of Pikitup's official S@S programme was one of Johannesburg reclaimers' most pressing concerns. In addition, Pikitup and EISD erased reclaimers' economic and environmental contributions, which underpinned the position that they did not need to be paid for the savings they generated and the services they provided. EISD also erased their contributions to integration itself. In the most egregious example, after the initial success of a registration campaign designed and conducted with ARO (see Section 8.6) the then member of the mayoral council (MMC) for environment and infrastructure services released media statements giving all credit to EISD and Pikitup, bizarrely rendering the role of reclaimers in a process to recognise reclaimers completely invisible (de Jager, nd.; Dube, 2018).¹²

Erasure of reclaimers' needs and interests

Reclaimers in both municipalities reported that even though they had raised the same concerns and problems for many years, most of the key issues remained unaddressed. One waste picker in Metsimaholo stated “in specific reference to Sasolburg, I'd say waste picker issues are still being suppressed. Our municipality is still shutting us out, our rights as waste pickers are still being suppressed” (15/9/2017; cited in Ntuli, 2019: 84). Although some of these issues may have fallen outside of officials' mandates and budgets, reclaimers in both municipalities frequently commented on what they experienced as officials' lack of empathy and unwillingness to collaborate with them

¹² In an even greater irony, DEA gave the city an award for reclaimer integration in which it cited the registration campaign as a key achievement, and the MMC's announcement of the award once again failed to acknowledge the crucial role of reclaimers in this campaign (de Jager, 2019). It is unclear what criteria were used in the decision to make the award to Johannesburg.

to develop plans so that the issues could be addressed in the future. Lack of communication and established engagement structures exacerbated the situation.

Erasure of reclaimers' adulthood (infantilisation of reclaimers)

Many reclaimers felt deeply infantilised by their exclusion from decision-making about their own integration. In Johannesburg this was exacerbated by some officials' deeply patronising language and approach. For example, at one meeting a Pikitup official told reclaimers that integration needed to start with "baby steps" and exhorted the reclaimers to "open up your minds about opportunities!" (Pikitup official, 11/10/2016), rather than opening her mind and trying to find out why reclaimers weren't interested in the opportunities on offer and what alternatives they would like to propose. Reclaimers were expected to simply participate in programmes developed without their input. As a result, reclaimers felt that they were "being treated like kids!" (Street reclainer in Johannesburg, 17/05/2017).

Erasure of reclaimers' dignity

Reclaimers considered their infantilisation and exclusion from decision-making an affront to their dignity. At a workshop held in May 2017, a street reclainer in Johannesburg informed Pikitup and EISD officials that:

[t]he municipality should treat us with respect and dignity. Even though we are doing different work from others because it is dirty work, we have dignity in ourselves because we are doing this for our kids (17/05/2017).

Although officials recognised a relationship between dignity and integration, some did so in a way that erased their own role in robbing reclaimers of their dignity. At another meeting, a Pikitup official told reclaimers:

we are trying to bring back your dignity by improving relations with committees. If you look at the room, there is no leather chair for [the name of the official] and another one for you. We want to be on an equal level (29/09/2016).

The official seemed to be implying that others had robbed reclaimers of their dignity and that Pikitup and EISD were 'giving' reclaimers dignity by sharing chairs with them, demonstrating a stark lack of understanding of the deep, historical processes through Pikitup and EISD had undermined reclaimers' dignity, as well as the depth of transformation required to redress this.

This broader context underpinned and shaped reclaimers' experiences of reclainer integration and empowerment initiatives.

8.2 Reclaimers' experiences of integration programmes

This section provides a brief overview of reclaimers' experiences of the five types of integration initiatives identified in the course of the research.

8.2.1 Top-down Pikitup and EISD programmes

EISD Empowerment Programme

Reclaimers who participated in EISD's empowerment activities derived benefits including information, skills, stipends for attending training workshops, trolleys, PPE, and support to create cooperatives. However, reclaimers also raised concerns regarding the quality, relevance, appropriateness, sustainability, and limited reach of these interventions. The small percentage of reclaimers who received PPE only received one set, and the trolleys did not meet reclaimers' needs. One reclainer who attended a training workshop noted that "[t]his is helpful for less than 3 percent

of us and some of the stuff is hard to understand for my colleagues” (Dladla, 2017: 123-4). A master’s student who attended the same workshop concurred, saying that even she struggled to understand some concepts and that the relevance to reclaimers’ work was unclear (Dladla, 2017).

Reclaimers noted that failure to involve them in decisions regarding both what should be included in the empowerment programme, and the design and oversight of the interventions underpinned many of these problems. The Joburg Reclaimer Forum lacked legitimacy precisely because it was a consultative, rather than decision-making, forum. In addition, representation on the forum was limited, several representatives were buyback centre owners,¹³ and there were no meaningful processes for representatives to obtain mandates and report back to other reclaimers.

Registration

The overwhelming majority of reclaimers did not register as they did not see benefits of doing so and did not trust the municipality or Pikitup. Reclaimers worked in public streets across the city and were incredulous when officials listed “not being able to find” them as a key challenge encountered in registration drives. When the issue of finding reclaimers was raised at a national workshop that included representatives of EISD, ARO, and SAWPA, virtually all strategies were proposed by reclaimer representatives, with the central one being that reclaimers need to be partners in registration campaigns (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2017). For reclaimers this was an example of how disregard of their knowledge and skills undermined the ability of EISD and Pikitup to achieve even their own objectives.¹⁴

Integration into S@S

The reclaimers from the Robinson Deep landfill who participated in the pilot S@S project were not involved in its design. Ironically, this project to integrate reclaimers led to a deterioration in their incomes and control over their work. The cooperatives were not paid a collection fee and were required to cover their expenses and pay members solely from the sale of recyclables. However, they could not obtain sufficient materials as the trucks were available for too few hours, only 18% of residents separated their recyclables, and street reclaimers often beat them to collect the separated materials. The cooperatives were required to sell to a particular buyer who paid lower rates than they could receive elsewhere, worsening their position in the recycling value chain. Unlike at the landfill, the reclaimers could not set their own daily income targets and work until these were achieved. Some reclaimers even lost money as they used their own funds to subsidise the cooperative to try to keep it afloat (Pholoto, 2016; Sekhwela, 2017).

One reclaimer highlighted officials’ callous attitude, reporting that:

We talked to Pikitup and told them our challenges but they couldn’t meet our demands...they told us ‘the actual programme now has not started, now we just wanted to see what is going on’ ... I then realised it is a case study, so why didn’t they tell us it’s a case study so that we don’t stop whatever we were doing...so that is when I decided that no [I can’t participate in a case study] cause my time, I won’t get this time again (cited in Sekhwela and Samson, 2019: 14-15).

¹³ While some buyback centre owners may have previously worked as reclaimers this was no longer the case and it was inappropriate for them to represent reclaimers.

¹⁴ Section 8.6 below discusses a subsequent registration campaign in which Pikitup and EISD collaborated with ARO.

