



# Quality of Life and Alliances in Solid Waste Management

## Contributions to Urban Sustainable Development

Isa Baud\*, Stelios Grafakos, Michaela Hordijk and Johan Post

*Department of Geography and Planning, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130, 1018 VZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

This paper examines the contributions that new alliances in urban solid waste management (SWM) systems can make to the quality of life by improving effective provision of this urban basic service, based on case studies of three multi-million cities in developing countries: Chennai, India; Manila, Philippines; and Lima, Peru. It starts with a systematic examination of the main types of alliances formed around SWM activities (including formal collection, transportation and disposal as well as informal collection, trade, re-use and recycling). These include public–private, public–community, community–private and private–private alliances. The main conclusion is that local authorities work together with large enterprises and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but refuse to deal directly with the informal trade and recycling enterprises which recover large fractions of waste – linking to them only through NGO or community-based organisation (CBO) mediation. It goes on to examine the contributions different alliances can make to sustainable development in cities, utilising the multiple goals of sustainable development as developed by Satterthwaite in 1997 (*Urban Studies* 34 (1997) 1667). Using a nine-point indicator system, it shows that current contributions of alliances between local authorities and large enterprises lie mainly in the area of improved disposal, cleaner neighbourhoods and financial viability. In contrast, alliances between local authorities, NGOs or CBOs and through them informal trade and recycling enterprises contribute more heavily to financial viability, employment, and cleaner urban neighbourhoods, as well as greater re-use and recycling of waste fractions. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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### Introduction

Research on urban solid waste management (SWM) in developing countries has developed from two main concerns: the concern for public sector reform (including privatisation issues), and the concern for sustainable development in the urban context.<sup>1</sup> The

latter is associated particularly with a focus on quality of life (QOL) aspects.

The first category of studies is closely connected to the neo-liberal doctrine proclaiming a resurgence of the market and a reduction of state control. The structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s included as crucial items curtailing of government bureaucracies and cutting of public expenditure. The strong push for privatisation initiated then still has strong effects on policy discussions about delivery of urban services.

Private sector involvement in service provision raises issues of public interest and acceptability. Governments must still ensure appropriate standards, achieve co-ordinated provision, provide a competitive environment, avoid monopoly control of essential services by non-accountable private providers, and mini-

\*Corresponding author. Tel.: +31-20-525-4067; fax: +31-20-525-4051  
E-mail: i.s.a.baud@frw.uva.nl (I Baud); s.grafakos@frw.uva.nl (S Grafakos); m.a.hordijk@frw.uva.nl (M A Hordijk) and j.post@frw.uva.nl (J Post)

<sup>1</sup>While admitting that any dualistic divide has something artificial and fails to do full justice to the wide variety of positions, these two basic orientations nevertheless seem to be real. However, individual authors will not always explicitly admit to one of these orientations. Being categorised within one of the two literatures does not automatically mean compliance with the main tenets.

mise corruption and inequity (Rondinelli and Iacono, 1996; Burgess *et al*, 1997). Therefore, privatisation in service provision usually implies a public–private arrangement. In such situations the government retains some degree of power, while saving on costs, reducing political interference and red-tape, and lowering levels of coercion. SWM studies in this category include those by Bartone *et al*, (1991), Ali (1993), Fernandez (1993), Cointreau-Levine (1994), Lee (1997), and Post (1999).

Sustainable development is the second major source of inspiration for many analyses of SWM systems in the developing world. The 1992 Earth Summit brought environmental problems to the forefront of international policy debates. However, developing countries have made it abundantly clear that environmental policies should reflect their own priorities and not curtail their legitimate desire for economic growth. They have shifted the environmental focus from issues of natural resource depletion and resource management<sup>2</sup> to pollution issues (the so-called “brown agenda”), with a predominantly urban focus (UNCHS, 1996). The brown agenda is defined as

. . . the immediate and most critical environmental problems which incur the heaviest costs on current generations, particularly the urban poor in terms of poor health, low productivity and reduced income and quality of life: lack of safe drinking water, sanitation and drainage, inadequate solid and hazardous waste management, uncontrolled emissions from factories, cars and low grade domestic fuels, accidents linked to congestion and crowding, and the occupation of environmentally hazard-prone lands, as well as the interrelationships between these problems (Bartone *et al*, 1994: 10–11).

This focus on pollution problems carries implicitly a conception of sustainable development, which combines “meeting the needs of the present generation . . . without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (cf. Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 1996; Satterthwaite, 1997: 1681). Improvements to the natural environment are considered in conjunction with improvements in the quality of life in the urban habitat. SWM studies carried out within this framework usually deal with the contributions various actors can make to improve environmental performance as well as contribute to urban livelihood strategies. These include contributions by Furedy (1992, 1997), Pacheco (1992), Bose and Blore (1993), and Baud and Schenk (1994).

Both sets of literature share a preoccupation with relationships between actors. In the literature on privatisation of SWM, the analysis of public–private partnerships is given primary importance, and usually covers collection, transportation and disposal activi-

ties. Studies enlarge on failures in public servicing, and suggest different methods of privatisation for greater efficiency and effectiveness. The major concern is to evaluate the organisational and financial aspects of privatisation initiatives, and to assess the capacity of government departments and private contractors to perform their new roles.

Little attention is given to the potential of small-scale, private operators and community-based organisations (CBOs) removing solid waste informally from residential areas. Local authorities prefer to link up with formal enterprises. There is an emphasis on strong contractual arrangements, for which informal businesses and communities do not qualify. Although their potential is increasingly acknowledged, few governments have started to include them in their policies.

In the literature on SWM from the perspective of sustainable development, a larger range of investigated relationships is covered, including public–private, community–public and private–private arrangements. Although some studies relate to public sector activities, the majority focus on other activities within the SWM system – notably, separation of waste, and the productive use of waste. Focus is often on examples of informal economic activities and community initiatives. Studies deal not only with linkages laid down in (semi-)contractual arrangements, but also with small-scale business transactions<sup>3</sup> and the impact of official rules and regulations on private or communal undertakings. Finally, more effective provision of services to poor households and the safety and health aspects of activities within the SWM sector are given more importance (Huysman, 1994).

A major gap in the current literature on SWM in developing countries is that the system is rarely investigated in its entirety, and assessments combining ecological, environmental health and socio-economic considerations are still largely absent.<sup>4</sup> This paper attempts to contribute to a framework for integrated assessment by (1) identifying existing types of partnerships in SWM systems, and (2) carrying out a qualitative exploration of their contributions to a QOL perspective by looking at such socio-economic and ecological aspects.

### **Actors and alliances in urban solid waste management**

To identify the actors and potential alliances the following model, based on earlier work at the University of Amsterdam, is used (Baud and Schenk, 1994). In

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<sup>2</sup>Namely, the prime environmental worries in the North.

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<sup>3</sup>Forward and backward linkages among firms.

<sup>4</sup>Currently, an attempt is being made in a comparative study of Nairobi and Hyderabad by researchers from the Moi University, the Centre for Economic and Social Studies in Hyderabad, and the International Institute for Environment and Development in London, coordinated by the University of Amsterdam.

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