

*Africa Review Report on Waste Management  
(Executive Summary)*



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa



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## I. Introduction

1. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 58/218 mandates United Nations Regional Commissions in collaboration with the secretariat of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), regional and subregional organizations and bodies, as well as regional offices of funds, programmes, international finance and trade institutions and other organizations of the United Nations system, to organize multi-stakeholder Regional Implementation Meetings (RIMs) and to provide regional inputs into the work of the CSD. In this context, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has been organizing RIMs in collaboration with partner organizations since 2003.

2. In preparation for the Eighteenth Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-18), the Africa RIM was held in October 2009 under the auspices of the Sixth Session of the Committee on Food Security and Sustainable Development (CFSSD-6). ECA organized the RIM in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and other partners. The RIM reviewed progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 (A21), the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (PFIA21) and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) commitments relative to the thematic areas of Transport, Chemicals, Waste Management, Mining, and A Ten-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP).

3. This executive summary draws from the Africa Review report on the same which was prepared under the leadership of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) for the Africa Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) for CSD-18. It provides an overview of trends and emerging issues on waste management in Africa. It highlights progress and achievements, identifies implementation challenges and constraints, as well as lessons learned. It also outlines the way forward, including policy measures and actions needed to accelerate implementation.

## II. Major trends and emerging issues on waste management in Africa

4. Poor waste management practices, in particular, widespread dumping of waste in water bodies and uncontrolled dump sites, aggravates the problems of generally low sanitation levels across the African continent.

5. Urbanization is on the rise in Africa, and this trend is expected to continue in the future. Of concern is the inability of infrastructure and land use planning methods (including for waste management) to cope with urban growth, (the highest in the world) at 3.5 per cent annually. This is particularly urgent in slum areas, which constitute a big part of many of the cities and towns in Africa.
6. Waste management infrastructure is largely non-existent in rural areas of Africa. Improvements in infrastructure are urgently needed to combat the high cost of health services and thereby alleviate poverty and reduce rural-urban migration.
7. The gap between waste management policy and legislation and actual waste management practices is widening due to perennial capacity constraints and lack of waste management facilities for various waste streams. Access to major investments and acquiring the technical know-how needed to resolve the capacity constraints remain a tall order.
8. Waste generation is expected to increase significantly as a result of industrialization, urbanization and modernization of agriculture in Africa. This will further aggravate current capacity constraints in waste management.
9. The fast growing use of ICT and rapid turn-over in technology (particularly computers, mobile phones, etc.) is creating a growing E-waste stream, for which there is no waste management capacity yet. This leads to disposal of both E-waste and municipal waste in dump sites.
10. Changing lifestyles and consumption patterns of the growing urban middle class, in particular, is increasing the complexity and composition of waste streams in Africa.

### III. Action taken and progress made

11. Progress has been made in waste management policies and strategies. The use of economic instruments and implementation of polluter-pays principles in waste management have yet to mature in most African countries.
12. Biogas and compost production from organic waste fractionation has been widely accepted in Africa as a best practice, and progress is being made in developing and implementing specific projects in various countries.
13. Energy production from agricultural residues (including co-generation) is increasingly accepted as another best practice, and several projects have been implemented, some of them with jointly-funded carbon credits (using the Clean Development Mechanism).

14. Some countries have refurbishment centres for used ICT equipment which serve to extend the useful life of the products.

15. Resource-efficient and cleaner production has become a feasible best practice for reducing waste from businesses and other organizations in different parts of Africa and is now being promoted through channels like the network of UNIDO-UNEP affiliated National Cleaner Production Centres (NCPCs).

## IV. Implementation challenges and constraints

16. The single largest implementation challenge remains creating sufficient capacity for environmentally sound management, including, where appropriate, recovery and recycling of various waste streams across Africa. The effort to do this is constrained by access to finance and technical know-how.

17. Current by-laws in most African countries give responsibility for waste management to municipalities, which are often ill-equipped to deal with collection and disposal. Such by-laws are now an impediment to investment in waste management by the private sector.

18. Imports of second-hand consumer goods and production and/or import of substandard products are all contributing to rapid increase in waste generation. Policies should be put in place and existing standards enforced to reverse this trend.

19. Implementation or enforcement of waste regulations and conventions is severely constrained by the lack of good governance, transparency and prevalence of corruption in some cases.

20. Lack of awareness and appreciation of best practices for environmentally-sound management of wastes is a major constraint. A paradigm shift among communities and society at large is needed.

## V. Lessons learned and the way forward

21. *Involvement of the Private sector:* The involvement of the private sector, in partnership with local communities, in solid waste management activities, has created employment and job opportunities for a substantial number of jobless city residents, many of whom were previously-unemployed women and youth. Gradually, this experience is gaining ground, and is certain to reach other countries.

22. *Income generation:* Solid waste management activities have been serving as means of income generation for people. The income generated is not only from wage payments but also from sales of items recovered from solid waste. Waste products like plastic bags, plastic containers, knives, spoons and frying pans may be reused. Indeed waste recycling could yield a monthly income of between US\$130 and US\$800. Income generation from waste related activities needs to be recognized, formalized and replicated. In this regard the use of the term *salvagers* instead of scavengers should be promoted to describe those involved in recovering reusable waste items
23. *Refuse collection charges:* In some cities, a sound refuse collection system is in place and serves as a good source of income for city and municipal councils. It is necessary to exchange knowledge and experience in Africa on successful experiences, which can be replicated.
24. *Practical and attitudinal changes:* The manner in which solid waste was previously managed has changed. For example, there are increasing signs of waste being segregated at source and to a large extent, collected and stored in waste bins. Sorting is being done at communal waste collection points with noticeably organized groups of people. Increasingly, peoples' attitude to solid waste is gradually changing; and they no longer regard solid waste as a menace but rather a commercial good that can be used to generate income and alleviate poverty.
25. *What Africa expects from the international community:* The international community should support transfer and dissemination of knowledge and technology and foster investments in best practices for environmentally sound management of various waste streams within the African continent. The scale of investments needed for proper sanitation and environmentally sound management of wastes is beyond the capacity of African countries.
26. The international community should implement the relevant international agreements/conventions on waste management (particularly the Bamako, Basel and Cotonou Conventions) and provide assistance to African countries to strengthen their national, human and institutional capacities for implementation and enforcement (especially for control of imports and exports of wastes and waste containing products into and within the region).
27. The international community should conclude, as a matter of urgency, the negotiations and ratification of a protocol on liability and compensation for damages under the Basel Convention.
28. Specific assistance is needed to establish proper inventories of hazardous and radio-active wastes and sites potentially affected by poor management of such wastes, as a basis for developing and implementing facilities for managing them and cleaning up contaminated sites.

29. Assistance is also required for awareness and cultural exchange programmes for integrated waste management.