



Green Jobs for Youth in Africa's Plastic Waste Recycling Sector: Executive Summary

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This insight paper is the result of a collaborative project by the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment and The INCLUDE Knowledge Platform into the role of green jobs in the future of work for youth in Africa.

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Executive Summary

Waste pollution in Africa is rapidly increasing and poses significant challenges to both the environment and the population. Over the last two decades, the volume of plastic waste has doubled, and projections indicate that within the next decade, approximately 165 million tonnes of plastic reach the end of its usefulness in African countries. The majority— 90% —of waste management in Africa is handled by informal workers, often working under indecent and insecure conditions. This compounds the existing challenges within Africa's waste management sector, characterized by weak organizational structures, inadequate budgets, a lack of necessary skills, weak legislation, conflicts, and political instability.

The emergence of technological and digital innovations in waste recycling is widely celebrated as a promising solution, poised to act as a catalyst for green jobs for Africa's youth. This not only promises to address the continent's pressing waste management challenges but also seeks to generate economic value from plastic waste at the local level. It aligns with the wider aspiration for a green and circular economy that provides decent employment opportunities for Africa's unemployed youth. However, a significant gap exists in empirical evidence demonstrating how these innovative solutions contribute to green jobs and what is required to overcome existing barriers and harness the potential drivers in the waste recycling sector. Therefore, the collaborative research partnership between the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform and the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) seeks to answer the question: **What are the promising pathways for green jobs for youth in Africa's Waste Recycling Sector?**

Starting this endeavor with a literature review, this report describes the multifaceted barriers and drivers to green job creation. Africa's waste recycling sector deals with weak support structures for scaling innovative recycling initiatives and the enduring social stigma and discrimination against waste pickers, significantly hindering their job decency and economic prospects. Encouragingly, waste pickers are increasingly acknowledged for their invaluable role in mitigating waste pollution while also securing economic livelihoods. The rising awareness of waste recycling's potential is furthermore fostering a more supportive environment, marked by promising policies and collaborative partnerships.

The primary research focus comprised two case studies examining pioneering social recycling enterprises within the CFYE portfolio in Kenya— **Mr. Green Africa** and **TakaTaka Solutions**. These case studies facilitated the identification of effective strategies employed by innovative recyclers to surmount barriers and create green jobs for youth in plastic waste recycling. To bolster and confirm these findings, the research team conducted a validation session with CFYE's Country Leads and Implementing Partners across Africa, broadening the insights beyond the Kenyan context.

The case studies presented an opportunity to bridge another knowledge gap. While existing research rightfully acknowledges the pivotal role of waste pickers and thoroughly examines the economic prospects and working conditions within the informal waste sector, it does not fully highlight the array of potential job opportunities for youth across the plastic waste recycling value chain.

This report shines a light on opportunities in waste recycling beyond the informal sector, ranging from roles in waste collection to skilled positions within manufacturing industries. It underscores the untapped potential for green jobs, calling for deeper exploration in research and programming efforts to harness these promising avenues.

In conclusion, this research unveils four promising and interconnected pathways essential for fostering green jobs for youth within Africa's Plastic Waste Recycling Sector. Green Finance, Green Innovation, Green Awareness, and Green Sector Alignment stand as pivotal avenues identified in this study. The report provides in-depth insights into these pathways and offers corresponding recommendations tailored for policymakers and practitioners. This is captured in 5 key messages for the promotion of green jobs for youth in Africa's waste recycling sector.

Key Message #1

Improving finance and funding channels for innovative solutions and scalability is crucial in establishing viable business models that ensure fair wages for waste workers.

Overcoming challenges such as price volatility of plastic and high competition for quality products in waste management necessitates a blend of short-term investments and long-term financing mechanisms for recycling initiatives. This approach supports initiatives in scaling and improving their infrastructure and efficiency necessary to maximize profits and increase the potential for creating green jobs beyond just income sources.

Key Message #2

Driving innovative solutions and technical skills augmentation is vital for effective waste recycling.

Technological innovation in plastic waste recycling can contribute to improved and more effective infrastructure for recycling different types of waste, contributing to more employment opportunities. Innovative approaches in companies' engagement with their direct and indirect employees, like piloting social support structures for informal workers, can enhance work quality for waste workers. Challenges like weak legislation and inadequate technical skills hinder innovation's potential. Therefore, collaboration with mentors and experts for informed technology decisions and technical training for employees is key, enabling the adoption of new technological and social innovations.

Key Message #3

Widespread awareness about the positive environmental, social and economic impact of waste recycling is crucial for unlocking green job potential.

A lack of understanding and social stigma surrounding recycling-related jobs still pose significant barriers to decent job creation. Insufficient awareness among the government and private sector leads to limited financial prospects and low involvement in the sector. Strategic media campaigns can destigmatize waste collection, while partnerships with organizations and advocacy efforts are important to create awareness among communities and government officials.

Key Message #4

Creating an efficient, aligned, and fair recycling ecosystem necessitates a sector-wide acknowledgment and inclusion of the rights, duties, and competencies of all involved stakeholders across various levels, with specific emphasis on youth and informal waste workers.

It is crucial that all relevant stakeholders acknowledge the rights, responsibilities, and capabilities of every actor involved in waste recycling, particularly recognizing the invaluable contributions of waste workers. Engaging young individuals, informal waste collectors, and other affected communities in finding solutions is essential. NGOs and waste picker associations hold a significant role in advocating for the needs of informal and marginalized waste workers.

Key Message #5

Collaboration among stakeholders and policy alignment is crucial to move beyond isolated efforts and collectively foster green jobs for youth in waste recycling.

Aligned efforts, policies and strategies among various ecosystem actors are essential in overcoming existing barriers for effective recycling and promoting decent employment. This alignment reinforces the interdependence of finance, innovation, and awareness, showcasing how they mutually complement each other. It emphasizes the interconnected and collaborative nature necessary for advancing green jobs in plastic waste recycling.

Figure 1. Green Job Pathways in Plastic Waste Recycling



About INCLUDE:

INCLUDE is an independent knowledge platform initiated by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012, to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and effective policies. The platform is made up of researchers, development practitioners and policymakers, promoting evidence-based policymaking on inclusive development, with a focus on Africa.

About CFYE:

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment is a 7-year programme funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and managed by Palladium, VSO Nederland and Randstad. The Fund aims to create a prosperous future for 230,000 young women and men in the Middle East, North Africa, Sahel & West Africa and Horn of Africa. This will be achieved by supporting youth employment initiatives in these regions. There is a key role for private sector in achieving this goal. Initiatives will offer youth, particularly young women, opportunities for decent work that delivers better prospects for personal development, is productive, and offers a stable income, social protection and safe working conditions.