As there was no end date for the pilot it was unclear when, if ever, these concerns would be addressed. Ultimately, virtually all reclaimers returned to work at the landfill. While most quit the cooperative, others undertook a range of actions (including subcontracting non-reclaimers) to keep the project running (Sekhwela, 2017), compensating for the problems in the pilot's design. One former participant traced the problems with the pilot to reclaimers' exclusion from decision-making and the requirement that they be integrated via a cooperative:

...we were told what to do actually, it wasn't our choice. It was not someone who woke up in the morning and thought, look, let me start something on my own. So it's like forcing someone into something he doesn't understand. So for me it never worked and for the other guys it never worked (25/10/2016; cited in Sekhwela, 2017: 92-3).

8.2.2 Sideways integration in the Vaal Park Recycling Centre

ID achieved a number of successes within the first three years of the VPRC's operation. Approximately 2000 out of the 3000 households in Vaal Park were separating materials for ID. Rather than salvaging at the landfill, the cooperative members had access to clean material, PPE, and safer working conditions. The cooperative further increased its volumes by collecting recyclables from private businesses and selling reusable items collected from households.

Despite these successes and widespread support for the pilot, the cooperative encountered a number of problems that had profound material implications for its members. Although the pilot was based on the Brazilian model, unlike in Brazil the cooperative was not paid for the collection and environmental services it provided. As it had not received start-up capital it struggled from the very beginning (waste picker representative, 07/08/2017; cited in Ntuli, 2019: 55). Members earned less than when they worked at the landfill, and by 2017 all but six had returned there. Few were replaced, as new members quit due to the low income and the original members wanted to protect their meagre incomes. Due to the cooperative's financial constraints, it paid casual workers low wages to sort materials, which only deepened exploitation in the sector.

None of the members of ID had experience running such a large-scale initiative or managing finances. Government conducted some training, as did industry experts, who also provided pro bono mentorship, assistance with the development of financial systems, and support in keeping financial records. However, the training and support were provided on a relatively ad hoc basis and cooperative members felt they were inadequate. The members also raised concerns that they were not involved in the selection of the professionals, who did not have experience or expertise in working with informal workers.

Many of the VPRC's problems could be traced back to the fact that the pilot was run on a surprisingly informal basis and a number of fundamental components were not in place:

- The parties had not developed a comprehensive project proposal.
- The project did not have a detailed implementation plan.
- Initial financial projections were based on a significant overestimation of the number of residents in the area, and a realistic financial sustainability plan was not developed.
- ID did not have a contract or memorandum of understanding with either the municipality or industry.
- There was no clear agreement on what was being piloted or how long the pilot would run.
- There was no monitoring and evaluation system or a review process.

- There was no dispute resolution mechanism to move beyond disagreements between the parties.

The pilot was an important advance for reclaimer integration as it was likely the first initiative in the country in which industry and government worked collectively with waste pickers to plan and implement an integration project. However, it was simply assumed that all parties would participate equally, rather than adopting measures to explicitly transform negative stereotypes of waste pickers and redress unequal power relations, skills, and access to resources and information. As a result, inequalities were perpetuated and the potential for true partnership was undermined.

8.2.3 Public-private partnership between Metsimaholo and Sasol

Sasol's offset project supported the participating waste pickers to establish and register cooperatives. However, participating cooperatives encountered problems not dissimilar to those experienced by both ID and reclaimers in the Robinson Deep pilot. The PPP project participants reported that the training did not meet their key needs, and Sasol confirmed that the training primarily consisted of giving participants notes written in English to read and then ask questions. Waste pickers were additionally aggrieved as they had been required to pay for their own transport to attend the training.

Delays in municipal allocation of the land to be used by the cooperatives meant that the cooperatives had not received the promised shelter, ablution facilities, or sorting places. Alternative forms of support that could proceed prior to receipt of the land had not been considered, and without a formal agreement or dispute resolution mechanism it was difficult for the participants to negotiate a different way forward. Cooperative members were despondent as they felt that neither the municipality nor Sasol heard or addressed their concerns. One cooperative leader explained how the problems in the project created tensions within the cooperative:

... people thought that by virtue of registering the cooperative it meant that all our problems would be solved and we would be successful overnight. Given that all of those expectations are not being met, members are not respecting me, they swear at me and say incredibly hurtful things to me. They say that I fetched them from their homes and told them to sign up for a cooperative and this cooperative isn't working for us so we want our money back and we want to be removed from the certificate (15/9/2017, interview by Z. Ntuli).

8.2.4 Informal municipal integration programmes in Metsimaholo

Metsimaholo officials' de facto approach to integrating reclaimers meant that despite not having official programmes, the municipality engaged and supported reclaimers. However, as this approach was informal, waste pickers could not contribute to the development of norms, strategies, and activities which would have more adequately addressed their needs, concerns, and interests. For example, while landfill waste pickers benefited from the temporary welfare initiatives at the landfill, they expressed greater concerns related to the development of forms of integration that did not require them to form cooperatives and ensuring that they could continue to work once the new landfill opened.

8.2.5 Reclaimer-resident integration in Johannesburg

In late 2018 ARO began to implement its own initiatives to integrate individual reclaimers in collaboration with resident associations in various suburbs in Johannesburg. Reclaimers provided residents in participating suburbs with clear plastic bags for recyclables donated by PETCO and collected the full bags once a week. A truck assisted reclaimers by transporting them, their materials, and their trolleys when they needed to cover longer distances and when they swept the

area at the end of the day to ensure that no bags remained uncollected. This approach hinged on ARO developing relationships with residents. ARO met with resident associations; made public presentations about who they were, the contributions they made, and how they were affected by S@S; ran workshops for school children; and participated in community festivities and clean-up campaigns. An ARO reclaimer activist who oversaw the partnership in Bordeaux explained how the project changed reclaimers' experience in the area:

The reclaimers, they came here [Bordeaux], but it wasn't as free as it is now. It was like they were stealing. Reclaimers were not allowed to come in here, only maybe a few. But now it's free and anyone can come in here to do recycling. Whether you are a member of ARO or not you can come in (18/9/2019; cited in Schalit, 2020: 46).

In Brixton and Auckland Park, ARO also collaborated with a range of partners¹⁵ to pilot a method to pay individual reclaimers for their collection service.

8.3 Separation at source and reclaimer dispossession

As discussed in Section 5.2, Pikitup contracted private companies to provide S@S services in middle and high income areas, and cooperatives to service low-income areas. During the research period the cooperatives were primarily part of Jozi@Work and were comprised of non-reclaimer community members. The only S@S service provided in Metsimaholo was the VPRC's programme in Vaal Park, which was not a municipal programme.

Pikitup's S@S programme was based on seven key assumptions that had profound implications for reclaimers and reclaimer integration. The assumptions were that:

1. Pikitup was "creating a recycling economy in Johannesburg", which erased the fact that a recycling economy already existed and that reclaimers had played a central role in its establishment and ongoing daily functioning.
2. Pikitup's S@S programme could therefore be designed without reference to reclaimers and their pre-existing system to collect post-consumer household recyclables.
3. As reclaimers' system to salvage recyclables was not relevant to S@S, reclaimers were equivalent to other unemployed community members and did not have any special claim to continue to provide the service they created.
4. Reclaimers did not possess knowledge relevant to S@S.
5. It was not necessary to include reclaimers in decisions about S@S.
6. S@S and reclaimer integration were distinct initiatives.
7. S@S took priority over integration and integration would only be considered after the mode of S@S had been selected.

¹⁵ The Brixton Community Forum, Auckland Park Resident Association, Unilever, the University of the Witwatersrand, Packaging SA, PETCO, The Glass Recycling Company, Fibre Circle, and Polycy.

