

Concept Note

Challenges of municipal solid waste management (MSWM): Learning from post-crisis governance initiatives in South Asia

The goal of this project is to identify, analyze and promote political and sociocultural processes that are necessary to enable the functioning of MSWM systems and to assess the opportunities in MSWM governance to strengthen horizontal and downward accountability in combination with localizing the material waste chain and rendering it more circular. To reach this aim, recent post-crisis governance initiatives in Kerala, Sri Lanka and Nepal are systematically examined.

University of Lausanne, Switzerland is the principal partner of the project while the Department of Sociology; University of Colombo, JANATHAKSHANA, Bombay Institute of Information Technology, Center for Environment and Development; Kerala, Center for Contemporary Studies and the Centre for Integrated Urban Development, Nepal are the other partners of the project. The Swiss National Science Foundation funds the project.

The study areas in Sri Lanka are the Dehiwala-Mt.Lavinia Municipal Council area and the Boralesgamuwa Urban Council area. The project studies the MSWM architecture in the selected locations after the 2017 Meethotamulla disaster. Different SWM initiatives will be examined with a focus on political and sociocultural processes and will be evaluated in terms of their replicability in different contexts and their potential for scaling-up. In this way, the project aims to contribute to global sustainable development, with a focus on its social and environmental dimensions.

The general objectives of the project include:

1. To analyze the institutional architecture of waste governance, the waste chain and related socially differentiated labor practices, and accompanying discourses on waste and waste-work in three cities in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Kerala. Particular attention will be paid to selected, recent post-crisis SWM initiatives that created stronger horizontal and downward accountability and localized waste cycles and to the political and sociocultural processes at the household (including gender), neighborhood and municipal levels that facilitated their development.

2. To facilitate mutual learning through horizontal South-South partnerships between local authorities, civil society actors and researchers across South Asia and through the organization of exchange visits and the development of policy briefs, video logs and YouTube clips. The project will provide evidence to policymakers, practitioners, profit and non-profit organizations about alternative MSWM practices and systems, which have evolved endogenously in the wake of crises, and their appropriateness, feasibility and acceptability in particular political and sociocultural contexts. In turn this will stimulate the discussion, the co-design and the experimentation of new MSWM approaches including those that imply stronger horizontal and downward accountability structures and more localized waste cycles.

3. To assess the potential for replicability and scaling-up of successful governance initiatives in order to promote environmentally sustainable, livelihood-oriented, gender sensitive, politically and socially appropriate, feasible and acceptable MSWM systems with circular waste chains and economies based on the knowledge created on post-crisis SWM initiatives.

Project Team



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