

World Bank and Government of Ghana begin closure of Kpone landfill leaving workers without livelihood alternatives or compensation

September 4, 2020 (Accra, Ghana) - Hundreds of waste pickers whose livelihoods rely on access to recyclable materials are calling on the Government of Ghana and the World Bank to halt the decommissioning of the Kpone landfill in Accra and to initiate negotiations on adequate livelihood alternatives off the dumpsite.

“This is the work I am doing to feed my children, my mother and my brothers,” says Grace Avemegah, a waste picker in her mid-40s who works at Kpone. “Our goal is to move forward. The government should help us. If they close the site, it will make our financial problems more difficult.”

Grace is one of over 300 waste pickers who survive and support their families by recycling waste in the Kpone landfill. She is now confronting the sudden decommissioning of the landfill where she has worked for years, without proper consultation with the waste pickers. The Government of Ghana had previously assured the waste pickers that they would not be displaced without appropriate alternative ways to earn their income. The disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis, however, appears to have presented an opportunity to move quickly, without the necessary livelihood protections that global experts call for when dumpsites are closed, and which are required under World Bank standards and Ghanaian law. In the middle of a pandemic, waste pickers now face more hardship: displacement from their workplace and source of income.

Waste picking: a crucial role in solid waste management systems

The implications of closure go beyond the individual livelihoods of the waste pickers. These workers provide important environmental and sanitation services. “We recover almost 60 per cent of the waste that is brought here. The materials that we pick are recycled and reused,” explains Johnson Doe, president of the Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association. “We want the government to know we are also helping the economy. The informal workers are part of the waste management system.”

In 2019, the Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association prevented the emission of 24,371 tons of eCO₂ by extracting 127.5 tons of plastic, 642.3 tons of metal and 17.25 tons of textiles from the landfill. This recyclable material is sold to be reused in the manufacture of new products. Vital contributors to their community's waste management system, the waste pickers reduce pressure on the landfill. Also, recycling is a significant contributor to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and lessens the strain on virgin resources, such as trees.

According to WIEGO's Focal City Accra team, the initiation of decommissioning the Kpone landfill lacks transparency and does not follow the proper processes for landfill closures. Specifically, the Government of Ghana has never prepared an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) that includes informed consultation from the waste pickers or tries to minimize the effects of closing the landfill on their livelihoods. This violates Ghanaian law on ESIA's. and it also falls short of the Operational Policies and Environmental and Social Standards of the World Bank, whose Greater Accra Resilient

and Integrated Development (GARID) project includes the decommissioning of the landfill. The World Bank is mandated to ensure that anyone who is economically displaced by a Bank-supported project will not be harmed by the displacement and will benefit from a livelihoods restoration plan and transitional assistance.

The World Bank and Ghana's Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources must halt the decommissioning of the landfill until an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment - has been properly undertaken and completed, including an alternative livelihoods negotiation with waste pickers.

Building alternative livelihoods

While open dumps pose environmental and health risks, WIEGO's experts have long stressed that any dump closure must assess and address the impact on waste pickers' livelihoods, through a [livelihood plan](#). Any removal of waste pickers' activities should be replaced with "another of at least equal value to waste pickers," says Brazil's Sonia Dias, a global authority on the subject. "And waste pickers must be involved as equal partners in all phases of planning and implementation."

A draft environmental audit prepared by the World Bank recognizes the waste pickers and the need for a plan to preserve and restore their livelihoods.

Ghana claims to want to include job creation and social inclusion as part of its waste management policies. The Ghana National Plastic Action Partnership initiative, led by the Ministry of Environment, Science Technology and Innovation, calls for "the creation of jobs, especially for the most vulnerable segments of Ghanaian society, and a strong and vibrant integration of the informal sector within the plastics value chain."

Waste pickers in Kpone have started scoping alternative livelihood collection in communities, including door-to-door collection of recyclables. They want the Government of Ghana to help them secure waste management contracts, finance and infrastructure, which will enable them to operate as an independent cooperative along the waste value chain.

The Kpone waste pickers also demand transparency from the government in all plans and processes to close, change or construct landfills, including the disclosure of due diligence reports and funding sources.

About the Kpone Waste Pickers Landfill Association: Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association is a membership-based organisation of informal waste pickers working on the Kpone Landfill Site and its environs in Accra. The association currently has a membership of over 300 women and men informal waste pickers who are involved in the collection of recyclable waste materials including plastics, e-waste, metals, and paper. Though recycling, the members of the Kpone Waste Pickers Landfill Association contribute to climate change mitigation and improved recycling rates.

About ACA: Advocates for Community Alternatives (ACA) is a U.S. and Ghana-based non-profit organization that puts legal and organizing tools in the hands of threatened West African communities. We are building an ecosystem of lawyers and other experts who collaborate with communities to defend communities' rights and pursue their own vision of development in the face of destructive resource extraction operations driven by foreign investment. We help mobilize communities to define for themselves a vision for the future that is appropriate for them. And we help them fight for and reach that future through community-driven development planning, financial support, and legal assistance. Visit advocatesforalternatives.org for more information.

About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities, rights, protection and voice. WIEGO promotes change by improving statistics and expanding knowledge on the informal economy, building networks and capacity among informal worker organizations and, jointly with the networks and organizations, influencing local, national and international policies. Visit www.wiego.org for more information.