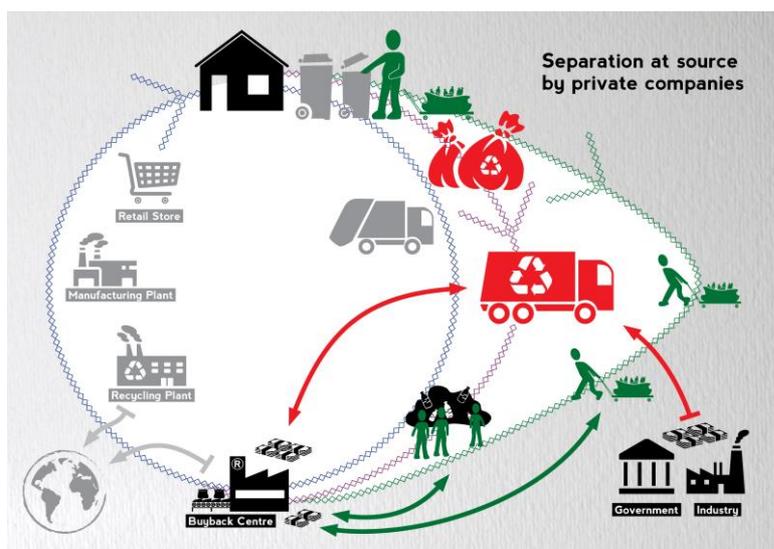


Figure by M. Samson, D. Seegers and J. van den Bussche

Figure 2 – Separation at source that excludes SoS and reclaimers

Figure 2 depicts the implications of S@S systems that overlook and exclude SoS and reclaimers. The official S@S system is in red. Residents separate their materials and place them outside their homes for collection by vehicles dedicated to the collection of recyclables. The recyclables are then sold to buy-back centres or larger buyers, which then sell them for export or to local recyclers who convert them into inputs for the production of new items. The private company providing the S@S service earns income from the sale of the recyclables and is also paid a collection service fee by either industry or government (in this case Pikitup).

The SoS system (depicted in green) is still present, as reclaimers salvage materials not separated by residents from rubbish bins and landfills, as well as from bags of separated recyclables before they are collected by the S@S contractor. However, compared to Figure 1, the reclaimers and their SoS system have been pushed to the margins. There are fewer reclaimers collecting fewer materials. They are not paid for collecting the recyclables and earn their entire income through the sale of their materials.

As in the overview of SoS, potential recyclables that were not salvaged or cannot be revalued due to material degradation or insufficient prices remain in the waste stream.

Completely out with outsourcing of integration

Reclaimers were technically eligible to form and join Jozi@Work cooperatives. However, Pikitup had not prioritised inclusion of reclaimers in Jozi@Work. Reclaimers reported that they had not been aware of the Jozi@Work programme, and the research found virtually no reclaimers who were members of Jozi@Work cooperatives. Although Pikitup business plans allocated responsibility for integration to companies and cooperatives contracted to provide S@S (see Section 5.2), neither Pikitup nor EISD provided them with guidance regarding how this should be done or monitored compliance. The contracting of private companies and cooperatives, compounded by their failure to integrate reclaimers, meant that reclaimers were completely pushed out of S@S with the outsourcing of integration.

Effects of S@S

A street reclaimer working in Zonde, Soweto (where S@S services were provided by Jozi@Work) explained the effects for reclaimers:

At first, before Jozi@Work existed, it was so simple, I was able to fill up my sac without any problems and make R100 and something in one trip and know that I am fine for the day and it became optional to go and collect again for the second time but now that is not the case, we need to be met halfway because we are suffering, we are really suffering (18/08/2016, cited in Ntuli, 2016: 32).

Street reclaimers were highly aggrieved that Pikitup and the municipality had pushed them out of jobs that they had created for themselves long before recycling became part of Pikitup's mandate:

We started recycling way back in the mid-nineties. Why does the municipality have to show up represented by its executives and say 'we have to entirely take over *ukubenza* [your work]'?.....The problem is the municipality that wants to snatch the food out of our mouths.....What are they going to do for us if they stop us from recycling or take it away from us as theirs? (Street reclaimer Reuben Mbabisa Manifesto, July 13, 2017).

Strategies to counter the effects of S@S

Street reclaimers developed a number of strategies to retain access to materials in the face of S@S. These included:

- forging alliances with security guards;
- fostering relationships with specific residents who saved materials for them;
- leaving home before dawn to reach their destinations and access materials before the trucks arrived;
- "cross-nighting" (travelling to a suburb the night before collection day);
- sleeping in parks close to collection sites.¹⁶

These strategies enabled reclaimers to generate some income. However, they involved a significant deterioration in reclaimers' working conditions, with negative implications for their physical and mental health.

S@S and reclaimer dispossession and criminalisation

S@S also undermined and worsened reclaimers' relationships with many residents who ceased supporting them and blocked their access to materials¹⁷. Speaking of how street reclaimers were forced to take materials from the separated bags in order to survive, one reclaimer shared:

I do not want to be a thief, I want to find my own recyclables in peace. When they catch you stealing their plastics they beat you up, look at my eye right now they beat me up (18/08/2016; cited in Ntuli, 2016: 33).

Effects when reclaimer cooperatives provided S@S

Although the Vaal Park and Robinson Deep S@S programmes were provided by reclaimer cooperatives, the participating reclaimers came from landfills. Pre-existing street reclaimers

¹⁶ In the absence of secure access to recyclables and places to sort and store their materials, some reclaimers chose to sleep in parks so that they could be closer to collections sites and have space for their recyclables. S@S exacerbated this situation.

¹⁷ See section 9.2 for further discussion of residents as 'enforcers'.

therefore encountered the same problems outlined above and employed similar strategies. In Mestimaholo, ID attempted to mitigate the harm to street reclaimers by allowing them to sort and sell their materials at the VPRC and agreeing that street reclaimers could continue to salvage the non-separated recyclables disposed in rubbish bins. Nevertheless, the street reclaimers were dispossessed by S@S and their relationships with residents were weakened.

8.4 Social differentiation

Power-laden social relations between reclaimers, residents, and other parties in the sector, as well as between reclaimers themselves shaped their experiences of integration and raised issues to be addressed by integration initiatives. This section highlights some of the key issues related to race, class, gender, location, and nationality.

8.4.1 Race and class

Reclaiming is predicated on inequality, as it only exists because some people are so wealthy that they throw away valuable materials, and others are so poor that they choose to support themselves by collecting and selling (as well as reusing and remaking) these items (Beall, 1997). As colonialism and apartheid continue to underpin South Africa's economy and society, race and class remain deeply articulated, and the overwhelming majority of reclaimers are African, with coloured and Indian reclaimers appearing in greater proportions in areas where they comprise a more significant component of the poor and working class (cf Benson and Vanqa-Mgijima, 2010; McLean, 2000; Samson, 2013; Shchenk and Blaauw, 2011; Sentime, 2011). Race and racism permeate reclaimers' daily experiences. As poor black people, reclaimers are seen as intruders and potential criminals in wealthy white suburbs. A street reclaimer in Metsimaholo shared:

...honestly we are very afraid working in white communities, sometimes the residents are nice and welcoming but in some cases they chase us away. So we are just trying our luck with them because their areas have a lot of recyclables (20/08/2017; cited in Pholoto, 2018: 81).

A SAWPA representative explained that racial inequity was also deeply ingrained in the industry:

Yes of course, it's economic racism at its best...As long as one wants to promote recycling, one doesn't promote it by funding the bottom tier of the pyramid only and doing nothing more than that. At the end of the day, you are still supporting the white industry with the nation's investment. If one is really serious about investing in this industry, one has to invest from the bottom up (13/09/2017; cited in Ntuli, 2020: 65).

Although many municipal officials in post-apartheid South Africa were black, class differences were found to frequently preclude solidarity that could have been presumed to arise based on race. Explicitly addressing racism must therefore form a key component of integration.

8.4.2 Gendered experiences of waste picking and integration

Although research in a number of countries identifies that reclaiming is highly gendered (cf Beall, 1997; Dias and Ogando, 2015; Nzeadibe and Adama, 2015; Ogando et al., 2017), there is a dearth of research on gender and reclaiming in South Africa. As less attention was paid to gender in the Metsimaholo research, this section sketches out some key ways gender shaped reclaimers' working days in Johannesburg, and identifies some implications for integration.

The vast majority of street reclaimers were men, who gained control over streets and areas through the exertion of physical and patriarchal power (Maema, 2017; Sentime, 2011; Shogole, 2019;

Schenck and Blaauw, 2011). The majority of women reclaimers worked at landfills (although they still comprised a minority and were completely banned from some landfills by their male counterparts) (Samson, 2013). This made women disproportionately vulnerable to the reduction of materials being sent to landfills due to S@Sc, and at greater risk of permanent displacement if and when S@S would be fully implemented in the future. Men also used their greater physical strength to dominate collection of higher value materials, both at the landfill and on the streets (Mahlase, 2017; Samson, 2013). Men's greater ability to retain access to space and materials, and their greater strength and willingness to physically confront S@S workers and security guards meant that they were better placed to maintain their livelihoods in the face of S@S (Maema, 2017; Mokobane, 2017).

Other gender differences had profoundly negative daily effects for women that were neither recognised nor addressed in Pikitup or EISD's integration and empowerment programmes. Women experienced greater indignities and health risks than men due to the lack of access to ablution facilities. Given Johannesburg's high levels of general crime and violence against women, women felt unsafe working in the streets and adopted strategies (such as working with men, dressing like men to ward off assault, and only starting work after sunrise) that compromised their independence, identities, and working hours (Mokobane, 2017). Their working day was further shortened due to their unpaid social reproductive labour in their homes (Mokobane, 2017). The integration of all reclaimers requires consistent attention to women's challenges, needs, and interests.

8.4.3 Nationality

Cross-border reclaimers comprised a significant percentage of reclaimers in Johannesburg and were subjected to additional layers of stigmatisation and exclusion due to their nationality. This resonated with more widely held beliefs in Johannesburg and the country that 'foreigners' brought crime to the city and took jobs away from South Africans; beliefs that were reinforced by then Mayor Mashaba in highly publicised statements against cross-border migrants (cf. Bornman, J., 2019; Chaskalson, 2017).

ARO included members of all nationalities and took actions to ensure that reclaimers from all countries would be registered and integrated. However, officials were unwilling to consider creative ways of integrating cross-border reclaimers due to legal considerations, lack of guidance regarding whether and how this could be done, and rather overt xenophobia in some cases. Some industry representatives had a more pragmatic perspective:

They are already included [in integration] by virtue of the fact that they are collecting and we are buying from them. But for them to be formally included, I think we have to rope in Home Affairs and maybe have a special sort of a criteria; I don't know (Industry representative; 27/02/2018).

8.5 Reclaimers' understandings of integration

Reclaimers in both Johannesburg and Metsimaholo considered fundamental transformation in how their municipality related to them as central to integration. Reclaimers insisted that they should be respected, appreciated, and centrally involved as equals in decisions that affected them through established processes and structures and the institutionalisation of commitments to integration.

Reclaimers in Metsimaholo and Johannesburg stated that cooperatives required sustained, sufficient, and appropriate support if they were to lead to meaningful integration. However, they held divergent views on the place of cooperatives in integration due to their differing experiences. Ntuli (2020) argues that despite the challenges confronting the VPRC, it shaped other Metsimaholo reclaimers' imaginaries of integration. She reports that there was a widespread belief that integration should take a form similar to the VPRC. This made integration elusive, as several members of cooperatives stated that they did not think it would be possible to access land for a centre, and many reclaimers (particularly at the landfill) did not want to form cooperatives. By contrast, reclaimers in Johannesburg did not have an example of successful reclaimer integration via cooperatives, and there was widespread support for the development of other forms of integration, including integration of individual reclaimers.

Reclaimers in both municipalities were interested in integration into the MSWM system and S@S as this would give them more secure access to greater quantities of cleaner recyclables. However, they equally prioritised better and deeper integration into the value chain and recycling sector. As noted above, reclaimers in Metsimaholo placed particular emphasis on de-racialisation of the industry.

Due to the profoundly negative implications of S@S for reclaimers in Johannesburg, they understood that S@S and integration could not be addressed independently and that their SoS system should be the basis for S@S. ARO was resolute that integration required payment for the services provided by reclaimers. It believed that cultivating relationships with residents was central to integration that went beyond simply collecting recyclables to include social, political, and economic transformation. Street reclaimers in Metsimaholo similarly upheld that forging strong relations with residents was crucial if they were to maintain their existing level of informal integration in the face of S@S by the ID cooperative at the VPRC. Reclaimers in both municipalities understood that integration must include the strengthening of their organisations, the transparent allocation of sufficient funds for integration, and the completion of pilots and projects within specific timeframes.

8.6 Contesting, negotiating, and forging integration

Rather than passively accepting municipal approaches to integration, reclaimers in both Johannesburg and Metsimaholo contested, negotiated, and forged their own versions of integration.

In the early 2000s, reclaimers in both municipalities protested municipal efforts to contract private companies to control reclamation at landfills. Reclaimers at Johannesburg's Marie Louise landfill stopped one contract in Johannesburg through court action (Samson, 2009, 2013). ARO's genesis was rooted in reclaimers' mobilisation against Pikitup's contracting of private companies to provide S@S services. After a successful march, the emerging organisation (then known as the Interim Johannesburg Reclaimers Forum) succeeded in halting the award of two contracts, and secured agreement from the Pikitup Managing Director to appoint a reclaimer-official task team to chart the way forward for integration.

The experience of the task team is instructive. Initially progress was made in developing a framework for reclaimer integration. In addition, EISD, Pikitup, and ARO launched a joint registration campaign that was highly successful due to ARO's active role, which generated confidence in the registration process amongst reclaimers. However, disagreements emerged, and the officials lacked

the seniority required to negotiate resolutions to key issues. As there was no dispute-resolution mechanism the Council simply imposed its positions, which led to another cycle of protests.

Organised reclaimers in both municipalities also forged their own forms of integration by partnering with other parties in the sector. As discussed above, reclaimers in Metsimaholo collaborated with industry to integrate themselves via the VPRC (eventually bringing in all levels of government), and in Johannesburg, ARO reclaimers integrated themselves by developing relationships with residents (and securing support from industry). Rather than imposing their own approaches to integration, municipalities have much to learn from how reclaimers are integrating themselves.

9 Residents' experiences of integration

Residents are often seen as passive recipients of official reclaimer integration and S@S programmes, who simply decide whether or not to participate. However, research in both Johannesburg and Metsimaholo found that residents were actively involved in forging S@S and integration on the ground as they made (explicit and implicit) decisions regarding how to relate to reclaimers and what to do with their recyclables.

9.1 Perceptions of reclaimers

Unaware that the same reclaimers moved between working at the landfill, in the streets, and at the VRPC, Vaal Park residents saw the reclaimers working in the three different locations as inherently different. In general, the more professional the work and the site were perceived to be, the more favourably residents viewed the reclaimers (Pholoto, 2018). In Johannesburg as well as Metsimaholo, the simple provision of uniforms and name tags to reclaimers improved residents' opinions of them and the ways they related to them. However, the provision of uniforms to project participants also led to a deterioration in residents' perception of the non-recipients, indicating the need to be as inclusive as possible in integration initiatives.

9.2 Resident approaches to S@S and reclaimer integration

In both Metsimaholo and Johannesburg, residents who lived in areas where S@S programmes were in place adopted a range of stances related to S@S and reclaimer integration (Kadyamadare, 2017; Ndlovu, 2017; Maema, 2017; Mahlase, 2017; Pholoto, 2018). Residents could be categorised into five broad groups: wasters, agnostics, enforcers, reclaimer integrators, and competitors (see Table 2).

Residents' decisions regarding what to do with their recyclables (and hence the category they fell into) were influenced by:

1. how they valued and related to reclaimers;
2. their understanding of reclaimers' existing role in the city's recycling system and beliefs about the role that reclaimers should play;
3. the type of economic contribution they thought S@S programmes should make (generating profit for private companies, preserving and improving the incomes and working conditions of reclaimers, or increasing their own incomes);
4. whether they saw S@S simply as a waste-related service or as a social, political, developmental, and environmental issue connected to the type of neighbourhood and city they wanted to live in.

Table 2 – Residents’ approaches to S@S programmes

Type	Characteristics	Quotes
Wasters	Wasters did not see the value in recycling, did not separate materials, and did not want reclaimers to go through their bins.	<i>“Honestly, I wasn’t happy with the fact that they would open my bin and leave everything scattered, so I ended up chasing them...your garbage is something you feel quite sensitive about...when someone exposes what you threw in there to your neighbours its quite embarrassing” (Vaal Park resident, 02/10/2017; cited in Pholoto, 2018: 79).</i>
Agnostics	Agnostics were not concerned about whether the company/cooperative or independent reclaimers salvaged their separated recyclables. If they did not separate, they were not opposed to reclaimers salvaging materials from their bins.	<i>“I just feel pity for them [street reclaimers] because I know what they want and it’s so sad looking at them going through other people’s garbage while I have sorted things already [for the VPRC]. So I just call them and give them” (Vaal Park resident, 04/10/2017; cited in Pholoto, 2018: 81)</i>
Enforcers	Enforcers actively prevented reclaimers from accessing recyclables through harassment, verbal and physical intimidation, force, and use of security guards and police.	<i>“Do not touch that! Pikitup gave it to me and I am standing here to make sure that no one touches that bag” (Resident in Johannesburg; cited in Maema, 2017: 29).</i>
Reclaimer Integrators	Reclaimer integrators chose to give their materials to reclaimers as they had pre-existing relations, preferred to support reclaimers to earn a living rather than a private company to make profits, and/or wanted a more inclusive neighbourhood and different kind of development in the municipality. Reclaimer integrators also frequently separated re-usable materials for reclaimers. In Johannesburg some collaborated with ARO to develop resident-reclaimer S@S programmes.	<i>“I do separate waste in my yard, but I do it to give to the reclaimers, because we have reclaimers in this community and I know that they are working to support their families ... I will never separate for Pikitup because they already have money” (Resident in Orange Farm, 01/08/2016; cited in Ndlovu, 2016: 39).</i> <i>“Through this partnership we created an opportunity for residents to acknowledge, thank, and get to know reclaimers who play an important role in our society. Previously, residents tended to ignore or harass reclaimers. Now residents greet reclaimers, separate materials for them, provide refreshments, and take time to learn more about their work and their personal stories. Building these relationships is helping to create the social cohesion we need in our country” (Resident in Bordeaux, 18/02/2020).</i>
Competitors	Residents in low-income areas often did not give materials to either the S@S programme or reclaimers as they sold the materials themselves.	<i>“It [S@S] won’t work. We are poor. What we can recycle we sell for ourselves” (Resident in Newlands, 03/11/2016; cited in Kadyamadare, 2017: 18).</i>

10 Key findings and recommendations

This section presents the key findings that emerge from this research report. Although the findings are based on experiences of integration in Metsimaholo and Johannesburg, they generate insights and recommendations that can be of value in the development and implementation of reclaimer integration initiatives elsewhere.

10.1 Understanding and forging integration

Reclaimers were already integrated via their SoS system

Reclaimer integration is typically predicated on the assumption that reclaimers have been functioning outside of the municipal solid waste management system and recycling economy, and that integration is necessary to bring them in. However, reclaimers had created an effective separation outside source (SoS) system through which they were already deeply integrated into both systems. Integration is not about bringing reclaimers into service delivery and the recycling value chain; it is about integrating reclaimers and the SoS system into how we understand and intervene in the recycling economy.

Charity approach to integration

International literature identifies the existence of a range of different approaches to integration stretching from traditional development models to emancipatory approaches that situate reclaimer integration as part of processes of broader social, political, economic, and environmental transformation (Chikarmane, 2012; Gutberlet, 2008; Samson, forthcoming; Velis et al., 2014). The research in Johannesburg and Metsimaholo identified that the two municipalities, Sasol, and (to a somewhat lesser extent) industry worked within a ‘charity approach’ to reclaimer integration predicated on the following assumptions:

1. Reclaimers are poor, marginalised people who require charitable support (rather than payment for service provision).
2. Reclaimers should be integrated via special projects (rather than systemic interventions).
3. Reclaimers perform simple, manual labour and do not possess knowledge relevant to official recycling programmes.
4. Reclaimers should not be involved in decision-making regarding their own integration or separation at source.
5. Officials and professionals know best how reclaimers should be integrated and how to implement integration and separation at source.
6. Reclaimers should be compliant, appreciative participants in integration projects designed for them by officials and professionals.

The charity model had profoundly negative implications for reclaimers. Reclaimers felt infantilised, denigrated, and disrespected. Projects were designed as isolated, piecemeal initiatives and had little prospect of fostering lasting positive changes for reclaimers. As reclaimers were not involved in decision-making, integration and empowerment projects did not necessarily focus on reclaimers’ highest priorities. The content and facilitation of training programmes, equipment provided, and pilots were not sufficiently tailored for reclaimers. When reclaimers identified key problems these frequently remained unaddressed, and their ideas and proposals for different approaches to integration were not considered. At least one integration pilot led to the deterioration of reclaimers’ incomes, working conditions, and position in the recycling value chain.

Meaningful integration requires explicit rejection of the charity model and the development of a new approach rooted in respect for, and appreciation of reclaimers; recognition that reclaimers have crucial insights into recycling, S@S, and their own integration; and agreement that decisions related to integration and recycling must be collaboratively developed and negotiated with reclaimers. Some key first steps for municipalities and industry pursuing integration include establishing relationships with reclaimers and their organisations, agreeing on a process to collectively develop integration policies and programmes, and establishing decision-making bodies that include dispute resolution mechanisms so as to ensure that disagreements are not put to rest by municipalities and industry imposing their will.

Devaluation and exploitation of reclaimers' services

Reclaimers were the primary collectors of post-consumer recyclables in both municipalities. If they had stopped their salvaging work, costly landfill airspace would have disappeared at an increasing rate, the municipalities would have spent more on labour and transportation to collect waste, and inputs for the recycling industry would plummet. Yet, unlike private companies contracted by Pikitup in Johannesburg, reclaimers were not paid for providing this service. Both the recycling value chain and diversion of waste from landfill were predicated on the assumption that poor, black reclaimers would continue to subsidise industry and municipalities by providing a free collection service. The forging of a circular or de-growth economy¹⁸ cannot be dependent on this continued exploitation. It is essential that municipalities and industries commit to paying reclaimers and to developing mechanisms to pay both cooperatives and individual reclaimers.

Erasure of the profession

Reclaimers had created their own green jobs and developed knowledge and skills required to revalue wasted recyclables. However, the municipalities ignored reclaimers' place in the sector and profession, and prioritised unemployed community members for participation in their official recycling programmes. It is essential that all parties understand that reclaiming is a profession and that as reclaimers are already doing recycling work they must be prioritised in all new official programmes. As in Brazil (Dias, 2011b), the occupation must be officially registered, acknowledged, and valued, and reclaimers must be remunerated for the services provided and paid a fair price for the sale of their materials.

Reclaimer integration must benefit reclaimers

Somewhat surprisingly, the research identified the need to emphasise that as integration of reclaimers is central to reclaimer integration, reclaimers must want to be integrated in the proposed manner and benefit from it. Integration projects that worsen reclaimers' incomes, working conditions, position in the value chain, and/or place in society must not be pursued. In order to ensure that integration is desirable to reclaimers they must play the leading role in defining integration and developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising integration initiatives. Improvements for reclaimers can only be identified once their current work in SoS and what they value about it are understood. Mechanisms must be put in place to evaluate the effects of integration initiatives and revise programmes and pilots as necessary.

¹⁸ Government advocates a 'circular economy'. However, current levels of production and consumption are unsustainable, and it is crucial that we shift towards a de-growth economy that is just, inclusive, and fundamentally transformed (Hickell, 2019).

Cooperatives and beyond

The research identified two paradoxes related to the role of cooperatives in integration. First, the municipalities upheld cooperatives as the only route to integration, yet the majority of reclaimers did not want to join cooperatives. The route to integration therefore mitigated against the achievement of integration. Second, although reclaimers were required to form cooperatives in order to be integrated, they received inadequate support and unrealistic expectations were placed on the cooperatives to be fully independent within short periods of time (one year in Johannesburg).

Moving forward, it is essential that municipalities, industry, and reclaimer organisations develop routes to integration other than cooperatives. It is equally important that reclaimers who choose to form cooperatives receive the support required for the cooperatives to thrive. The development and selection of modalities for integration must be based on the interests, needs, and aspirations of reclaimers in the relevant geographical area/industry, and reclaimers must play the leading role in prioritising which modalities to pursue.

Integrating all reclaimers – gender, space and nationality

The research in Johannesburg revealed profound differences and inequalities between women and men reclaimers. However, integration and empowerment projects did not take women's specific needs or interests into account, and therefore could not result in full integration for women. The projects also did not address landfill and street reclaimers' very different working conditions or the ways they were differently affected by S@S. The achievement of integration requires that all types of reclaimers be included. In order for this to happen, reclaimers from each group must play central roles in identifying their specific needs and developing ways in which these can be addressed in integration plans and processes. Integration must also include explicit initiatives to eliminate power relations between reclaimers.

Although EISD and Pikitup had previously registered cross-border reclaimers, by the end of the research period these reclaimers had been completely excluded from registration and all other official empowerment and integration initiatives in Johannesburg. However, excluding cross-border reclaimers did not make them stop reclaiming or leave the country. It simply meant that Pikitup and EISD did not have accurate data on the number of reclaimers working in the city, and that the successful implementation of their projects was undermined. Cross-border reclaimers remain central to the minimisation of waste to landfill and the functioning of the recycling economy in Johannesburg (as well as some other municipalities), and mechanisms must be developed for them to be officially integrated. This will require expert investigation into ways in which their status in the country can be regularised.

Power and the ongoing centrality of race

Relationships between reclaimers and representatives of both government and industry were steeped in decades of profoundly unequal power relations. However, this was not explicitly acknowledged or addressed in empowerment and integration initiatives. As a result, even in projects such as the VPRC in which industry committed to a partnership with ID, these historical power relations were perpetuated. Fundamentally, reclaimer integration is about transforming power relations between reclaimers and other players in the sector, as well as between aspects of the economy considered to be formal and informal. Creating equality between reclaimers and other parties requires providing reclaimers with the resources required to organise, deepen their knowledge and skills, meet with each to strategise and develop their positions, secure expert

support when they deem this necessary, and meaningfully engage other parties. Integration also requires explicit initiatives to address racism and racial hierarchies, and to develop mechanisms to deracialise the recycling industry that go beyond professionals to include reclaimers in all of levels of the value chain.

Informal approach to integrating 'informal' reclaimers

Ironically, while reclaimers and their SoS system were overlooked as they were deemed informal, there was a high level of informality in how the municipalities, Pikitup, Sasol, and industry sought to integrate reclaimers. The VPRC, Sasol offset project, and Robinson Deep pilot project were not guided by detailed proposals, implementation plans, financial sustainability plans, contracts between reclaimers and government/industry, dispute resolution mechanisms, or monitoring, evaluation, and revisions systems. This created space for the parties to develop very different expectations of the projects, have different analyses of problems, and different proposed solutions. Precisely because integrating an aspect of the economy considered to be informal into policy is new terrain, it is even more important that policy be comprehensive and unambiguous, and that even greater emphasis be placed on thorough, highly professional, and transparent planning and implementation of integration. It is also crucial that integration be institutionalised in corporate business plans, KPIs, and municipal IDPs and IMWPs.

10.2 Separation at source and reclaimer (dis)-integration

S@S dis-integrated and dispossessed reclaimers

As the Pikitup S@S programmes did not take the existing SoS system into account, they led to significant deteriorations in street reclaimers' access to materials, incomes, working conditions, and relationships with a significant section of residents. These S@S programmes were therefore large-scale 'reclaimer dis-integration' programmes that dispossessed reclaimers and weakened their integration into the solid waste management system, recycling value chain, and the communities where they worked.

The S@S programmes also had negative consequences for the contracted companies as they collected and sold fewer materials than anticipated. In Johannesburg, the municipality overspent on S@S as the companies were paid a flat fee per household, even if reclaimers collected the materials or the residents did not separate any materials at all. In addition, overlooking SoS meant that Pikitup did not obtain accurate statistics on quantities diverted from the landfills.

The research highlighted that locally appropriate, effective S@S and recycling programmes must start with comprehensive analysis of the entire existing waste management and recycling systems, understand how recyclables are currently salvaged and collected, build from what exists, and take all possible negative effects into account. New, formally planned S@S programmes must be integrated with the existing SoS system, rather than individual reclaimers being integrated into a wholly new S@S system.

S@S overwhelmed and negated integration and empowerment projects

As S@S in Johannesburg was a systemic intervention it overwhelmed the small, stand-alone projects intended to empower and integrate reclaimers. The profoundly negative consequences of dis-integration due to S@S therefore outweighed the few positive benefits of integration and empowerment initiatives for participants. There is little point in implementing integration projects if reclaimers are being dis-integrated and dispossessed by S@S.

S@S and integration are inextricably linked

In Johannesburg, as at the national level, separation at source and reclaimer integration were seen as separate policy spheres, and separation at source was prioritised over integration. Reclaimers were only considered after the decision had been taken to appoint community cooperatives and private companies as service providers. However, the research clearly revealed that S@S and integration are inextricably linked and cannot be addressed in isolation from each other.

The benefits of ‘integrated S@S’

ARO’s reclaimer-resident S@S initiatives in Johannesburg demonstrated that S@S can promote, rather than counter, reclaimer integration. In addition to benefiting reclaimers, ‘integrated S@S’ has a number of positive attributes. Recognising reclaimers and supporting them to collect separated recyclables would enable municipalities and industries to quickly initiate S@S across the city and generate data that could be used to inform evidence-based decision-making. While separation of all materials at source is an agreed goal, it is notoriously difficult to secure resident participation. Unlike private companies and non-reclaimer cooperatives, reclaimers who provided S@S services in the reclaimer-resident collaborations continued to salvage materials from bins and directly engaged residents regarding which materials to separate and how this improved both reclaimers’ lives and the environment. Integrated S@S can therefore ensure that the greatest possible quantity of recyclables is diverted from landfills as we transition to full resident participation in S@S. The piloting of payment to individual reclaimers is establishing payment for services provided as an important principle, and will hopefully develop a payment mechanism that can be replicated in other locations.

The VPRC in Metshimaholo affirmed that provision of S@S services by a reclaimer cooperative can also be a successful form of integrated S@S. A key factor in the success of this initiative was that the cooperative had its own space, infrastructure, and equipment, and was able to aggregate and sell larger volumes of materials to buyers offering the best prices, rather than being forced to sell to a particular buyer as in Johannesburg. Although the ID cooperative’s efforts to mitigate the harm experienced by local street reclaimers due to their exclusion from S@S did not fully redress their dispossession, it revealed that it is possible to negotiate revisions to existing initiatives to address negative effects, and to draw lessons to avoid such effects in the future. This is something that must be pursued with respect to all existing recycling and integration programmes and initiatives. The ID’s success despite non-payment for the service provided is testament to the perseverance of the cooperative members. However, the financial challenges that they encountered also re-affirmed the importance of payment for collection services.

10.3 Municipalities, industry and residents

Support for municipalities and officials

Municipalities and municipal officials were in a difficult position in relation to integration. National government had placed integration on the agenda, and reclaimers in both municipalities mobilised around it. Yet national government had not established guidelines, dedicated funding, targets, training, or support programmes to assist the municipalities to operationalise this new responsibility. Integration fell outside officials’ areas of expertise and was not part of their KPIs, and they did not receive adequate funding for integration programmes and initiatives. Officials compensated for lack of resources and policies by creating their own de facto programmes and raising funds to support work with reclaimers. As the main point of interface with reclaimers, they

bore the brunt of reclaimer frustration with, and anger over municipal work on integration, yet they lacked the resources, time, and authority to make meaningful changes. In order for integration to succeed, national government and industry must work with reclaimers and municipalities to create adequately funded integration support programmes and provide officials with substantive guidance.

Industry and integration

This research project did not include a specific focus on industry. However, analysis of the VPRC centred on the relationship between the ID cooperative, PACSA, and producer responsibility organisations. The role of industry as a partner in the VPRC integration project has been discussed above. It is crucial to note that while the municipalities focused on reclaimer integration into the MSWM, reclaimers were equally concerned to secure and improve their integration into the recycling value chain and recycling industry in a manner that included support to collectively reach the upper tiers of the value chain. Industry also has a crucial role to play in funding integration and paying reclaimers as part of extended producer responsibility (EPR).

Residents actively forged reclaimer integration and S@S

Residents adopted a range of positions regarding what they wanted to do with their recyclables including: selling the recyclables themselves, giving their recyclable (and reusable) materials to reclaimers, actively preventing reclaimers from collecting their materials, preferring that their recyclables be disposed as trash, and being agnostic regarding whether their recyclables were collected or by whom. The residents' positions were linked to their perspectives on broader social, political, economic, and development issues. These findings indicate that simply educating residents on how to separate recyclables and why this is important for the environment is not sufficient to increase acceptance of, and participation in official S@S programmes. Residents must be engaged in the development of S@S policies and programmes and support the approach adopted. As part of this process it will be important for residents to learn more about who reclaimers are, why they work as reclaimers, the contributions that they make, why they must be paid for the services provided, and the need to value and appreciate reclaimers regardless of how they are dressed or where they work at that time.

10.4 Reclaimer organising and integration

Reclaimers were only able to create and offer integrated S@S services because they had formed democratic organisations through which they could develop positions and proposals, and negotiate and mobilise to achieve their visions. As observed in other countries (cf Chikarmane, 2012; Ezeah et al., 2013; Gunsilius, 2012; Gutberlet, 2008; Masood and Barlow, 2013; Velis et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2006), democratic reclaimer organisations are fundamental to reclaimer involvement in the development and implementation of integration programmes. South African municipalities, industry, and national government should follow the Brazilian example of supporting reclaimers to organise themselves (Dias, 2011a; Gutberlet, 2008), rather than waiting for organisations to emerge in opposition to exclusionary policies. In addition to the benefits for reclaimers, this would mitigate against: the implementation of inappropriate programmes; negative effects for reclaimers; and tensions between reclaimers and municipalities. It would also catalyse and facilitate progress towards meaningful integration.

10.5 The Integration Spectrum

This report established that reclaimers held positions on key aspects of integration that differed starkly from those of municipalities, their officials, industry, and the corporate partner in the public-private partnership. These differences underpinned the central challenges and problems related to integration in the two municipalities. Table 3 presents a spectrum of positions that can be adopted on key aspects of integration identified through the research.

By locating each position along a spectrum this approach highlights that rather than being neutral or technical, the design of integration initiatives is always based on political choices. Making the positions taken explicit facilitates: transparent engagement between all parties on the approach to integration; deeper understanding of the issues at stake; awareness of the implications and possible effects of each position; and development of agreed, appropriate integration interventions. Prior to agreeing on concrete policies and programmes, it is important that reclaimers and other parties negotiate agreements on the positions on each aspect of integration.

Table 3 – Integration Spectrum

Aspect of integration	Bottom of spectrum	Top of spectrum
How reclaimers are seen	Marginal, need help	Knowledgeable experts, make important contributions
Position on SoS	Not acknowledged	Foundation for integration & S@S
Claim to work on the sector	No claim, preference for unemployed community members	Right to continue working in the sector + first opportunities
Who/what is being integrated	Individual reclaimers	Reclaimers, their organisations, SoS
Integrated with what	MSWM system	Transformed MSWM system, value chain, society, environment
Direction of integration	Reclaimers into MSWM	Official S@S and recycling based on and integrated with SoS
Modality of integration	Coops	Coops, individuals, other relevant modalities
Relationship of S@S & integration	Discrete, S@S prioritised	Inherently connected, addressed together
Exploitation	Reclaimers provide free collection service	Reclaimers paid for service & receive benefits
Who benefits	Assume reclaimers benefit from any initiative	Reclaimers improved income, benefits, conditions & status (+ municipalities save landfill space and meet social and economic goals; industry EPR + steady flow of materials; society)
Position in value chain	Collectors (possibly BBC)	All levels of a transformed industry
Difference and inequalities between reclaimers	Reclaimers treated as homogeneous	Differences based on gender, nationality, location etc identified and addressed so all are integrated
Role of residents	Expected to sort recyclables	Actively involved in integration
Power and control over integration	Top-down as charity	Participatory, negotiated and driven by reclaimers
Institutionalisation	Initiatives are ad hoc and informal	Included in laws, polices, Plans (IDP, IMWP etc) bylaws, EPR etc
Spheres of integration	Work related interventions (tools etc.)	Political, legal, social, cultural, financial and institutional spheres
Funding	None	EPR (+ government and donors)
Timeline	None	Clear targets and time-frames
Organising	Not related to integration	Support for autonomous, democratic organising central to integration
Relation to environment	Produce recyclables so reclaimers keep jobs	Reclaimers forge and integrated into just, de-growth economy
Objective and extent of integration	Integration of work into MSWM system	Just and emancipatory transformation of social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural spheres

11 Conclusions

This report synthesised and analysed research on reclaimer integration in Johannesburg and Metsimaholo. Other municipalities have had different experiences and it is important that more studies be conducted to document and learn from them. While the findings of this study cannot be generalised, the key insights and concepts presented can assist in re-thinking integration so that it can achieve its full, multi-faceted, transformative potential.

The research established that reclaimer integration is not a special project to provide assistance to poor people working at the margins of the recycling economy. Instead, it is about transforming how we understand the recycling economy by seeing, understanding, and valuing the central role played by reclaimers and their SoS system.

A locally appropriate, highly functional, just system to revalue trashed materials must be integrated with, and build from the SoS system. This is dependent on learning from and negotiating with reclaimers regarding its design and implementation, as well as paying reclaimers for the services they provide.

Reclaimer integration highlights that the recycling economy is an integrated whole, and that unless we adopt integrated S@S and integrated approaches to all recycling initiatives, new official programmes will result in large-scale reclaimer dis-integration and dispossession. They will also fail to meet their own targets and objectives, as reclaimers support themselves and their families by collecting recyclables and so will have little option but to continue to do so. The identification and rectification of harm generated by existing programmes is a crucial component of reclaimer integration, as is the generation of data to inform decisions related to integration, S@S, and recycling more broadly.

A coordinated and integrated approach is required to design and implement reclaimer integration. Municipalities need an enabling environment and support from other levels of government and industry. Reclaimers already play a critical role in providing inputs into the recycling industry. This role will assume greater importance with the introduction of EPR. It is essential that industry pays reclaimers for their collection service. Paying reclaimers higher service fees for materials that are wasted due to low prices could dramatically improve diversion rates. Commitment to 'integrated EPR' will be central to both reclaimer integration and the achievement of EPR goals.

The transformation of power relations is central to reclaimer integration. These include relations between reclaimers and other parties in the sector; reclaimers themselves; and the so-called 'formal' and 'informal' parts of the economy. If these existing inequalities are not explicitly addressed they will be reproduced and preclude meaningful integration.

It is particularly important that women reclaimers play a lead in identifying their specific needs and priorities; that a commitment to forging gender equity informs the overall form and content of integration; and that efforts are made to ensure that women reclaimers are fully integrated. Explicit initiatives must be undertaken to address the harassment, exploitation, maltreatment, and spatial exclusion of reclaimers rooted in race and class discrimination. Deracialising the recycling industry in a way that facilitates reclaimers' collective advancement in the value chain and transforms the nature of the industry itself is also a crucial component of integration.

An additional inequality relates to the almost exclusive focus on recycling and exclusion of re-use and remake in literature on reclaimer integration, including the Lessons from Waste Picker Integration Initiatives research and this report. The report does, however, identify that reclaimers are involved in re-use and remake and that this makes important contributions to waste minimisation and diversion. It is crucial that future research and policy integrates re-use and remake into discussions on reclaimer integration.

The integration spectrum highlights that decisions related to integration, S@S, and recycling more generally are neither technical nor neutral. It is essential that positions on the integration spectrum are negotiated with reclaimers, and that these discussions are informed by relevant data. A key starting point is to reach agreement on answers to the questions: “Who/what is being integrated into what, why, how, when, by whom, and in whose interest?” Such explicit discussion will ensure that all parties understand the choices that exist and how different options support and/or undermine the achievement of broader goals.

Positions on the relationship between reclaimer integration and the environmental crisis were curiously absent from discussion about, and implementation of, the five forms of integration analysed in this report. There is a need for explicit discussion on this issue within all levels of government, industry, and reclaimer organisations. It is important to note that a commitment to reclaimer integration does not mean that we must perpetuate environmentally destructive forms of production and consumption so that reclaimers continue to have materials to collect. Instead, by insisting that we develop a holistic analysis of the current recycling system, reclaimer integration ensures that the invisible, exploited people who are pivotal to its success are acknowledged, remunerated, and recognised as needing to play a central role in the collective envisioning and forging of a just de-growth economy, polity, society, and environment in which they play important, valued, transformed roles.

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Appendix A – Some typical interventions to promote reclaimer integration

- registration of reclaimers
- provision of equipment (trolleys, trucks, baling machines etc.)
- provision of space for sorting and storing materials
- provision of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- provision of infrastructure (materials recovery facilities, warehouses, recycling centres etc)
- training and provision of training facilities
- education and training for officials
- education campaigns for residents on who reclaimers are, the contributions they make, and how to support them
- activities to build trust
- commitment to respecting reclaimers and engaging reclaimers as equals
- creation of participatory structures and agreed processes to develop and implement integration
- recognition that integration requires economic, social, legal, cultural, and technical interventions and transformation
- transparency and accountability of government officials and industry
- recognition of reclaimers as experts on the sector and their own needs
- support for the formation of cooperatives
- funding and support for reclaimer organising
- political education
- programmes to empower women reclaimers and create gender equity in the sector
- securing reclaimers' social, economic, and political rights
- recognition of reclaimers
- establishment of participatory processes and structures
- funding for municipalities and reclaimer organisations
- pilot projects
- development of enabling policy and legislation
- legal granting of first right to access recyclables and receive contracts to reclaimers
- recognition of reclaiming as a professions and creation of an occupational classification
- campaigns to end stigmatisation and create respect for reclaimers and their contributions
- payment to reclaimers by industry and/or local government for services provided and/or environmental contributions
- initiatives to strengthen relationships with residents
- creation of partnerships with industries
- formal contracts/memorandums of understanding with municipalities and industries
- inclusion of reclaimer integration as a key component of extended producer responsibility (EPR)
- provision of social benefits and health care
- provision of health care
- transformation of the value chain (supporting reclaimers to move up the value chain, deracialising the value chain).

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